

# Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge:

Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-  
Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends

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## Abstract

The Christian-Muslim dialogue has exploded in recent decades into a cacophony of voices on history, politics, theology, and literary criticism, yet there remains little concentrated effort to preserve the Qur'anic voice in its original context, or highlight those voices from each side that employ the Qur'an as a builder of bridges rather than walls between Christianity and Islam.

Herein is a survey and analysis of the Christian-Muslim dialogue during four centuries, highlighting those voices of ecumenical tone which have more often used the Qur'an for drawing the two faiths together rather than pushing them apart, and amplifying the voice of the Qur'an itself.

This study begins with a survey and analysis of voices from the first three centuries of Islam, arranged thematically, exploring the tone of dialogue and the development of its key themes. The second section is a survey and analysis of Christian and Islamic voices in dialogue from the most recent century, comparing the two time periods and amplifying voices of ecumenical tone whose innovations and interpretations may without proper attention be missed by the academy.

The entire study concentrates not only on the ecumenical tones of dialogicians, but focuses on the interpretation of the Qur'an, highlighting key verses in the conversation. This study also amplifies the voice of the Qur'an itself in its historical context, as a dialogical voice.

This research finds that there is tremendous ecumenical ground between Christianity and Islam in the voices of their own scholars, extending from a period of declining ecumenism during the first three centuries of Islam, to a period of resurging ecumenism during the most recent century until now. This study also finds, highlighted among the ecumenical voices in the Christian-Muslim dialogue, that the Qur'an itself is possibly among the strongest of those voices.

## **Dedication**

For my covenant partner and best friend, Dawn. I'm so glad it's you.

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My personal thanks are due primarily to my family who have believed in and encouraged me with every breath. My parents and parents-in-law, extended family, and my wife and children, have been my biggest fans. I owe my dedication to interfaith dialogue and scholarly study to my grandfathers, Henry and Jake, whose legacy I certainly am.

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More generally, the bibliography barely makes tribute to the other giants of thought whose shoulders I stand on with this work. The research here is made possible truly by the centuries of continued contribution to academic research and interfaith dialogue by the authors and scholars who have gone before me. I feel that some of my closest friends have been dead for centuries already, and I hope to meet you yet. In the meantime, thank you all for your cumulative thought and writing on what is perhaps the most important question of humanity: how does what God reveals of himself in history inform how we should behave toward each other today? Here's what we've come up with so far...

Race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together.

Qur'an 2:148

The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.

Mark 12:29-30

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## Introduction

### Motivation for the Study

The quantity and diversity of voices in the inter-faith conversation between Christians and Muslims highlights the necessity for a concentrated approach to knowledge stewardship. Gone are the days when single epic conversations between great leaders like the Caliph al-Mahdī (d.168/785)<sup>1</sup> and Patriarch Timothy I (d.208/823) could prove sufficient for their followers to understand the Christian-Muslim relationship.<sup>2</sup> Instead, shocked to life by missionary passion, religious extremism, and the secular academy, the realm of Christian-Muslim dialogue has in recent times exploded into a cacophony of lay and scholarly opinions.

A quick Google search for Christian-Muslim dialogue renders thousands of hits, and the world's largest online bookseller Amazon.com carries more than ten thousand books in its Islam section alone.<sup>3</sup> Flying across digital, academic, and lunchroom tables, voices on the relationship between Christianity and Islam are vying for earspace in an increasingly crowded environment. The now polylogue of Christian-Muslim relations, fuelled by the internet and global media, has spawned thousands of new voices, and there are nearly as many trains of thought as there are contributors to the conversation. At the center of this paradox of a plethora of commentary, each claiming exclusive interpretive rights, sits the Qur'an, unedited by the variety of ways in which it is being employed.

In this kind of globalized conversation, where there is no agreed upon central mediation or central representation from each side, how is one to follow the dialogue, or know which interpretation of a Qur'anic verse is right, or even helpful? Few key transactions such as those formal documents issued by the World Council of Churches or even the Vatican can be said to speak on behalf of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> And even were the whole of Christianity to speak with a single voice, its commentary on the Qur'an would likely be rejected by Muslims as heresy.

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<sup>1</sup> All dates will be in the (AH/CE) format.

<sup>2</sup> See Alphonse Mingana, *The Debate on the Christian Faith between Patriarch Timothy I and Caliph Mahdī in 781 Ad* (USA: Atour Publications, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The bestselling book in the Islam section is written by an apostate Muslim turned atheist. *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali spent more than two years on the New York Times best sellers list and has sold more than ten million copies worldwide. Amazon, "Religion & Spirituality - Islam" [http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Religion-Spirituality-Books/b/ref=ab\\_22\\_8?ie=UTF8&node=12522&pf\\_rd\\_p=236774201&pf\\_rd\\_s=browse&pf\\_rd\\_t=101&pf\\_rd\\_i=22&pf\\_rd\\_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf\\_rd\\_r=0VHB63782AVYBE7C7BQ6](http://www.amazon.com/Islam-Religion-Spirituality-Books/b/ref=ab_22_8?ie=UTF8&node=12522&pf_rd_p=236774201&pf_rd_s=browse&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_i=22&pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_r=0VHB63782AVYBE7C7BQ6) (accessed November 7 2009).

<sup>4</sup> For example, *Lumen Gentium* from the second Vatican Council (1381/1962-1385/1965) announces that, "the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Mohamedans [sic], who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind." (Section 16). Though this is an official declaration of the Vatican, some popular Catholic commentators have criticized the position openly as

As Harold Birkeland noted, "Representatives of a ruling doctrine usually do not admit that their view is due to a special interpretation of a sacred text. When heretics support their view by another interpretation, traditionalists tend to maintain the view that interpretation is illegitimate." It was this reluctance to entertain alternative interpretations of the Qur'an, and perhaps frustration at the flexibility with which it was being interpreted, that led to an early Islamic movement against *tafsīr* altogether.<sup>5</sup> And if there is no central voice in Christianity, there seems to be even less so in Islam where the factions are just as plentiful, and still viewed by each other as the heretics that Birkeland highlighted. With so much commentary, is a rejection of the practice of *tafsīr* on the horizon again?

Since the times of Ibn 'Abbās (d.c.66/686) however, there has been virtually no limitation on *tafsīr*, despite the aforementioned efforts of some Islamic scholars to restrict the practice. Qur'anic commentary, diverse in topical interpretation, has also been historically diverse in tone. Through commentary and polemic alike, the building blocks of the Qur'an have historically been as likely to be hurled as weapons at one's opponent as used for construction material to build bridges of communication. It may be argued that in recent times the former represents the attitude of the vocal masses, and the latter moderate voices of authority from either side. In any case, it seems that the Qur'an is being interpreted by anyone and everyone,<sup>6</sup> for both benefit and harm to the Christian-Muslim relationship.

As inter-faith dialogue diversifies, how are we to steward the knowledge that is being gained? Will the helpful innovations of quieter voices disappear without academic support? Will epic outreaches like the *Common Word* project be broadly accepted, or fade once their

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even "offensive to Catholic doctrine." See Pope Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium", Vatican [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed November 25 2009).; and the rebuttal at Raymond Taouk, "Do Catholics and Muslims Worship the Same God? ", Catholic Apologetics Information <http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/islam/worship.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Arabic transliterations are given according to the Encyclopaedia of Islam transliteration scheme, with two alterations: the *jīm* is rendered herein 'j' instead of 'dj', and the *qāf* is rendered 'q' instead of 'k'. *Arabic words which are now of common use in English (i.e. surah, Qur'an, Muhammad, Torah)* will not be transliterated. Birkeland develops well the history of rejection of *tafsīr* within early Islam. The *tafsīr* movement began to implode as commentators freely rejected one another. At one point it seemed it was only the great, "Ibn 'Abbas himself and a few of his most prominent disciples whose *tafsīr* enjoyed some recognition." Harris Birkeland, *Old Muslim Opposition against Interpretation of the Koran*, Avhandling Utg. Av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi I Oslo. li. Hist.-Filos. Klasse. (Oslo ; Uppsala: J. Dybwad ; Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956), 27.

<sup>6</sup> The internet is replete with arbitrary Qur'anic interpretations. One anonymous author interpreting the Qur'an for a website sarcastically named "The Religion of Peace" goes through great lengths to show the internal textual basis for the Qur'an as "hate propaganda." See Anonymous, "Is the Qur'an Hate Propaganda?", The Religion of Peace <http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/Pages/Quran-Hate.htm> (accessed December 16 2009). It is not only polemical authors that are engaged in the practice of Qur'anic interpretation. Professor Alfred Kroner, a geologist from the University of Mainz in Germany is quoted by an Islamic website as calling the Qur'an, "a simple science text book for the simple man." The goal of the site is to legitimize seemingly scientific references within the Qur'an, but it does not appear to address how such a statement restricts the application of the Qur'anic meaning of such verses to simple-minded readers. See Islamic Awareness, "Scientists' Comments on the Qur'an", Islamic Awareness <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Science/scientists.html> (accessed November 25 2009).

novelty is gone?<sup>7</sup> And what of the Qur'an: who is monitoring how it is being treated, interpreted, used, and hurled? Does it have a voice independent of its interpreters? How will the truly beneficial interpretations be given earspace at the grand dialogue table?

The present author has yet to encounter a detailed study in this area, so it is to these questions that this research will respond.<sup>8</sup> The secular academy should attempt to keep track of the knowledge being developed in the realm of Qur'anic interpretation as it pertains to the inter-faith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Interpretive innovations, especially those helpful to the dialogue, should be captured, recorded, and amplified. It is to this task that we will turn in what follows.

The aim of the present study is to benefit Christian-Muslim relations by noting how Qur'anic meaning and interpretation contribute to either improving or hindering the dialogue.

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<sup>7</sup> This initiative will be explored more thoroughly below. See The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "A Common Word between Us and You", The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought <http://www.acommonword.com/index.php?lang=en&page=option1> (accessed August 17 2011).  
<sup>8</sup> Comparative studies on the Christian-Muslim relationship and the topics of dialogue exist. Notably among them, John Renard has recently completed a historical summary of the Christian-Muslim relationship contrasting the scriptures, creeds, institutional structures and spiritual/ethical expressions of the two religions. John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011). See also for example Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*, Reprint. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999); Kenneth Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999); Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); George Dardess and Marvin L. Krier Mich, *In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan: Catholics and Muslims Working Together for the Common Good* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011); Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995); Paul L. Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Ian Richard Netton, *Islam, Christianity, and Tradition: A Comparative Exploration* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); F. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, New ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and Their Theological Foundation*, Theologische Bibliothek Teopelmann Bd. 107 (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2000); James Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions*, 2 vols., Library of Ecclesiastical History (Cambridge: James Clarke Co., 2002); W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today* (London: Routledge, 1983); Clinton Bennet, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations: Past and Present* (London, NY: Continuum, 2008). More are included in the Bibliography. This study will focus on the history of the use of the Qur'an as a dialogue tool, innovative interpretations and lines of reasoning, and the tone of the dialogue, particularly ecumenism.

Perhaps the closest in content to this study is the recent work of David Bertaina. Bertaina concentrates on the early Christian-Muslim dialogue and thus runs parallel to Section I.2 here. He opens with the declaration that dialogue in the early period was only exclusive (apologetical and polemical), and its singular focus was persuasion. In the modern period, which he compares the early period to but does not study, adds to this exclusive dialogue a liberal approach wherein dialogue itself is the end (*teleos*) of the dialogue. "[Dialogue] functions as a therapy meant to redeem religious groups from their commitments to objective truth and persuasion." Certainly this describes pluralism accurately, but does not account for ecumenical tones, in which dialogicians acknowledge their own subjectivity and the mutual pursuit of objective truth with their interlocutors. It is conceded that pluralism is a modern invention, but ecumenism, as at will be shown herein, is a tonal thread in Christian-Muslim dialogue that runs chronologically as deeply as apologetics. The ecumenical tone that this present study focuses on is perhaps the only piece missing from Bertaina's otherwise excellent study. It may also be noted that Bertaina's study highlights forms of dialogue over its themes and tones, and literary style in general rather than Qur'anic interpretation specifically. This present study thus presents a necessary compendium to Bertaina's work, offering attention on aspects of Christian-Muslim dialogue that have not been covered in his and the above mentioned volumes. David Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, ed. George Kiraz et al., Gorgias Eastern Christian Studies (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 1-5.

This study may help dialogicians on either side, as well as secular Qur'anic researchers, to see at a glance the role of Qur'anic interpretation in the conversation. It will then be potentially easier for all parties in the conversation to calibrate their voices to harmonized topics and tones in Qur'anic interpretation that have borne fruit in the dialogue, or show potential for doing so.

This study will likely be of benefit not only to dialogicians in general, but to Qur'anic scholars: Islamicist, polemicist, and revisionist. The reader will discover herein a filtered survey and analysis of Qur'anic interpretation in dialogue between Christianity and Islam, import and commentary from the secular academy, and occasional commentary on the possible meaning of the Qur'an in its original context. It is hoped that these highlighted interpretations provide insight into the role of the Qur'an in interfaith dialogue, and by way of both encouragement and caveat, prompt the reader toward helpful directions for Qur'anic interpretation.

## Philosophy, Assumptions and Delimitations

Outside of the realm of historiography, this research is intended to benefit inter-faith dialogue, and therefore religious representatives of both Christianity and Islam. Religious scholarship may however question the validity of research on religious issues from a secular historical perspective, as it is often the view of religious representatives that research on religion from the secular academy attempts to remove or reduce religion from the wonderful to the mundane. The author concedes the validity of this concern, and stipulates that this is not a goal of the present work. This research will be presented as well as possible from a non-reductionist historical perspective. In the words of Wilfred Cantrell Smith:

The academic study of religion may be uncouth; but it is making progress. And these days, when we are fortunate in having before us in this realm a recently acquired massive array of historical data - far beyond any-thing available to past generations, so as to constitute a quantum jump - our great task is to forge new concepts that will do those data justice, that will serve appropriately to comprehend and to clarify the facts that we now know: new concepts that will be adequate to our rich and subtle material - that will both penetrate and make coherent, will analyse and synthesize.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's Non-Reductionist Interpretation of the Qur'an," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 2, no. 4 (1980): 487-488. Smith presents an extended and helpful explanation in this article of the historian's view of the Qur'an as scripture. To Smith, anyone that takes history seriously cannot do so without taking God seriously, whether they believe God to be a transcendent being or imaginary, for, "If the concept 'God' be in your view a figment of the human imagination, either in general or in the case of the particular Muslim concept, then for God's sake recognize that it is an exceedingly important figment, one that has been historically consequential on a stupendous scale" See pp. 493-494. Mahmut Aydin notes Smith's evaluation of the

It is with this in mind that what is presented below aims to respect not only the history of religions, but the wonder beyond the secular that these religions add to the human experience.<sup>10</sup> In practical terms, this entails a reporting on events and interpretations, commenting on their probability from a historical or empirical perspective, including traditional narratives and occasional inference, and not from any singular theological position. It is also not the position of this work that, “disinterested historical inquiry would be fatally undermined,” by respect for the dynamic influence of religious life on the human experience.<sup>11</sup> It is not intended here to defend either higher criticism or traditional narrative, as though the two philosophies of historicism exist in dichotomy. Rather, historical criticism and tradition inform each other in a non-reductionist approach that may produce a coherent, sometimes synthesized narrative of historical meanings. In the context of this research, reductionism and non-reductionism are to be understood as Smith defines them: reductionism as the presentation as history of only what is objectively verifiable in the mind of the historian, and non-reductionism as the presentation as history of what is most probable in the mind of the historian given the materials available, including traditional narratives.

Smith’s approach requires that all interpretations of the Qur’an are valid according to their historical context. He further notes that once an author has published a work, the intent behind their words loses validity in meaning to the meaning interpreted by their readers.<sup>12</sup> This view is further developed by semiologist and novelist Umberto Eco who views texts as,

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Qur’an. Though often non-committal in his evaluation of whether or not the Qur’an is the word of God, Smith ultimately concludes the Qur’an to be, theologically speaking, the word of God for Muslims. Smith therefore rejects strict historical criticism of the Qur’an as irreverent of the Qur’an’s true meaning, which is for Smith not limited to the time and place in which it was revealed, but is phenomenologically apparent across centuries in the lives of its interpreters. This paper adopts a similar non-reductionist approach. For an evaluation of Smith’s phenomenological approach to the Qur’an see Mahmut Aydin, *Modern Western Christian Theological Understandings of Muslims since the Second Vatican Council*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change. Series Iia, Islam, vol. 13 (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2002), 143-149.

<sup>10</sup> This paper is written primarily for the benefit of those in the philosophical disciplines, and so admittedly strays from the strict empirical reductionism that purist historians traditionally strive for. Herein we take a non-reductionist approach to history, balancing what is known or knowable of history, which in Part I is especially sparse, with what is reasonably derived from a position that as Smith noted, appreciates the wonderful in the mundane. The theologian reader for whom this research is presented may find the historical inquiry more agnostic than they are comfortable with, and the reductionist historian from whose materials some of this research is derived may find it more colourful and narrative, even speculative, than they are comfortable with. The present author concedes these challenges. The recording of historical events as empirical for the reductionist sits a little lower on the spectrum of probability than for the non-reductionist, and both sit much lower still than the records of those events as held by the traditionalist historian. The non-reductionist approach is intended here to strike middle ground between historical reductionism and traditionalism, and to bring the two approaches to history themselves into dialogue.

<sup>11</sup> The quote is from Ibn Warraq, who is very critical of Montgomery Watt, Louis Massignon, and others who have in their ‘quest for the historical Muhammad’ allowed themselves to respect the influence of religion in their historical inquiries. See Ibn Warraq, *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 78.

<sup>12</sup> Smith: 502.

“...machine[s] for generating interpretations,”<sup>13</sup> remarking shortly thereafter that is it better that, “the author should die once he has finished writing. So as not to trouble the path of the text,” or in the Islamic voice of Mohammed Arkoun, “Any text, once written, escapes from its author and takes on a life of its own, whose richness or poverty, expansion or desiccation, oblivion or revival, will henceforth depend on its readers.”<sup>14</sup>

In the case of the Qur’an, however, this implies that the original intended meaning of the Qur’an is of less importance than the meaning created by its present interpreters. Since from an Islamic perspective it is God who “wrote” the Qur’an, we are left with an interpretive conundrum. If there are differing interpretations of the same verse over time (for example), we can understand this reality from the following positions:

1. The author was not able to communicate clearly enough that his audience would understand its meaning.
2. The audience is not capable of understanding the intended meaning from what the author wrote.
3. The language of medium is insufficient to communicate the intended meaning without ambiguity.
4. The ambiguity in the text that allows for differing meanings is the intention of the author.

To honour the Islamic position is to attribute the authorship of the Qur’an to God, and presenting mutually exclusive interpretations of the Qur’an may therefore be considered an insult to its author.<sup>15</sup> However, drawing from the positions above and the voice of the Qur’an

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<sup>13</sup> Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?* (London: Saqi Books, 2006), 157. Arkoun describes the revelatory books of the three monotheistic religions as peculiar in their ability to produce meaning for existence. Though they each originated orally and passed from oral transmission into book-form, they became the ‘Books’ which necessitated the creation and ever more efficient production of ‘books’, therefore Arkoun calls societies based on them, societies of the Book/book. Regarding the three revelatory texts, Arkoun notes that, “They should not be confused with theological systems, exegeses, or legal codes that managers of the sacred establishments have drawn from them at various times. These derivatives constitute some among many meanings potentially contained in revelation.” Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, trans., Robert D. Lee (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 30-34.

<sup>15</sup> The challenge of taking a literary approach to the Qur’an has already been addressed. In the famous case of Muhammad Ahmad Khalafallah (1334/1916-1418/1998), whose Ph.D. thesis as presented to Cairo University in the 1940’s (then Fu’ad al-Awwal University) explored the literary nature of the Qur’an, the thesis was rejected amid a public outcry that it raised questions on the Qur’an’s authorship and historicity. Since then, however, Islamic scholars are slowly coming to grips with the skills gap between Western disciplines in historical and literary criticism, and their own traditional hermeneutical technique. See Nasr Abu-Zayd, “The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur’an,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 23, no. (2003). Mohammed Arkoun acknowledges this gap, and suggests that the reasons for it are primarily, “political and psychological.” Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 35. Literary approaches to scripture are not foreign to Islamic scholars studying those of other religions from a historical or sociological perspective, only as applied to Qur’anic historical criticism. For an overview of the state of Islamic scholarly study of other religions at the end of the twentieth century see

directly, there is a way forward that honours both the historical reality of differing interpretations over time, and the clear communication of the Qur'an. Position 1 cannot be considered applicable as the Qur'anic witness of itself is that its author is entirely capable of clear communication: "These are the verses of the Scripture, a Qur'an that makes things clear" (Q15:1).<sup>16</sup> Position 2 cannot be considered valid as the Qur'an also presents its author as capable of communicating in a manner and a language which transmits his intentional message, even clarifying it within the Qur'an: "God makes His messages clear to you: God is all knowing, all wise" (Q24:18; 57:17); and,

The day will come when We raise up in each community a witness against them, and We shall bring you [Prophet] as a witness against these people, for We have sent the Scripture down to you *explaining everything*, and as guidance and mercy and good news to those who devote themselves to God (Q16:89; emphasis mine).<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, position 3 cannot be considered applicable as the Qur'an is clear that the choice of the Arabic language for its recording was also intentional: "Truly, this Qur'an has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds: the Trustworthy Spirit brought it down to your heart [Prophet], so that you could bring warning in a clear Arabic tongue" (Q26:192-195).<sup>18</sup>

It is posited therefore that the Qur'an does not regret its language or word choice. It follows that ambiguity within the original text that allows for differing interpretations of the same passage over time, is more likely to have been the author's intention than not, by the author's own indication in the text:

It is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning – these are the cornerstone of the scripture - and others are ambiguous. The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin

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Jacques Waardenburg, "Observations on the Scholarly Study of Religions as Pursued in Some Muslim Countries," *Numen* 45, no. 3 (1998). It is the position of this author that out of respect for the Qur'an, the intentionality of its style, particular words choices, and historical context of the revelation be respected. Thus, where its own historical contextual voice seems to stray from the interpretations of its commentators, that original voice should be highlighted.

Adjacent to this discussion is perhaps an aside on the seven *ahruf*, or, the seven readings, of the Qur'an. This will not be dealt with here in detail. There has been extensive study on this subject elsewhere. It is herein presented that apart from the seven readings in tradition, the Qur'an, by its very nature and testimony of itself, allows for varying interpretations, even if there was only ever one reading. For an introduction to the seven readings see Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an : Towards a Contemporary Approach* (Abingdon England ; New York: Routledge, 2006), Ch. 6.; cf. Ahmad Ali al-Imam, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an : A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> See also Q4:174; 5:15; 26:2; 27:1; 28:2; 36:69; 43:2; 44:2. All Qur'anic references will be taken from the M. A. S. Abdel Haleem translation unless otherwise noted: M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Page numbers will not be given. Haleem's translation is chosen because of its accessibility to a wide readership, and his position as Editor of the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*.

<sup>17</sup> See also Q2:219, 221, 242; 3:108, 266, 301; 4:26, 176; 5:89; 24:58-59, 61.

<sup>18</sup> See also Q16:103.

down a specific meaning of their own: only God knows the true meaning (Q3:7a).<sup>19</sup>

It therefore follows that although the original meaning of the Qur'an is variously important to its followers, the presentation of various interpretations of the Qur'an does not constitute disrespect for its author.<sup>20</sup>

This work will report on the historical meaning of the Qur'an not only in the seventh century CE in which it originated, but also its meaning in the eighth, ninth and twentieth centuries during which the comments were made that are of interest to this study. If anything can be said universally of the Qur'an, it may be said that the Qur'an is a work whose meaning as interpreted in time has influenced every point in human history subsequent to its inception. A single Qur'anic verse may be shown to have meant something different to Muhammad's contemporaries than to a twentieth century Islamic scholar, but the value of this difference theologically is an Islamic issue, both interpretations must be considered meaningful from this work's historical perspective.

The Qur'an in this study will be treated as a dynamic work, as outlined above, with its meaning differing over time. Yet the historical context into which it came also provides clues as

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<sup>19</sup> This verse presents two words in Arabic the interpretations of which are in debate: *muḥkamāt* (clearly understood), and *mutashābihāt* (vague, or possibly 'similar'). Leah Kinberg provides a helpful study on these terms noting even in early exegesis that, "in some cases the *muḥkamāt* are opposed to the *mutashābihāt*; in others they are treated as complementary terms." Kinberg does not resolve the conflict, further highlighting the ambiguity of the text and emphasising the reflexive nature of its ambiguity in a single verse that attempts to clarify the interpretability of the Qur'an as a whole. See Leah Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis" in Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an : Formative Interpretation*, The Formation of the Classical Islamic World, vol. 25 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), 283-312. Ayoub's survey of the commentators reveals the same confusion. Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters, Vol. 2* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 20-46. There is either irony or tragedy in the ambiguity of the word *mutashābihāt*, which itself may be understood in opposing terms. If the author intended clarity, the word's ambiguity is tragic, yet if the author intended ambiguity by use of that particular term, its use is cleverly ironic. It may be assumed based on the discussion above that the author of the Qur'an was able to clarify the meaning of the word *mutashābihāt* in unequivocal terms, or to express the intended message in less ambiguous terms, and chose not to. The author's choice of the word *mutashābihāt* is not tragic, and its ambiguity therefore should be understood as intentional. Cf. Saeed, 109-111.

<sup>20</sup> A similar finding is presented by Islamic scholar Abdullah Saeed, who argues, "for the recognition of a degree of indeterminacy and complexity in meaning, of the importance of context (linguistic, socio-historical and cultural), and of the legitimacy of multiple understandings." Saeed presents the limitations of textualists in Qur'anic interpretation. Historians too make assumptions and limit their sources based on those assumptions. This, "signals the impossibility of a completely objective interpretation of the Qur'anic text. ... However objectively their subjects may be pursued, historians cannot escape their own understanding. Objective meaning cannot be spoken of, for history cannot be known except through the subjectivity of the historian." Saeed, 102-103. Saeed outlines limitations for the flexibility of interpretations while stating that, "From a Contextualist perspective, the meaning of the Qur'an is knowable. However, this knowledge is contingent on time, place and circumstance. It can also change from time to time in line with developments (intellectual, political, economic and social) in the community." Ibid., 109. At first glance, this lends to a reductionist, ideological, or even relativistic view of the text, which Saeed certainly rejects. He recognizes the trap of relativism and recalibrates: "To overcome this [reductionist] problem, any reading of the Qur'anic text should take into account the textual, historical and contextual aspects of the text. This will inevitably lead to a more balanced understanding of the text." Ibid., 112. Thus though ambiguity is present in the Qur'an, and some degree of interpretive flexibility is acknowledged, historical criticism and revelatory context should properly outweigh both tradition and ideology as informative in the interpretation of the Qur'an. In this sense, the non-reductionist historian is an ally of the *mufassir*.



to what its meaning may have been in its original revelation, which as it will be shown may differ occasionally from subsequent dominant interpretations. Historical inquiry in this paper will at times attempt to provide a voice for the Qur'an to speak into its original historical environment in the early first/seventh century. The historical inquiry into the meaning of the Qur'an will not follow the strictest rules for reductionist or secular historicism as already stated, rather, it will also entertain inference based on the traditional sources of Muslim followers and outside commentators, as these are those for whom this paper is written. The historical criticism of the Qur'an in this work is only intended to bring later *tafsīr* into dialogue with Qur'anic revelatory context, about which more information is available now than has ever been.

As this research is primarily concerned with Qur'anic interpretation in dialogue, Qur'anic commentary will be made only from a historical understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an, which must later be re-interpreted and balanced with the theological perspectives of religious representatives. It is assumed that knowledge and transmission of accurate history is of value in the Qur'anic perspective, and therefore seeking its accuracy and employment in Qur'anic interpretation an intrinsically Islamic pursuit. As the Qur'an says, "[Prophet], tell them the story of the man to whom We gave Our messages ... tell them the story so that they may reflect" (Q7:175-176); and, "Have you not heard about those who went before you, the people of Noah, 'Ad, Thamud, and those who lived after them, known only to God?" (Q14:9). A high respect for contextual accuracy reflects a high respect for the Qur'an.

One of the challenges in this research is the use of the categories "Muslim" and "Christian." Though it is common for researchers to use these titles without defining them, in the present work, because of the variety of voices that will be incorporated, some delineation must be made. For the purpose of this work, a Muslim is one who adheres in faith to the Islamic creed, "There is no God but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." Christians are those who believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, he died and rose again, and is one of the three Persons of the Trinitarian God. The meanings of these statements are in debate in both religions. Those debates will not be addressed here. Contributors to inter-faith dialogue will be categorized according their general religious standing, and the typology by which they engage in dialogue (below).

## Sources for the Study

The sources for this study may be classified as both orthodox and unorthodox, and from Christian, Islamic, and secular standpoints. Orthodox sources are those typically used in research (e.g. books, journals, etc.). These will form the bulk of our sources. Unorthodox sources are those which neither hold a place in a laboratory nor on an academic library shelf, yet contribute to the study. These sources may be internet based and include websites, and the publications of interfaith dialogue centers as well as private religious commentators.

The Qur'an and the religion of Islam are inseparable, as one is inherent in the other. It is therefore assumed that all Qur'anic commentary from outside of Islam *is* interfaith dialogue, and will be treated as engagement with Islam. These inputs will be restricted to Christian and other academic voices on the Qur'an. However, as the Qur'an belongs to Islam, some clarification on the use of Islamic sources is appropriate.

As the present work will focus on the use of the Qur'an in inter-faith dialogue, polemical, apologetical, and eccumenical sources will be primary. As the context sought will be directly related to the meaning of the Qur'an at a certain point in history, Islamic *tafsīr* corresponding with that time will also be considered a primary source. *Tafsīr* will be employed for two purposes: 1) that *tafsīr* which can be said to contribute to inter-faith dialogue, and; 2) that *tafsīr* which contributes to a historical interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'an.<sup>21</sup> In the former case, this research will comment on the compatibility of commentary with the commentary of others, not about its empirical validity as *tafsīr*. *Tafsīr* is recorded and therefore it has inherent historical value, especially for the time in which it was written. To determine its theological correctness is outside the scope of the present work. In the latter case, known history is a voice with which commentary must be balanced, and the usefulness of *tafsīr* in inter-faith dialogue may be evaluated based on its alignment with known historical events and other *tafsīr* sources.

Other Islamic sources such as histories, biographies and *ḥadīth* will be consulted secondarily, and only to ascertain the historical meaning of a Qur'anic verse. The usefulness of *ḥadīth* as a historical source for Qur'anic interpretation is extremely problematic. The Qur'an itself seems to question the value of *ḥadīths* in Q45:6, "These are God's signs that We recount to you [Prophet, to show] the Truth. If they deny God and His revelations, what [*ḥadīths*] will

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<sup>21</sup> For the purpose of this research, those *tafsīr* compiled during the time periods being focused on will be considered primary sources. From the early period this will include primarily the *tafsīrs* of 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbās (d.c.66/686); Sahl al-Ṭustarī (d.283/896); Abū Jafār Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923); and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d.468/1076). There is a multitude of *tafsīr* from modern times, only those most dominant or most innovative will be noted here.

they believe in?”<sup>22</sup> The Qur’an certainly differentiates itself from the *ḥadīths* in Q12:111; admits that *ḥadīths* can lead one astray in Q31:6; and determines that nothing has been left out of the Qur’an (Q6:38).<sup>23</sup>

Jane Dammen McAuliffe surveys the various views of twentieth century scholars on the matter of the historicity of *ḥadīths*, and there is no need to duplicate her efforts here.<sup>24</sup> McAuliffe notes that, “by attacking the orthodox Islamic understanding of *ḥadīth*, Western scholars ... have thrown the issues of the Qur’an’s canonization and early exegesis open to question.”<sup>25</sup> As *ḥadīths* provide nearly all of the sources of information on the Qur’an’s canonization and exegetical history, it is not helpful for non-reductionist historians to dismiss them out of hand. However, since it cannot be said either that all are historically accurate or inaccurate, *ḥadīths* will be used here only to provide Qur’anic interpretations appropriate to the times in which they were published or referred to in dialogue. It must also be concluded based on the intentional ambiguity authored into the Qur’anic text (as shown above), that *ḥadīths* provide one of perhaps many possible and equally accurate interpretations of the Qur’an, and their usefulness as an interpretive filter is best measured in their coherence with the Qur’anic text as a whole, and not in their absolute historical accuracy as transmitted *isnads*.

On the whole, *ḥadīths* will be balanced with other histories, secular and Christian. Christian sources will include primarily polemics and apologetics, both dialogical and missiological. Secular sources will include primarily contextual criticism of the Qur’an, and secondarily histories. Secular historiography will be given the greatest value for historical accuracy.

In terms of language, all early Islamic sources will be considered regardless of the original language used, as these are dominantly available in Arabic or English. In recent times Christian-Muslim dialogue has been most widely spread and deeply appreciated in Europe and North America, and so the reader will notice the dominance of sources composed in or translated into English. It should also be noted that interpretations of originally Arabic, Greek,

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<sup>22</sup> “بَلِّغْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ فَيَأْتِي حَدِيثٌ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ”

<sup>23</sup> Arkoun too notes the challenge of using *ḥadīths*, as they are varied and disputed. Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 45-48.

<sup>24</sup> See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 13-28.; cf. A. F. L. Beeston, *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 317-321.

<sup>25</sup> McAuliffe, 25.

or Syriac texts herein are informed by other academic voices with greater command of those languages in history. Those voices will be noted.<sup>26</sup>

This study will be arranged in two parts. Part one will focus on the first historical section of Qur'anic interpretation in Christian-Muslim dialogue identified above. We will examine the use of the Qur'an from its inception to 287/900, looking for key themes that reoccur in the dialogue, and focusing on the tone of the dialogue as it develops over time. Part I will be divided into three chronological phases, primarily to ease the flow of information. The division between Phase 1 and Phase 2 at 114/733 is chosen to highlight the importance of the work of John of Damascus, which published between 105/724 and 125/743, a century after the death of Muhammad, marked what appears to be a major shift in the tone of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The chronological division of 114/733 is chosen to approximate that period of time just prior to John's writings. These observations on tone, dating, and the justification for using John's writings for this particular chronological division will be explained in greater detail in Part I. The exact date of John's writing is unknown.

The second part of the study will take up dialogue trends in modern times. This will allow us to contrast the topics and tones discovered in Part 1 with more recent interactions. Authors during this period will be chosen for their presentation of prominent concepts representative of their respective traditions, or unique or innovative Qur'anic interpretations that aid particularly in the ecumenical tone of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The study will distill these findings into analyses of topics, tones, and Qur'anic interpretations constructive for future Christian-Muslim dialogue.

These time periods will focus the research, and help us to trace the Christian-Muslim relationship from the point of introduction through the first impressions, comparing and contrasting them with more recent interactions. To survey and interact with every single act of inter-faith dialogue during these periods would be unreasonably monumental. This research will be focused in scope to those interactions which are grand in representation or influence, or unique and innovative in approach.

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<sup>26</sup> This author is an Arabic speaker, but not a native one, and is grateful for the work of other scholars who have made some of these more challenging works accessible through dedicated study to particular voices in the dialogue. Their contributions will be cited.

## Methodology

Since here we are primarily concerned with the historical usefulness of Qur'anic interpretation from a dialogue perspective, some classification of kinds of engagement is needed. In order to gauge the helpfulness of different tones in inter-faith dialogue, a typology for theology of religions will be used.

Catholic theologian Paul Knitter suggests a typology based on confessional boundaries between Christians: Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, and Theocentric.<sup>27</sup> The categorization of interfaith engagement by Christian denominations, however, proves insufficient for a general typology for a theology of religions, as noted by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen.<sup>28</sup> Hans Küng presents a revised quadrilateral typology:

1. No religion is true.
2. Only one religion is true.
3. Every religion is true.
4. One religion is true in whose truth all other religions participate.<sup>29</sup>

As Kärkkäinen notes, position 1 (above) negates the need for dialogue, and so the typology that has gained the most favour among scholars has been that of the now common categories of Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism. Kärkkäinen describes the typology according to a Christian Theology of Religions, but for general interfaith dialogue, they may be described in this way:

1. Exclusivism is the position that there is no salvation outside of one's religion.<sup>30</sup>
2. Inclusivism is the position that though salvation is provided by one's own religion, its benefits extend to members of other religions in varying degrees.
3. Pluralism is the position that all religions are valid.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985). Knitter's pluralism has been evaluated by Aydin, see Aydin, 213-225.

<sup>28</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions : Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>30</sup> This may be understood most clearly as the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* position. Vatican Council II altered its language and described the global Church as "subsisting" in the Catholic Church in *Lumen Gentium*. See Pope Paul VI. The exact meaning of the terminology *subsistit in* has been in debate since then. The Vatican clarified its word choice by saying, "...the Council chose the word *subsistit* precisely in order to make it clear that there exists a single 'subsistence' of the true Church, while outside her visible structure only *elementa ecclesiae* exist, which — as elements of the Church — tend and lead toward the Catholic Church." See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Notification on the Book 'Church: Charism and Power' by Fr. Leonardo Boff", Vatican <http://www.ewtn.com/library/curia/cdfboff.htm> (accessed December 16 2009).

The category of Inclusivism has become more interesting lately as both Muslims and Christians work to provide frameworks for the salvation of the other. In Christianity, the best known of these is the work of Karl Rahner on his theory of the anonymous Christian. A helpful summary of Rahner's position was developed by Gavin d'Costa:

The logical structure of the argument for the possibility of the anonymous Christian is this: if grace, which is freely offered to all, is freely accepted, it is orientated towards, and originates from, the one God; if God's definitive self-revelation is expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, then all grace freely accepted originates from, and is orientated towards, Christ. Consequently, a person who accepts this grace implicitly and subjectively in the radical love of his neighbour, for instance, is understood to be an anonymous Christian for he has, in his basic orientation and fundamental decision, accepted the salvific grace of God, through Christ, although he may never have heard of the Christian revelation. It is clear that the anonymous Christian does not explicitly confess that 'Jesus is the Christ' in propositional terms, but makes an implicit 'confession', so to speak, in existential terms.<sup>31</sup>

The theory of including the other without their knowledge is not unique to Christianity. Polemicist Maged S. Al-Rassi presents an exclusive Islamic theology of religions with a decisively inclusive twist. He states that though people learn the religions presented to them in the environments in which they are raised, "every human being was born into the religion of Islam and human beings are naturally drawn to what they already know."<sup>32</sup> He bases his inclusivism on a *ḥadīth* which quotes Muhammad the Prophet as saying, "Each child is born in a state of Islam. Then his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian."<sup>33</sup>

The general attitude of Muslims toward Christianity may be popularly considered a dualistic theology of Christianity. There are those within Islam who are of the opinion that the

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<sup>31</sup> See Gavin D'Costa, "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian - a Reappraisal," *Modern Theology* 1, no. 2 (1985): 132. Rather than directing the reader to all of Rahner's work on the subject, Gavin D'Costa sums up the theory brilliantly while providing defences to the most common criticisms that Rahner faces. D'Costa's own take on the theory is still maturing as in the article quoted above he demonstrates that, "Rahner's thought is not anthropocentric, relativist and historically reductive, but tries faithfully to explicate the teachings of Vatican II within the framework of the Roman Catholic tradition," *ibid.*, 146. In his more recent work, D'Costa clarifies that, "when pushed, Rahner could not hold that the anonymous Christian who has never heard the gospel is 'saved' in the proper eschatological sense, but is on the road to salvation." See Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 23.

<sup>32</sup> Maged S. al-Rassi, *Islam Is Your Birthright*, 2009, Saaid al-Fouaid, Online. Available at <http://saaid.net/book/open.php?cat=92&book=1056>. The quote is from page 174. Though al-Rassi's presentation is interesting, it is not always rationally coherent. For example, in presenting the Bible as heavily corrupted, he also quotes it in defence of Islam without presenting an adequate framework for why he chooses some Biblical verses as corrupted and others as revelatory (pp. 21-22). Similarly al-Rassi argues within a single paragraph that prayers directed to "idols" such as Jesus Christ, Buddha, Krishna, et al. are both, "answered by Allah," and contradictorily, "of no avail." (p. 24). It is not this author's intention to enter into polemics here, only to highlight an inclusive Islamic theology of religions presented in modern Islamic discourse, and the questionable academic value of the polemical source from which it is presented.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Rassi refers the reader to *Sahīh Bukharī* no. 1385 (Vol. 6, Book 60, no. 298; cf. Vol. 8, Book 77, no. 597) and to *Sahīh Muslim* no. 2658 (Book 33, no. 6423; cf. Book 33, no. 6425, 6426). Al-Rassi's references as well as his English translation have been preserved here. See *Ibid.*, 28.

Christian religion is not salvific (Exclusive), as there are Muslims who believe that Christians are cared for under Islamic soteriology (Inclusive).<sup>34</sup> However, neither Islamic theology of Christianity nor Christian theology of Islam can be so easily simplified as Inclusive and Exclusive. A more nuanced typology is appropriate.

What is absent from this typology is an indication of the degree to which one alters one's own theology, or attempts to alter the theology of the other, in order to arrive at their position. It may be helpful to think of this as a degree of interpretive flexibility. Though a dialogician may be categorized as Inclusive, there is no indication in that category of the degree to which she has altered her theology or revised that of the other in order to be so. If for example the Qur'an is interpreted to categorically deny the event of the crucifixion of Christ, then a Christian interpreter may incline toward Exclusivism. However, if that same interpreter were to revise their interpretation of the Qur'an, independent of Islamic commentary, and were to determine that the Qur'an does not deny the crucifixion of Christ, they may incline toward Inclusivism. If they were to find decreasing discrepancies between the Qur'an and their own theology over time, a new category may form as they begin to view the dialogue in more ecumenical terms. Here is presented a typology that may be used to not only gauge the soteriological attitude of one representative toward the other, but the degree to which one preserves or revises the other's or their own interpretation of revelation in order to arrive at their position (figure 1).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sachedina, whose concern is primarily Islamic democratic pluralism, argues that religious pluralism among the Abrahamic faiths is certainly possible from an Islamic perspective. Sachedina asserts that Q:101:1-5 are the foundation from which an Islamic theology of a pluralistic society may emerge. It should be noted that there are two kinds of pluralism in contemporary discourse, democratic pluralism: that which permits other religions to exist in a society dominated by one religion; and religious pluralism which is the view that all religions are of equal salvific value. Sachedina's pluralism is political, his inter-religious views are more accurately branded Inclusivist, especially pertaining to Christianity and Judaism. Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35-36.

<sup>35</sup> This typology is developed with interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims in mind, and may be of limited use outside of that field.

The Pluralistic position is clearly designated here. Inclusivism and Exclusivism however are spread along a spectrum that allows for equal designation of Preservist and Revisionist attitudes toward scriptural interpretation. The Apologetical attitude is therefore one of conversionist missiology, maintaining the integrity of the other's presentation of their own theology. Polemicists are those who exclude the other soteriologically, while making interpretive alterations to the other's theology. The Ecumenical position is one of both theological interpretive flexibility, and openness to soteriological accommodation of the religious other.

One distinct advantage of this typology is that it allows us to involve the secular academy in Christian-Muslim dialogue. It seems as though secular Qur'anic studies are playing an increasing role in Christian-Muslim dialogue, and this role may be categorized in similar terms. For instance, it may be said that Ibn Warraq engages Islam as a secular polemicist, or that Kenneth Cragg approaches Islam as an ecumenist.<sup>36</sup> The degree to which secular Qur'anic scholars revise Islamic Qur'anic interpretations by way of contextual criticism, lexicography, historiography or otherwise, may be indicated by a place on the Preservist-Revisionist spectrum. The degree of their tolerance as secularists, of Islam as a faith, may be indicated as either Exclusive or Inclusive.

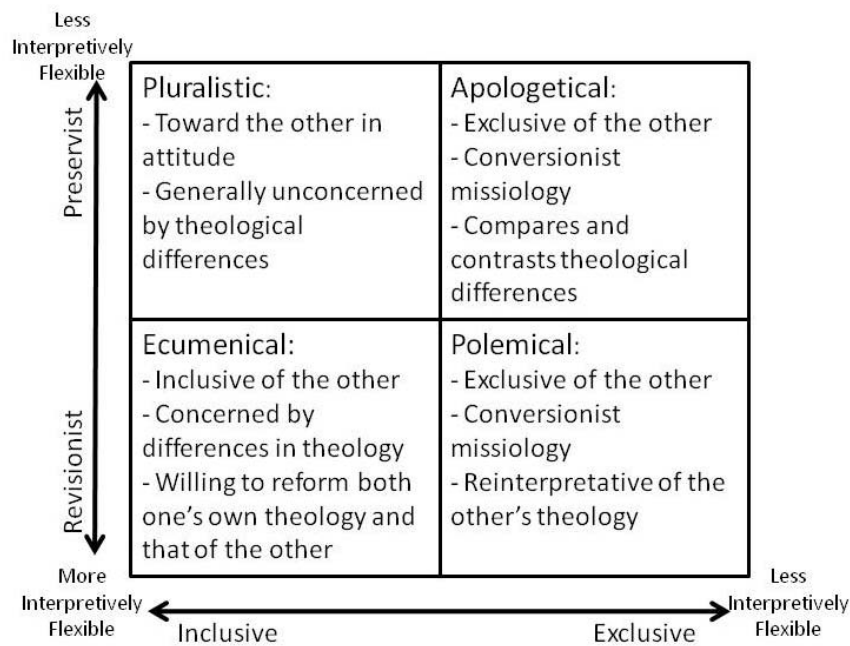


Figure 1: A Typology for Christian-Muslim Dialogue

<sup>36</sup> See Warraq. Also see Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration.*; and Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response.* A short biography of Cragg can be found in John Watson, *Listening to Islam: With Thomas Merton, Sayyid Qutb, Kenneth Cragg and Ziauddin Sardar: Praise, Reason and Reflection* (Brighton; Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 49-52.





## I.1 The First Christian Encounters with Islam<sup>37</sup>

### The History of Christianity in Arabia

The early history of Christianity in Arabia is muted by the fog of time, the scarcity of sources, and confused by the often legendary character of the few materials that remain from which to draw our information. It may be that Christianity first had an impact on Arabia in the person of Jesus of Nazareth himself. "His itinerant ministry ... was concentrated on Arab regions, Ituraea, and in the Decapolis, among Arab peasantry rather than in the Hellenistic cities."<sup>38</sup> Some of Jesus' first followers are reported to have been the Arabs of Damascus and Nabatean Haūrān.<sup>39</sup> The Apostle Paul reportedly met some of these early believers on his way through Damascus to Arabia (cf. Galatians 1:15-17).<sup>40</sup>

According to Ibn Ishāq (d.c.153/770), the first Christian influence to reach South Arabia was a man named Faymiyūn, a brick builder who introduced Christianity to Najrān.<sup>41</sup> If the story is true history, the date of Faymiyūn's journey, along with any Christian source material are lost to us.<sup>42</sup>

*The Chronicle of John of Nikiu* credits a woman named Theognosta with the conversion of the Yemenis in the mid-fourth century.<sup>43</sup> In what seems to be a separate event, Theognosta

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<sup>37</sup> An abridged version of section I.1 here is published elsewhere. See C. Jonn Block, "Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of 'Thalātha' in Qur'ān 4. 171 and 5. 73," *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2011).

<sup>38</sup> J. Spencer Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, Arab Background Series (London ; New York: Longman, 1979), 41.

<sup>39</sup> Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* clarifies that Damascus was Arab territory in the early first century. Damascus was leased by the Nabatean King Ḥārith IV from Caligula at about the time of Paul's conversion experience in c. 36 AD. See *ibid.*, 42, n.3.

<sup>40</sup> According to C.W. Briggs, Paul's journey into Arabia was an evangelistic Eastern tour to the Jewish dispersion in Parthanan, Medes, and Mesopotamia. See C. W. Briggs, "The Apostle Paul in Arabia," *The Biblical World* 41, no. 4 (1913). N.T. Wright however defines Paul's "Arabia" as Mount Sinai (cf. Gal 4:25), to the South, and determines the trip to have been a kind of pilgrimage rather than evangelistic. N. T. Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 4 (1996).

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad : A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans., Alfred Guillaume (London ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 14-16.; cf. Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sirat Al-Nabawiyah* (Egypt: Dar Al-Hadith, 2006), 38.; cf. Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of Al-Ṭabarī: Volume V: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakmids, and Yemen*, ed. Ehsan Yar-Shater, trans., C. E. Bosworth, Bibliotheca Persica (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 193-202. Arkoun concedes that Ibn Ishāq's *Sira* is a mix of myth and history, amplifying the challenge of its use as a primary source. Its contents should be weighed against other sources of the same time. Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 43.

<sup>42</sup> It has been proposed that this story is a spin-off from stories contained in the fourth and fifth century *Tales of the Coptic Fathers*, and is not to be treated as historical. See Gordon Newby, "An Example of Coptic Literary Influence on Ibn Ishaq's Sirah," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 31, no. 1 (1972).

<sup>43</sup> John of Nikiu and R. H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu : Translated from Zotenberg's Ethiopic Text*, Christian Roman Empire Series, vol. 4 (Merchantville, NJ: Evolution, 2007), 69-70. According to John, Theognosta's travels in Yemen occurred after the death of Constantine I in 337CE. It is not impossible for both John of Nikiu and Necephorus to be correct about the sending of Frumentius. It may be that Frumentius was sent after the death of Constantine I in 337, seven years after his consecration by Anasthasius in 330. One however wonders if we are not introduced here to two separate

is subsequently also credited with the conversion of the king of India. The Indian king then requests a bishop and one Afrudit (Frumentius) is sent to him. The history of Nicephorus tells us of the travels of Frumentius of Tyre, whom Athanasius consecrated as bishop in c.330 CE, and sent to Ḥimyar, however this destination is almost certainly not correct. According to Athanasius himself, the bishop Frumentius was received from and returned to Ethiopia (Axum).<sup>44</sup> Though it has now been shown confidently that he was sent to Ethiopia, two observations can be made that are of interest here. The controversy over the location of this story in early sources highlights the close relationship between South Arabia and Ethiopia in pre-Christian times;<sup>45</sup> and, Frumentius may now be called the founder of the Abyssinian Monophysite movement which would later have a strong influence in South Arabia.<sup>46</sup>

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events which became intertwined in their historical preservation: that is, the conversion of the Yemenis (Ḥimyarites) by Theognosta, and the sending of the bishop Frumentius to the Ethiopians.

<sup>44</sup> Most historians believe this to have taken place in Ethiopia rather than Ḥimyar. For example Trimmingham, 288-289.; and Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2006), 91-92. An in-depth analysis is not necessary, but Thomas Wright presents an alternative interpretation that may be of interest. There are three main accounts of this story: Rufinus, Theodoret and Nicephorus. As the name India was given both to Ethiopia and to Arabia Felix in writings at that time, Wright thinks the location to have been Ḥimyar, as Nicephorus directly states. Socrates' translation of Rufinus seems to indicate Axum, but when compared to the near and far Indias distinguished in other writings of Rufinus, it seems Rufinus intends Ḥimyar as the destination. See Thomas Wright, *Early Christianity in Arabia: A Historical Essay* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1855), 28-33. Mayerson asserts that, "Athanasius (c. 295-373), bishop of Alexandria, makes clear that the remote region penetrated by Frumentius in the late fourth century—the Further India of Rufinus, the Inner India of Socrates, and the Innermost India of Gelasius was Axum, which according to the Periplus was an eight-day journey from the Ethiopian port of Adulis. In Athanasius' *Apol. ad Const.*, Frumentius is twice cited as bishop of Axum." See Philip Mayerson, "A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 2 (1993): 171. An English translation of the Rufinus account can be found in Stanley Mayer Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum*, Updated and expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 112-114. The version of Theodoret is in Bishop of Cyrrhus Theodoret, *The Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 50ff.

<sup>45</sup> A fourth century inscription found in Axum places both Ḥimyar and Saba under the rule of the Christian Axumite king Ezana (r. 330-356CE). The inscription is translated in Burstein, 89-90; 97-100. Ezana's Christianity is recorded in a similar inscription that contains this claim: "In the faith of God and the Power of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost who have saved my kingdom. I believe in your son Jesus Christ who has saved me." See F. Anfray, A. Caquot, and P. Nautin, "Une Nouvelle Inscription Grecque D'ezana, Roi D'axoum," *Journal des Savants* (1970): 266. On the Christianity of Ezana see also Steven Kaplan, "Ezana's Conversion Reconsidered," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13, no. 2 (1982).

<sup>46</sup> By way of introduction to the non-specialist reader: the Monophysite doctrine is a Christological stance which contends for Christ being in one nature God and man at the same time. At the Council of Chalcedon (451), this formula was rejected as heresy by the Chalcedonians, but remained the Christology of about a third of Christendom until the rise of Islam. The implication of Christ being in one nature God and man meant to the Chalcedonians that Mary had literally given birth to God and God had literally died on the cross. Further, the distinction between Christ's divine-humanity and the full divinity of the Father and Holy Spirit necessitated an epistemological division between the Trinitarian persons, so the accusation of tritheism was awarded to the Monophysites. Thus the formula was rejected by the Chalcedonians. The Chalcedonians were also known as diaphysites, contending Christ to be 100% human and 100% divine at the same time, the two natures never mixing, but nonetheless co-existing in full potency. These two Christologies differed from the Nestorian Christology which presented Christ in much more human terms, him having learned of and even attaining his divinity over time. The Nestorians also widely rejected the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) for Mary, proposing *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ) instead. These three Christologies (Monophysite, Nestorian, and Chalcedonian) were probably more or less equally represented at the time of the advent of Islam. Eventually Nestorianism and Monophysitism declined severely, and the majority of contemporary Christians (Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox in general) are doctrinally Chalcedonian (diaphysite). On the Nestorianism of the Church of the East see Gerrit J. Reinink, "Tradition and the Formation of the 'Nestorian' Identity in Sixth-to Seventh-Century Iraq," *CHRC* 89, no. 1-3 (2009). On the state of the non-Chalcedonian Christologies in modern times see Anthony O'Mahony, *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics* (London: Melisende, 2004).

A fifth/eleventh century text, the *Kitāb al-Mijdal* (Book of the Tower) by 'Amr ibn Mattā alleges that between the times of the Roman Caesar Nero (r.54-68) and whom Mattā calls Aphrahat the King of Babylon (c.270-345),<sup>47</sup> Christianity had already spread as far as the Yemen to the Indian Ocean.<sup>48</sup> He credits this achievement to the work of the famous missionary Mār Māri,<sup>49</sup> a student of the teachings of Mār Addai (c.50-150).<sup>50</sup> An unpublished second part of the text states that, "There was no one who preached about the Messiah in the country of Tihāma and the Hijāz, because the apostles stopped at Najrān and went no further. They were preoccupied with the kings of Kinda and the princes of Yemen."<sup>51</sup>

The sources available indicate that the Arab Nabatean tribal region officially became the Roman Province of Arabia during the rule of Hadrian (c. 117 CE). The tribal ruler Imru' al-Qays, whose more Southern reign included Najrān by 328 CE, also had treaties with Rome.<sup>52</sup> The influence of Christian Rome into South Arabia would likely have become even more formal in 356 CE when an embassy was reportedly sent by Constantius to the Ḥimyarites. *Church History* by Philostorgius records that Theophilus was sent to the Ḥimyarite ruler, Ta'ran Yuhan'im, who then converted to Christianity. Three churches were subsequently constructed, one in the capital city of Ḥafār, one in Aden, and one at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.<sup>53</sup> In the latter half of the fifth century, the first Monophysite Bishop of Najrān, Paul I, was in place.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Aphrahat refers to Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c.270-345), who wrote 23 theological demonstrations.

<sup>48</sup> Henricus Gismondi, *Maris Amri Et Slibae De Patriarchis Nestorianorum Commentaria*, 2 Vols. (Rome: F. de Luigi, 1896), Vol. 2. See especially page 1 of the Arabic text.

<sup>49</sup> Amir Harrak has recently completed a translation of *The Acts of Mār Māri* which he dates from between fourth century and the advent of Islam. A more precise dating based on known sources is speculative. See Amir Harrak, *The Acts of Mār Māri the Apostle*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 11 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xvi.

<sup>50</sup> Though it cannot be said that Addai was himself a Monophysite as he lived centuries prior to the Council of Chalcedon, Addai's *Doctrina* (w.c.400, prior to the Council of Chalcedon in 451) has been shown to carry strong Monophysite tendencies. This may have either made South Arabia fertile ground for the flow of official Monophysitism, or found a welcome audience in the Monophysitism of South Arabia, depending on when Mār Māri is to have visited there. See Jan Willem Drijvers, "The Protonike, the Doctrina Addai and Bishop Rabbula of Edessa," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 3 (1997). Mār Māri is thought to have been such a disciple of Addai that they have a liturgy written that is credited to both of them. *The Holy Qurbana of Addai and Māri* (a.k.a. *The Anaphora of Addai and Māri*) is one of the foundational liturgies of the Syrian Church of the East. A study of this text can be found in A. Gelston, *The Eucharistic Prayer of Addai and Mari* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>51</sup> This quote is extracted from Samir K. Samir, "The Prophet Muhammad as Seen by Timothy I and Some Other Arab Christian Authors," in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 84. The *Acts of Mār Māri* places the missionary in South Eastern Arabia including Ubulla at the Southern opening of the Arabian Gulf, and Maishan (Zubayr) on the South Arabian side, near where Baṣrah would be built in 638. A translation can be found in Harrak, 67, n.134; 71, n.139. Harrak has also included a section from the *Liber Turris* of Māri b. Suleman, which also witnesses to Mār Māri's travels in South Eastern Arabia. See *ibid.*, 83-87.; cf. Gismondi, Vol.1, 3-6 of the Arabic. Having traveled Arabia a great deal, and having been at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf, Mār Māri's possible travel to another major center such as Najrān is certainly not out of the question.

<sup>52</sup> The treaties reportedly occurred after the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in 318 CE, and the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. Trimingham, 93-94.

<sup>53</sup> The construction of the churches did not secure the position of Christianity in the area, as Judaism was probably on the rise. Unfortunately the texts are not clearer on the specific location of the church on the Persian Gulf. Philostorgius and Philip R. Amidon, *Philostorgius : Church History*, Writings from the

*The Book of the Himyarites* names the first South Arabian Christian as Ḥayyān (a.k.a. Hannan).<sup>55</sup> Ḥayyān reportedly became a Christian on his trade route to Persia, bringing Christianity back with him to Najrān between 399 and 420 CE.<sup>56</sup> The same source records in detail the martyrdom of a number of the Najrānian Christians in the early sixth century. The Najrānian bishops Paul I and Paul II were also said to have been martyred in Ḥayyān and Najrān (respectively) under the Jewish Himyarite king, the Dhū Nūwās Masrūq, in c.520 CE.<sup>57</sup>

Byzantium and Abyssinia heard the cry of the martyrs and in 525 CE launched an invasion, conquering South Arabia and returning it to Christian rule. The church in Ḥayyān was recorded as consecrated as The Church of the Holy Trinity, along with eight other churches (including three in Najrān) under Monophysite Christian rule between c. 525 CE and 570 CE.<sup>58</sup>

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Greco-Roman World, vol. no. 23 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 40-44.; cf. Shahīd, 86-106.

<sup>54</sup> Both Paul I and Paul II, his successor, were reportedly consecrated by Philoxenus of Maboug who, together with Severus of Antioch, were head of the Monophysite movement. Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 374.

<sup>55</sup> J. Ryckmans and J.W. Hirschberg have disagreed on whether Hayyān was Monophysite or Nestorian. Shahīd takes up the discussion concluding that neither option is possible, since the reign of Yazdgard I (399-420 CE) during which Hayyān's conversion took place, occurred prior to both the Council of Ephesus (431 CE) and the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE). Hirschberg also proposed that the characters of *The Chronicle of Sa'ard* and Hayyān of *The Book of the Himyarites* were not the same person. Shahīd demonstrates as well that this is incorrect. *Ibid.*, 362-363.

<sup>56</sup> This story is not anymore contained in the earliest manuscripts of *The Book of the Himyarites*. It was retold in the *Nestorian Chronicle of Sa'ard*, and is preserved by Moberg in his translation. Axel Moberg, *The Book of the Himyarites : Fragments of a Hitherto Unknown Syriac Work*, Skrifter Utg. Av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet I Lund, vol. 7 (Lund, Sweden: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1924), xlix-l. *The Book of the Himyarites* is undated, Christedes suggests that since the overthrow of the Christians by the Persians in 570 CE is not recorded, the author died prior to the Persian occupation. Vassilios Christedes, "The Himyarite-Ethiopian War and the Ethiopian Occupation of South Arabia in the Acts of Gregentius (Ca. 530 Ad)," *Annales d'Ethiopie* 9, no. 1 (1972): 136. Also see Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 264ff.

<sup>57</sup> A letter from the Persian Bishop Simon of Beth Arsham to Mar Simon is contained in the *The Chronicle of Zuqnīn* (a.k.a. *Pseudo-Dionysius*) and includes another telling of the Najrān martyrdom recording the death of Paul I. See Irfan Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, Subsidia Hagiographica, vol. 49 (Bruxelles: Societ  des Bollandistes, 1971), 46.; Amir Hakkak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnin, Parts Iii and Iv, A.D. 488-775 : Translated from Syriac with Notes and Introduction*, Mediaeval Sources in Translation, vol. 36 (Toronto, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1999), 78-86. For the martyrdom of Paul II see also Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, 46. De Blois proposed a date for the martyrdom of 523. Also, the Dhū Nūwās Masrūq as he is commonly known, is given the name Yūsuf As'ar Yath'ar in an inscription dating from 523. See al-Ṭabarī, 194-205, esp. n. 488.

<sup>58</sup> See Irfan Shahīd, "Byzantium in South Arabia," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 33, no. (1979): 29. The source for this historical material is *Bios* Chapter 9 of *Vita Sancti Gregentii* (hereafter *Vita*). The historical information is woven into legendary tales of miracles surrounding a character named Bishop Gregentius. Shahīd divides the *Vita* into two halves, discarding the Mediterranean as spurious and retaining the Arabian as partly authentic. He then divides the Arabian section into the list of churches, the *Leges*, and the *Dialogus*. Of these, he retains only the record of the churches as authentic. See *ibid.*, 31. A full study and English translation is now available in Albrecht Berger, *Life and Works of Saint Gregentios, Archbishop of Taphar : Introduction, Critical Edition and Translation*, Millennium-Studien, Bd. 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006). Though Berger presents the majority of the *Vita* as legendary, an argument for the extraction of the Arabian section (*Bios* 9) is upheld by Gianfranco Fiaccadori who posits in Berger's book that, "A part of the *Bios* that certainly goes back to a much older source is Gregentios' itinerary with the detailed list of churches ... This wealth of information about the Christian topography of South Arabia is still of value even if Gregentios should have been no historical person at all" (p. 52). The challenge of reconciling completely the details surrounding the mysterious South Arabian Bishop are outside the scope of this study. The list of churches in *Bios* 9, and the existence of a Bishop in Himyar under the reign of Abraha are accepted as likely. The unlikelihood that the name Gregentius is an accurate name for such a bishop is noted. Fiaccadori suggests that Gregentius (Gregentios) could have been a contemporary of Abraha, consecrated independently, if Abraha's request for a bishop from Rome was denied. See *ibid.*, Ch. 2.

In 570 CE South Arabia was conquered by Zoroastrian Persians, who had a long tradition of religious pluralism. Though Christians had most likely lost political control, Christianity was likely the dominant religion in South Arabia during the turn of the seventh century.

## Christian Doctrine in South Arabia in the Sixth and Early Seventh Centuries

Bell posits that the disputes over Trinitarian theology stemming from Chalcedon are not reflected in the Qur'an, as Trinitarian theology had been settled by the time of Muhammad.<sup>59</sup> By Bell's estimation, the Qur'an therefore responds to misunderstood Chalcedonian Trinitarian theology. This is most likely not the case. The Chalcedonian Church had largely settled its doctrine by the seventh century, but Chalcedonian Christianity was not likely the largest branch of Christianity at the time of Muhammad, and probably not the dominant Christian influence in Arabia. Instead, it was Monophysitism that Muhammad likely encountered in his Christian contemporaries, and the particular brand of Philoponian tritheism that Muhammad found in the Najrānians.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment: The Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, ed. John Ralph Willis, *Islam and the Muslim World* (Abingdon, UK: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Monophysite Philoponian Tritheism was a short-lived doctrinal position in the late 6<sup>th</sup> Century, dominant in South Arabia (as will be shown below), in which Christians worshipped three distinct gods. No longer one nature and three persons, the Philoponians recognized doctrinally three distinct natures. The doctrine came from John Philoponus and was spread by the bishops Conon and Eugenius. The designation 'tritheism' may be thought of as derogatory, but that is not what is intended here. The theology of John Philoponus propagated three individual natures for the three Persons of the Trinity, and further denied any common nature between them, and hence 'tritheism' is clinically appropriate terminology. John's discourse, *Against Themistius*, as reported, specifically denies the common nature of God as anything more than an abstract human idea: "For we have proved that the nature called 'common', has no reality of its own alongside any of the existents either, but is either nothing at all – which is actually the case – or only derives its existence in our minds from particulars." Though in its early years the tritheist movement shied away from using plain terminology such as 'three Gods' or 'three Godheads', they eventually affirmed these designations and began to use them freely. A work contemporary to the Philoponian Tritheist movement clarifies the distinction between orthodox Monophysitism and Philoponian tritheism. Replying to the accusation of tritheism in orthodox Monophysitism, between 581 and 587, Patriarch Peter of Callinicum composed an anti-Tritheist dossier to distinguish the two. The volume contains many quotes which he reports are from the works of John Philoponus. A study and translation of the dossier is available in R. Y. Ebied, A. van Roey, and Lionel R. Wickham, *Peter of Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 10 (Leuven: Dept. Orientalistiek, 1981). The above quote of John Philoponus is from the text of the dossier on p. 51. Joel Kraemer agrees with the assessment of John's theology as tritheism. See Joel L. Kraemer, "A Lost Passage from Philoponus' Contra Aristotelem in Arabic Translation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85, no. 3 (1965): 325. A good introduction to John's tritheism is prepared in Aloys Grillmeier SJ and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition Volume 2: From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to Gregory the Great (590-604), Part Four: The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, trans., O. C. Dean (London: Mowbray, 1996), 131-138.

John's scandal was not entirely unknown in the Arabic world. In Ibn al-Qiftī's (d.1248) *History of Learned Men* (*Tarīkh al-Ḥukamā*), John is known as Yaḥya al-Naḥwy (John the Grammarian). It is written of him that he was a Jacobite Bishop in Alexandria, and a follower of Severus. He rejected the, "one in three and three in one" (الوحد ثلثة و الثلثة واحدًا), which angered the bishops, who debated with him and ultimately dismissed him. He is said to have lived until Alexandria had been conquered in 21/642 by 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ (d.c. 42/663), who listened to John and appreciated his rejection of the Trinity, and offered him a position. The relationship between the two men is impossible, as John reportedly died in c.565, 77 years before their meeting is said to have taken place. Though his location and the controversy are highly likely,

The distinction between Diophysitism (Chalcedonian Trinitarian theology) and Monophysitism (a widespread Christology at the time of Muhammad) is important to make here, as the Qur'an most likely responds to Monophysite theology.

The Monophysites ... had been maintaining that while Christ existed in one indivisible *hypostasis*, this *hypostasis*, though united in essence to God, must be distinguished from the *hypostaseis* of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit ... the distinction between the persons of the Trinity was elaborated to the extent that not only individualities (*hypostaseis*) but individual natures within each person had to be recognised... Such ideas deserved the term 'Tritheist'.<sup>61</sup>

Additionally, as Christ was God and had only one nature, Mary was therefore in theory the very literal "Mother of God" (*theotokos*) though not in the same meaning as understood by the Diophysites. The exaggerated Mariology of the Monophysitism that the Qur'an appears to correct is made clear by its direct rebuttal against the elevation of Mary as an actor in the Godhead (Q 5:116; below).

In 520, the Monophysite James of Serug (d.521) wrote to the Himyarite Christians to commend their faith.<sup>62</sup> Irfan Shahid notes that, "Monophysitism [had] established itself as the dominant Christian denomination in Najrān, probably late in the [fifth] century and certainly in the sixth."<sup>63</sup> In spite of this concession, Shahid and others have at times questioned whether or not Chalcedonianism or Nestorianism played a role in the sixth century leadership of Najrān.

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al-Qifṭī's account of the meeting between John and Ibn al-Āṣ must be considered legendary. See Ibn al-Qifṭī and Julius Lippert, *Tarikh Al-Hukamā* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1903), 354ff.; cf. entry 'Amrb.al-Āṣ (al-Āṣī) al-Shamī in H. A. R. Gibb and others, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam : New Edition*, 13 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

<sup>61</sup> The quote and a history of the development of Monophysitism can be found in W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2008), 289-290. The term *hypostasis* (plural: *hypostaseis*) stems from Greek, and refers here to the Trinitarian Persons of God in Christian trinitarian theology. Christianity proposes God in one Nature (Greek: *ousia*) and three Persons (*hypostaseis*): the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the three Persons of a single indivisible Nature which is God. In Arabic, hypostasis is rendered: *qunūm* (pl. *aqānīm*). For a better understanding of the roots of Monophysitism see Uwe Michael Lang and John Philoponus, *John Philoponus and the Controversies over Chalcedon in the Sixth Century : A Study and Translation of the Arbitrator*, Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense. Etudes Et Documents Fasc. 47 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001). James Sweetman states that though a tritheist heresy is doubtful, a misrepresentation of the Trinity by John Philoponus could account for the charge of tritheism. The quotes from Philoponus's works above both challenge Sweetman's appraisal of Philoponus, and prove his assertion of Philoponus as the source of the heresy at the same time. Sweetman, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, p. 61. John Philoponus is known in Islamic sources as Yaḥyā al-Naḥwī. See Abū 'l-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq al-Nadīm and Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist : A 10th Century Ad Survey of Islamic Culture* (Chicago, IL: Great Books of the Islamic World Inc. , 1998), 612-613. The reader may also wish to consult the monophysite christologies of Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Maboug and Jacob of Sarug, all of which are now conveniently summarized in Roberts C. Chesnut, *Three Monophysite Christologies: Severus of Antioch, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and Jacob of Sarug*, Oxford Theological Monographs (London: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>62</sup> Frend, 306.

<sup>63</sup> Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 363. Cook also describes the Christians in Yemen as Abyssinian Monophysites. He suggests that the Persian Christians were dominantly Nestorian, though the rise of Assyrian Miaphysitism in Persia prior to the Persian-Byzantine wars casts doubt on this. Michael Allan Cook, *Muhammad, Past Masters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10. Byzantium itself was Monophysite from Zeno's *Henotikon* in 482 CE at least through the reign of Anastasius (r. 491-518 CE). Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 373-374.

As the Christian doctrine of Najrān is likely the contextual target of some Qur'anic responses to Christianity, we will turn to these questions here.

According to EI, the Monophysite Abyssinian Negus Ella-Aṣbeḥa (a.k.a. Caleb; Hellestheaios; r.c.500-534) conquered Ḥimyar in around 525 CE.<sup>64</sup> He left there a new King named Esimiphaïos who was quickly overthrown and in spite of Caleb's attempts to regain power, Abraha replaced Esimiphaïos as King of Ḥimyar. Writing for EI, Beeston tentatively suggests that Abraha may have had Nestorian leanings. He makes this observation based solely on Abraha's political distaste for Caleb, and a differing in the wording of his opening Trinitarian blessing in writings from those of Esimiphaïos, his predecessor.<sup>65</sup> It is not inconceivable that Abraha allowed ambiguity in his presentation of his faith in order to gain Byzantine support for his action against the Persians, but an official conversion from Monophysitism to Nestorianism is very unlikely. It is more likely that Byzantium still had Monophysite leanings, and was on friendly terms with Abyssinia. Beeston's conviction on the matter seems lower than that of Shahîd, who proposes the possibility that Abraha changed his faith from Monophysite to Chalcedonian.<sup>66</sup>

According to Shahîd, the *Vita* draws Abraha's Monophysitism into doubt by identifying the Bishop of Ṣafār, sent by Byzantine Emperor Justin I (r.518-527), as Gregentius, and identifying him as a Chalcedonian.<sup>67</sup> Shahîd's proposal rests on a complex series of intricately aligned conditions for identifying this mysterious bishop dispatched to Ḥimyar between 525 and 535 CE as a Chalcedonian.<sup>68</sup>

Shahîd also leans heavily on the *Chronicle of Zuqnān* which he interprets as suggesting that it was Caleb who requested the bishop from Justin. The two had met in Jerusalem, according to the *Kebra Nagast*, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Shahîd interprets this as a pilgrimage for Caleb rather than a business trip, implying Caleb's Chalcedonianism. The bishop sent by Justin to Ḥimyar is identified in the *Chronicle of Zuqnān* as John of St. John's, a church administrator.<sup>69</sup> Shahîd equates John with Euprepus, bishop of Ethiopia at the time.<sup>70</sup> Paramonarius and Caleb thus being Chalcedonian would imply that Abraha, having requested a

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<sup>64</sup> Ehsan Yarshater, "The Persian Presence in the Islamic World," in *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>65</sup> See entry Abraha in Gibb and others, Vol. 1, 102-103.

<sup>66</sup> Shahîd, "Byzantium in South Arabia," 27.

<sup>67</sup> Evelyne Patlagean argued elsewhere that it could not have been that the bishop sent to consecrate the South Arabian churches was either named Gregentius or a Chalcedonian. See *ibid.*, 29-30. Berger's work has concluded rather forcefully that with the exception of *Bios 9*, none of the *Vita* is to be trusted as historical.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>69</sup> Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuqnān, Parts Iii and Iv, A.D. 488-775 : Translated from Syriac with Notes and Introduction*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Shahîd, "Byzantium in South Arabia," 90.



bishop from Justin through Caleb, was also Chalcedonian. It is also telling to Shahîd that Gregentius is excluded from the *Ethiopic Synaxarion* implying that Gregentius was not Monophysite, thus agreeing with the *Vita's* position on the bishop's ecclesiastical stance.<sup>71</sup>

Not only is Shahîd's supposition of Abraha's Chalcedonianism based on some remote possibilities, clear problems remain. Firstly, the *Chronicle of Zuqnîn* ultimately relies on the *Book of the Himyarites* which as Shahîd admits is too damaged to clarify the event if it is included at all in the damaged sections.

Secondly, there is very little evidence to show that although the Abyssinians and Byzantines had worked together in the liberation of South Arabia from the Jewish king, that they agreed on matters of Chalcedonian theology. In fact, quite the opposite, as Shahîd himself clarifies that when Byzantium and Abyssinia shared theology just prior to Abraha's rule, it was Monophysitism that they shared, not Chalcedonianism.<sup>72</sup> It is in spite of any remaining differences that they worked together for political reasons, and no theological reason need be found for their doing so.<sup>73</sup> In fact, taken together with other sources such as Procopius and Nonnosus, it seems clear that Justin's intent in helping the Abyssinians in the takeover of South Arabia was precisely economic and political.<sup>74</sup> In the aftermath of Abraha's takeover as king of South Arabia, both the Byzantines and the Abyssinians seem to have lost political control over the region they had banded together to conquer. Abraha reportedly received official delegations of his own from Rome, Persia, and even his former home, Ethiopia.<sup>75</sup>

Thirdly, if the author of the *Ethiopic Synaxarion* was relying on the *Vita* as a source, the *Vita's* identification of Gregentius as Chalcedonian would explain quite simply the name's exclusion in the *Synaxarion*. Whether or not Gregentius was in fact a Chalcedonian, his identification as such in the *Vita* is sufficient to justify the excluded name in the *Synaxarion*. Vassillios Christedes has asserted that the author of the *Vita* misidentified Gregentius as Chalcedonian in order to line him up with the author's own orthodoxy.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless it is the ecclesiastical allegiance of the leaders in Najrân that is primarily at question here, and regardless of Abraha's theological allegiance Shahîd concedes that,

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>72</sup> Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 373. A theological treaty known as the *Henotikon* in 482 was intended to hold the Byzantines and the Abyssinians together, but it was the Acacian schism (484-519) between Rome and Byzantium that really divided the two as the Byzantines slid more and more toward Monophysitism, and Abyssinian loyalty. Emperor Justin I was able to reconcile with Rome by signing a rejection of Acasius, Macedonius, Anastasius, and Zeno (author of the *Henotikon*), and the schism between Rome and Byzantium formally ended on March 28, 519. See Frend, 236.

<sup>73</sup> Zeev Rubin, "Islamic Traditions on the Sasanian Conquest of the Himyarite Realm," *Der Islam* 84, no. 2 (2008): 194.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>76</sup> Christedes: 117.

Najrān probably enjoyed politically a somewhat autonomous status in the sixth century, and this would have been another consideration justifying its being an ecclesiastically autocephalous see, which, however, might have been related to the see of Zafar, the capital of the country, whose bishop must have been the metropolitan of the whole South Arabian region. If Abraha led South Arabia to the Chalcedonian fold, then that country would have had two ecclesiastical hierarchies, as did Syria in the sixth century, and this circumstance would have both ensured the continuance of the see of Najrān and enhanced its autonomy.<sup>77</sup>

Some of the confusion over the doctrine of the South Arabian Christians is due to signs of continued alliance to both the Byzantine and Abyssinian Churches while speaking Syriac and propagating Monophysitism. *The Book of the Himyarites* includes among the clergy in Najrān, “two Arabs from al-Hīra, two Byzantines, one Persian and an Abyssinian.”<sup>78</sup> Shahīd recently claimed Najrān home to Arians, Julianists, Monophysites (Severan), and Nestorians.<sup>79</sup> It follows as no surprise then that one of the features of the dialogue between the Najrān Christians and Muhammad as recorded by Ibn Ishāq was disagreement between the Christians themselves on the nature of God.<sup>80</sup>

Even if perchance Shahīd’s suggestion is right and John Paramonarius / Euprepus was the bishop in question (a.k.a. Gregentius), or that he was Chalcedonian, it is still implied in *The Chronicle of Zuqnān* that he died between 535 and 537 CE, almost a century prior to the meeting of Muhammad with the Najrān Christians.<sup>81</sup> The latter quarter of that century was spent under Persian rule, with Assyrian Monophysites likely accompanying the Persians.<sup>82</sup> Further, not only did the Banū Ḥāritha in Najrān have a long standing tribal allegiance to

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<sup>77</sup> Shahīd, "Byzantium in South Arabia," 40-41. See footnote 42 in particular.

<sup>78</sup> Christedes: 132.

<sup>79</sup> Irfan Shahīd, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 19-22.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn Ishāq, 269-270.; cf. Ibn Hishām, 407.; Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *Ibn Sa'd's Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, trans., S. Moinul Haq and H. K. Ghazanfar, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1990), 418-420.

<sup>81</sup> Shahīd, "Byzantium in South Arabia," 90.

<sup>82</sup> At the synod of Beth Lapat (143BH/484) in Persia, Nestorianism was declared the official doctrine of the Eastern Assyrian Church. However, in making concessions to their Zoroastrian rulers, the Nestorian church leaders allowed clergy to marry. Opponents of the changes defected to Monophysitism. Henana of Adiabene (d. 610 CE) reportedly became head of the school of Nisibis (from c.571-610), covering the time of Muhammad’s life from birth to the first revelations. Henana dismissed Antiochene tradition and reverted to the teaching of Origen, advancing the Monophysites (Miaphysites) among Assyrian Persians by teaching a one-*qnōmā* Christology. The bishops tried to censor Henana, but he was well protected by the royal court and he remained head of the school. Monophysitism gained a strong official following among the Assyrians. The later wars between the Persian and Byzantine empires (610–7/628 CE) further weakened the political standing of the Assyrian Nestorian church. The Miaphysites took their opportunity to rise up again, and took over rural areas. By the mid-first/seventh century the Monophysites in Persia are supposed to have been a strong section of religious life. This push from Nestorianism toward Monophysitism/Miaphysitism among Assyrian Christians was beginning to peak at about the time that the Persians moved into Ḥimyar to conquer the Abyssinians. In 612, the official Christology was returned to Nestorianism, “but the influence of Henana and his pupils made itself felt long after in the East Syria Church.” See Reinink: 221-223.; cf. Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History* (London ; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 32-39.; cf. Arthur Vööbus, *The Statutes of the School of Nisibis*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile (Stockholm: ETSE, 1962), 27-29.

Monophysitism through the Ghassānids,<sup>83</sup> but their first and second bishops, the martyred Paul I, and his successor Paul II, were consecrated by Philoxenus, a founder of the Monophysite movement.<sup>84</sup>

There may have also been a third Monophysite bishop in South Arabia in the sixth century, Bishop Silvanus, whom we know of only through the works of John Diacrinomenus, who directed a fellow Christian to the bishop in one of his letters.<sup>85</sup> Silvanus' presence in South Arabia presents independent evidence of the regional Monophysitism that the Banū Al-Ḥārith represented in Najrān. Shahīd himself, who originally raised the question of Chalcedonianism in South Arabia, later concedes the Monophysitism of the region stating confidently that, "it was in the reign of Anastasius and through the vision of Philoxenus that Najrān acquired its strong Monophysite character, which determined the confessional stance of South Arabia for a century till the rise of Islam."<sup>86</sup>

In 541, Ḥārith b. Jabalah (r.529-569) is reported to have requested from Empress Theodora (d.548) Monophysite bishops for the Ghassānids. The empress arranged for Theodosius (Patriarch of Alexandria, r.535-566) to consecrate two now famous Monophysite bishops, Theodore of Bostra (consecrated 542-543), and the Syrian Jacob Baradaeus (a.k.a. James Baradai, d.578), after whom the Monophysites would eventually be called "Jacobites."<sup>87</sup> Jacob was perhaps the strongest of Monophysite missionaries, covering massive ground between 542 and 578. Early on, he consecrated Conon of Tarsus and Eugenius of Seleucia who became leaders in the tritheist movement starting in the 550's. Capitalizing on the theology of John Philoponus (d.c. 565), the two are said to have propagated a widespread overt tritheism<sup>88</sup> which influenced a massive contingent of the Arabian Monophysites, including Bishop Sergius of Antioch and John Asconaghes, (both d.c.560).<sup>89</sup> The tritheist movement reportedly spread

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<sup>83</sup> Shahīd outlines this direct relationship between the Banū Al-Ḥārith in Najrān and the Ghassānids in North Arabia. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 374; 400-401. The Banū Al-Ḥārith in Najrān provided some of the principle martyrs during the persecution of the Najrān Christians by the Jewish king Masrūq in 520 CE. It was this martyrdom that instigated the reaction of Justin and Caleb and the re-Christianization of South Arabia. For a translation and commentary the martyriology given by the *Book of the Himyarites*, see Moberg.; cf. Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*. Greg Fisher has recently argued that it is perhaps more appropriate to present the names of the antique Arabic tribes by their dynastic names rather than the names of elite leaders. Ghassānids may be better described as Jafnids, Lakhmids as Naṣrids, and Kinda as Ḥujrids, for example. See Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monograph (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-7.

<sup>84</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 374.; cf. Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, 46.; see also Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, 2 Vols.* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2009), Vol. 1. p. 710.

<sup>85</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 401-404.; cf. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, 2 Vols.*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, p. 709.

<sup>86</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, 2 Vols.*, Vol. 1, pp. 710-711.

<sup>87</sup> Frend, 285.

<sup>88</sup> As shown above, the theology of Philoponian Monophysitism was overtly tritheistic as it promoted three gods, not one God in three hypostases, but of three natures as well. See *ibid.*, 290.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-291.

quickly to Greece and Rome, to Syria, Egypt and into Africa. In 574 the tritheists themselves divided into two groups, the Athanasians and the Cononites.<sup>90</sup>

In 563, Ḥārith of the Northern Arabian Ghassānids carried a letter from Jacob Baradaeus to Constantinople, the primary concern of which was the denunciation of the rapid and extensive spread of tritheism among the Arab clergy.<sup>91</sup> Of the 137 signatories listed at the end of the letter, it is shocking that there are none from Najrān or Ḥafār.<sup>92</sup> Given the centrality of these two cities to the Christian identity in South Arabia as already shown,<sup>93</sup> the likely presence of at least six churches and two Monophysite bishoprics between them, and the close historical ties between the Banū al-Ḥārith and the Ghassānids, the absence of signatories from these two cities is stunning. It is unlikely given these observations that the South Arabian Christians would be uninvited to sign such a declaration had they agreed with it. Far more likely is that the strong and widespread tritheistic doctrine that the letter admonishes, that of Conon and Eugenius, was present precisely in these locations in the mid-sixth century.

In 566, the Roman Emperor Justin II (r.565-578) held a conference between the Chalcedonians and the two kinds of Monophysites (the orthodox Monophysites and the Philoponian tritheists). Eugenius and Conon were involved in the debate which reportedly lasted a year, and some reconciliation was gained as both bishops were restored to their sees.<sup>94</sup> This did not extinguish the tritheist movement, however, as Patriarch Peter of Callinicum (r. 581-591) was still managing debates with tritheist bishops between 582 and 585.<sup>95</sup>

Al-Mundhir (r.569-582) succeeded Ḥārith b. Jabalah as the *sheikh* of the Ghassānids. Al-Mundhir is said to have been a strong Monophysite, and received to the court of Emperor Tiberius II in 580 as the king of the Ghassānids, second in power only to the Emperor himself.<sup>96</sup> Frend further notes that Al-Mundhir was slandered and betrayed by Maurice (r.582-602), and was arrested and exiled to Sicily. In 582 Maurice became Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. In

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<sup>90</sup> The Athanasians rejected the idea of bodily resurrection, which the Cononites accepted, though the two groups shared tritheist theology. Ebied, van Roey, and Wickham, 22. Muhammad was four years old at this time.

<sup>91</sup> Trimmingham, 183. The letter is in Latin in Jean Baptiste Chabot, *Documenta Ad Origines Monophysitarum Illustrandas*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 103 (Louvain: Secretariat du CorpusSCO, 1965), 145-156.; The letter is in Syriac with a French translation in J. Lamy, "Profession De Foi Adressée Par Les Abbés Des Couvents De La Province D'arabie À Jacques Baradée," in *Actes Du XIè Congrès International Des Orientalistes*, ed. J. Lamy (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897), 117-137. The letter is discussed in detail in Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 824-838.

<sup>92</sup> Chabot, 148-156.

<sup>93</sup> The churches of South Arabia and their ecclesiology are discussed below as well in the context of the Qur'anic rebuttal of South Arabian Christianity.

<sup>94</sup> Frend, 318.

<sup>95</sup> One of those was Bishop Elias, whom Peter won back to orthodox Monophysitism. See Ebied, van Roey, and Wickham, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Frend, 328-329.

584 he abolished the rule of the Ghassānids, and the mighty Arab Christians divided into fifteen tribes. Some of these joined the Persians, advancing Monophysitism under their rule.<sup>97</sup> Maurice was a Chalcedonian, with no taste for Monophysites, and his betrayal of the Arab Monophysites was possibly avenged when a united Arab army marched against Syria and Palestine in the spring of 12/634. It seems that the Arabs were no longer interested in ecumenical debate, as they attacked Monophysite monasteries as well as Chalcedonian.<sup>98</sup>

There is enough evidence for the Monophysitism of South Arabia in the sixth century to relegate Nestorianism to secondary representation, and any known hints of Chalcedonianism among South Arabian Christians to the whispers of a small Christian minority. The Najrān Christians were most likely staunchly Monophysite in 10/631, and are extremely likely to have been propagating the overtly tritheistic heresy of Eugenius and Conon.<sup>99</sup>

In 12/633, just prior to the Arab invasion, the Synod of Alexandria under Cyrus finally saw the unification of the various kinds of Monophysites and the eventual end of formal tritheism. However, the meeting between the Najrān Christians and the Arab prophet is reported to have already taken place, and the Arabs now had their own Christology.

Monophysitism had been brought to Najrān most likely by the Ghassānids, of which Abū Ḥāritha b. Alqāma was a direct relative.<sup>100</sup> It was not likely the common Monophysitism of Severus, but the overtly tritheistic Monophysitism of Philoponus that the Najrānites followed. The Qur'an itself is a witness to this, as it is this tritheistic theology that the Qur'an appears to respond to in some of the surahs explored below. An accurate understanding of the Qur'anic rebuttal in the context of the meeting between Muhammad and the Najrānians will later be explored.

## Muhammad's Direct Encounters with Christians

The first encounters between Christians and Muslims reportedly took place during the lifetime of Muhammad. The Prophet himself likely met with Christians in formal dialogue near the end of his life. According to Islamic sources, the Qur'an records the Islamic response to the Christian theology that Muhammad encountered. In spite of the Qur'an's stern responses to the Christians, Muhammad apparently understands Islam in relation to Christianity to be more

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 330.

<sup>98</sup> Including the monasteries of Mardin and Q'atar; *ibid.*, 350-352.

<sup>99</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 Vols., Vol. 2, 296.

<sup>100</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 373ff.

dialogical than imperialist. He reflects this tolerant dialogue in policy which protects not only the Christians who live in Islamic territory, but their Christian faith as well.

There are four main Christian characters discussed in Muhammad's biography: the Monk Baḥīrā, Bishop Quss b. Sa'īda al-Iyādī of Najrān, Warāqa b. Nawfal, and Abū Ḥāritha b. Alqāma of Najrān. When Muhammad was twelve years old, Abū Ṭālib reportedly brought him on a trade caravan to Bostra, Syria. There they were hosted by Baḥīrā, a Christian monk.<sup>101</sup> Baḥīrā, allegedly aware of a Christian prophecy concerning a coming prophet for the Arabs, identified Muhammad as the foretold, and warned Abū Ṭālib to guard Muhammad against the Jews.

Whether the story of Baḥīrā is historical or not, Spencer Trimmingham is, "certain that there was no direct Christian influence upon Muhammad during the formative years of his mission since there is no trace of it in the early suras of the Qur'an."<sup>102</sup> This is not likely to be accurate, as Muhammad is said to have had connections with Bishop Quss and Warāqa b. Nawfal after his travels to Syria and before his meeting with Abū Ḥāritha. Warāqa was supposedly of the Meccan Quraysh, indicating his (and therefore Khadijah's) Christian persuasion. More likely is that the Christianity that Muhammad encountered in these influences simply did not provoke the Qur'anic rebuttal that Abū Ḥāritha's Christianity did later on.

Sometime before Muhammad's call to prophethood, he reportedly visited the market of Ukāz, and heard a sermon preached by Bishop Quss of Najrān.<sup>103</sup> Not much can be historically verified about this encounter. It is said that Muhammad remembered the event fondly when the Iyād sent a delegation to him later on.

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<sup>101</sup> The historicity of this event is debated outside of Islamic tradition. As Trimmingham notes, the Syriac name *bhīrā* simply means "reverend" as a title, and could have referred to any monk. See Trimmingham, 4. One can find the retelling of the story by historians in Philip Khuri Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, Rev. 10th ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 111., Bertaina, 120-124. Also see Tor Andræ, *Mohammed, the Man and His Faith* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2000), 37-38. The earliest biography of Muhammad tells the story in Ibn Ishāq, 79-81.; cf. Ibn Hishām, 136. Ibn Sa'd includes a brief mention of the event in Ibn Sa'd, 134-135. The Arabic original is in Muhammad Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat Al-Kubra*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dar Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, 1997), Vol. 1, pp. 96-100. The biography assembled by Martin Lings is a more colourful version, mentioning that manuscripts belonging to Baḥīrā had predicted a prophet, though this author has yet to find any credible references to such manuscripts. See Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1983), 29-30. The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā as it played out in inter-faith dialogue after Muhammad's death will be treated in the next section. If Baḥīrā lived in Bostra, and was of Arab descent, he would most likely have been of the Ghassānids, and therefore a Monophysite, see Frend, 306.

<sup>102</sup> Trimmingham, 259.

<sup>103</sup> Quss was a Monophysite. Shahīd argues that Quss had a strong influence on the literary style of the Qur'an. Shahīd, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," 24ff.

It is transmitted that when Muhammad was forty years old, shortly after his first revelatory encounter, he met with Waraqa b. Nawfal.<sup>104</sup> He was a learned Christian, and the uncle of Muhammad's wife Khadīja. Waraqa reportedly affirmed Muhammad as a prophet of the Christian God.<sup>105</sup> He is said to have been old at this time, and some sources report him to have been blind.

According to Ibn Ishāq, the Najrān Christians who visited Muhammad in 10/631 were fourteen men in all. Only three of them spoke directly with Muhammad. They were Najrān's political leader, or *Aqīb* (ʿAbdul Masīḥ); administrative leader, or *Sayyid* (al-Hyam); and,

Their bishop, scholar, religious leader and master of their schools, was Abū Ḥāritha, who was respected among them and a renowned student with an extensive knowledge of their religion; the Christian princes of Byzantium had honoured him with gifts of goods and servants, built churches for him, and venerated him for his learning and religious zeal.

<sup>106</sup>

و أبو حارثة بن علقامة ، أحد بني بكر بن وائل ، أسقفتهم و حبرهم ، و صاحب مدراسهم ... و كان أبو حارثة قد شرف فيهم ، و درس كتبهم ، حتى حسن علمه في دينهم ، فكانت ملوك الروم من النصرانية قد شرفوه و مولوه و أخدموه ، و بنوا له الكنائس ، و بسطوا عليه الكرامات ، لما يبلغهم عنه علمه و اجتهاده في دينهم.<sup>107</sup>

As Abū Ḥāritha was the religious leader, his clear Philoponian Monophysite (tritheistic) theology is likely to have been the most dominant and skilfully explained to the Prophet Muhammad during the meeting.<sup>108</sup> According to Islamic sources, he was the dominant spiritual

<sup>104</sup> Waraqa b. Nawfal in Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* was one of the four men who rejected polytheism (*ḥunafā*). "Waraqa attached himself to Christianity and studied its scriptures until he had thoroughly mastered them." Ibn Ishāq, 98-99. Ghada Osman recently argued that the Christian communities in Mecca and Medina at the advent of Islam were small at best, and their particular creed undeterminable. Osman also posits that though conversions to Christianity in Arabic source materials are presented as individualistic rather than tribal, religious individualism was normative. This is questionable from a historical standpoint. Though the stories of Christian conversions in Arabic sources are indeed about individuals, the information available from Pre-Islamic Christian sources suggests that whole tribes (i.e the Ghassānids) were wholly Christian. Likewise the conversion of whole tribes to Islam is well documented in Arabic sources. The presentation of Meccan and Medinan Christian converts as isolated individualists in spite of there often being noble or powerful converts about whom the stories are told, rings anachronistic and contrary to what is known from other sources of the social norms of religious allegiance among Arabs in general both before and after the advent of Islam. Muhammad's individualistic conversion to monotheism from polytheism and his success as a religious leader in spite of being marginalised for his beliefs in Mecca is a notable exception to social trends for religious allegiances, which are understood to be dominantly tribal. See Ghada Osman, "Pre-Islamic Arab Converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 1 (2005).

cf. Ibn Hishām, 163. "فأما ورقة بن نوفل فاستحکم فی النصرانية ، و اتبع الكتب من أهلها ، حتى علم علما من أهل الكتاب."

Trimingham notes that of the four *ḥunafā*, three became Christians, and the fourth died in his quest for the true religion. See Trimingham, 263.

<sup>105</sup> Ibn Ishāq, 107.; c.f. Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 2 Vols., 2 ed., Turath Al-Islam (Egypt: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1955), Vol. 1, p. 191., Lings, 44., Bertaina, 117-120.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Ishāq, 271.

<sup>107</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, p. 573.

<sup>108</sup> It is also possible that of the Christian leaders of Najrān, Abū Ḥāritha was one of only few that could speak both Syriac, the educated language of the Monophysites and Nestorians, as well as the Arabic that Muhammad would have clearly understood. The liturgical language of Najrān was likely Syriac, and their leadership may have included Byzantines, Persians, and Abyssinians as well as Arabs, as recorded in *The Book of the Himyarites*. Syriac would have united the leadership in Najrān, but Arabic was

leader, and from the dominant tribe in Najrān,<sup>109</sup> and it was his theology that the Qur'anic revelations respond to in the later surahs. The brand of Abū Ḥāritha's faith is important to the context of the Qur'an and its use as an interfaith dialogue tool.

According to Ibn Ishāq, sometime that same year leaders of the Banū Al-Ḥārith from Najrān converted to Islam. Abū Ḥāritha was not among the names of prominent converts listed by Ibn Ishāq. This may indicate that he did not convert along with his tribe, or possibly that he had died by that time.<sup>110</sup>

## The Qur'an: the Original Muslim-Christian Apology

Our primary source, the Qur'anic text,<sup>111</sup> serves as the original record of formal inter-faith dialogue, and so some contextualism of the Qur'an is appropriate here. The Qur'an existed without commentaries in early Islam, and though some *tafsīr* will be engaged in this section for the sake of determining historical context, the Qur'an is capable of self-clarification as shown above, and will be its own primary source of explanation of meaning wherever possible.<sup>112</sup> As the Qur'an has been since its composition in immediate dialogue with Christians and Jews, making reference to their texts, a brief introduction to the concept of *tahrīf* will be made before we move into Qur'anic content on Christians.

### **Tahrīf**

The Qur'an accuses Jews of distorting the meaning of their revelations (Q2:75; 3:78; 4:46; 5:13). Ibn'Abbās specifies that Q2:75 refers to seventy men that were with Moses, who

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necessary for the dialogue with Muhammad. Abū Ḥāritha, being both Arab and bishop, would have known both. On the liturgical language of Najrān see Christedes: 132.

<sup>109</sup> Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 400.

<sup>110</sup> See Ibn Ishāq, 645-648.; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 2 Vols., Vol. 2, p. 592.

<sup>111</sup> Abu Bakr compiled the Qur'an already in 11-12/623-633, and the *maṣḥaf al-sharīf* compiled by Uthman was completed in 30/650. See al-Imam, 20-23. cf. John Gilchrist, *Jam' Al-Qur'an ; the Codification of the Qur'an Text* (Benoni, South Africa: Jesus to the Muslims, 1989). John Gilchrist and Ahmad al-Imam may be seen as representing opposing ends of the interpretive spectrum in the academic view of the codification of the Qur'anic text.

The earliest known dated copies are from 94/712, 102/720, and 107/725. See Adolf Grohmann, "The Problem of Dating Early Qur'āns," *Der Islam* 33, no. 3 (1958): 216, n. 17. Some of the Sana'a manuscripts are earlier, but their precise dating is unknown. See Ursula Dreiholz, "Preserving a Treasure: The Sana'a Manuscripts," *Museum International* 51, no. 3 (1999); cf. Gerd-Rüdiger Puin, Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, "Neue Wege Der Koranforschung," *Forschungs Magazin* 1 (1999). A published facsimile edition of the Topkapi recension is available in Tayyar Altikulac, *Al-Mushaf Al-Sharif: Attributed to Uthman Bin Affan* (Istanbul, Turkey: Organization of the Islamic Conference Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> For this reason the reader may notice a lack of input from works of *tafsīr* in this section. This is intended to honour the Qur'an as an internally consistent text in its brief history prior to the *tafsīr* works, and not meant to dishonour the *mufasssīrūn*. As this present work is developed chronologically, the *tafsīr* works will be introduced in greater detail below as they occur chronologically.



altered Moses' recitation of God's word.<sup>113</sup> Q4:46 according to Ibn 'Abbās refers specifically to, "Malik ibn al-Sayf and his friends," who allegedly changed the, "traits and description of Muhammad after these were exposted upon in the Torah,"<sup>114</sup> and Q5:13 specifically accuses, "Abdullah ibn Salam and his followers," of changing the traits and description of Muhammad as well as deliberate misinterpretation of the Torah's teaching on stoning.<sup>115</sup> Al-Wāḥidī (d.468/1076), corrects Ibn 'Abbās by noting that regarding the context of Q2:75, "most Qur'anic exegetes are of the opinion that it was revealed about those who had changed the verse of stoning [adulterers who are married] and the description of Muhammad, Allah bless him and give him peace;" regarding Q4:46 and Q5:13 al-Wāḥidī is silent.<sup>116</sup>

As Gordon Nickel has shown, "the focus of early Muslim accusations of *tahrīf* was not corruption or falsification of the text. Rather, the commentators were more concerned about the response of non-Muslims – primarily the Jews of Madīna – to the Muslim claims that Muhammad is a prophet and that the recitations he is speaking are from Allah."<sup>117</sup> Nickel shows that the oldest complete *tafsīr*, that of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767) treats with some detail the accusation of *tahrīf*, and after a comprehensive evaluation concludes:

It is clear from the analysis of Muqātil's exegesis of the tampering verses that he did not understand the verbs *ḥarrafa* and *baddala* to refer to an act of textual falsification of the earlier scriptures. Rather, he explains the verses containing these verbs with a variety of tampering actions which revolve around response to authority.<sup>118</sup>

Though accusations of textual corruption can be found in earlier texts,<sup>119</sup> the concept of *tahrīf*<sup>120</sup> as it is known now was popularized more than two centuries after the death of Muhammad, and its formalization was the innovation of one of al-Wāḥidī's contemporaries,

<sup>113</sup> This text, though referred to here as *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* (d.68/687), cannot be dated earlier than its editor, Muhammad al-Kalbi (d.146/763). See discussion in section I.2 below. 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbas*, trans., Mokrane Guezzou, Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an, vol. v. 2 (Louisville, KY ; Amman, Jordan: Fons Vitae; Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 16.; cf. Y 'aqub Fayrūzābādī and 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās, *Tanwīr Al-Miqbās Min Tafṣīr Ibn 'Abbās* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1987), 12. Though Fayrūzābādī can no longer be considered a completely credible source, the references to the Fīrūzābādī are included here.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn 'Abbās, 107-108.; cf. "اليهود مالك بن الصيف و أصحابه" in Fayrūzābādī and Ibn 'Abbās, 71.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn 'Abbās, 135.; cf. "عبد الله ابن سلام و أصحابه" in Fayrūzābādī and Ibn 'Abbās, 90.

<sup>116</sup> "وعند أكثر المفسرين: نزلت الآية في الذين غيروا الرجم وصفة محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم." Al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is now available online in both Arabic and English thanks to the Aal al-Bait Institute in Jordan. See The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Quranic Science: Context of Revelation", Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought <http://www.altafsir.com/AsbabAlnuzol.asp> (accessed March 15th 2010).

<sup>117</sup> See Nickel in David Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 6 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 207. Nickel has elsewhere completed a full survey and analysis of the twenty-five 'tampering verses' of the Qur'an in early Islamic exegesis, concluding that, "Examination and analysis of the commentary passages has shown that the exegetes of the formative period did not in the first instance understand the Qur'anic verses of tampering to mean the textual corruption of the earlier scriptures." Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'an*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 13 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 223.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas, 222.

<sup>119</sup> These are noted in section I.2.iv below.

<sup>120</sup> Meaning "change, alteration or forgery." See Gibb and others, Vol. 10, p. 111.

Ibn Ḥazm (d.456/1064). Ibn Ḥazm broadened the accused to include Christians with the Jews, and application to the altering of texts rather than just interpretations.<sup>121</sup>

However, as Camilla Adang has shown, Ibn Ḥazm's accusations were both innovative, and far from generally accepted in Islamic *tafsīr*. For example, Abū al-Rabi' ibn al-Layth wrote a letter to the Byzantine emperor Constantine VI (r.163/780-181/797) from the court of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in which he, "categorically denies the possibility of passages having been added to, or omitted from, the [Jewish and Christian] scriptures, and professes his belief – and Caliph Hārūn's – in the authenticity of these scriptures."<sup>122</sup> This is the same view held by Ali b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (b.194/810), Ibn Qutayba (b.213/828), and al-Mas'ūdī (d.345/956) who agree with al-Layth that any distortion is one of interpretation and not textual.<sup>123</sup> Al-Ya'qūbī (Aḥmad b. Abī Ya'qūb b. Ja'far; d.c.292/905), though not as explicit, likewise uses the Jewish and Christian scriptures as evidence to uphold Islam, implying their accuracy.<sup>124</sup> Even the renowned commentator Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923) did not uphold the accusation of textual edition. Adang has summarized al-Ṭabarī's views thus:

The Israelites and their descendants, the Jews, broke their covenant with God by questioning Muhammad's prophethood and calling him a liar. God made their hearts impure, which led to their misrepresenting and altering the words that their Lord had revealed to Moses. When Moses ordered the Israelites to express their repentance, they used a phrase other than the one they had been told to use; instead of *ḥiṭṭa* – which according to Goldziher may be derived from the Hebrew *ḥata'nu*, we have sinned – they said *ḥinṭa*. The distortion that was affected here was an oral one, and al-Ṭabarī does not link it with the written text of God's word. The same applies in the case of the seventy elders who accompanied Moses to Mount Sinai and were allowed to hear God's

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<sup>121</sup> For a study of Ibn Ḥazm's accusation of *tahrīf* see Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible : From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, vol. 22 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 237-248. Theodore Pulcini's study of Ibn Ḥazm begins with a declaration that, "the doctrine of *tahrīf* began in the Qur'an itself," even though, "specific textual examples were not adduced to substantiate the charge." Q3:78 and 4:46 are employed, though it cannot be shown that textual corruption as an accusation of Qur'anic origin was the view of early Islamic commentators. Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse : Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures*, American Academy of Religion the Religions (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), 14-15.

Ibn Ḥazm has been selectively marginalized by mainstream Islamic scholarship. For example, in 2006, 38 Islamic scholars responded in unison to the Pope's reference to Ibn Ḥazm by clarifying that Ibn Ḥazm, "is a worthy but very marginal figure ... much more important to Muslims are figures such as al-Ghazālī (d.1111 CE) and many others who are far more influential and more representative of Islamic belief than Ibn Hazm." Yet the evidence of the preponderance of his innovations in the arena of *tahrīf* suggests that Ibn Ḥazm is a far more influential character than these scholars indicate. See *Various Authors, "Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI", The Official Website of the Amman Message* <http://ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf> (accessed March 27 2011).

<sup>122</sup> Adang, 21, 224. The letter itself can be found in Arabic with a French translation in Hadi Eid, *Lettre Du Calife Hārūn Al-Rašīd À L'empereur Constantin Vi*, Etudes Chrétiennes Arabes (Paris: Cariscrypt, 1992). The letter is also preserved in Ahmad Zaki Safwat, *Jamharat Rasa'il Al-'Arab*, 4 vols. (Cairo: Mustafa al-Bab al-Halabī, 1971), Vol. 3, pp. 217-274. From the content of the letter, it seems clear that the Caliph has access to an Arabic Bible. He quotes many times from the *Injīl*, *Torah*, and *Zabūr*, authenticating the accuracy of the text that he holds.

<sup>123</sup> See Adang, 225, 232.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

speech. Once they returned to their people, some of them gave a false report of what they had heard, distorting God's spoken words, but not the written Torah, as explicitly stated by al-Ṭabarī.<sup>125</sup>

The distortion of the Jewish and Christian texts was not likely an accusation widely accepted as congruent with the Qur'an until the fifth/eleventh century and therefore cannot be considered valid commentary on Qur'anic content until that time. As the following discussion is based on the first three centuries of Islam, the modern doctrine of *tahrīf* (as textual corruption) cannot be considered informative for Qur'anic interpretations during this period.

### The Qur'an on Christians

Though it is not the focus of this study to determine the precise standing of the Qur'an on the usefulness of Christianity from an Islamic perspective, some comment on the formation of the Qur'an in the context of inter-faith dialogue is appropriate.

The Qur'an addresses Christians by a number of different titles. The Qur'anic name for Christians is *al-naṣārā*.<sup>126</sup> The term is used directly in Q2:62, 111-113, 120, 135, 140; 3:67; 5:14, 18, 51, 69, 82; 9:30; 22:17.

Notably, the Quran lists Christians and Jews along with Sabians: "The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians - all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve" (Q2:62). The Sabians are mentioned three times in the Qur'an (Q2:62; 5:69; 12:17), each time listed with the Christians and the Jews.<sup>127</sup>

In the passages listed above, the Qur'an is clear that the Jews and Christians do not hold exclusive rights to Abraham as a spiritual patriarch (Q2:135, 140; 3:67; 5:69), nor do they

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 227-228.

<sup>126</sup> Meaning either "the Nazareans" or "the helpers" depending on whether it is derived from *nāṣra* (Nazareth) or from *anṣār* (helpers, referring to Jesus' disciples). See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* (Baroda, India: Oriental Institute, 1938), 280-281. See also McAuliffe, 94-98.; cf. Shahîd, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," 23. Shahîd also argues for Ethiopic as the origin of the name *Isā* for Jesus. See also Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 152-165. De Blois proposed that not only is the Qur'an using the name *naṣārā* to refer to Christians, it is referring to a specific sect of Christians known as that Nazoraean, who followed food restrictions not unlike those corrected in Q5:5, and taught an anthropomorphic trinity consisting of Father, Mother (Holy Spirit), Son (Christ). See François de Blois, "Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and Ḥanīf (Ἐθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65, no. 1 (2002): 1-16.

<sup>127</sup> The exact identity of the Sabians is unknown, though they are identified in the Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an as possibly "Manichaeans, i.e. what the Arab antiquaries refer to as the *zanādika* among the Kuraysh." See Gibb and others, Vol. 8, 672. Also Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, 6 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), Vol. 5, 511-512. Al-Nadim's *Fihrist* discusses the religious practices of what it calls the Harranian Sabians, but as these are polytheists, it is unlikely that they are the Sabians meant by the Qur'an; see al-Nadim and Dodge, 745ff. See also the extended discussion on Q2:62 in traditional exegesis in McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Ch. 3.

have exclusive rights to salvation history (Q2:111-113, 120), though clarifying that they are not excluded from salvation history either, as the Qur'an repeats the declaration above, "For the [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians—those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds—there is no fear: they will not grieve" (Q5:69). Ultimately, the question of salvation is in God's hands alone: "As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection; God witnesses all things"<sup>128</sup> (Q22:17; cf. 5:18).

The Qur'an also distinguishes between Christians and Jews,

You [Prophet] are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians,' for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance (Q5:82; cf. 9:30).<sup>129</sup>

In addition to direct references, the Qur'an also addresses Christians along with Muslims and Jews as *ahl al-kitāb* (the people of the book).<sup>130</sup> Though the phrase applies by definition to all three groups, its context is most often that of speaking to Christians and Jews specifically. McAuliffe notes that when the direct and indirect references to Christians are taken together, the Qur'an corrects and criticises Christians more than it praises or affirms them.<sup>131</sup> Since the Qur'anic view of *al-kitāb* cannot be said to be other than inclusive of the Qur'an, direct criticisms of Christians and Jews under the title *ahl al-kitāb* should also be understood as warnings to Muslims against potential heresy.

The most prominent issues that the Qur'an addresses Christians on directly appear to be the prophethood of Muhammad, tritheism, and the characters of Jesus and Mary. We will

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<sup>128</sup> The term 'Magians' probably refers to the Zoroastrian priesthood. McAuliffe, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, Vol. 3, 244.; and Jeffery, 259-260.

<sup>129</sup> For a helpful survey of the Islamic *tafsīr* literature on Q5:82, see McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Ch. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Giulio Bassetti-Sani argues that *ahl al-kitāb* is a reference, "restricted to the Scribes and teachers of the Jews." This is unlikely true. Daniel Madigan does not divorce the classification of people from its qualifier "the book." After an exhaustive treatise on the internal use and structure of the Qur'anic root *k t b*, Madigan concludes that, "the logic of the Qur'an's own approach demonstrates the impossibility of understanding *al-kitāb* as a fixed text, a book," furthermore, "nothing about the Qur'an suggests that it conceives of itself as identical with the *kitāb*." *Kitāb* in Madigan's Qur'anic exegesis, "is a claim to authority and knowledge, not a statement about the form in which it is kept." Madigan highlights the limitations of 'book' as a translation for the Qur'anic concept of *kitāb* and suggests 'writing' as a more accurate yet still limited alternative. See Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 177-179., cf. Giulio Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 123. From the Islamic voices, Mahmoud Ayoub offers that, "The expression, 'people of the Book' (*ahl al-kitāb*) can, in my view, be used as a unifying idea. In the Qur'an it is limited to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Muslims are 'people of the Book' in the strictest possible sense." Mahmoud Ayoub and Irfan A. Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 12.

<sup>131</sup> McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 4.

return to each of these topics as they occur in dialogue throughout history, however, as the Qur'an is the foundational record of Christian-Muslim dialogue, we will explore just a few opening comments of the Qur'an on these issues in the early seventh century Qur'anic context. This is intended only to acknowledge the Qur'an's own voice in the dialogue.

### Muhammad's Prophethood

Here we will highlight two passages that speak to the *ahl al-kitāb* directly to affirm Muhammad's prophethood. In surah 5:19 the Qur'an makes explicit to the *ahl al-kitāb* that Muhammad is a messenger of the Judeo-Christian God, and the seal of the prophets.

People of the Book, Our Messenger comes to you now, after a break in the sequence of messengers, to make things clear for you in case you should say, 'No one has come to give us good news or to warn us.' So someone has come to you, to give you good news and warn you: God has the power to do all things. (Q5:19)

It may be said that the Christian-Muslim dialogue on the prophethood of Muhammad begins with this declaration. Elsewhere, the Qur'an gives in greater detail the context of Muhammad's prophethood in the Judeo-Christian tradition:

We gave [Abraham] Isaac and Jacob, each of whom We guided, as We had guided Noah before, and among his descendants were David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron—in this way We reward those who do good—Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah—every one of them was righteous—Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot. We favoured each one of them over other people, and also some of their forefathers, their offspring, and their brothers: We chose them and guided them on a straight path. Such is God's guidance, with which He guides whichever of His servants He will. If they had associated other gods with Him, all their deeds would have come to nothing. Those are the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. Even if these people now disbelieve in them, We have entrusted them to others who do not disbelieve. Those were the people God guided, '[Prophet], follow the guidance they received.' Say, 'I ask no reward for it from you: it is a lesson for all people. (Q6:84-90; cf. 23:23-52)

### Christian Tritheism

The Qur'an also begins a discourse with Christians on the nature of God.

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a 'Trinity' (تِلْكَ) —stop [this], that is better for you—God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and

earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. (Q4:171; emphasis mine)

And also,

Those people who say that God is the **third of three** (ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ) are defying [the truth]: there is only One God. If they persist in what they are saying, a painful punishment will afflict those of them who persist. (Q5:73; emphasis mine)

Some remarks on the emboldened translation rendered “trinity” in Q4:171 are necessary here, as it does not seem to be congruent with the most likely historical context of the Qur’an. The Arabic text is included here to add clarity to the following discussion.

يٰۤاَهْلَ الْكِتٰبِ لَا تَغْلُوْا فِىْ دِيْنِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُوْلُوْا عَلٰى اللّٰهِ اِلَّا الْحَقَّۗ اِنَّمَا الْمَسِيْحُ عِيسٰى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُوْلٌۙ اللّٰهُ وَكَلِمَتُهٗۙ الّٰتِيْهَا اِلٰى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوْحٌ مِّنْهُۗ فَآمَنُوْا بِاللّٰهِ وَرُسُلِهٖۗ وَلَا تَقُوْلُوْا ثَلٰثَةٌۙ اِنَّهُمْ اَحَدٌۙ خَيْرًا لَّكُمْۗ اِنَّمَا اللّٰهُ اِلٰهٌۙ وَّاحِدٌۙ سُبْحٰنَهٗۙ اَنْ يَّكُوْنَ لَهٗۙ وَلَدٌۙ لَّهٗۙ مَا فِى السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِى الْاَرْضِۗ وَكَفٰى بِاللّٰهِ وَكِىْلًاۙ

(Q. 4:171; emphasis mine)

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِيْنَ قَالُوْۤا اِنَّ اللّٰهَ ثَلٰثٌۙ ثَلٰثَةٌۙ وَمَا مِنْ اِلٰهٍ اِلَّا اِلٰهٌۙ وَّاحِدٌۙ وَاِنْ لَّمْ يَنْتَهُوْۤا عَمَّا يَقُوْلُوْنَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِيْنَ كَفَرُوْۤا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌۙ اَلِيْمٌۙ

(Q. 5:73; emphasis mine)

Haleem’s English translation of 4:171 above uses the word “trinity” to translate the Arabic word *thalātha* (ثَلَاثَةٌ).<sup>132</sup> This translation may also be found in the translations of Rashad Khalifa and the translation of The Monotheist Group.<sup>133</sup> To illustrate the challenge that translators have faced with these two terms alone, included below is a survey of English translations of these two terms.

<sup>132</sup> The exact word *thalātha* may also be found in surahs 9:119 and 19:10, for example. It is clear that the internal meaning of the Qur’an is the number three.

<sup>133</sup> See Rashad Khalifa, *Quran : The Final Testament : Authorized English Version, with the Arabic Text*, Rev. 4. ed. (Capistrano Beach, CA: Islamic Productions, 2005); The Monotheist Group, *The Message: A Translation of the Glorious Qur’an* (USA: Bainbow Press, 2008). The Qur’anic references are given, page numbers will not be provided.

Date of Translation	English Translator	Surah 4:171 rendered ثَلَاثَةٌ	Surah 5:73 rendered ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ
1734	George Sale	There are three Gods	Third of three
1930	Marmadule Pickthall	Three	Third of three
1934	'Abdulla Yusuf Ali	Trinity	One of three in a Trinity
1955	A.J. Arberry	Three	Third of three
1957	'Abdul Majid Daryabadi	Three	Third of the three
1978	Rashad Khalifa	Trinity	A third in a Trinity
1985	T.B. Irving	Three	Third of three
1999	Aisha Bewley	Three	Third of three
2002	Amatul Rahman Omar	[There are] three [Gods]	Third of the three
2004	'Abdel Haleem	Trinity	Third of three
2008	The Monotheist Group	Trinity	Trinity

Perhaps the present research can be of some help in clearing up the context. The word *thalātha* should be literally translated as “three,” hence the phrase should here read, “do not speak of three.” Surah 5:73 in Khalifa and The Monotheist Group is also translated incorporating the word trinity in place of the phrase “third of three” as used by Haleem, rendered *thālithu thalāthatin* (ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ) in the text.<sup>134</sup>

There exists a proper Arabic word for Trinity, *al-thālūth* (الثالوث) which includes the letter “wāw,” clearly identifiable even in early Arabic writings in the absence of diacritical marks and vowelings.<sup>135</sup> This translation choice (trinity) is curious as the Arabic word for trinity was almost certainly in use at the time of the Qur’an’s textual assembly and does not appear in the Qur’an.<sup>136</sup> We know this from several sources. Firstly, the Arabic term الثالوث was in common use for more than a century prior to Islam. The oldest known Arab Christian apology

<sup>134</sup> The term *thālithu* occurs also in surah 36:14, where its meaning is clearly “third.”

<sup>135</sup> The vowelings which distinguishes between various pronunciations of the same spelling and therefore various words is not included in the earliest known Qur’an manuscripts. Likewise, the diacritical marks, which distinguish between varying letters of the same shape, were not included. Neither of these exclusions from the text would have prevented early readers from misinterpreting “three” as “trinity.” On the development of the Arabic script see al-Imam, Chs. 3, 5.; cf. Altikulac, Ch. 1.

<sup>136</sup> The phrases in question occur as pictured here from the Topkapi Maṣḥaf al-Sharīf in Picture 1, Line 6 (Q4:171), and Picture 2, Line 3 (Q5:73). The reader may also cross-reference with the Cairo Maṣḥaf al-Sharīf in Tayyar Altikulac, *Al-Mushaf Al-Sharif: Attributed to Uthman Bin Affan: The Copy at Al-Mashhad Al-Husayni in Cairo* (Istanbul, Turkey: Organization of the Islamic Conference Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 2009). See for Q4:171, p. *alif*/146; and for Q5:73, p. *alif*/172. The Cairo copy is less easy to read as it is of an older Kufic script, however, the make-up of the lettering is clear. In Q4:171 appears ثَلَاثَةٌ; and in Q5:73, appears ثَلَاثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ, of course, without any diacritics. In neither appears any long vowel.





were used to render it in writing, it is irrational to suppose that the Arabic word for “trinity” had not been developed during the period of likely more than 250 years of Arab Christianity prior to Islam. The letter of Jacob Baradaeus discussed above portrays that the Arabs were intimately involved in nuanced discussions on trinitarian theological issues by the mid-sixth century at the latest.

Secondly, the Najrān martyriological letter of Simeon of Beth Arsham (w.c.519CE) contains the word “trinity” in written form.<sup>140</sup> It was likely written from Hira very shortly after the Najrān massacre. The text is preserved in Syriac script and in a later Karshuni translation.<sup>141</sup> In the Syriac version of the letter the word for trinity is ܬܠܝܬܗܝܘܬܗ (tlīthāyūthā), clearly indicating the long vowel “wāw” (ܘ).<sup>142</sup> The long vowel was written in Syriac for both Syriac

<sup>140</sup> The text definitely predates the second Assyrian invasion of Hīmyar in 525. See Shahīd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, 62, 113

<sup>141</sup> Karshuni is the Arabic language written in the Syriac script. This was how spoken Arabic was often recorded before the written Arabic language had developed. The fact that there is a Karshuni version of this letter means that at some point before classical Arabic writing was popularized, the materials of the letter were told and understood in spoken Arabic. The Syriac text of *Simeon's New Letter* is in *ibid.*, iii-XXXii. Facsimiles of the Syriac are in *ibid.*, PL. I-IX.; and facsimiles of the Karshuni version are also in *ibid.*, PL. X-XVIII.

<sup>142</sup> Griffith suggests that the phrase *thālithu thalāthatin* in the Qur'an is a simple Syriacism. In his own words: “The range of meanings inherent in the expression *thālithu thalāthatin*, as a Syriacism, translating a typologically inspired epithet of Christ, would perhaps have been fully understood only by the Christians; but on the reading proposed here [Q5:73] the Qur'an can nevertheless be seen to have correctly reported, critiqued and rejected a genuine Christian locution. One has only to recognise it as a Syriacism to understand its authenticity. The recognition of its authenticity in turn frees the commentator from the temptation to impugn the Qur'an's veracity as a reporter in this instance, or to use the expression as a basis to postulate an impossible Christian Trinity. The phrase could easily be imagined to have been on the lips of any 'Melkite', 'Jacobite' or 'Nestorian' of the sixth or seventh century; St. Ephraem's legacy lived among them all.” Sidney H. Griffith, “Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?,” in *A Word Fittly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, Presented to Haggai Ben-Shammai.*, ed. M.M. Bar-Asher, B. Chiesa, and S. Hopkins (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi-Institute, 2007), 107.

Griffith proposes that the Qur'an responds in Q5:73 to a Syriacism in trinitarian phraseology, specifically referring to Christ. That is that *tlīthāyā* in Syriac may be the inspiration behind *thālithu thalāthatin* in Arabic, and understood to mean ‘the treble one’ in reference to Jesus. Thus the question: is *thālithu thalāthatin* a reference to Christ as presented in any one of the three main trinitarian orthodoxies (Melkite, Nestorian, Monophysite)? Is it a correction of what appears in Syriac as *tlīthāyā* meaning ‘third’, or sometimes ‘the treble one’ (i.e. Jesus), as Griffith proposes? Or is it a reference to *tlīthāyūthā*, ‘the Trinity’ as in the Karshuni text mentioned above? The answer is likely no to all three.

Griffith's proposal has merit, and the absence of Syriac in the same references must be seen to be equally informative as the presence of Syriac. The Syriac word for Trinity (*tlīthāyūthā*), in the Karshuni text shown above was perhaps even more popular than the Syriacism *tlīthāyā* as translated ‘the treble one’ instead of its common translation, ‘third’. Yet, if ‘the treble one’ is intended as the meaning of *tlīthāyā* as appearing in the Qur'an, one may posit that the Qur'an might have represented its meaning more accurately, as *thālithu wahadatin*, or as *wahadu thalāthatin* perhaps. If some assumption is extended to propose that ‘the treble one’ (Jesus) was meant in the Qur'an by *thālithu thalāthatin*, perhaps more is needed to propose that it is so meant by the indefinite articles by which it therein appears. If the Syriacism that Griffith is presenting is what is meant in Q5:73, it would likely have appeared in a different, more accurate, form. Still it remains that the Qur'an renders ‘third of three’ (*thālithu thalāthatin*) in 5:73, and not ‘trinity’ (*al-thalūth*) as was available in Arabic. Even if it may be assumed that both meanings for the Syriac *tlīthāyā* were in equal vernacular usage (i.e. ‘third’ and ‘Jesus as Treble One’), the Qur'an's choice of terminology in Q5:73 here is important: *thālithu thalāthatin* may stem from *tlīthāyā* meaning either ‘third’, or, as Griffith suggests, ‘the treble one’, but in either case, *thālithu* (Syriac: *tlīthāyā*) is under scrutiny in 4:171 and 5:73, *al-thalūth* (Syriac: *tlīthāyūthā*), is not. The Qur'an had access to both terms, and intentionally chose the former, and thus the Qur'anic rebuttal is in response to something not-trinitarian in nature. If Griffith's proposal is correct, then 4:171 and 5:73 take on the tone of Q5:17 and 5:72, “Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,’ have defied God.” If there are Syriacisms in the Qur'an, Griffith's qualifications for identifying them are nearly unquestionable.

readings and the Arabic Karshuni readings, and made the later transition into formal written Arabic as the letter “wāw” (و). The Syriac *tlīthāyūthā* and the Arabic *al-thālūth* both contain the long vowel (ū) distinguishing the word “three” (syriac: *tlīthāyā*; Arabic: *thalātha*) from “trinity.” Since there is a Karshuni version, it is known that this text in its oral tradition existed in the native tongue (Arabic) of the people about whom it was written, and as Shahîd notes, “there is no doubt that in the sixth century [Najrān] was an Arab city whose inhabitants spoke the Arabic language as their native tongue.”<sup>143</sup> Therefore we have been able to date the Arabic word for ‘trinity’ (الثالوث) to more than one century prior to the meeting of Muhammad and the Najrānians, and locate that Arabic word in a Karshuni text about the Najrānian martyrs themselves.

Thirdly, it is known from the *Vita* and highlighted by Shahîd that the largest pre-Islamic church in the spiritual center of South Arabia (Ẓafār) was named “The Great Church of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>144</sup> Though it is uncertain whether the title of this church was engraved on it in Syriac, Sabaic or Ḥimyaritic, it is unreasonable to suggest that so famous a name did not exist in each of these languages, and especially on the Arab tongue of Bishop Abū Ḥāritha in nearby Najrān.<sup>145</sup>

Fourthly, not less than eight villages in Yemen still today carry the name *al-thālūth*: Al Khanq-Sūq al-Thalūth, Barm-Sūq al-Thalūth, and Sūq al-Thalūth are located in the governorate of al-Jaūf; Ghārib al-Thālūth and Sūq al-Thalūth are in the governorate of Amrān; and there are three separate villages all named Sūq al-Thalūth in the governorate of Ṣā’ada.<sup>146</sup> It is notable that all of these villages are in the North-Western, former Najrān, region of Yemen, directly

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Yet there are two outstanding issues. Firstly, as even Griffith admits above, there is a “range of meanings inherent in the expression *thālīthu thalāthatin*”. Also, as identified here, its appearance in the Qur’an is as an indefinite article and thus the ‘treble one’ appears inconsistent with other Qur’anic occurrences of the word ‘third’. Secondly, as Griffith rightly begins his study with the dismissal of some less substantiated claims of Collyridians or Ebionites being the recipients of the Qur’anic address here, he has missed the candidacy of the Philoponian Tritheists, and perhaps prematurely closed the door on the possibility of a heresy known to be widespread among Arab clergy and yet not aligned with the three main orthodoxies of the time. Griffith writes: “The classical Muslim commentators reached something of a consensus that the Arabic phrase *thālīthu thalāthatin* grammatically means ‘one of three’ and that it is Christ who is so described. While some of them took the Qur’ān verse then to be a rejection of what they perceived to be Christian ‘tritheism’, others rejected this idea as inaccurate, rightly pointing out that the Christians did not in fact profess a belief in three gods.” *Ibid.*, 102. Griffith’s agreement with the Islamic commentators is perhaps premature, for as already shown above, widespread overt Christian tritheism was very likely present precisely among Arab (Monophysite) clergy during the life of Muhammad. Griffith’s proposal has merit, and deserves more attention, but is not a closed case.

<sup>143</sup> Shahîd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, 157-158.

<sup>144</sup> Shahîd, “Byzantium in South Arabia,” 28-29. This detail is from *Bios* 9, the only section of the *Vita* to be considered historically accurate.

<sup>145</sup> Shahîd has confirmed that the language of Najrān in the sixth century was Arabic, and shown that it could not have been Sabaic. It is therefore rational to suppose that Abū Ḥāritha as a bishop spoke both Arabic and Syriac, and that the name of the largest church in South Arabia was known to him in the Arabic language. See Shahîd, *The Martyrs of Najrān : New Documents*, 242ff.

<sup>146</sup> The list of villages in Yemen may be obtained through the Yemen Ministry of Public Health at Yemen Ministry of Public Health, “Maps & Data: Geo Datasets”, Yemen Ministry of Public Health [http://www.mophp-ye.org/docs/Data/xls\\_codes.zip](http://www.mophp-ye.org/docs/Data/xls_codes.zip) (accessed April 9 2010).

between the cities of Sana'a, Yemen and Najrān, Saudi Arabia. One may posit that the names of these villages were not likely given to them by Muslim rulers subsequent to the Islamic takeover of Yemen in 10/631, and thus they are likely pre-Islamic Arabic names assigned by their pre-Islamic Christian inhabitants.<sup>147</sup>

Based on the evidence above, it is conclusive that the term "trinity" existed in the spoken Arabic language of South Arabia prior to the advent of Islam, and would therefore very likely have been known by Abū Ḥāritha. It is clear from the *Sīra* that Christology was a major theme of Abū Ḥāritha's dialogue with Muhammad, and is thus posited that the Arabic word for trinity, *al-thālūth*, was used during the discussion. It was most certainly a known term during the composition of the Qur'an, as shown above.

If the term "trinity" was available in Arabic, why did the Qur'an provide a different term (three) to communicate "trinity," as rendered in some English translations? There are four possible explanations.

1. The Qur'an was unable to include the Arabic word *al-thālūth*.
2. The Qur'an confused the meaning of the two terms, it intended "trinity" and yet entered "three" into the text. This may be interpreted by some as a clear error which was subsequently corrected by some interpreters and translators of the Qur'an.
3. The Qur'an chose "three" as a euphemism for "trinity." In this case it may have been meant to either communicate the concept of "trinity" by using a simpler term, or to explain "trinity" to a Qur'anic audience with no understanding of it.
4. The word "trinity" did not express the meaning intended. The Qur'an meant "three."

As shown above, the word for 'trinity' was known and in use in Arabia at the time of Muhammad's meeting with the Najrān Christians. This eliminates possibilities 1 and 2. As established in the introduction above, the Qur'an's view of itself is as a clear presentation of intentional information. The Qur'an is intentional about word choices and not given to vagueness. It may therefore be asserted then that possibility 3 is in fact opposed to the Qur'an's testimony of itself. Further, the Christian context of the pre-Islamic Tihāma combined with the pre-Islamic commonality of the word for "trinity" rule out a lack of local knowledge of the word at the time, thus eliminating possibility 3 altogether. The term "three" is therefore a deliberate choice of terminology and we are left with option 4. As we explore the fourth

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<sup>147</sup> The possibility exists that these names were given to the villages by Christians living under Islamic rule in the area. However, it is unlikely that Muslim rulers would have tolerated such a contestable name for a new village, if it were offensive at all. If the names of the villages were given prior to Islam, they indicate the common use of the Arabic word for 'trinity' in known Christian Arabic speaking lands, if they were given after Islam, they indicate the tolerance of Muslim rulers for the Arabic word for 'trinity' as formal names for new villages under their governance.

possibility, the historical context may provide some understanding as to the reasoning behind this deliberate word choice in the Qur'an.

The *tafsīr* of Ibn'Abbās, Wāhidī's *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, and the *Sīra* all place surah 4:171 in the context of Muhammad's meeting with the Najrān Christians.<sup>148</sup> The context of surah 5:73 is indicated by Ibn'Abbās as a response to the Najrān Christians as well. As the theological differences between Nestorianism, Chalcedonianism and Monophysitism may not have been known to Ibn'Abbās, he misidentifies the Najrān Christians as Nestorians.<sup>149</sup> However, as shown above, the Najrān Christians with whom Muhammad had direct interactions were most certainly Monophysite, not Nestorian. This is especially true of the Bishop of Najrān, Abū Ḥāritha, whose Philoponian Monophysite presentation of Christian doctrine would have most likely been understood as tritheistic. This theological difference, though perhaps not clear to Ibn'Abbās, or to Muhammad's contemporaries, seems clear enough in the Qur'an which responds directly to the tritheistic heresy by deliberately using the word "three" instead of "trinity" to highlight the tritheistic doctrine. Out of respect for the Qur'an, we must accept "three" as a deliberate choice of terminology. Therefore the Qur'an is addressing a non-trinitarian doctrine, likely Philoponian Monophysite tritheism, in 4:171 and 5:73.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Ibn'Abbās, 130.; cf. Fayrūzābādī and Ibn'Abbās, 86. Also Ali ibn Aḥmad al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl*, trans., Mokrane Guezzou, Great Commentaries on the Holy Qur'an, vol. 3 (Louisville, KY; Amman, Jordan: Fons Vitae; Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008), 89.; cf. The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Quranic Science: Context of Revelation". Also Ibn Ishāq, 272.; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, p. 553.

<sup>149</sup> Ibn'Abbās, 146.; cf. Fayrūzābādī and Ibn'Abbās, 98. Parrinder sees the Qur'an as a rebuttal of the Christian heresies of Adoptionism, Patripassianism (the belief that God the Father suffered on the cross), and Mariolatry (especially Collyridianism, a fourth century Arabian sect in which women offered cakes to Mary), though he offers little in the way of historical evidence to support these outside of the Qur'an's own voice. Parrinder offers the Most Beautiful Names of God as a parallel to the trinitarian concept of three persons in one nature, a topic which will be explored in detail below. Parrinder, 133-141.

<sup>150</sup> One of the reasons we know that it is Philoponian Monophysite tritheism specifically that the Qur'an is addressing in these verses is that there was no such revelation (as Q4:171 and 5:73) between the times of Muhammad's relationship with Warāqa ibn Nawfal and his meeting with Abū Ḥāritha. The Qur'an did not refute the Christian theology of Warāqa ibn Nawfal. Muhammad was conversing with Christians from the beginning of his prophetic work, yet as the *Sīra*, the *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, and the *tafsīr* of Ibn'Abbās tell us, it was not until he met with the Christians of Najrān that the verses concerning tritheism (4:171, 5:73) were revealed (see above). It is known that the Christians in Ḥirā were likely Nestorian, with a more diaphysite Christology. In the mid-sixth century, Abraham of Kashkar (d.586), a great Nestorian and leader in the cenobitic movement, was reportedly a missionary in al-Ḥirā before founding the great monastery in Iḏlā in 571. Since the Qur'an does not seem to react to Warāqa's theology as tritheistic, it is likely that he had a more unitarian theology than that of the Philoponians, and al-Ḥirā certainly could have provided that theology at about that time. See Arthur Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents: Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: ETSE 1960), 150.

It has been suggested that Warāqa ibn Nawfal may have been an Ebionite. The Ebionites stressed the humanity of Jesus and the oneness of God, a Christology not likely to have elicited a negative response from the Qur'an. The Christology of Warāqa ibn Nawfal did not provoke corrective content in the Qur'an, and Abū Ḥāritha's tritheism did. So whatever Warāqa's Christology, we may suppose that it was not tritheistic, as we see here the Qur'an differentiating between different Christian doctrines. It is also notable that Warāqa's Christology, Ebionite or otherwise, seems to be acceptable to the Qur'an. Hoyland is sceptical of Warāqa having been Ebionite, noting that the, "theory suffers from a selective reading of the text." See Robert G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It : A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, vol. 13 (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1997), 28.

The deliberate choice of terminology in the Qur'an is strikingly similar to that of Peter of Callinicum in his refutation of Tritheism, roughly 50 years prior to the Qur'anic revelation in Q4:171 and 5:73. Peter quotes John Philoponus directly, "Now tell me, do you not confess each of the hypostases to be God in a different way? Do not scheme against the number when you say 'three Godheads', but if Godhead is not in each of them in a different way, have the temerity to say so openly."<sup>151</sup> Resembling the Qur'anic reply to Abū Ḥāritha, Peter replies to John Philoponus:

...we do not hold to three Gods or three particular Gods, three Godheads or three particular Godheads, three substances or three particular substances, three natures or three particular natures ... nor do we hold in any way whatsoever to Gods, Godheads, substances or natures beside the one substance or Godhead in the holy and consubstantial Trinity or beside its hypostases, as new-fangled theologians have newly seen fit to decree.<sup>152</sup>

Peter's critique of Philoponian Tritheism finds echo in the Qur'an: "Those people who say that God is the third of three are defying [the truth]: there is only One God" (Q5:73a). The Qur'an seems to be deliberately addressing Christianity in non-trinitarian terms in Q4:171 and 5:73. The Philoponian Tritheistic sect provides a highly reasonable solution as to why. This finding is likely to have some effect on the interpretation of the Qur'an not only in its historical context but in contemporary Christian-Muslim dialogue as well.<sup>153</sup>

It will be shown below that the meaning of the text evolved rather quickly from "three" to "trinity" as interpreted by both Muslim and Christian exegetes over time, and thus the subsequent translations using "trinity" instead of "three" have been tolerated. However, the exegesis of the Qur'an as an early seventh century correction of diaphysite (Chalcedonian) trinitarian monotheism is not accurate to the context in which the text was originally spoken.<sup>154</sup> Therefore the translation "trinity" in place of "three" or "third of three" in Q4:171 and 5:73 is the result of the evolving *tafsīr* of the translator(s), and not indicative of the meaning of the text in the historical context in which it was composed. As indicated above, the context of composition was most likely the refutation of the Philoponian Monophysite Christian heresy; a tritheistic form of Christianity implicitly followed by Abū Ḥāritha, the bishop of Najrān.

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<sup>151</sup> Ebied, van Roey, and Wickham, 51.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>153</sup> Now that it is shown that the Qur'anic revelations appear very likely to divide between trinitarianism and tritheism, it may be re-considered whether or not in spite of its clear unitarian leanings, the Qur'an itself is an anti-trinitarian document at all in its original historical context.

<sup>154</sup> In light of these findings (and in isolation from the doctrine of *tahrīf* which would develop in the fifth/eleventh century), the Qur'anic reader would be forgiven for understanding the identification of Jesus as the Word of God and a Spirit from God in 4:171, as a high Christology. More work is needed on the exegesis of these passages to determine whether it can be said that the Qur'an corrects tritheism while upholding trinitarianism, but this work belongs to the theological disciplines, whose comments will be explored in Part II, and not to a historian. In this historian's view, it appears just as possible that in the early days of Islam these verses defended trinitarian monotheism as the possibility that they did not.

## Jesus

The character of Jesus is of principle concern to the Qur'anic author. The Qur'an's comments on Jesus can be considered among the opening remarks in the inter-faith dialogue between Christianity and Islam.<sup>155</sup> There is possibly no clearer summary of Jesus' character in the Qur'an than that of Geoffrey Parrinder, for whose work on this subject the present author is extremely grateful. Parrinder says:

The Qur'an gives a greater number of honourable titles to Jesus than to any other figure of the past. He is a 'sign', a 'mercy', a 'witness' and an 'example'. He is called by his proper name Jesus, by the titles Messiah (Christ) and Son of Mary, and by the names Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word and Spirit of God. The Qur'an gives two accounts of the annunciation and birth of Jesus, and refers to his teachings and healings, and his death and exaltation. Three chapters or sūras of the Qur'an are named after references to Jesus (3, 5, and 19); he is mentioned in fifteen sūras and ninety-three verses. Jesus is always spoken of in the Qur'an with reverence; there is no breath of criticism, for he is the Christ of God.<sup>156</sup>

Jesus is in some respects like Muhammad and in some respects a unique character. The Qur'anic audience is encouraged to respect Jesus, and yet cautioned as to the proper boundary for that respect.

According to the Qur'an Jesus is like Muhammad as he is both a prophet and an apostle (Q3:59; 3:144; 5:75).<sup>157</sup> Both are teachers of God's word (Q4:80; 71:3; 43:63), are involved in social justice issues (Q1:87; 9:60), and both teach the supremacy of peace (Q4:35; 6:34). Jesus is also sinless (Q19:19).<sup>158</sup>

He is also referred to by titles which would have been recognized by Christians, such as Messiah (Q3:45; 4:157, 171-172; 5:17, 72, 75; 9:30-31). Parrinder writes that Jesus did not

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<sup>155</sup> Some of the following material is extracted from the appendices of a study forthcoming by the present author: Corrie Block, "No God but God: The Focused Life of Muhammad in Leadership Emergence Theory" (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007).

<sup>156</sup> Parrinder, 16.

<sup>157</sup> For the differences between apostle (*rasūl*) and prophet (*nabī*) consult Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 57-58.

<sup>158</sup> One should be careful not to tread out of context and into commentary here. Clarifying Jesus as sinless in the Qur'an does not imply that Muhammad was not. Many Muslims believe that Muhammad was also sinless. The Qur'an requires of Muhammad that he repent for sin in surahs 40:55; 47:19; 48:2. Yet these may be interpreted as requirements for Muhammad to repent on behalf of others. Independent historical evidence does not clarify the meaning of these verses in their context, so we must rely on early Islamic commentary which charges Muhammad himself with ungratefulness in the context of Q40:55, and with violence against a Jew (Zayd ibn al-Samnī) in the context of Q47:19, both events occurring after the revelations began. Ibn 'Abbās interprets Q48:2 as referring to Muhammad's sin from prior to the Night of Power. See Ibn 'Abbās, 627, 680, 685 respectively.; cf. Fayrūzābādī and Ibn 'Abbās, 397, 429, 431. Whether the Qur'an upholds Muhammad as sinless or not, it should be noted that the Qur'an awards sinlessness to Jesus as well to Noah, Hud, and other prophets for whom no request is recorded that they ask forgiveness for sin. Depending on the interpretation of the command *istaghfir* in the above mentioned verses, one may conclude that Muhammad has sinned. Such an interpretation however may indicate that Muhammad is the only Qur'anic prophet to have done so, and is in danger of being incongruent with the Qur'anic presentation of the office of prophethood. This will be addressed again in Part II of this study.

refer to himself as “the Christ” in the Gospels, noting that this is more likely to do with his rejection of the nationalistic expectations behind the title in the Jewish culture of his day than his rejection of its Biblical meaning or its use as an appropriate reference to him.<sup>159</sup>

Jesus is also called Word of God (Q4:171) and Word from God (Q3:39, 45), titles which have caused some controversy.<sup>160</sup> The internal Qur’anic meaning of the title is connected with the virgin conception of Jesus in Mary. God simply decides upon something, he uses his creative Word, “Be!” and “it is” (Q3:45; 19:35). Therefore Jesus in the Qur’an is the incarnated Word of God. The Qur’anic title has been paralleled to that of *Logos*, given to Jesus in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. This, Parrinder suggests, is accurate only inasmuch as John uses the term as previously employed by Philo of Alexandria, to whom *Logos* was equated with the “Divine Reason, intermediate between God and the world.”<sup>161</sup> The title *Logos* is also in John linked with creation, as it was not by hands but by God’s creative Word that creation was made. In this context also, John’s *Logos*, and the Qur’an’s Word of God seem congruent. Interpretations of the concept of the incarnate *Logos* of God are not necessarily mutually exclusive between the Qur’an and the Bible. For example, Jacques Dupuis has recently forwarded within the Christian theology of religions the possibility of the continuing nonincarnate *Logos*. Kärkkäinen summarizes thus:

The universal sphere of the nonincarnate Logos of the Prologue to the Gospel of John still continues after the incarnation, parallel to the universal ministry of the Spirit. Thus, while Jesus is Christ and Son of God, other ‘saving figures’ may be ‘enlightened’ by the Word/Logos or ‘inspired’ by the Spirit, ‘to become pointers to salvation to their followers, in accordance with God’s overall design for humankind’<sup>162</sup>

Dupuis thus proposes that the *Logos* of God is something divine which was ‘cast’ (*alqāhā*; Q4:171) within Jesus but which does not render him uniquely divine among humans through whom the *Logos* of God has been incarnated.

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<sup>159</sup> Parrinder, 32.

<sup>160</sup> The controversy extends to internal debates among early Islamic commentators on the meaning of the title. See Ayoub, *The Qur’an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 2, 107-112, 131-135.; cf. Sweetman, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, pp. 115-122.

<sup>161</sup> Parrinder, 47.

<sup>162</sup> Dupuis is here quoted and summarized by Kärkkäinen in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 55. Dupuis’ view is expanded to an even greater degree by theologians such as John Hick, who understands the *Logos* of God to be present in all religions, and Raimundo Panikkar who with application to Hinduism sees the Christ/Logos as an expression of God never perfectly incarnated in any religion, but present in all of them. See *ibid.*, 112; 120-121. Hick’s pluralistic-metaphorical view of Christ has been evaluated by Islamic scholar Aydin as a bold step in reassessing the status of Jesus toward Christian-Muslim consensus, though noting that Hick’s views have received little acclaim among Christian theologians, earning even a Papal reprimand. See Aydin, 204-213.

The Qur'an also refers to Jesus as a Spirit from God (Q4:171; 58:22) and Mercy from God (Q19:21). He is also said to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Q2:87)<sup>163</sup> and holding a place near to God (Q3:45).

Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary (Q3:45) and referred to sixteen times by the title Son of Mary. Though some have suggested that this title is intended to highlight Jesus' humanity and others to highlight his birth without a father, Parrinder notes that these are simplistic interpretations.<sup>164</sup> The origin of the title is likely to have been Jewish-Christian debate, during which the title Son of Mary could be used by both sides without controversy. The title also appears in Syriac texts known as the Infancy Gospels, which are without historical value except that in their legendary stories they use the title to refer to Jesus.<sup>165</sup> The title is also used in the Gospel According to Mark 6:3, and is the only such reference in the Bible. The value of this title for dialogue is apparent as there is no controversy regarding its inherent honour in either Christianity or Islam.

Jesus' miracles as mentioned in the Qur'an are reminiscent of those that Christians of the time would have been familiar with, such as raising the dead<sup>166</sup> and creating new life (Q3:49; 5:110; 29:46).<sup>167</sup> The intent of these miracles was to show his authority (Q43:63). And the upholding of Jesus' teaching is salvific (Q5:66).<sup>168</sup> So far these are declarations of the Qur'an concerning Jesus that its Christian audience would have likely agreed with.

The Qur'an also takes three apparent points of departure concerning Jesus: his deity, his genealogical descent from God, and the circumstances surrounding his crucifixion. Firstly, the text clearly denies the deity of Jesus as an independent god beside God. Jesus is just a man, like Adam (Q3:59), a servant of God (Q4:172). Little commentary on the meaning of the following verses can be made on the basis of historical evidence, and their evolving

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<sup>163</sup> Ayoub notes universal agreement here among Islamic commentators that the "Spirit" in this verse refers to the angel Gabriel. Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters, Vol. 1* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 124-125.

<sup>164</sup> Ibn 'Aā'sha and Ibn Mayyāda, both Arab poets were known by their mothers' names. Parrinder, 22-23.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 26-28.

<sup>166</sup> See Mark 5, Luke 7, John 11.

<sup>167</sup> In Q3:43-49 and Q5:109-110 are found references to the story of Jesus' breathing life into a clay bird. This is not a Qur'anic innovation, the story may be found in the pre-Islamic apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas. The story of the clay bird was present in Christian literature prior to Islam as an illustration of Jesus' power over nature. See Parrinder, 83-85. The story in the Gospel of Thomas can be found in J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75-76; *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> McAuliffe's brilliant survey of Islamic sources reveals that, "the exegetical tradition on this verse indirectly acknowledges the partial veracity of such earlier disclosures. A commendable orthopraxis can be distilled from their contents. Exegetical testimony to this possibility is mandated by the syntax of this verse." She further comments that though the exegetes concede the authenticity of the revelation to the Christians, the 'authentic revelation' is wrapped in the *tahrif* conspiracy. The acid test for whether or not the revelation of the Christians was corrupted, for some exegetes, thus became the degree to which those Christians accepted the Qur'an as the continuation of that revelation. See discussion in Chapter 6 of McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 201.



interpretations in Christian-Muslim dialogue will be presented below, so the Qur'an will speak for itself here:

The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food [like other mortals]. See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are. (Q5:75)

Those who say, 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,' are defying the truth. Say, 'If it had been God's will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth? Control of the heavens and earth and all that is between them belongs to God: He creates whatever He will. (Q5:17)

Secondly, the Qur'an flatly denies the direct genealogical descent of Jesus from God himself: "It would not befit God to have a child. He is far above that: when He decrees something, He says only, 'Be,' and it is." (Q19:35; cf. 4:171).<sup>169</sup> These verses seem to react to an Arian or Adoptionistic heretical Christology which supports the notion of God's having adopted Jesus at some moment during his life. In this, Parrinder notes, is the rejection of the title "Son of God."<sup>170</sup>

Thirdly, the Qur'an questions the accuracy of the Jewish retelling of Jesus' crucifixion.

And so for breaking their pledge, for rejecting God's revelations, for unjustly killing their prophets, for saying 'Our minds are closed—No! God has sealed them in their disbelief, so they believe only a little—and because they disbelieved and uttered a terrible slander against Mary, and said, 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.' (They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear (*shubbiha*) like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: *they certainly did not kill him*—God raised him up to

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<sup>169</sup> Some may include surah 19:88-92 here, "The disbelievers say, 'The Lord of Mercy has offspring.' How terrible is this thing you assert: it almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces, that they attribute offspring to the Lord of Mercy. It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]." However, this is due to a persistent mistranslation of the word *walad* as "son" in this passage. Haleem notes of his use of the word "offspring" that, "Many translators say 'a son' here, not realizing that *walad* in classical Arabic means 'child' or 'children'. The discussion here is about the pagans of Mecca, who said that the angels were daughters of God." This verse in context is not concerning the character of Jesus. The quote is from footnote *b* in Haleem, 195.

<sup>170</sup> Parrinder goes on to note that Jesus does not refer to himself as Son of God in the gospels, preferring Son of Man instead. Son of Man relates directly to the function of the Messiah, and finds prophetic reference in Daniel 7:13. "Son of God" was said about Jesus by others, demoniacs, disciples, the high priest and the crowds at the cross. But Jesus himself clearly wished to avoid the misunderstandings that might be attached to this title, ideas that expressed wrong notions of the Messiah." Parrinder, 128-129. However popular, the title 'Son of God' must be understood metaphorically, and one of many used to describe Jesus (i.e. The Vine in John 15:5, The Shepherd in John 10:11). As polemicist Muhammed Asadi so clearly states, "The concept of 'son', and an uncreated, eternal 'God' are mutually exclusive, logically speaking." Muhammed A. Asadi, *Islam & Christianity: Conflict or Conciliation?* (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club Press, 2001), 5. From a purely philosophical standpoint, the metaphor "Son of God" quickly finds its limit in Christian theology when considering the issue of gender in "Son" and the issues of chronology and inheritance in "of." Perhaps an appropriate parallel in Islamic terminology for 'son' as in 'son of God' would be 'abd' as in 'abd-allāh, or 'abd al-rahmān. The implications in these metaphors of 'son' and 'servant' carry similar meaning between Christians and Muslims.

Himself. God is almighty and wise. There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them). (Q4:155-158, emphasis mine)

The main claim emphasized here is that, “[the *ahl al-kitāb*] certainly did not kill [Jesus].” It is certain that *ahl al-kitāb* in this context refers to the Jews. The debate over the historicity of Jesus’ crucifixion is outside of the scope of this research. However, the Qur’an seems to uphold Jesus’ ability to die in Q4:158 above, as well as in 5:17, and,

[But] he said: ‘I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet; made me blessed wherever I may be. He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live, to cherish my mother. He did not make me domineering or graceless. Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again.’ Such was Jesus, son of Mary. (Q19:30-34)

It may be asserted that the Qur’an simply defends the mortality of Jesus, and denies the Jews the right to claim responsibility for his death. It is also possible, as Shahīd noted, that Julianistic Monophysite Docetism may have been prevalent in Najrān in the sixth century. The Julianists held that either Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene were crucified instead of Jesus.<sup>171</sup> Parrinder however upholds a more straightforward and internally consistent interpretation of the Qur’an stating that, “the cumulative effect of the Quranic verses is strongly in favour of a real death, and a complete self-surrender of Jesus,”<sup>172</sup> adding that Jesus’ total self-surrender as Servant (*‘abd*) of God blends in the crucifixion with God’s ability to destroy the Messiah (Q5:17). To Parrinder, the Qur’an testifies that,

Jesus is the *‘abd*, the servant, fully surrendered to God and so truly worshipping him. He is the servant of the servants of God, who ‘came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many’. He is the suffering servant, ‘despised and rejected of men’. He is the Son of Man, the Messiah, truly human, yet exalted, for ‘God raised him to himself’.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Shahīd notes that the Greek Docetic term *dokein* ‘to seem’ is of the same root as the Arabic word *shubbihā* found in Q4:155-158, which lends to Julianism as a likely source for the Qur’anic view of the crucifixion. Shahīd, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad,” 19-20. Perhaps this is the response that Parrinder was looking for in his discussion on the influence of Docetism in the Qur’an (p. 119). For an expanded discussion on Christian substitution theories and their relation to the Qur’an see Parrinder, 105-121.

<sup>172</sup> Parrinder, 121.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 121.

## Mary

The Qur'an also addresses Christians in dialogue concerning the character of Mary, the only woman properly named in the Qur'an.<sup>174</sup> Barbara Stowasser notes that, "In the Qur'an, Mary is the only female identified by name, and her name appears far more frequently in the Qur'anic text than in the entire New Testament."<sup>175</sup> Mary's conception and birth of Jesus was not only miraculous, but appears to have been sinless: "The angels said to Mary: 'Mary, God has chosen you and made you pure: He has truly chosen you above all women' (Q3:42; cf. 19:16-35; 21:91). The Spirit of God is breathed into Mary and she is called a sign from God (Q21:91; 23:50). She is an example to the believers (Q66:11-12).<sup>176</sup>

The Qur'an also corrects any deification of Mary:

When God says, 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God"?' he will say, 'May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say— if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen. (Q5:116)

The Qur'anic text here is addressing a rather unorthodox assembly of three independent gods: God, Jesus, and Mary. Here the historical context of the Qur'an in dialogue with the Najrān Christians may shed some light on the original meaning of the text.

The Chalcedonian schism (451 CE) ended with the Monophysites accused of tritheism by the Church of Rome. One of the major theological rifts in the schism was over the term, "Mother of God," or *Theotokos* (lit. God-bearing). The Monophysites accepted this term while the Nestorians rejected it. As according to the Monophysites Christ was God and had only one nature, Mary was therefore in theory the very literal, "Mother of God."

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<sup>174</sup> There is a well known problem of Mary's lineage in the Qur'an. According to the relevant verses (Q3:35-36; 19:28; 66:12) Mary is both the daughter of Imrān and the sister of Aaron, brother of Moses. Suleiman Mourad has already surveyed this challenge and its relevant sources, concluding that the problem can be solved if the genealogical references to Aaron and Imrān are understood to be allegorical. In this case, all of these verses point to Mary's descent from the family of Imrān, father of Moses and Aaron, and therefore may be reconciled with Mary's known genealogy from Christian sources. This is consistent with Q3:33 wherein the family of Imrān is among those chosen above all the nations of the earth. See Suleiman Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'an: A Reexamination of Her Presentation," in *The Qur'an in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2008), 163-166. Mourad's solution seems to be an acceptable solution to Islamic researchers as well. See for example Ahmed Ginaidi, *Jesus Christ and Mary from Qur'anic-Islamic Perspective : Fundamental Principles for Dialogue between Islam and Christianity*, trans., Christa Ginaidi (Stuttgart: Edition Noëma, 2005), 85-88.

<sup>175</sup> Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 67.

<sup>176</sup> A detailed survey of the character of Mary in Islam is now available in Aliah Schleifer, *Mary the Blessed Virgin of Islam*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2008). Some Islamic scholars have considered Mary a prophetess. A discussion on the prophethood of Mary from an Islamic perspective can be found in *ibid.*, 73ff.

The Monophysite theological presentation of a Father-God and God-Son with a very real and human “God-Mother” (*Theotokos*), is more than likely to have elicited the accusation of tritheism from the Qur’an against the Christians (addressed above), and the correction concerning Mary’s deity in Q5:116. The Qur’an here likely highlights and confirms here the tremendous emphasis placed on Mary in the ongoing Monophysite-Diophysite debate by correcting the Monophysite Mariology of Abū Ḥāritha.

### The Treaty of Muhammad with the Najrān Christians

One other document survives that may shed light on the Christian-Muslim relationship during the lifetime of the Prophet, and before the assembly of the Qur’anic text. After the dialogue between Muhammad and the Najrān Christians, they apparently arrived at a theological impasse. The Najrāns reportedly offered to subjugate themselves to Muhammad’s political rule, and Muhammad prepared for them a treaty. It was not until after Muhammad’s death, when the condition prohibiting usury was broken, that the treaty was cancelled.

The treaty of Muhammad with the Najrān Christians is recorded in Ibn Sa’d’s *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*.<sup>177</sup> Required taxes of cloth will be paid to the Muslims.<sup>178</sup> The messengers of Muhammad are to be well hosted, for around twenty days when they come to collect payments, but they should not stay for more than a month. The Najrānians will support the prophet in any wars in Yemen with a loan of thirty horses, thirty camels, and thirty chain-mail coats. These will be returned to Najrān after their use by the prophet’s army. The lands, houses, and churches of Najrān are under the prophet’s protection, along with the people and their faith. “No bishop will be removed from his diocese, no monk from his monastery [sic], and no trustee from his trust.” Usury is not permitted. Any claim to rights will be heard justly, “and oppression of the people of Najrān (will not be tolerated).” No one will be blamed for the deeds of others. The treaty is guaranteed by Allah and his prophet.<sup>179</sup>

In spite of disagreements over some theological issues (discussed above), according to the treaty Muhammad does not require the Najrān Christians to convert to Islam in order to gain political protection from the Muslims. This seems to indicate inclusivity, however, this treaty with Najrān is preceded by the older Constitution of Medina, which also included

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<sup>177</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ibn Sa’d’s Kitāb Al-Ṭabaqāt Al-Kabīr*, 418-420.

<sup>178</sup> According to the *Kitāb al-Buldān*, the Najrān Christians were the first among the “people of the book” to pay taxes to the Islamic Empire. See Aḥmad ibn Yaḥya Balādhurī and Philip Khuri Hitti, *The Origins of the Islamic State, Being a Translation from the Arabic Accompanied with Annotations, Geographic and Historic Notes of the Kitāb Futūḥ Al-Buldān of Al-Imām Abū-L Abbās Aḥmad Ibn-Jabīr Al-Balādhurī* (Pascataway N J: Gorgias Press, 2002), 105.

<sup>179</sup> Ibn Sa’d, *Ibn Sa’d’s Kitāb Al-Ṭabaqāt Al-Kabīr*, 341-342. There is also a summary of the treaty given on page 314. Another record is in the *Kitāb Futūḥ al-Buldān*; Balādhurī and Hitti, 100-101.

polytheists and Jews without requiring conversion.<sup>180</sup> The Qur'an's stern yet dialogical approach to matters of theology appears reflected in Muhammad's political tolerance of other religions. Muhammad's policy of religious plurality in Arabia is informed by but separate from his theology, and therefore relatively uninformative in terms of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The Treaty of Najrān indicates only that Muhammad was not militarily conversionist in his inter-faith engagements with Christians.

## Concluding Remarks

The earliest known formal inter-faith dialogue between Christians and Muslims took place between the head of Islam and the head of Monophysitism in South Arabia, Muhammad and Abū Ḥāritha, within the last two years of Muhammad's life. Islamic histories place the Qur'anic response to Christianity in the context of that discussion, thus the Qur'an likely records the Islamic response to the tritheistic Philoponian Monophysite doctrine. Understanding the historical context of the Qur'an as a response to Monophysitism sheds new light on the original contextual meaning of some Christian-Muslim concepts, especially those of the charge of tritheism and the deification of Mary. The degree to which this response applies to Chalcedonian Christianity would not be known until several decades after Muhammad's death, when the Qur'anic teachings were applied in dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the Byzantine and former Persian Empires.

The Qur'an has its own voice in the dialogue,<sup>181</sup> a voice which seems first of all inclusive of Christians in general terms. Though it corrects Christian exclusivism, it does not do so in a way which is itself exclusive. The attitude of the Qur'an toward Christianity can be indicated thus far as generally revisionist, and it may be said that the Qur'anic tone in its historical dialogue with Monophysite Christians is more inclusive than exclusive, and therefore ecumenical rather than polemical. The Qur'an in its original context is (according to the typology above) generally an ecumenical voice in Christian-Muslim relations. The Treaty of Najrān may be interpreted as a political by-product of the Qur'an's ecumenical stance toward Monophysite Christians.

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<sup>180</sup> The constitution of Medina can be found in Ibn Ishāq, 231-233.; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawīyah*, 368.

<sup>181</sup> Bertaina proposes that not only does the Qur'an have a voice in a dialogue, but its voice is often in the form of dialogue (i.e. Q5:116-118). The Qur'an responds to Jews, Christians, and others, as well as housing its responses in a dialogical literary style. This again highlights the importance of studying the Qur'anic meaning in its original context along with the interpretations of its subsequent commentators. Bertaina, Ch. 2. The Qur'an thus assumes religious pluralism. To some degree it may be posited then, that were the Qur'anic vision of global Islam to be realized, much of the Qur'an would become meaningless.

نسألك اللهم، برحمتك و قدرتك،  
أن تجعلنا ممن يعرف حَقَّك،  
و يتبع رضاك، و يتجنب سخطك،  
و يسبح بأسمائك الحسنى،  
و يتكلم بأمثالك العليا.  
أنت الراحم الرحمان الرحيم.

We ask you, O God, by your mercy and your power,  
to put us among those who know your truth,  
and follow your will and avoid your wrath,  
and praise your beautiful names,  
and proclaim your sublime examples.  
You are the Compassionate, the Merciful.

- an anonymous second/eighth century Arab Christian<sup>182</sup>

## I.2 Early History and Trends in Interfaith Dialogue

### Introduction

What follows is a survey and analysis of notable recorded interactions between Christians and Muslims during the first three centuries of Islam.<sup>183</sup> As outlined in the introduction to this study, not all interactions during this period are mentioned here, rather only those which are especially informative to or innovative in the development of Christian-Muslim dialogue, and the attitudes of Christian and Muslim religious leaders regarding the other. These filtered engagements are interpreted according to the Christian-Muslim dialogue typology also from the introduction. They are arranged here topically under the subjects of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, *tahrif*, the prophethood of Muhammad, and Islamic expansionism. These six headings provide the main themes for Christian-Muslim relations during this time period.

Within each of these topics, the material is arranged chronologically according to three phases of Christian-Muslim relational development. The first phase takes place from 11/632 to 114/733. The second phase from 115/734 to 184/800; and the third phase between 184/800 and 287/900. The time period is divided into these chronological phases primarily for the ease of research and orderly presentation of information. The division between Phase 1 and Phase

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<sup>182</sup> This quote is from the author of the first Arabic Christian apology, which herein is given the title *On the Unified Trinity*. This particular text can be found in Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 67-68. This work will be dealt with in some detail below.

<sup>183</sup> More comprehensive surveys are now available in Hoyland., and in David Thomas and Barbara Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009). There is no intent here to duplicate these great efforts, but rather only to highlight some of the more important interactions from an early Christian-Muslim dialogue perspective. Wherever possible, the footnotes here will contain references to the material in these two works, so as to provide the reader with a more comprehensive bibliography for each of the following entries.

2 in 114/733, however, is chosen because of the work of John of Damascus which came out at about that time, due to the effect it appears to have had on subsequent writings. John's importance and the rationale for dividing the two phases here will be apparent in what follows, though the date itself should be understood as illusory based on the approximate date of John's writings. Also, any dialogical tendencies discernible during these phases should be understood to be observations based on sources studied here, and not typological in nature.

From a reductionist historical viewpoint there is little absolutely knowable of the sources from the historical period of our inquiry in Part 1 here. This history in general consists of very few subjective recordings of events which often cannot be verified by other scientific disciplines. Although there exists a plethora of modern historical commentary written about this period, it remains a dark time from which there survives very little written information, and all of which that has survived is the recording of subjective observers, many of whom are second or even third hand authors, writing (for our purposes) from different branches of Christianity and Islam, and from great distances apart from each other.<sup>184</sup> Equally humbling for the historian of this period is the vast amount of material which is likely to have been written during these centuries, and yet has not survived.

Given these realities, it may be said unreasonably brash for the historian of religions to claim to *know* that anything at all happened concretely, and one may be forgiven for wrapping nearly the entire of this period of inquiry in the language of hypothesis. Nevertheless, this research is presented from a non-reductionist historical perspective, which is more tolerant of historical narratives based on the best available evidence, which sometimes leaves only traditional narratives. These narratives will be brought together in what may sometimes feel a bit forced, as we attempt to distil a Christian or Islamic voice in dialogue from the discontinuous and diverse voices which we examine. Where the reader finds in this paper historical narratives that stray from the absolutely knowable into the realm of hypothesis or tradition, they will be based on the available sources studied here, which the reader is invited

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<sup>184</sup> This challenge is well treated by Christian historian Michael R. Licona, who in his inquiry into the resurrection of Christ extensively addresses this same challenge. See Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), Ch. 1. From a strict reductionist historical viewpoint, there is little independent evidence to prove that many of the ancient authors referred to below ever existed at all. It may only be said that they are to varying degrees likely to have existed, as we have texts sometimes bearing their names, and some of those names are mentioned in other independent texts. However, reductionist historians must concede that the names, places, dates, and events which these authors record, where not verifiable through the archeological disciplines, may possibly be invented. Of course, the Qur'an itself falls into the category of texts originating from the time period into which we peer below, and thus reductionist historians have on occasion questioned the origin of the Qur'an through the lens of that possibility of invention which they are forced to admit. Those historians have earned only a brief remark in Part II below. This paper, written for the philosophical disciplines, will not hold such a distant view of the Qur'an, and so it along with its contemporary texts from other sources, will be treated from a non-reductionist perspective as outlined in the Introduction to this study.

to follow through the bibliography, and must not be understood to hold the value of an eye-witness account. This will be especially true in the narrative on tone in the concluding section of Part I, which commenting on the intentions or heart-posture of ancient authors based on works attributed to them, is educated speculation. None can truly know the hearts of these authors.

It is important here to introduce this study with the first impression of Islam to Christians. Goddard suggests that the first reaction of Christians to the growth of Islam was to interpret it in the context of their Old Testament scriptures.<sup>185</sup> They understood Islam as a fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham and Hagar concerning the descendants of Ishmael.<sup>186</sup> The framework for this interpretation may be abbreviated as follows.

In Genesis 16:10-13, an angel of the Lord meets Hagar and describes her son Ishmael's future. He will be a "wild one,"<sup>187</sup> adding that, "[Ishmael] will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live at odds with the rest of his brothers."<sup>188</sup> As Culver clarifies, "The clear implication is that Ishmael would give blows and receive blows, but he would not be overcome... Ishmael and his descendants would have to fight for survival in the

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<sup>185</sup> Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations* (Chicago, IL: New Amsterdam Books, 2000), 11.

<sup>186</sup> There has been some debate outside of Islam on Muhammad's descent from Nebaioth son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13), but this debate has already been closed by several authors. The Nabataeans (*Al-'Anbāf*) were the dominant nomadic traders of the Arabian Peninsula from as early as 585 B.C.E. and throughout the life of the Roman Empire. They were the descendants of Nebaioth. A detailed history of the Nabataeans can be found at Dan Gibson, "Nabataea.Net", CanBooks [www.nabataea.net](http://www.nabataea.net) (accessed January 26 2010). Hitti includes a brief historical genealogy connecting Muhammad with the Quraish; Hitti, 111. The location of the twelve tribes of Ishmael in Arabia was established already by Forster some time ago: "We have thus a clear and full concurrence of scriptural, heathen, Jewish, and Christian testimonies to the historical fact, that the great northern desert of Arabia, including the entire neck of the peninsula, was colonized by the twelve tribes descending from the sons of Ishmael, and called after their names." Charles Forster, *The Historical Geography of Arabia : Or, the Patriarchal Evidences of Revealed Religion ; a Memoir, with Illustrative Maps and an Appendix, Containing Translations, with an Alphabet and Glossary of the Hamyaritic Inscriptions Recently Discovered in Hadramaut. Vols. 1-2.* (London: Duncan and Malcolm, 1844), Vol. 1, 211. Jonathan Culver provides a helpful overview of the sources involved in the debate over Muhammad's descent from Ishmael, concluding from a Christian perspective that, "The evidence provides a historical basis for the claim that the North Arabians are the descendants of Ishmael." Jonathan Edwin Culver, "The Ishmael Promises in the Light of God's Mission : Christian and Muslim Reflections" (Ph. D., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001), 229. The descent of the Arabs in general from Ishmael was a conceded fact among Christians at the time of Muhammad. The names Saracen, Ishmaelite, and Hagarene were often used interchangeably because of this. See Isidore of Seville and W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarvm Sive Originvm Libri Xx (Etymologiae)*, 1st ed., Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), IX.ii.57. An English translation of the Isidore text is available in R. A. Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent : The Dramatic Story of the Earliest Encounters between Christians and Muslims* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 10.

<sup>187</sup> Genesis 16:12. A common Christian interpretation of this name (rendered "wild ass" in Hebrew instead of "wild one" as translated in the NLT) is as a prescriptive curse which describes the character of Ishmael and his descendants. As Culver notes, this equation of Ishmael's descendants as a race of wild asses in a derogatory sense is not exegetically sound. It primarily ignores the fact that God Himself named Ishmael, thus his name "God hears" is of divine origin. Culver goes on to state that the description of Ishmael as a "wild ass" was not derogatory at all. In fact, in Job 39:5-8, God Himself is quite proud of the wild donkey, describing its nature in a very positive light which Culver parallels to the ideal Bedouin lifestyle. Hagar was thus unconcerned with the description of her son as a "wild one," and perhaps celebrated it in light of the fact that God had seen her. Culver, 45-48.

<sup>188</sup> It is a theological leap to interpret either of these as prescriptive curses rather than descriptive warnings, since in context Hagar herself seemed quite thankful for the revelation.



wilderness. They would have to compete with other tribes for limited resources of water and grass lands for the flocks.”<sup>189</sup>

Though the angel describes well the struggles that the descendants of Ishmael will have with those of his brothers, it is noteworthy that the angel of God reaffirms Ishmael’s brotherhood with Isaac ... Also notable is that Hagar does not hence refer to God as the one who had cursed or shamed her ... but as a discarded slave and single mother who has heard from God, she notes the personal and affirming nature of the one who spoke to her as, ‘the God who sees me’ (v. 13).<sup>190</sup>

Culver notes that, “Hagar is the only person in the Bible who actually names God after an encounter with him.”<sup>191</sup>

In Genesis 21, God reaffirms to Abraham His promise made regarding Isaac, but here adds a promise to Ishmael’s line: “But I will make a nation of the descendants of Hagar’s son, because he is also your son.”<sup>192</sup> Nevertheless, once again Hagar and Ishmael end up alone in the desert, separated from each other this time, and now out of water. Hagar leaves her son under a bush, escaping his cries, and inevitable death of exposure and thirst, “Then *God heard the boy’s* cries, and the angel of God called to Hagar from the sky...”<sup>193</sup> God reaffirms his promise to Abraham concerning Ishmael, this time restating its terms to Hagar: “I will make a great nation from his descendants.”<sup>194</sup> God then opens Hagar’s eyes to see a water source in the desert, and, “God was with [Ishmael] as he grew up in the wilderness.”<sup>195</sup> It is from this foundation of God’s promise to bless Ishmael’s descendants, and to make a great nation from them, that Christians began their interpretation of Islam.

## I.2.i The Trinity

### I.2.i.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

There is very little mention of trinitarian theology during this time. The debate over the nature of Christ during this phase is outlined in section I.2.ii.1 below. However, one text does offer a rather curious comment. In *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab*

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<sup>189</sup> Culver, 49.

<sup>190</sup> Block, “No God but God: The Focused Life of Muhammad in Leadership Emergence Theory”, 4-5.

<sup>191</sup> Culver, 51.

<sup>192</sup> Genesis 21:13; cf. Gen 17:20. There are differing interpretations of the implications of this promise made by God. Culver provides an extensive exegetical treatise on Genesis 17. *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>193</sup> Genesis 21:17, emphasis mine.

<sup>194</sup> Genesis 21:18.

<sup>195</sup> Genesis 21:20. The ‘angel of the Lord’ appeared to three women in the Bible: Mary the mother of Jesus, Hagar the mother of Ishmael, and the wife of Manoah, father of Samson (Judges 13).

*Notable* (c.101/720),<sup>196</sup> a monk and an Arab associated with Maslama b. 'Abd al-Malik supposedly held a debate. The content including the apparent conversion of the monk's opponent quickly reveals a fabricated story.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, the story of the disputation reveals something of the Christian view of Islam.

In the text, the monk clarifies for the Arab that the reason Muhammad did not educate the Arabs on the nature of the Trinity was because of their, "simplicity and the deficiency of [their] understanding."<sup>198</sup> This indicates that though there were disagreements between Christians and Muslims concerning the nature of the Trinity, the disagreements were only present due to the Arab inability to comprehend what Muhammad supposedly would have taught them if they had been more educated. Thus the author identifies the Islamic understanding of God as a truncated trinitarian monotheism, and Muhammad as a culturally sensitive teacher of truth.

### 1.2.i.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

This sensitivity toward Muhammad's apparently abbreviated orthodoxy would find its end in the works of John of Damascus. John was reportedly the grandson of Manṣūr b. Sarjūn, who surrendered Damascus to the Arabs in 14/635.<sup>199</sup> John's father was a government official under Mu'āwiya, and John too was presumably someone of political importance under Islamic rule in Damascus.<sup>200</sup> Between 98/717 and 100/720 the Caliph 'Umar II issued a decree prohibiting non-Muslims from holding high political positions. It was possibly for this reason that John left for the monastery of Mār Saba, close to Jerusalem. There he became a priest and

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<sup>196</sup> It has been suggested that the monk is Abraham of Bet Hale, and perhaps Abraham the student of John Azraq. See the discussion in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 269.; cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Hālê and an Arab Notable," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 157-167. The late Professor H.J.W. Drijvers of Groningen University had been working on a full critical translation when he passed away in 2002. This author leans heavily on the works of Hoyland and Griffith on this text. cf. Sidney H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), VII, 154. Also see Sidney H. Griffith, "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bēt Hālê and a Muslim Emir " *Hugoye* 3, no. 1 (2000)., Bertaina, 138-145.

<sup>197</sup> One suspects that this may be based on a credible event with embellishments intended to encourage the author's Christian audience. The context is in fact quite believable, and the format of the text is said to be written specifically, "in question-and-answer form, as it is fitting." Hoyland, 466. However, the content is clearly composed fictitiously. The Arab in the dialogue concedes to the monk that, "You certainly possess the truth and not a false worship, as some people thought. Muḥammad, our prophet, also said about the inhabitants of the monasteries and the mountain dwellers that they will enjoy the kingdom. Truly, God will not reject any person who, according to this point of view, as you told me, possesses your belief and is purified from wickedness and sin." Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Hālê and an Arab Notable," 161.

<sup>198</sup> Hoyland, 538.

<sup>199</sup> Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The Heresy of the Ishmaelites* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 7.

<sup>200</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 295.

a prolific writer. In c.115/734, John wrote *De haeresibus*, which outlines the heresies that he was aware of at the time. Islam is the last entry in chapter 100/101.<sup>201</sup>

In the work, John answers the now apparent challenge of Islam to Christians on the doctrine of the Trinity, by referring to what he sees are Qur'anic inconsistencies with unitarianism.

Again we say to them: 'How, when you say that Christ is the Word of God and Spirit of God, do you revile us as associators?'<sup>202</sup> For the Word and the Spirit are inseparable ... So we call you mutilators of God.<sup>203</sup>

John makes numerous references to the Qur'anic text for examples of what he calls, "ludicrous doctrines."<sup>204</sup> For example, he mocks the Qur'anic concept of polygamy (Q33:37), the story of God's camel (Q7:77; 91:11-14), and heaven in the Qur'an (Q2:25; 18:31; 22:23). It seems certain by his numerous references and often direct quotations, that John of Damascus

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<sup>201</sup> Hoyland notes that this should not be taken to mean that John thought of Islam as a Christian heresy, as several pre-Christian religions are listed in the chapter as well, and therefore, "the term simply signifies an erroneous belief or a false doctrine." Reinhold Gleis holds to the thought that John views Islam as a Christian heresy, as John traces its origin through Muhammad to an Arian monk. See Hoyland, 484-489.; cf. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 297-299. The present author inclines to side with Gleis, as the root of Islam is clearly believed by John to have been (heretical) Christianity. There has been some controversy surrounding the traditional accounts of John's life; see John Meyendorff, "Byzantine Views of Islam," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 18, no. (1964). Those controversies will not be entered into here in detail.

The content of *De haeresibus* indicates composition after Caliph Umar II's decrees of c.100/720 and Caliph Yazid II's iconoclastic edict of 101/721. Daniel Sahas suggests that John left the Caliph's court in about 105/724, see Sahas, 45. John Voorhis dates *De haeresibus* to c.111/730, see N. A. Newman, *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue : A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries, 632-900 A.D. : Translations with Commentary* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 137. Hoyland proposes a date of 125/743 or shortly thereafter, see Hoyland, 483. Gleis clarifies that though the entire *Fount of Knowledge* of which this text is a part was completed after 125/743, some chapters may have been written earlier than this, see Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 297. Dating of the text cannot be more precise than 100/720-125/743 based on the available source material. For the purpose of this study, we will use the mean value between Sahas' proposed time of John's departure from Damascus in 105/724, and Hoyland's proposed date of the completion of the *Fount of Knowledge* in 125/743, thus we arrive at c.115/734. The chronological division between Phase 1 and Phase 2 in this study (114/733) is intended to approximate the period of time just prior to John's writings being published, marking with a certain degree of ambiguity, the beginning of Phase 2 at c.115/734.

The text can also be found in Newman, 139-144., and in J. H. Lupton, *St. John of Damascus, The Fathers for English Readers* (London; New York: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882). As a note to the reader, some historians have included the *Discussion Between a Christian and a Saracen* among John's works (as in Newman, 144ff.). Hoyland has shown that though this work may have been based on John's materials, it, "cannot have been written by John of Damascus himself." Hoyland, 489.

Another debate has questioned the attribution of chapter 100/101 of *De haeresibus* to John of Damascus. Armand Abel tried to show that the content of the chapter was anachronistic with the Christian-Muslim dialogue and the Christian theology of Islam at the time. As Sahas has shown, Abel's suggestion is easily refuted and the text is most likely from John of Damascus. However, what Abel's concerns about the text shows, and Sahas does not address, is why the last chapter of *De haeresibus* seems anachronistic. It is possibly so as it represents a dramatic shift in the Christian theology of Islam. It is, that we know of, the first strictly textual refutation of Qur'anic content (and perhaps the first commentary of any kind on Qur'anic text), it is likely the first Christian theology of Islam that does not attribute the rise of Islam to the God of the Bible, and it is possibly the first work of a theologian of John's literary prolificacy who had considerable personal cause to hate Muslims. For an outline of Abel's argument and Sahas's rebuttal see Sahas, 60-66.

<sup>202</sup> *Hetairias: mushrikūn* in Arabic.

<sup>203</sup> Hoyland, 486.; cf. Q4:171. John had a very clear view of the Qur'anic materials concerning Jesus. Sahas has compiled it here: Sahas, 78.; cf. Hoyland, 488.

<sup>204</sup> Hoyland, 486.

had direct access to at least part of the text of the Qur'an.<sup>205</sup> It is also likely from his writing that John, though he most probably had relationships with many Muslims, is reacting personally to something textual. He quotes the Qur'an out of context and with malice.

As perhaps the first religious authority (Christian or Muslim) to react to the text of the Qur'an in a written commentary, John is therefore the first Qur'anic commentator that we know of to interpret Q4:171 as a refutation of the Trinity. As the Qur'an chose the word "three" instead of "trinity" in the context in which the verse was spoken (as shown above), John appears unaware of the likelihood that the verse was condemning Philoponian tritheism (as John himself did). John's interpretation of Q4:171 is thus as erroneous as others of his comments on the Qur'an.

One wonders why theological unitarianism is a departure point for John at all, as the Qur'anic concept of *tawhīd* is remarkably similar to John's own description of God in his work in *De Fide Orthodoxa* where under the heading "On the Holy Trinity" John writes:

We believe in one God, one principle, without beginning, uncreated, unbegotten, indestructible and immortal, eternal, unlimited, uncircumscribed, unbounded, infinite in power, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, unchanging, unaffected, inalterate, invisible ... maker of all things visible and invisible...<sup>206</sup>

This reveals something of John's context as an interpreter. As John has a well-developed unitarian theology of his own, he does not have to react as he did to the unitarianism in the Qur'anic text, he chooses to. He appears both unaware of the original context of the Qur'anic refutation of tritheism, and untrusting of the Muslims who might interpret it for him. He may in fact be the first commentator to conceive of an interpretation for this text as a refutation of trinitarian monotheism.<sup>207</sup>

It is furthermore quickly apparent from where John's distaste and distrust for Muslims may have stemmed. Without their humiliation of his grandfather, John was likely destined to have been Governor of Damascus.<sup>208</sup> Not only was his family slighted by the Islamic takeover,

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<sup>205</sup> Though perhaps only to a portion of the Qur'an, as he seems to interact only with Surahs 2-5. This is particularly clear in John's rendering of Muhammad's Christology. Hoyland captures the text as well as the Qur'anic allusions brilliantly, and there is no need to repeat it here. See *ibid.*, 488-489.

<sup>206</sup> Sahas, 75.

<sup>207</sup> One may note here that John was able to widely publish his polemical materials under Umayyad rule, apparently free from oppression for their content. This may indicate that his interpretations either coincided with the Islamic interpretation of the Qur'an in his context, or that at least his interpretations were accepted by Muslims.

<sup>208</sup> John's grandfather was reportedly someone of political importance in Damascus at the time when the Muslims took over the city. In that culture at that time, political positions were commonly inherited, passed from father to son. Though it is impossible to know concretely from the sources available, that John would have inherited his father's and grandfather's position is highly likely. It is of course possible that John simply elected to move from Damascus to the monastery, and that his move and subsequent comments on Islam were entirely independent from the policies of Umar II and their probable impact on

but 'Umar II's decree against non-Muslims holding high authority appears to have secured his eventual release from any further position of power under Islamic rule. Thus it is quite possible that instead of his presumably preferred life as the son of a ruler, he was raised in the home of a Christian intermediary whose position it was to collect taxes for, and carry out the orders of, a foreign ruler. Presumably his family, for their devotion to Christianity, sacrificed all of their previous political power during John's lifetime.<sup>209</sup> John conceivably then, not attempting to understand Islam through a Christian framework for its existence, and ridiculing the Qur'an and Muhammad, represents the strongest exclusive polemical approach to Islam until this time.

In spite of John's polemical influence on subsequent Christian writings on Islam,<sup>210</sup> some strong ecumenical Christian voices remain. A decade later in 137/755 a Melkite tract *On the Unified Trinity* (a.k.a. *On the Triune Nature of God*) is released, and it is one of the earliest known Christian apologies in Arabic.<sup>211</sup> This tract is unique to this point in its structure and composition. It is a defence of Christian theology, specifically the Trinity and the Incarnation, but presented in a style which blends Christian theology with Qur'anic content. The structure is very fluid. "It is much more of an oral type, where ideas follow each other by association, rather than by logical sequence."<sup>212</sup> Its presentation is in Arabic verse. The introduction begins with echoes of the *fātiḥa*:

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his inheritance and family legacy, though this seems unlikely given the dramatic nature of John's comments on Islam.

<sup>209</sup> It is also notable that when John was a younger man, Yazīd II's decree against icons in 102/721 was the first of its kind to extend to Christian churches in the Islamic Empire. This may have been the inspiration behind a similar decree by Leo III. This very likely added to the source of John's anger toward Muslims, as it was for his love and defence of icons that John was ultimately anathematized in 136/754. See A. A. Vasiliev, "The Iconoclastic Edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A. D. 721," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9, no. (1956).

<sup>210</sup> See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 299.

<sup>211</sup> Samir dates the text to 119/737-120/738. Mark Swanson dates the text to 171/788. This author is convinced by the work of Sidney Griffith, who dates the text to 137/755, which uses the duration of 746 years given in the text, to date it from the Incarnation according to the Alexandrian world era (9 CE). The present author also reads the text as an ecumenical reaction to the polemical presentation of Islam by John of Damascus. As this work was not a lengthy scholarly project, it was likely written much closer to the work of John of Damascus, the context thus favouring Samir's dating, or Griffith's at the latest. See *ibid.*, 330-333., Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 61-64., and Sidney H. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque : Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam*, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 89-90, n. 47. Also see Mark Swanson, "Folly to the Hunafa: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 243-247. The Arabic transcription as well as Margaret Gibson's translation are available in Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles : From an Eighth or Ninth Century Ms. In the Convent of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai : With a Treatise, on the Triune Nature of God, with Translation, from the Same Codex*, Studia Sinaitica No. 7 (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1899), 2-36 (English), 73-107 (Arabic).

<sup>212</sup> Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 65.

Oh God, in Your mercy,  
 we are favoured in truth and  
 righteousness!  
 Praise be to God,  
 before whom nothing was,  
 and who was before everything,  
 after whom there is nothing,  
 and He is the heir of all things,  
 and to Him all things return;  
 who kept the knowledge of all things,  
 by His knowledge,  
 and nothing but His intellect  
 is sufficient for this.<sup>213</sup>

اللهم، برحمتك توفقتنا للصدق و الصواب!  
 الحمد لله، الذي لم يكن شيء قبله،  
 و كان قيل كل شيء.  
 الذي ليس شيء بعده،  
 و هو وارث كل شيء،  
 و إليه مصير كل شيء.  
 الذي حفظ بعلمه علم كل شيء  
 ولم يسع لذلك إلا عقله.  
 الذي إلى عل  
 مه انتهى كل شيء،  
 و أحصى كل شيء بعلمه.

There are a number of expressions that appear in the text which are taken directly from the Qur'an. For example, "your beautiful names" (اسمائك الحسنی) cf. Q7:180, 17:110; 20:8; 59:24), and "You are seated upon the throne" (على العرش استويت) cf. Q7:54; 10:3; 13:2; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4) are used, among others.<sup>214</sup> The author reverses the Qur'anic phrase "mercy and guidance" to read "guidance and mercy," in reference to Jesus. This phrase in the Qur'an refers three times to Moses, and ten times to Muhammad.<sup>215</sup>

The author quotes directly from the Qur'an many times. He quotes Q90:4, 54:11, and 6:94 to argue in favour of the Trinity that both the Bible and the Qur'an use plural terms for God. He quotes Q4:171 and 16:102 both to highlight Jesus as the Word of God and Spirit of God, which the author believes directly refers to the Trinity.<sup>216</sup> This presents a direct refutation of the interpretation of John of Damascus, and a debate between Christians on whether the Trinity appears in the Qur'an is now open.

The author promotes trinitarianism using the eye (being the eye, the pupil and the light), and the mouth (being mouth, tongue, and word), to analogize the Trinity, both somewhat unique analogies within Arab-Christian theology. He also uses analogies drawn directly from John of Damascus, like the tree (being the root, branches, and fruit), and the source (being the fountain, river, and lake).

The major prophets of Q3:33-34 are also referenced to tell the Biblical history of salvation. In spite of numerous Qur'anic references, Samir asserts that the work was, "certainly not a scholarly exercise. Reading the Apology, one gets the impression that the author writes rather spontaneously, and that these expressions are not artificial, even if their use might have

<sup>213</sup> Another example of this is the quote made at the very beginning of this section. The text and translation are taken from *ibid.*, 66-67.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>215</sup> Q6:154; 7:154; 28:43 (Moses), and Q6:157; 7:52; 7:203; 10:57; 12:111; 16:64; 16:89; 27:77; 31:3; 45:20 (Muhammad); see *ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

been calculated to impress the reader."<sup>217</sup> "He has brought into Arabic Christianity all that he could draw from the Islamic and Qur'anic heritage, and he introduced it into his own theology. On the other hand, he has presented Christian theology to Muslims in a Muslim garment."<sup>218</sup>

Great thought has been given recently to the targeted audience of this tract. In a recent Italian translation Sr. Maria Gallo concluded that, "the author is speaking to Christians and that the Muslim-directed discourse is simply a literary device meant to give greater liveliness and concreteness to his words." Mark Swanson too suggests that the *testimonia*-lists in the tract indicate a Christian audience.<sup>219</sup> But what if Islam *is* the Christian audience? Given the radical departure of John of Damascus from the relatively ecumenical nature of the Christian-Muslim dialogue to this point, as will be shown in subsequent comments on phase 1 below, and the counter witness that *On the Unified Trinity* provides in this milieu, the possibility must be considered that though the Muslims at this time were unorthodox from a Melkite standpoint, they were not yet universally considered non-Christian. The release of this tract in Arabic within two decades of *De haeresibus* in Greek, both by Melkite sources indicates that the tract is highly likely a deliberate reaction to John's diatribe. The tract possibly then represents an ecumenical treatise meant to draw the heretical into orthodoxy, not the non-Christian into Christianity.

Given the author's clear access to the works of John of Damascus, his seemingly greater immersion into Arab and Islamic life than John, his inclusive attitude toward truths within Islam, and the spontaneity with which he writes, this work is almost certainly intended as an ecumenical reaction to the polemics of John of Damascus. It is written, as John's work is, for a Christian audience looking to understand Islam,<sup>220</sup> though this author presents a dramatically different kind of Qur'an and Islam than does John. This author apparently intends to encourage the Muslim-Christian reader to 'soften their heart' and 'lay open their breast' to

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<sup>217</sup> This gives an important clue to the identity of the author, who is not using Christian Arabic or writing from a Christian environment. The author uses Qur'anic Arabic seamlessly and indicates the author's total immersion in an Arab Muslim culture. *Ibid.*, 108-109.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>219</sup> Mark Swanson, "Apologetics, Catechesis, and the Question of Audience in "on the Triune Nature of God" (Sinai Arabic 154) and the Three Treatises of Theodore Abū Qurrah," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Berut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 111-134. The quote is from p. 132.

<sup>220</sup> This is, as Mark Swanson notes, in spite of occasional use of phrases like, "you will find it in the Qur'an" or "in your book." These are to be understood as literary devices meant to encourage confidence in the author's knowledge of the Qur'an. See Mark Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting (2): The Use of the Bible in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 107-108.

truths within Islam, without losing the context of Melkite orthodoxy through which those truths may be identified.<sup>221</sup>

*Tanwīr al-Miqbās* by Muhammad al-Kalbi (d.146/763) is also known as the *tafsīr* of pseudo-Ibn'Abbās (d.68/687).<sup>222</sup> This early collection of *tafsīr* is not a work of inter-faith dialogue *per se*. However, Islamic rule had spread deeply into the territory of the Christians and the Zoroastrians by this time, and a key to understanding the meaning of the Qur'an for both the Islamic rulers of those regions, as well as for new converts to Islam, was observably necessary.

Ibn'Abbās places Q4:171 in the context of the conversation between Muhammad and the Najrān Christians, whom he mistakenly identifies as Nestorian also in Q5:73. He correctly quotes the Qur'an saying, "three," and notably makes no attempt to draw diaphysite trinitarianism, or the Arabic word for trinity into the context of the verse.<sup>223</sup> He highlights the tritheism presented by the Najrānians as that of, "a son, father, and wife,"<sup>224</sup> consistent with Philoponian tritheism carrying a high Mariology.<sup>225</sup> In Q5:73 Ibn'Abbās clarifies the tritheism to include, "a father, a son and a holy spirit,"<sup>226</sup> a doctrine he credits specifically to the

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<sup>221</sup> The two phrases in quotes are adapted from the text's introduction: a plea to God to, "soften our hearts, and lay open our breasts," which is a direct reference to Q6:125; 16:106; 20:25, 39:22; and 94:1. See Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 69.

<sup>222</sup> The *Tanwīr al-Miqbās min Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* by al-Fīrūzabādī (d.1414/817) is understood to not be an accurate transmission of the commentary of Ibn 'Abbās. Andrew Rippin posits that the *Tanwīr al-Miqbās* is an abbreviated form from the works of 'Abdullah b. Muhammad al-Dinwarī (d.308/920), and may have come through him from Muhammad al-Kalbi (d.146/763). See Andrew Rippin, "The Exegetical Works Ascribed to Ibn Abbas: An Examination," in *The Qur'an and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 2001). In any case, as Rippin concluded elsewhere, "there is no way of proving the fact that Ibn 'Abbās is connected to the material found in this *tafsīr*." Andrew Rippin, "Tafsir Ibn Abbas and Criteria for Dating Early Tafsir Texts," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18, no. (1994): 71. For the purpose of this study and ease of understanding, the commentary will be referred to by the name Ibn 'Abbās, and dated to 146/763. The English translation and further discussion on the sources for Ibn 'Abbās can be found in Ibn 'Abbās. The translator himself acknowledges that, "there is no doubt that this commentary is not the work of Ibn Abbas" (from p. xiii of the introduction). The English and Arabic can be found under the *Tafsīr* of Fayrūzabādī online at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Al-Tafsīr", Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought <http://www.altafsir.com/tafasir.asp> (accessed March 15th 2010). Further English and Arabic references to the *tafsīr* of Ibn 'Abbās will not be given page numbers. Quotes from Ibn 'Abbās will be given in both English and Arabic. The English references are to the Mokrane translation unless otherwise noted. Both the Mokrane English translation and the al-Fayrūzabādī text in Arabic are available online as noted above.

<sup>223</sup> Which, it should be noted was in use already by this time in *On the Unified Trinity*, an Arabic Christian text defending the trine God. See above.

<sup>224</sup> "ولد ووالد وزوجة"

<sup>225</sup> The Monophysite discourse on the title *Theotokos* for Mary seems a possible origin for this. It is also documented now that Christians sometimes equated the Holy Spirit with Mary, *Theotokos*. For example in a rebuttal to the apocryphal *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, Origen comments quoting the Gospel, "If any should lend credence to the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the saviour himself says, 'My mother, the Holy Spirit, took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great Mount Tabor,' he will have difficulty in explaining how the Holy Spirit can be the mother of Christ." The third century *Gospel of Thomas* refers to the Holy Spirit as "the mother of all creation" and "compassionate mother." See Elliott, 9, 464, 458. Aphraates of Edessa referred in his homilies to a man who believed in God as his father and "the Holy Spirit his Mother." The quote is from Parrinder, 136; William Wright, *The Homilies of Aphraates, the Persian Sage in 2 Vols.* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1869).

<sup>226</sup> "أب وابن وروح قدس"



Marqusiyyah.<sup>227</sup> Again, no use of “trinity” appears in Ibn‘Abbās’ commentary and so it seems possible that Ibn‘Abbās is aware that the Qur’an is specifically refuting tritheism, though he mistakenly ascribes the heresy to all forms of Christianity rather than the specific tritheist Philoponian heresy.

In the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century, a set of letters were allegedly exchanged between the Caliph ‘Umar ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (‘Umar II; r. 98/717-101/720) and the Byzantine Emperor Leo III (r.98/717-123/741).<sup>228</sup> The set of letters comprises of an abbreviated form of a letter by ‘Umar to Leo, and a detailed reply by Leo to ‘Umar. Leo addresses the tritheistic accusation, derived from Q4:171, 5:73, 116, which has by now evolved into an argument against trinitarianism. He uses imagery and logic to clarify the trinitarian monotheistic position and bridges this into a discourse on the Incarnation, quoting at length from the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus.<sup>229</sup>

Even late into the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century, it was not yet agreed by Christian scholars whether the Qur’an in fact challenged trinitarianism at all. The debate of Patriarch Timothy I and the Caliph al-Mahdī (164/781) exposes the ongoing ecumenical side of the developing Christian theology of Islam.<sup>230</sup> The best known of Timothy’s works on Christian-Muslim relations is the account of his debate with the Caliph al-Mahdī.<sup>231</sup> There have been a number of good studies

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<sup>227</sup> The meaning of the term Marqusiyyah is unclear. The word occurs as المرقوسية in the text. Perhaps it is a reference to the Coptic Orthodox Church of St. Mark (الكنيسة المرقسية) which is said to have been established in Alexandria in 68 CE, though this is not objectively verifiable. For written reference see ‘Abd Allah Ibn Abbās, *Tanwīr Al-Miqbās Min Tafṣīr Ibn ‘Abbās* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1987), 98.

<sup>228</sup> The opening letter of ‘Umar to Leo is obviously abridged in the Newman and Jeffery texts. It does however outline the topics for debate. ‘Umar questions Leo on the Incarnation, the Trinity, the crucifixion, *taḥrīf*, and Old and New Testament prophecies of Muhammad. His tone, or at least that given to him by the later scribe, is one of scorn for Christianity, clearly polemical. Present scholarship has not confirmed if these men are truly the authors, though the dispute text is datable to the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 203-208, 375-385.; cf. Hoyland, 490-501. In 1984, Jean-Marie Gaudeul published what is perhaps the remainder of ‘Umar’s letter in the text known as the *Aljamiado* (B.N.M. 4944). Jeffery had originally discarded the text, but Gaudeul believes that it is in fact the second half of ‘Umar’s letter. Gaudeul dates the text to c.287/900, and this dating conflict may indicate that Gaudeul’s text was a later copy with additions or emendations. For this study, we will be reviewing the text as recorded in the history of Ghevond. Arthur Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar li and Leo lii," *The Harvard Theological Review* 37, no. 4 (1944).; reprinted without ‘Umar’s letter to Leo in Newman, 47-132. For the *Aljamiado* text and Gaudeul’s explanation see Jean-Marie Gaudeul, "The Correspondence between Leo and Umar: Umar's Letter Re-Discovered?," *Islamochristiana* 10, no. (1984): 109-157.

<sup>229</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar li and Leo lii," 300-309.

<sup>230</sup> Timothy I (d.207/823) became Patriarch of the Nestorian Church of the East in 163/780. He reportedly had a strong working relationship with the Islamic Caliphate. Timothy received permission from al-Mahdī (r.158/775-168/785) for the restoration of churches, translated Aristotle’s *Topics* into Arabic at his request, and travelled with the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 169/786-193/809) to various places.

<sup>231</sup> This is sometimes known as Letter LIX. His letters XL, XXXIV, XXXV and XXXVI also contain interesting information from a dialogue perspective. See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of the Christian Kalām in the Mu‘tazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times," in *Syriac Polemics: Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinink*, ed. Wout Jac. van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers, and Alex C. Klugkist, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (Leuven, Paris, Dudley: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2007). For example, Timothy classifies Muslims as, “the new Jews” (p. 106), clarifying for his audience the nature and severity of the Christian-Muslim divide. He also concentrates on the title “Servant of God” for Christ, distinguishing between the proper Christian understanding and the Islamic

on this debate already, and it is not necessary to repeat their findings here.<sup>232</sup> We will concentrate on Timothy and al-Mahdī's use of the Qur'an, and Timothy's apparent ecumenical stance toward Islam.<sup>233</sup>

The persistent interpretation of Q4:171 and 5:73 outside of their likely historical context by this time is apparent from the outset of the debate in the first question that is asked of Timothy by the Caliph, "O Catholicos, a man like you who possesses all this knowledge and utters such sublime words concerning God, is not justified in saying about God that He married a woman from whom he begat a son." To which Timothy replied, "And who, O God-loving King, who has ever uttered such a blasphemy concerning God?"<sup>234</sup>

Later in the debate, Timothy retorts in favour of the Trinity with an equally ill-considered argument based on the plural form of personal pronouns in the Qur'an which refer to God, presumably derived from *On the Unified Trinity* (above). "As to your book, it is written in it, 'And We sent to her our Spirit,' and, 'We breathed into her from our Spirit, and 'We fashioned,' 'We said,' 'We did,' and all such expressions which are said of God in a plural form."<sup>235</sup>

In this phase there is not yet clear agreement on the interpretation of Q4:171 and 5:73 by Christians as refutations of trinitarian monotheism, with John of Damascus and Leo III on one side and the author of *On the Unified Trinity* and Timothy I on the other. Ibn'Abbās clearly directs the verses against any form of tritheism, whether the triad includes Mary or the Holy Spirit along with Father and Son, and 'Umar II seems the lone Islamic voice that directs the Qur'an against trinitarianism in any form. This discussion would become much clearer in the next phase of dialogue.

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perspective (p.117). A biography and bibliographical information are in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 515-531. Discussions on authenticity can be found also in the preface to the English translation from Mingana reprinted in Newman, 163-267. Newman includes Mingana's preface as well as his own. Cf. Mingana., Bertaina, 145-159.

<sup>232</sup> See along with the above E. C. D. Hunter, "Interfaith Dialogues: The Church of the East and the Abbassids," in *Der Christliche Orient Und Seine Umwelt*, ed. Vashalomidze and L. Greeisiger(Weisbaden: 2007).; Swanson, "Folly to the Hunafa: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," 248-255.; David Bertaina, "The Development of Testimony Collections in Early Christian Apologetics within Islam," in *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, ed. David Thomas(Leiden: Brill, 2007), 155-162.; Hoyland, 472-475.; Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims : A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster, 2005), 21-27.; Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, V, 262-264.

<sup>233</sup> Heimgartner notes the four main topics of the debate: the nature of the Son of God, the Trinity, Muhammad, and the relationship between Islam and Christianity in salvation history. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 522-523. For a list of all the Biblical quotations made during the debate see Hunter, 296.

<sup>234</sup> Newman, 175.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.; cf. Q19:17; 21:91.

### 1.2.i.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

The Melkite Bishop Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c.204/820) was a prolific writer. Thirty of his writings deal with Islam in one way or another.<sup>236</sup> Griffith identifies him as a student of John of Damascus.<sup>237</sup> A full study of his work on Islam demands its own dissertation. Only an attempt to summarize his position on Islam as a dialogician, and some comments on his use of the Qur'an, will be made here.<sup>238</sup>

Theodore quotes Q112 in a full and slightly altered format, as what he believes is a Qur'anic refutation of the Trinity.<sup>239</sup> This is the first time we see Q112 applied as an anti-trinitarian text, and may be a misunderstanding of context, as al-Wāḥidī places this surah in the context of challenges to Muhammad by Jews and “idolaters” as to the lineage of God. There is no hint of Christianity in the context of this surah in the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*.<sup>240</sup> Ibn'Abbās however disagrees, his commentary allocating this surah as a response to Christians concerning Jesus as a son of God. Theodore it seems is responding to Ibn'Abbās' interpretation.

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<sup>236</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 439-491., Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 182-190.

<sup>237</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, Collected Studies Series, vol. CS380 (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1992), V, 56.

<sup>238</sup> This will not include *The Debate of Abū Qurrah* as the authorship of the work which was once attributed to him, is now unknown, though David Bertaina has recently defended Abū Qurrah as the author. For further discussion see Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 556-564.; cf. Bertaina, "The Development of Testimony Collections in Early Christian Apologetics within Islam," 168-171., Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 212-228. There is a distinction in the manner in which Theodore writes about Islam depending in which language he is writing. In Arabic, Theodore used epithets for Muslims such as “those who lay claim to faith,” or, “those who claim to have a book sent down by God,” only rarely referring to Muslims directly. As Lamoreaux notes, “that Islam is frequently the subject of his concern in his defence of Christianity is confirmed by his subtle use of Qur'anic language and his frequent use of the technical terminology of Muslim theology.” In Greek however, “the tenor of his arguments is far from subtle, even to the point of accusing the prophet of Islam of moral turpitude, insanity, and wilful distortion of the truth or, perhaps most strikingly, of having been possessed by a demon.” Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 440-441. Marc Swanson notes that Qurrah was a master of subtlety. His Qur'anic allusions are often, “so light that they may have been missed by all but the most competent readers. ...it allowed Theodore to bring the Qur'an into the argument without explicitly claiming it as an authority.” Swanson, "Apologetics, Catechesis, and the Question of Audience in "on the Triune Nature of God" (Sinai Arabic 154) and the Three Treatises of Theodore Abū Qurrah," 123. Elsewhere, Theodore wrote in Arabic a *Treatise Confirming that Christians Do Not Necessarily Speak of Three Gods When They Say that the Father is God and the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One God, Even Though Each of Them is Fully God by Himself*. Though Muslims are not specifically mentioned, it is likely from the context of his other writings and the language in which this is composed, that he intends both Jews and Muslims as his audience. John C. Lamoreaux and Theodore Abū Qurrah, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, Library of the Christian East, vol. 1 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 175-193; Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 453.; cf. Mark Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 3 (2005).

<sup>239</sup> He quotes the Qur'an as saying, “God is one, barren-built, who did not beget and was not begotten, who has no partner.” Lamoreaux understands ‘barren-built’ as likely to be a deliberate mistranslation of the Qur'an which says *ṣamad* ('eternal' or 'absolute') in this place. Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 424-425.

<sup>240</sup> al-Wāḥidī, 266.; both the English and the Arabic of the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* are available at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Quranic Science: Context of Revelation".

*The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* was composed in the early 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>241</sup> This legend provides a particularly interesting view of the Qurʾān in that it continues the presentation of a potentially congruent reading of the Qurʾān with Christian theology. The whole of the Qurʾān, according to the main character, Baḥīrā, is to be understood by Christians. His opening statement to Muhammad for transmission to the Arabs is the *basmala*, “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.” This Baḥīrā interprets in a novel trinitarian formula with Jesus as The Merciful, and the Holy Spirit as The Compassionate.<sup>242</sup> The text highlights the Christian framework within Islam, with references to Q4:171, 5:81-82 and 5:116-117 among other texts.<sup>243</sup>

*The Apology of al-Kindī* (c.204/820) is attributed to ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-Kindī. Though some have questioned the authorship and dating of *The Apology*, Muir and others have rested on al-Kindī’s authorship, and in the time of the Caliph al-Maʾmūn (197/813-218/833).<sup>244</sup> *The Apology* consists of two letters: the invitation of a Muslim to a Christian to convert to Islam, and the refutation of Islam in the Christian’s reply.<sup>245</sup>

The first letter begins with the invitation of a Muslim known as ʿAbdullah b. Ismail al-Hashimī to the Nestorian al-Kindī, inviting him to Islam. He appeals to Abraham as the originator of monotheism with references to Q2:129; 3:60 and 27:83. He then determines his engagement to be out of kindness, quoting Q29:45,<sup>246</sup> but is stern in his assertion that Islam is the only true religion citing Q3:17 and 3:79. He praises the clergy, citing Q5:85,<sup>247</sup> and then stands on the uniqueness of the Qurʾān, quoting from Q17:90.<sup>248</sup>

He invites his Christian friend to the pillars of Islam, the *shahāda*, and to the rewards that await good Muslims, quoting from a number of surahs,<sup>249</sup> warning him against rejecting

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<sup>241</sup> This is a major text in the development of Christian-Muslim dialogue. A greater introduction to this text will be given in the section on Muhammad’s Prophethood below, as that is the primary concern of the text.

<sup>242</sup> Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2009), 459., Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*.

<sup>243</sup> The later expanded Arabic version of the legend contains many more Qurʾānic verses. See Hoyland, 478.; cf. Roggema, 106, 111-112.

<sup>244</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 585-594. See especially pp. 587-588.; cf. William Muir, "The Apology of Al Kindy: An Essay on its Age and Authorship," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 14, no. 2 (1882). Massignon dates the text later, citing possible quotes from al-Ṭabarī. See the entry for al-Kindī in Gibb and others, Vol. 5, 120-121.

<sup>245</sup> The Apology is translated into English by Anton Tien, available in Newman, 381-545.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 389.

<sup>249</sup> Q22:23; 35:31-32; 37:40-47; 39:21; 43:68-71; 44:51-57; 47:16-17; 38:49-54; 55:46-78; 40:73; 76:11-18; 78:31-36; 52:17-28; and 56:10-39.

the message.<sup>250</sup> The Muslim writer reminds his addressee that it is his duty to warn his friend of the consequences of not responding to the message of Islam (Q44:12; 80:4; 87:9; 89:24).<sup>251</sup> Finally, the author gives his friend instructions on prayer and fasting, marriage (Q2:230)<sup>252</sup>, and delivers a final call to Islam:

Thus now I have spoken to you the Word of God. His is a voice of truth, who never breaks His promise, nor belies His Word, what has been briefly stated will suffice. Away then with your present unbelief, which means error and misery and calamity. Will you any longer cleave to what you must admit is a mere medley? I mean your doctrine of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the worship of the cross?<sup>253</sup>

He then quotes Q4:51 and 5:76-79 before delivering a few final warnings and fresh encouragement to consider the offer, to his Christian counterpart. The second letter is the reply of al-Kindi to the letter of invitation to convert to Islam. The response begins warmly enough, thanking al-Hashimī for his friendship and concern, but then quickly changes in tone to a more polemical type of work.

Al-Kindi defends the Trinity on numerical grounds, being that the number 3 is superior to the number 1. The number 3 contains the number 1, and is divisible only in a way that produces one odd (1) and one even (2) number, and there are two kinds of numbers, making the number 3 more complete than the number 1.<sup>254</sup> He responds to his interlocutor's misconception of the Incarnation as having involved a sexual relationship with Mary by affirming the rejection, and blaming the Jews for introducing the concept to the Muslims.<sup>255</sup> Otherwise, his defence of the Trinity is fairly standard and Biblically based.

Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī (d.c.215/830) was a Miaphysite scholar, who may have been the bishop of Takrīt, in Abbasid Iraq, at some point.<sup>256</sup> He is an early Arabic writer of apologetics, writing for the most part to prevent conversions from Christianity to Islam, while supplying his Christian contemporaries with rationale behind the Christian faith

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<sup>250</sup> Q3:20-21; 35:33; 37:60-66; 38:56-57; 39:18, 61, 63, 71; 40:52-53, 71-73; 42:42-44; 43:74-77; 44:43-50; 47:17-19; and 77:24-38. Citations are listed here and in the note above are in the order in which they appear in *The Apology*; Newman, 391-398.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>256</sup> Keating's work contains Arabic editions and English translations of the three letters: *The Proof, On the Trinity*, and *On the Incarnation*, as well as two shorter works. What is discussed of Abū Rā'īṭa herein is taken primarily from these works. See Keating on his ecclesiastical status in Sandra Toenies Keating and Ḥabīb ibn Khidmah Takrītī, *Defending the "People of Truth" in the Early Islamic Period: The Christian Apologies of Abū Ra'ītah*, *The History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, vol. 4 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 40-48. A short biography and bibliographical information can be found in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 567-581.; cf. David Thomas, *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001), 49-53. On his use of Christian scriptures in apologetics see Keating in Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 257-274.

and responses to their Islamic counterparts. He was a contemporary of Theodore Abū Qurrah, al-Kindi, Timothy I, and Ammār al-Baṣrī. As a full study of Abū Rā'īṭa's work is now available, this present work will highlight only the use of the Qur'an and attitude toward Islam in Abū Rā'īṭa's writing.<sup>257</sup>

As al-Kindi does, Abū Rā'īṭa appeals to the plurality of the language of the Qur'an's personal pronouns which refer to God.<sup>258</sup> This again is not a compelling argument, but is a theme nonetheless in Christian apologetical writing. Of his more interesting arguments, Abū Rā'īṭa may be the first to develop the comparison between the trinitarian names of God and the Islamic attributes of God (*ṣifāt Allah*).<sup>259</sup> He asks of his interlocutor if the attributes "living," "knowing," and "wise" are eternal. If they are, then they are related to God, "either as other than Himself, as [one] partner is related to [another] partner, or as from Him."<sup>260</sup> In this argument he uses the Islamic doctrine against *shirk* to guide his reader to the concept of the attributes being "from God" in nature, and since life, knowledge, and wisdom are not the same concept, God is therefore both unified in nature and divided in *hypostaseis*.

Abū Rā'īṭa's stance as an apologist seems clear. He notes that even though Christians and Muslims may agree on there being only one God, "what a great distance lies between the two statements in what you think and what we believe."<sup>261</sup> Despite a solid command of Qur'anic idiom, he does not appear to make any concerted effort to reinterpret the Qur'an according to Christian categories or definitions. He also has little interest in any ecumenical form of dialogue. The opening phrase to his response to the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd* is, "Oh people! Verily we are called upon to a debate with you. Let us get down to our dispute about what stands between us [بيننا و بينكم]."<sup>262</sup> This is a clear reversal of the words of Q3:64, "Say: O followers of the Book! come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah; but if they turn back, then say: Bear witness that we are Muslims." Dionysius presents a more conciliatory approach.

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<sup>257</sup> See Keating and Takrītī.; cf. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, II.

<sup>258</sup> Keating and Takrītī, 203; *ibid*.

<sup>259</sup> Sweetman introduces the problem of parallel here well. He states that, "the problem of the attributes as it comes before us in the early formative period of Muslim theology is the counterpart in Islam of the problem of the personal distinctions of the Godhead on the Christian side," continuing, "If God is said to have knowledge it is a quality which, if it exists apart from His Essence, may be attributed to others, and so God would cease to be *sui generis*. Thus to predicate qualities of God is to be in danger of *tashbīh*, i.e., likening God to creatures. But the dilemma is that the Qur'an does apply epithets to God." This is essentially the challenge of Islamic theologians, how to protect the unity of God's essence and his ultra-transcendence, when the Qur'an, it seems, does not. Sweetman, Vol. 1, Pt. 2, p. 24.

<sup>260</sup> Keating and Takrītī, 184.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d.230/845) was elected patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church in 202/818 under the rule of Caliph al-Ma'mūn. He reportedly had excellent relations with the Muslim leaders. He was able to influence laws concerning the leadership of *dhimmi* confessions in 213/828, and travelled with the Caliph al-Ma'mūn in 218/833 to Egypt. Caliph al-Mu'taṣim later gave Dionysius a diploma. Teule notes that Dionysius approached his Muslim rulers, "with respect but without fear, judging from his own reports of various encounters, when it was necessary to plead for the Christians or to disagree with the rulers."<sup>263</sup>

He refers to Muhammad twice as "king of the Arabs" and affirms Muhammad's descent from Ishmael, even listing Ishmael's sons.<sup>264</sup> Dionysius displays considerable knowledge of Islam, and his summaries of Islamic thought are very accurate. On *tawhīd* he writes:

So much for the cause and origin of the movement of Muhammad, the first king of the Arabs. Now we may turn to the laws and commandments which, as he claimed, he was inspired by God to impose upon them. To begin with, he taught them to confess one God, the Creator of everything. He eschewed the names of the Father, Son and Spirit and affirmed instead that the Divinity was unique in His Person and unique in His Being, a Being neither begotten nor begetting, and having no companion.<sup>265</sup>

The summary of Dionysius provides a rich view of the Christian understanding of Islamic doctrine and thus provides a bearing for a Christian understanding of the Islamic theology of Christianity during his time. It is interesting that Dionysius presents Muhammad's theology as unitarian, and yet does not describe Muhammad's God as other than the Christian God. As his work appears below, Dionysius also summarizes well Islamic Christology, drawing attention to qualities of Christ that both agree and disagree with the Gospel.

Two major works of the Nestorian Ammār al-Baṣrī (d.c.235/850) are extant today, his *Questions and Answers*, and the *Kitāb al-Burhān (The Proof)*.<sup>266</sup> The main topics of

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<sup>263</sup> Hoyland; Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 622-623.; cf. Hoyland, 416-419.

<sup>264</sup> Andrew Palmer, Sebastian P. Brock, and Robert G. Hoyland, *The Seventh Century in the West-Syrian Chronicles*, Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 15 (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 144. This contains the reconstituted *Chronicle of Dionysius*, translated into English, found on pp. 111-221. This source of material for Dionysius of Tel-Mahre is not to be confused with the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn* by Joshua the Stylite, which is often still referred to in academic writing as the *pseudo-Dionysius*.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>266</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 604-610. The Arabic texts and a French summary are available in Michel Hayek, *Ammar Al-Basri: Apologie Et Controverses*, Recherches De L'institut De Lettres Orientales De Beyrouth. N.S. B. Orient Chretien 5 (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1977). *The Fihrist* places Ammār in dialogue with Abū al-Hudhail al-Allāf (d.c.840) who wrote a *Kitāb 'lā Ammār al-naṣrānī fī al-radd 'lā al-naṣārā*. Beaumont questions whether Ammār is the addressee in this tract, but Griffith proposes that in addition to both men living in Baṣra at the same time, Ammār's attention paid to the *ṣifāt Allah* in his work is a precise response to the thesis of Abū al-Hudhail. This is difficult to prove as none of the works of Abū al-Hudhail have survived. See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*,

consideration are: the existence of God, the right religion (Muhammad's prophethood), Christianity as the right religion, *tahrīf*, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the crucifixion, and expressions of faith (baptism, the Eucharist, the cross etc.).<sup>267</sup>

Griffith has already highlighted Ammār's Qur'anic usage in the *Kitāb al-Burhān*.<sup>268</sup> We will abbreviate the most interesting of these for our present study. On the oneness of God, Ammār posits that all of the world religions believe in the oneness (*al-tawhīd*) of God. The polytheists agree that there is a God above all gods, and even Aristotle proposed the uncaused causer.<sup>269</sup> In diluting God's oneness this way, Ammār may have stretched the Islamic concept of *tawhīd* beyond its limits.

To the defence of the Trinity, Ammār follows the lead of Abū Rā'īṭa and calls on the *ṣifāt Allah* (the 99 Beautiful Names of God). He draws attention to the relationship between Arabic adjectives and nouns. The attributes of God (*ṣifāt Allah*) denote corresponding nouns. There is no "seeing" without the corresponding "sight." The nouns are then separate entities, parts, or derivations within God. The nouns cannot be denied, as their existence within God is prerequisite to any corresponding adjectives. However the nouns 'life' and 'word' denote special qualities, that which separates animate from inanimate, and that which separates rational from irrational. They are not like the other attributes as he says: "we find that life and speech are of the constitution of the essence and of the structure of the substance, while any others that are different from them are not."<sup>270</sup> Denying the Word and Spirit of God as from God is the same as denying God: "...he has fallen into the denial of the Creator and he has made Him dead, having no life and no word, like the idols that are named gods ... While in all His scriptures, He describes Himself as having a Spirit and a Word."<sup>271</sup> He then clarifies trinitarian monotheism in these terms:

Before God we are blameless of alleging three gods. Rather, by our saying Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we want no more than to

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606., and Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, III, 147-148. The *Kitāb al-Burhān* follows the same basic topical outline as Theodore Bar Koni's Tenth Chapter in *The Scholion*, and the apology of Abū Rā'īṭa.

<sup>267</sup> See also the list in Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, III, 158. On Ammār's Christology see also Beaumont, Ch. 5.

<sup>268</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, III, 159-181.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>270</sup> The quote is made by Thomas in R. Y. Ebied and Herman Teule, *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage: In Honour of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. At the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 284. Ammār is deriving this argument from the intra-Islamic debate between the Mu'tazilites and other Islamic scholarship. This presentation of the *ṣifāt* is particularly close to that of 'Abdullah b. Sa'īd b. Kullāb. See Muhammad ibn Hārūn Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq and David Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū 'Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, vol. 59 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>271</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, III, 170.



substantiate the statement that God is living (*ḥayy*), speaking (*nāṭiq*). And the Father is the one whom we consider to have life (*ḥayyah*) and word (*kalimah*). The life is the Holy Spirit, and his word is the Son. It is not like what those who differ with us ascribe to us, viz., that we fashion a female companion for God, and a son from her.<sup>272</sup>

Ammār is clearly an apologist. His intent is to use what he has to prove the Islamic thesis wrong. He has no need to bring the Qur'an and the Gospels into congruence as they are to him mutually exclusive and contradictory texts. Where Ammār is silent on the Qur'an, we might expect Muslims to be vocal, but this is not always the case, even in Qur'anic commentary.

Another major work of *tafsīr* entered the conversation in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century. *Tafsīr al-Ṭustarī* (a.k.a. *Kitāb Fahm al-Qur'an*; w.c.245/860) from Sahl ibn' Abdullah al-Ṭustarī (d.283/896) is the first Sufi collection of *tafsīr*.<sup>273</sup> Shortly after the death of his Sufi forerunner Dhū al-Nūn al Miṣrī (d.c.245/860), al-Ṭustarī gathered his own followers. Among them was Abū Abdullāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Sālim al-Baṣrī (d.297/909), who was with al-Ṭustarī for sixty years.

[al-Ṭustarī] proposed a pattern of Kur'an [sic] interpretation that theoretically distinguished four meanings for each verse, literal (*zāḥir*), allegorical (*bāṭin*), moral (*ḥadd*) and anagogical (*maṭla'*, *muṭṭala'*). In fact, however, he consistently employed only two levels of meaning, a literal and an allegorical sense, combining *zāḥir* and *ḥadd* as opposed to *bāṭin* and *maṭla'*.<sup>274</sup>

As seen before, surah 112 had been employed as an anti-trinitarian Qur'anic reference. This sura is interpreted by al-Ṭustarī as a declaration of *tawḥīd*. Though al-Ṭustarī understands this passage to be a refutation of the disbelievers, he does not mention Christianity at all. He merely restates that God's unity is confirmed and he has no dependence on causes. The name of God *al-Ṣamad* receives no further definition.

In general, a good deal of what is contentious in Ibn'Abbās, and approached dialogically therein, is simply ignored in al-Ṭustarī. Q2:62; 5:47; 5:69; and 22:17 are all surprisingly absent from this *tafsīr*. Where al-Ṭustarī does take the opportunity to comment on verses which directly relate to Christians, or can be interpreted that way, he chooses not to

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., III, 170. See the accusation that this responds to in Q72:3.

<sup>273</sup> Though there is some debate over whether or not al-Ṭustarī wrote any works at all. See Rippin, *The Qur'an : Formative Interpretation*, 314 and n.7. Also see Gibb and others, Vol. 8, pp. 840-841. Though it is conceded that the *tafsīr*'s collection is the work of his followers, the interpretations are for the purposes of our study considered to be those of al-Ṭustarī. No references to physical books will be provided for al-Ṭustarī, as the *tafsīr* in both English and Arabic is now freely available online at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Al-Tafsīr". All references to al-Ṭustarī will come from this source unless otherwise noted.

<sup>274</sup> Gibb and others, Vol. 8, p. 841.

acknowledge Christianity at all. Even in the most contentious verse in the Qur'an up to this point, Q4:171, al-Ṭustarī applies the meaning to himself and his followers, a warning against their own potential for heresy.

Nonnus of Nisibis (c. 246/860) is the Syrian Orthodox Archdeacon of Nisibis, and the protégé of Abū Rā'īṭa al-Takrītī.<sup>275</sup> Nonnus wrote well in Arabic, having completed an Arabic commentary of the Gospel of John. Nonnus, Abū Rā'īṭa, and the Melkite Theodore Abū Qurrah were of the first Syriac speaking Christian scholars to have earned academic fluency in Arabic.<sup>276</sup>

*The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis* consists of three uneven sections: the first presents the existence of one God; the second presents trinitarian monotheism; and the third addresses the Incarnation. These last two topics are now the dominant points of departure for Muslims and Christians. He writes covertly of Muslims, at one point describing them as the, “present-day [pagans], who acknowledge that God is one, and are against the other [pagans].”<sup>277</sup>

Nonnus presents trinitarian monotheism by appealing to the numerical argument. “This [statement], ‘God is one’, if it pertains to Him only in regard to number, He is lacking because of the fact that there is another and much more honourable unity.”<sup>278</sup> He explains the three hypostases (in Arabic the *aqānīm*; ألقانيم) in the one substance (*jawhar*; جوهر) in quickly recognizable Qur'anic terms. He states that, “As everyone agrees, even apart from the scriptures, God has a Word and a Spirit.”<sup>279</sup> This is a clear allusion to the trinitarian interpretation of Q4:171, reflective of a similar reference in *The Religious Dialogue of*

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<sup>275</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 743-745. On the dating see Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, V, 265. For further biographical information see also Keating and Takrītī, 35-45. He reportedly debated with Theodore Abū Qurrah in c.199/815, and was later imprisoned by the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r.232/847-247/861) in 241/856. It may have been from prison that *The Apologetic Treatise of Nonnus of Nisibis* was written. Al-Mutawakkil silenced a number of the controversial commentators, both Christian and Islamic, and ushered in a strict religious polity. By Griffith's estimation, “His action marked the end of the first period in the history of the dialogue between Muslims and Christians in the Caliphate in early Islamic times.” Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, IV, 115.

<sup>276</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, IV, 116.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., IV, 125. It is clear that the meaning is Muslims, but that in his context, it is unsafe to state so directly. Nonnus refers to the Muslims as pagans. In Syriac the term pagan occurs as *ḥanpō* (pl. *ḥanpē*), a kind of inter-lingual homonym to the Arabic *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafā'*). As the Syriac term is derogatory and the Arabic term complimentary (referring to the faith of Abraham), Syriac writers used the term often to refer to Muslims, as a pejorative. For an in depth exploration of the term *ḥanīf* and its etymological meaning see de Blois: 17-25.

<sup>278</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, IV, 122.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., IV, 123.

*Jerusalem*.<sup>280</sup> He then parallels the trinitarian concept to that of the *ṣifāt Allah* before moving into a discussion on the perfection of the number three. Again, not very much attention is given to this topic, as two-thirds of the text is devoted to the Incarnation.

If it were not for his derogatory references to Muslims as ‘pagans’, or the context of imprisonment from which this treatise was likely written, one may conclude Nonnus to be an ecumenist on account of his conciliatory approach to Islam. However, his reinterpretations of the Qur’an are on his terms, not necessarily the Qur’an’s own terms. He accepts most of the Qur’anic teaching on Christ as he understands it, but rejects its teaching on heaven,<sup>281</sup> and he summarily dismisses the Islamic interpretation of the Qur’an, in some ways that would be repeated by Alī al-Ṭabarī from the Islamic side later. He also chooses to write in Syriac, not Arabic, in which he is also fluent. Therefore it must be concluded that Nonnus is writing polemically. He provides a framework from which Christians can engage Muslims in dialogue, and a subtle commentary on what he believes is acceptable, rejectable, and interpretable within the Qur’an.

Not all writers were using the Qur’an in their dialogue pieces. Abū’ Isā al-Warrāq (d.c.250/864), even as an Islamic scholar, uses the Qur’an much less than does Nonnus of Nisibis. Abū’ Isā is a Shī’a convert, originally a Mu’tazilī. He is a controversial character in Islamic literary history as he was occasionally soft on heresies like dualism and Manicheism, and hard on some of the core Islamic beliefs about Muhammad and the Qur’an. His most widely known work, *The Teachings of People and the Differences Between Them*, no longer exists. It was the foundation for his later work, *The Refutation of the Three Christian Sects*, which “is the longest and most detailed Muslim attack on the two major Christian doctrines that has survived.”<sup>282</sup>

Despite his intra-Islamic criticisms, Abū’ Isā made extended comments on the Trinity and the Incarnation for inter-faith dialogue. He had a profound understanding of the

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<sup>280</sup> Newman, 291. Kurt Vollers’ translation of the East Syrian rescension along with introductions by Newman and Vollers is in *ibid.*, 269-353., cf. Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 199-212. The text is generally polemical and unoriginal in content, and so has not been highly informative for this study.

<sup>281</sup> Nonnus’ last allusion to the Qur’an is in his description of a paradise which Christians do not pursue. The Christian works for Christ alone, not like, “those who will have rivers of delicacies, couches where they are not sated, and a new creation of women, whose birth is not from Adam and Eve.” In this the allusions to Q9:72 and 44:51-56 are clear.

<sup>282</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 695-701. The quote is from p. 698. Al-Mas’ūdī records Abū’ Isā’s death at 247/861, though Abū’ Isā is to have recorded a death that occurred in 250/864. Abū’ Isā al-Warrāq was active in the middle part of the third / ninth century, and it is difficult to be more accurate than this. See Abū’ Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, 23-25., cf. David Thomas, “Denying the Cross in Early Muslim Dialogues with Christians,” in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, ed. David Emmanuel Singh, Global Theological Voices (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

theological differences between the different sects of Christianity.<sup>283</sup> His *Refutation* consists of three major sections: an introduction to the theologies of the Melkites, the Jacobites and the Nestorians; a refutation of the Trinity, and; a refutation of the Incarnation. A full study of the work has been prepared, and so here we will only concentrate on Abū Isā's use of the Qur'an.<sup>284</sup>

Abū Isā is an apologist, though until this time we have not seen an Islamic apology concentrate so much on philosophy and use so little of the Qur'an as Abū Isā's, perhaps marking a shift at the end of this phase to a more strict rationalism. In this he stresses not the incompatibility between the Christian and Islamic scriptures, but rather the rational incoherence of the Christian theses of the Trinity and the Incarnation. It is perhaps easy for Christians to dismiss the Qur'an as a refutation of Christianity, but a rational argument is far more challenging for Christians to dismiss. Thus his lack of use of the Qur'an does not degrade his effective argumentation, as Thomas comments elsewhere that, "he demonstrates inconsistencies and contradictions with a surgical precision that cuts away any attempt at defence on the part of anyone who accepts his presentation of the doctrinal formulations of Christianity."<sup>285</sup> Perhaps his lack of use of the Qur'an was a strategy intended to strengthen the argument. If so, this is a unique (non)use of the Qur'an in dialogue.

In this phase, the application of Q112 as an anti-trinitarian text, led by Ibn' Abbās and Abū Qurrah, did not appear to gain much ground. Christians quickly caught onto the numerical argument and highlighting the plurality in the pronouns for God in both the Christian and Islamic scriptures as staple proofs of the Trinity. Perhaps the most interesting development in this phase was the use of the Islamic conception of *ṣifāt Allah* to bridge the philosophical gap between trinitarian and unitarian monotheism, a tactic adopted by Abū Rā'īṭa, Ammār al-Baṣṣī, and Nonnus of Nisibis. Perhaps the most contentious verse in the Qur'an, Q4:171 is beginning to fade from the toolboxes of Christians, who are seemingly becoming less apt to use the Qur'an as proof of Christian truths.

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<sup>283</sup> For example, Abū Isā differentiated between the Melkite description of the Incarnation as occurring between the Christ and 'the human being' rather than the Monophysite or Nestorian preferences for using 'a human being'. Likewise he distinguished between the Nestorian and Melkite descriptions of the mixing or mingling of the natures of God and man in Christ, and the Monophysite description of the two natures having become one nature. See Muhammad ibn Hārūn Abū Isā al-Warrāq and David Thomas, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam : Abū Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Trinity'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 68-71.

<sup>284</sup> The first part of the work is in the second part of *ibid*; Abū Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*. The second part can be found in *ibid*. Both works contain the Arabic text and an English translation.

<sup>285</sup> Thomas in Ebied and Teule, *Studies on the Christian Arabic Heritage : In Honour of Father Prof. Dr. Samir Khalil Samir S.I. At the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, 281.

## Concluding Remarks on the Trinity in Dialogue

Perhaps the most contentious issue, and the one where the least understanding is reached in spite of the most amount of exchange is that of the Trinity. The topic of the Trinity begins with a comment in Letter 48 of Isho'yahb III (addressed below) which remarks that Islamic Christology is closer to that of the Nestorian than the Monophysite (Jacobite). This note alone is enough to suggest that the early Christian reaction to Islam was that of an intra-Christian Christology rather than a new religion. With the writings of Jacob of Edessa, the description of Jesus began to near to the Qur'anic words of Q4:171 and 5:73. *The Disputation between the Monk of Beth Hale and the Arab Notable* comments that real trinitarianism was too complex for Muhammad's Arab audience, and so it was not further clarified by him.

This disagreement between the Monophysite and Islamic Christologies makes what appears to be a radical shift with John of Damascus in 115/734. John comments that the Qur'an itself is inconsistent with unitarianism, he is also the first known to interpret Q4:171 as a refutation of trinitarianism. The first claim is certainly untrue, and the Qur'an's favouring a unitarian monotheism cannot yet be said to exclude trinitarian monotheism by the sources available at this time. The witness of the Qur'an, as shown above, is that in its context it most likely addressed both trinitarian monotheists in the Christianity encountered by the prophet in Mecca (the family of Waraqa ibn Nawfal), as well as the tritheistic heresy present in the Christianity of Najrān.

The tract *On the Unified Trinity* seems to agree with Ibn'Abbās that it is tritheism addressed in Q4:171 and 5:73. The tract presents a trinitarian interpretation of Q4:171, as Ibn'Abbās defines the heresy there as the worship of a Father, Son and a Wife. Though placing Q5:73 in the same historical context, Ibn'Abbās expands his tritheistic definition to include those who worship a Father, Son, and a Holy Spirit, as the Marqusiyyah do. The author of the tract seems to view the Qur'an as congruent with Christianity in general. Ibn'Abbās shows that there are some Christians that the Qur'an rebukes, and others like, "Abdullah Ibn Salam and his followers, the monk Bahirah, the Negus and his followers, and Salmān al-Fārisi and his fellows" that are as the Qur'an says in 5:66, "on the right course." It therefore cannot be that Ibn'Abbās views the Qur'an as incompatible with all forms of trinitarian monotheism, as this would render him logically incoherent.

The discussion on trinitarian vs. unitarian monotheism becomes quite a bit more developed after this. The Qur'an is wrenched out of context by the *Christian Arab Disputation* to show that God indeed had a son. It is an ill-planned and unacceptable exegesis. The debates of 'Umar II v. Leo III and Timothy I v. Al-Mahdī clarify a new Islamic hard line against

trinitarianism in the Qur'an. It seems as though since the Christians cannot agree amongst themselves on trinitarian doctrine, and the Qur'an does not seem specific about which to reject, then they all must be rejected. This possibly encouraged John of Damascus' anti-trinitarian interpretation of Q4:171 to be applied by 'Umar II and al-Mahdī in debate. Though Timothy I continues to try to advance the trinitarian interpretation of the Qur'an, he loses influence with low-level discourse on the plurality of the Qur'anic personal pronouns for God, an argument first proposed in the tract *On the Unified Trinity*, and later echoed by Abū Ra'itā and others.

Most of the Christian authors reviewed here advance Bible-based defences of trinitarian doctrine at this time, and this invites critique on the Biblical foundation for trinitarian doctrine by Muslims. The Christians answer back with evidence for trinitarianism not from the Bible alone, but from the Islamic *kalām* discourse on God's divine attributes. The miaphysite Abū Ra'itā parallels the Islamic thought behind God's attributes to trinitarianism by presenting God's divine and trinitarian attributes of 'living', 'knowing', and 'wise'. He presents Jesus' humanity and divinity as attributes as well. The Nestorian Ammār al-Baṣrī clarifies that two of the attributes, that of Life (Spirit) and Word (Christ) are intrinsic to God and proceed from God, they are of and from Him. Nonnus of Nisibis later uses the attributes of goodness, wisdom, power, and justice to argue for Christ's divinity. But inviting the unitarian language of Islam into Christian trinitarian commentary stretches both concepts.

Al-Ṭustarī reminds his audience that the general direction of the Qur'an is away from tritheism and toward unitarianism, and is instructive for all of the people of the book: Christians, Muslims and Jews alike. The end of the first three centuries of Christian-Muslim dialogue on the nature of God appears to have been a blizzard of prooftexting, the unitarian monotheists on one side, and the trinitarian monotheists on the other, each picking and choosing from whatever source which advances their position best. Where the dialogue is broken is likely in the insistence by Christians to sceptical Muslims that three and one are logically compatible, and the Islamic insistence to incensed Christians that three and one are mutually exclusive. This drama takes place in the paradoxical context of the Islamic insistence that one God can be described in ninety-nine separate ways, and the passionate Christian insistence that there is in fact only one God.

## I.2.ii The Incarnation

### I.2.ii.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

Though the Incarnation specifically did not yet become a major topic for discussion during this phase, some commentary on the relationship between Islam and the other three major Christologies of the time (Monophysitism, Chalcedonianism, and Nestorianism) in the extant texts will be made here. The texts that have survived appear to treat any Christology other than those of their authors on equally heretical footing, Islam included, thus revealing the origin of Islam as possibly a Christology in the minds of Christians.

The works of Isho'yahb III of Adiabene (Pre-16/637)<sup>286</sup> provide little direct dialogical content, however, "Letter 48 is the earliest East-Syrian text in which the suggestion is made that Nestorian Christology would be more compatible with Muslim view on Christ than the Miaphysite teaching."<sup>287</sup> This indicates some fascinating points.

Firstly, there presumably existed a Muslim Christology already at this time, known to Christians, and at least well enough developed that comparisons could be made between it and both Miaphysitism and Nestorianism independently. Secondly, that Miaphysitism was incompatible with the known Muslim Christology is consistent with the observations concerning the Qur'anic address of Monophysitism above. Thirdly, the observation that Muslim Christology is more consistent with Nestorianism is also consistent with the Qur'anic address of Monophysitism above, as Nestorius emphasized the humanity of Jesus, and rejected the designation *Theotokos* for Mary, both of which appear to be Christian-Muslim themes of the Qur'an itself.

It is reported that on Sunday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 23/644, John Sedra, the Monophysite (Jacobite) Patriarch of Antioch (d.27/648) was summoned before the Muslim Emir 'Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Anṣārī, governor of Homs and Damascus.<sup>288</sup> Leaders from the three strongest Jacobite Arab

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<sup>286</sup> Hoyland, 179.

<sup>287</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 135. Miaphysitism is a nuanced form of Monophysitism whose adherents preferred the original wording of Cyril of Alexandria (from Greek: *mia-physis*; meaning "one-nature").

<sup>288</sup> The Muslims had conquered Damascus in 13/635. The text is commonly known as *The Disputation of John and the Emir* (c.23/644). See *ibid.*, 782-785.; Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, 257-259.; Hoyland, 459-465.; Harald Suermann, "Copts and the Islam of the Seventh Century," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 104-106.; Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 87-94.; Michael Philip Penn, "John and the Emir: A New Introduction, Edition and Translation," *Le Museon* 121, no. 1-2 (2008). Nau dates the text to 18/639, but Crone and Cook have shown that 23/644 is a more likely date. See Patricia Crone and M. A. Cook, *Hagarism : The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 162, n.11. Barbara Roggema and Harald Suermann prefer a much later date, though the present author disagrees. Roggema's concern over the Emir's final question is valid, but it has already been supposed that the final question on inheritance was added later. Perhaps the simplest answer is the best: the inheritance issue was one of concern to this

tribes were in attendance.<sup>289</sup> The interaction is recorded in a letter from a representative of the synod to an unknown addressee, to ease their fears about the nature of the summons. One interesting feature of this dialogue is the ambiguous position of the Emir on the nature of Jesus given the depth of the discussion. When asked whether Christ was equal to God, John presents and defends the incarnation of Christ as God and Word in flesh. John refers to Deuteronomy 6:4 and emphasizes the unity of God.

The Emir asks John to defend himself using the law of Moses. When he does so in Syriac and Greek, the Emir asks a Jew to judge John's interpretation, but the Jew takes an agnostic position. It is not indicated directly, though it may be presumed from the questions that the Emir denies the divinity of Christ, though he neither overtly confirms nor denies Jesus' messianic status,<sup>290</sup> possibly revealing some uncertainty on the part of Muslim leadership to affirm or deny the Christian definition of Messiah. The Patriarch also appears cautiously inclusive, describing the Emir and the *mhaggrāiyy* as "heretics," rather than a new religion.

Half a century later, Jacob of Edessa (d.89/708), a Syrian Orthodox bishop, reportedly wrote letters to Addai and John the Stylite regarding issues of engagement between Christians and their Muslim rulers.<sup>291</sup> Though written to Christians, Jacob's letters do illuminate his Christian view of Islam, and help put to rest the ambiguity of Emir 'Umayr some years earlier. One of Jacob's letters to John the Stylite contains a passage resembling Qur'anic content regarding Jesus, and is therefore notable here:

The Muslims, too, although they do not know or wish to say that this true Messiah, who came and is acknowledged by the Christians, is God and the son of God, they nevertheless confess that he is the true

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particular Emir, and as perhaps a friend of Muhammad himself, what would become Islamic law much later originated with this Emir and his circle of understanding of Muhammad's teaching. The Qur'anic allusions are clear, but even though the book was not yet compiled, the Qur'an as a recitation would likely have been known to an Emir of this status. As Roggema notes, "Most of the issues that appear in Muslim-Christian debates of the eighth and ninth centuries are lacking." This may be because these issues were simply not yet issues, as shown in the flow of debate in this study, further evincing the accuracy of the likelihood of 23/644 for this text. It is also unlikely that the Emir knew enough of the Torah or Gospel to engage in debate, perhaps assuming that as the Qur'an seems to claim, they are themselves authoritative texts. The possibility of *tahrif* would not be considered for another century. See Barbara Roggema, "The Debate between Patriarch John and an Emir of the Mhaggraye: A Reconsideration of the Earliest Christian-Muslim Debate," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Berut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 40. English translations available in Penn.; A. M. Saadi, "The Letter of John of Sedreh: A New Perspective on Nascent Islam," *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society* 11, no. (1997)., and; Newman, 24-28. Penn questions the authenticity of the letter as a historical record of an actual event. Dialogues of this type, recorded as conversations between interlocutors, are certainly not innovative. For an introduction to the early history of literary dialogues see Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 19-45.

<sup>289</sup> These were the Tanūkāye, the Tu'āye, and the 'Aqūlaye. Newman, 26; cf. 43 n.80.

<sup>290</sup> Crone and Cook, 11.

<sup>291</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 226-233.; cf. Hoyland, 160-168; 601-610. For a study of Jacob of Edessa's life and works see R. B. ter Haar Romeny, *Jacob of Edessa and the Syriac Culture of His Day*, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, vol. 18 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).



Messiah who was to come and who was foretold by the prophets; on this they have no dispute with us.<sup>292</sup>

As Hoyland has already noted, Jacob's understanding of the Islamic view of Jesus bears a striking resemblance to the content of Q4:171; 5:73-75, indicating a developing Qur'anic source. It also seems from Jacob's writings that he views Muslims as closer in doctrine to Christians than the Jews, as the Jews do not recognize the Messiah, but the Muslims in recognizing the Messiah only stop short of his divinity.<sup>293</sup>

In one instance, Addai asks Jacob about the giving of communion to the Christian wife of a Muslim man. Jacob's reply suggests that he may view Christianity and Islam as distinct religions. He replies to Addai that a Christian wife of a Muslim is to receive communion, "so that she does not then become a Muslim." Further, the Christian wife of a Muslim is to, "suffer under the canons whatever she is able to bear," as a warning to other women.<sup>294</sup> This suggests that Jacob is exclusive in his theology of Islam. He also disallows the reception of communion by Muslims, and orders the church to be locked on the day of sacrifice so as, "the perverts to Islam would not enter and mingle with the believers and disturb them and laugh at the holy mysteries."<sup>295</sup> It is however notable that in the letters of Jacob to John the Stylite and to Addai, Muslims and pagans are categorized individually. Though subject to the same treatment, the term "pagans" does not seem to include Muslims as one might expect. Instead they are referred to as 'Muslims or pagans,'<sup>296</sup> thus implying some distinction between the two categories in the mind of the author.

As Muslims and Chalcedonians are (as ruling authorities) linked together in Jacob's treatment of them, it seems possible that Jacob views Islam as a Christian heresy. Christians are not permitted by Jacob to eat with any non-orthodox (in this case, non-Monophysites), unless it is so ordered by a Muslim or Chalcedonian governor, in which case out of need they may.<sup>297</sup> He does not recognize Chalcedonian excommunications,<sup>298</sup> and even a right and just canon of the Chalcedonians he says should be disregarded as worthless.<sup>299</sup> Herman Teule summarizes well Jacob's exclusivity: "In his rulings about contacts with heretics, that is, the Chalcedonian Christians, Jacob leaves no room for ambiguity. The principle is that official contacts by priests

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<sup>292</sup> The quote is taken from Hoyland, 166. Robert Hoyland has done a good work of consolidating the sources from which the canons and *responsa* of Jacob can be found, however a full and critical examination is still lacking.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-167.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 605, n.12.

<sup>295</sup> Arthur Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Syri, vol. 162 (Louvain: Secretariat du Corpus SCO, 1975), 219. Also see the discussion on the validity of baptism for converts to Islam, *ibid.*, 231-232.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 228, 231, 238.

<sup>297</sup> Haar Romeny, 17.

<sup>298</sup> Vööbus, *The Synodicon in the West Syrian Tradition*, 225.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

and ascetics with these 'strangers to the Church' are to be avoided, since it is impossible to both love the Lord and the heretics."<sup>300</sup> Jacob's exclusivity of Chalcedonians, like that of John of Nikiu, must be accounted for in assessing his apparent apologetical stance toward Islam. His exclusivity does not appear to indicate that he values Islam any less than Chalcedonianism.

Writing at about the same time, the Monophysite Coptic bishop John of Nikiu (c.80/700) is even more strongly worded in his rejection of Islam.<sup>301</sup> Walter Kaegi suggests that John seems to understand Islam as not a heresy, but a separate and anti-Christian religion.<sup>302</sup> It should be noted however, that the distaste that John shows for Islam is also equal to that of his disapproval of Chalcedonianism, as with Jacob of Edessa. Though the Muslims are called "enemies of God" so the Chalcedonians are rendered "enemies of Christ" by John, and so it may be argued that if he sees Islam as a separate religion, so he also views other branches of Christianity as separate religions as well, thus tempering his polemical stance against Islam from an inter-faith dialogue perspective.<sup>303</sup>

The dialogue seems to grow more polemical with the minting of coins by 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (r.65/685-85/705). The text of Q112 appears on one side, and an abbreviated form of Q9:33 on the other. Reinink noted that the minting was in Kaskar, and may have been the catalyst for the response of Kashkar's Bishop Mar Aba II (d. 133/751) written in homilies of the early eighth century. His tone is critical, and includes a rebuke of the 'deniers' (*sārōbē*) whose creed rejects the word 'birth'. Mar Aba II elsewhere quotes Q19:36 and relates it as a direct refutation of John 20:17.<sup>304</sup> To this point in the dialogue and from the available sources it seems reasonable to suggest that Christians may have understood Islam as another Christology rather than a separate religion, but that changed.

### 1.2.ii.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

In *On the Unified Trinity* (137/755), the author makes the statement, "Thus God sent from His Throne His Word, which is from Himself" (فأرسل الله من عرشه كلمته، التي هي منه) which as Samir notes is the combination of the Biblical idea of God sending His Word, and the Qur'anic

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<sup>300</sup> Haar Romeny, 99.

<sup>301</sup> On sources for John of Nikiu as well as biographical information see Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 209-218.; and Hoyland, 152-156. A full English translation is available at John of Nikiu and Charles; *ibid.* Hoyland has suggested a date of c.29/650 for the text as the text ends with Benjamin of Alexandria's return in 23/644 after the capture of Alexandria by the Muslims in 20/641. This is not an unreasonable suggestion, though as Hoyland admits the capture of Alexandria does seem an, "obvious place to finish." Hoyland, 153.

<sup>302</sup> Walter Emil Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," *Church History* 38, no. 2 (1969): 148-149.

<sup>303</sup> John of Nikiu and Charles, 187, 201.

<sup>304</sup> Reinink, "Political Power and Right Religion in the East Syrian Disputation between a Monk of Bēt Hālē and an Arab Notable," 153-157. The argument against John 20:17 is echoed in the early third/ninth century *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem*. See Newman, 300.

idea of Jesus being the Word from God (Q3:39; 3:45).<sup>305</sup> He quotes Q4:171 and 16:102 as a trinitarian reference highlighting Jesus as the Word of God and Spirit of God. In another example of theological blending, the author uses a rather un-Christian phrase to refer to Jesus as, “His Word and His Spirit.” Referring to Jesus as the Spirit of God has been until this point a Qur’anic innovation, and so unique that not only is the Qur’an the source of this designation, but Jesus is the only person to whom it is applied therein.<sup>306</sup> The author has it seems adopted a grey area between the Christian concept of Spirit of God as a trinitarian person, and the Qur’anic concept of Spirit of God as a designation for Jesus.<sup>307</sup> This is remarkably ecumenical in tone and content.

Yet the author does not lose sight of his own orthodoxy. The author applies Q42:51, a passage in which the concept of the veil “*hijāb*” is used in the context of revelation. The author uses a different form of the same verb, *iḥtajaba*, when explaining the Incarnation of Jesus who, “put on this weak, defeated humanity from Mary the Good, whom God chose ‘above the women of the worlds,’ and *veiled himself* through her.”<sup>308</sup> The description of Mary as ‘above the women of the worlds’ is a clear allusion to Q3:42. This is the earliest known instance of what would become the “veil” theme in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Ibn’Abbās presents Jesus to have been a product or consequence of the Word of God, rather than the word itself. This interpretation seems inconsistent with the Qur’anic text, which does not include a preposition to separate Jesus from the title “the word,” though as an *iḍāfa* the text may indicate a “belonging to” God. The verse also refers to “the word” as a definite article, not one of many creative words, as Ibn’Abbās presents, but as the whole Word of God.<sup>309</sup> As Parrinder writes, “Jesus both comes as the effect of the word of God and is the word which God ‘cast’ (*alqā*) upon Mary.”<sup>310</sup> Even al-Ṭabarī later corrects Ibn’Abbās by saying

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<sup>305</sup> Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 90-92., especially n. 136.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 95., especially n. 164. An interesting allusion to the concepts of Irenaeus (d.c.202) emerges here. Irenaeus too blurred the concepts of Son and Holy Spirit, proposing them as the hands of God. “It was not angels, therefore, who made us, nor who formed us, neither had angels power to make an image of God, nor anyone else, except the Word of the Lord, nor any Power remotely distant from the Father of all things. For God did not stand in need of these [beings], in order to the accomplishing of what He had Himself determined with Himself beforehand should be done, as if He did not possess His own hands. For with Him were always present the Word and Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, by whom and in whom, freely and spontaneously, He made all things...” From *Against Heresies*, Book IV, Ch. XX, Part 1. Available online at Armitage Robinson and Irenaeus, “Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching: Translated from the Armenian with Introduction and Notes,” (New York: Macmillan, 1920). <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.toc.html> (accessed February 26, 2011).

<sup>307</sup> See also Bertaina, “The Development of Testimony Collections in Early Christian Apologetics within Islam,” 162-167.

<sup>308</sup> Emphasis mine. The quote is a translation by Swanson in Mark Swanson, “Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur’an in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies,” *The Muslim World* 88, no. 3-4 (1998): 297.

<sup>309</sup> Perhaps Ibn’Abbās’ meaning here is to define the word as: the fullness of all created things encapsulated in a single created form.

<sup>310</sup> Parrinder, 47.

that, “God calls this son which is in thy womb his word.”<sup>311</sup> As “the Word of God” may be asserted as the primary revelation for both Christians and Muslims, a brief foray into the Qur’anic usage of the term *kalām* is appropriate here.

The word *kalām* in reference to the words of God occurs four times in the Qur’an, twice in reference to the Torah (Q2:75; 7:144), and twice to the Qur’an itself (Q9:6; 48:15). *Kalima* occurs a number of times in the Qur’an in reference to God. Jesus is called a word from God (Q3:39; 3:45), and the word of God (Q4:171). The word of God is perfect (Q6:115; 9:40). God shows the truth by his word (Q8:7; 10:82; 42:24) which he gives to his apostles (Q37:171), such as Noah (Q40:6), and Adam (Q2:37). Muhammad believes in the Word of God (Q7:158), and no one can change the Word of God (Q6:34; 6:115; 10:64; 18:27).

It is interesting that the Word of God in revelatory form is identified in the Qur’an as the Torah, the Qur’an, the speech of God to prophets, and finally the person of the prophet Jesus himself. Daniel Madigan notes the relationship between *kalām* and *kitāb* as blurred here, as Jesus seems to be the *kalimat* Allah, and his *Injīl* a corresponding *kitāb Allah*.<sup>312</sup> This relationship between *kalām Allah* and *kitāb Allah* is explored in greater depth by Madigan, who writes of Islamic tradition on the issue that:

When the *kitāb Allah* becomes too closely identified with just what is written down in the *muṣḥaf*, the concept of *kalām Allah*, the speech of God, defended by the orthodox as an essential attribute of the divine nature, starts to take over the richness of the former, yet the two are never quite distinguished. Books are speech.<sup>313</sup>

In Madigan’s view, the Qur’anic use of *kitāb Allah* is much closer in meaning to *kalām Allah* than to *muṣḥaf*, as even in Islamic tradition Madigan found that:

The term *kalām*, though comparatively rare in the Qur’an, had virtually replaced *kitāb* as the key to understanding the nature of God’s revelation ... The term *kalām* offered all the richness and flexibility, the sense of responsiveness and freshness that *kitāb* still has in the Qur’an’s text, but no longer in the tradition ... The Qur’an never claimed to be the entirety of God’s address. As *kitāb*, it intended to be the locus of continued guidance.<sup>314</sup>

Ibn’Abbās views Jesus as creation however, not revelation, which exhibits a lack of understanding of the Qur’anic relationship between *kitāb* and *kalām*, nowhere more closely revealed in the Qur’an than in the blurred relationship between Jesus and his *Injīl*.

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<sup>311</sup> Translation by Parrinder in *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>312</sup> For a note on the comparison of *kalimat* in the Qur’an with Logos in the Bible see the section on Jesus in the Qur’an in Part I.1 above.

<sup>313</sup> Madigan, 48-49.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

Alternatively, Ibn'Abbās' understanding of Jesus may be understood as Jesus having been a revelatory product of the spoken word of God. This possibility is consistent with the Islamic understanding of the Qur'an as direct revelation, and arguably consistent with the text. Jesus is thus the physical manifestation of spoken revelation, not unlike the Qur'an itself. This may explain why the *Injīl*, though listed in the Qur'an with the Torah and Qur'an as *al-kitāb*, is not referred to in the Qur'an directly as either *kalām Allah* or *kalimat Allah*.

Ibn'Abbās employs the eating of food by Jesus and Mary in Q5:75 as evidence of their humanity, adding for emphasis that it amounts to, "signs that Jesus and his mother were not gods."<sup>315</sup> Two interesting queries arise here. Firstly, it seems that Ibn'Abbās does not believe that gods are capable of consuming food. Secondly, Jesus and Mary are mentioned together, revealing once again the issue of the *Theotokos* apparent in the Qur'an in Q5:116. Whatever god-status Ibn'Abbās understands the Qur'an to be correcting of Jesus, there is an apparent understanding by him that Mary is being elevated to the same status. In Q5:17 Ibn'Abbās credits the doctrine of Jesus as God to the Jacobites (Monophysites).<sup>316</sup> The remainder of the verse is interpreted in line with the text, and this identification of the Monophysite Christology is accurate to the Philoponian Monophysitism that the Qur'an addresses in context. From Q3:45 Ibn'Abbās interprets the title "Messiah" as either "the king," or, "one who travels from one country to another."<sup>317</sup> His interpretation of "word from [God]" is consistent here with that presented in Q4:171 above.

A *Christian Arab Disputation* appeared in the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century which too began proof-texting the Qur'an, unconcerned with its context.<sup>318</sup> The extant materials contain five Qur'anic references in defence of the concept that God has a son (Q39:4; 90:1-2; 4:171; 2:116; 43:81). This text seems to continue the work of *On the Unified Trinity*, but with a strong and incongruous polemical tone.<sup>319</sup> Graf and Swanson have both noted this author's total disregard for context when quoting the Qur'an. Swanson remarks of the five quotations, that Q90:1-2,

<sup>315</sup> العلامات بأن عيسى ومريم لم يكونا باليهين

<sup>316</sup> *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* later clarifies the Jacobites as a Christian sect ("اليقويبة فرقة من النصارى"). Both of these interpretations are consistent with the historical context presented above for the Najrān Christians, but more interesting is the inclusion of a category at all for the Christians to whom this verse is directed. There is an implication in these authors identifying the sect: that is, that there are other sects of Christianity, whose Christology does not necessarily cross the theological boundary defended here by the Qur'an. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr Al-Jalālayn*, trans., Feras Hamza, Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'an (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 2008), 99-100.; cf. *Tafsīr al-Jalāgayn* online at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Al-Tafsīr".

<sup>317</sup> "يسمى المسيح لأنه يسبح في البلدان ويقال المسيح الملك"

<sup>318</sup> Not much is known of the author and origin of this text. It is given the title "Questions and [the] rational and religious answers [thereto]" by Robert Hoyland. Hoyland, 504.

<sup>319</sup> An edition and English translation is forthcoming by Mark Swanson. Meanwhile, some comments and a bibliography are available in Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 386-387.; cf. Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur'an in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," 303-305.

“simply mis-takes the oath formula ‘by the begetter and that he begot’ as applying to God. The other citations have been wrenched violently out of context.”<sup>320</sup>

At about the same time, the correspondence between ‘Umar II and Leo III too employs a Qur’anic argument to explain the Incarnation. Leo is far more simplistic however, resting on the Qur’anic idea that God can do what He wills. “God then, who has so honoured man by creating him in His image, would not think it shameful to take man’s image in order to save him.”<sup>321</sup>

During the debate between Patriarch Timothy I and Caliph al-Mahdī (164/781), in Timothy’s defence of the Incarnation he asks of Q4:171, “If Jesus is God’s Word and Spirit, as you have it in your scripture (*kitābak*), and as the prophet David says, ... he is the Lord and maker of all, how then can he be said to be a servant?” Drawing on Q3:55, he then posits that *ilayya* in Arabic can here only mean that Jesus and God occupy the same throne in heaven, relating Jesus to God indivisibly.<sup>322</sup> Timothy continues, noting Jesus’ power to perform miracles in the Qur’an, and most stunningly, to breathe life into clay (Q5:110, as God breathed life into Adam: Q15:26-29; 38:72-73).<sup>323</sup>

Near the end of the debate, Timothy resorts one last time to the Qur’an:

I also heard that it is written in the Qur’an that Christ is the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and not a servant. If Christ is the Word of God and Spirit of God as the Qur’an testifies, He is not a servant, but a Lord, because the Word and Spirit of God are Lords. It is by this method, O our God-loving King, based on the law of nature and on divinely inspired words and not on pure human argumentation, word and thought, that I both in the present and in the first conversation have demonstrated the Lordship and Sonship of Christ and the divine trinity.<sup>324</sup>

It is not at all disguised here that in Timothy’s appeal to Q4:171 as the foundation of a Qur’anic trinitarian theology, he has likewise rendered the words to which he appeals as “divinely inspired.” Timothy is not simply employing the Qur’an as a debating tool. As will be shown in the section on Muhammad’s prophethood below, it appears that Timothy believes the Qur’an and Muhammad to be voices of his trinitarian God.

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<sup>320</sup> Swanson, "Beyond Proof-texting: Approaches to the Qur'an in Some Early Arabic Christian Apologies," 304.

<sup>321</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III," 319.

<sup>322</sup> Griffith, "The Syriac Letters of Patriarch Timothy I and the Birth of the Christian Kalām in the Mu'tazilite Milieu of Baghdad and Basrah in Early Islamic Times," 119.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>324</sup> Newman, 239.

The Syrian Nestorian writer Theodore Bar Koni (w.c. 176/792) included some comments on Islam in the tenth chapter of his *Book of Scholia*,<sup>325</sup> which is delivered in the style of a dialogue between a student and his teacher. The text deals with foundational Christian theology including baptism, the Eucharist, the cross, and the sacraments. Its Muslim audience then becomes clear in discussions concerning Jesus as the Son of God.<sup>326</sup>

Though there are no direct references to Muslims or Islam, *Chapter Ten* is most likely Theodore's, "apology for Christianity against Muslim challenges to its credibility."<sup>327</sup> Hoyland notes that Theodore refers to Muslims as Timothy I does, as, "the new Jews" and thus dialogicians re-appropriated anti-Jewish polemics into their inter-faith relationships with Muslims.<sup>328</sup> Theodore understands the Islamic view of Jesus well, and closes the Christian voice of this phase of dialogue by restating the Islamic position in the questioning voice of a student:

I believe that Christ was born of a virgin woman and that he was sent by the one who gave the Law, and that he will bring about the resurrection and the judgement, and that he is now in heaven. But that I should call him the son of God, and you blaspheme; that God has a connatural son, born of him, perfect like him in everything, I cannot accept.<sup>329</sup>

Between 173/790 and 181/797,<sup>330</sup> it is transitted that Ibn al-Layth wrote a letter on behalf of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 786-809) to the Byzantine Emperor Constantine. The letter is written during a time when the Byzantines were reportedly paying the Abbasids not to war against them. Constantine stopped paying, and the letter was sent containing what appears to be both a threat of war and a sincere attempt at Christian-Muslim dialogue.

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<sup>325</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 343-346.

<sup>326</sup> Griffith notes that these subjects are typical of Christian-Muslim dialogue, referring to Abū Ra Īta, Abū Qurrah, and Ammār al-Baṣrī for example. Sidney H. Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 47, no. (1981): 174.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.; cf. Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, I, 100.

<sup>328</sup> Hoyland, 541. A full discussion of *Chapter Ten* is in Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity." For further bibliographical data see Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 344-346.

<sup>329</sup> As translated by Griffith in Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity," 181-182. Griffith remarks that, "Theodore makes no attempt to state the tenets of Muslims in their own idiom. His apology, as is evident from the fact that it is a chapter in a first manual for Christian studies, is meant for Christian eyes alone." If this were the case, however, perhaps a more direct approach to Islamic teaching would have been employed. The Qur'an was available, and other scholars had done so. The dialogue style of this presentation was distinct from the preceding chapters of the student's manual, and common to Christian-Muslim discourse. It seems unlikely that Theodore did not intend this apology to be read by Muslims. Its dialogical style and its lack of overtly provocative language lean toward its application as a dialogue piece, perhaps something a student of his might share openly with his Muslim counterpart without fear of punishment for insulting the prophet or the Qur'an. In any case, there is nothing innovative in Theodore's defence of the Trinity or the Incarnation. He takes a Biblical approach, and funnels his teachings into the Trinity and incarnation being the only possible outcomes of the Old Testament teachings. Anyone who believes otherwise from the Old Testament readings must be a Jew in his eyes. See *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>330</sup> El Cheikh has dated the letter to 180/796. See Nadia Maria El Cheikh, *Byzantium Viewed by the Arabs*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 92.

Eventually in 181/797 Hārūn began incursions once again against Byzantium.<sup>331</sup> The letter contains extensive defences of Muhammad’s prophethood, and refutations of Christianity.

With the refutation of Christianity comes references to the gospels, including the observation that Jesus’ prayer “our Father” (Matt 6:9-13) placed him on par with his disciples in their relationship to God. The author also highlights the miracles of other prophets in the Bible, noting that divinity was not given to them. These are possibly new arguments, and will be repeated in later dialogue.

### 1.2.ii.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c.204/820) opens this phase with a Biblical defence of the Incarnation, though of Theodore’s presentation of it, the Qur’an most certainly disagrees. Theodore writes:

The Gospel says that Christ the Son of God was begotten of the Father before the ages and that the Father is not prior to him. It says that this Son at the end of time descended to take up residence in the belly of a woman and from her was begotten a man, while remaining God as he always has been.<sup>332</sup>

From a dialogue perspective, it seems as though Theodore’s word choices “Son of God,” “begotten of the Father,” “belly of a woman,” carry the intent to irritate readers of the Qur’an. If this is true, it could reveal something of Theodore’s attitude as an antagonist in Christian-Muslim dialogue, and add evidence to what appears to be the ever-hardening of Christians and Muslims toward each other in this phase.

Our first Islamic voice on the Incarnation in this phase comes from the *Refutation of the Christians* (*Kitāb al-radd ‘ala al-Naṣārā*; w.210/825) by Al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm (d.246/860). According to Madelung, “It is the earliest extant *kalām* refutation of Christian theology.”<sup>333</sup> The author has a solid command of the Gospel materials, presenting a refutation of Christianity that is both strong and unique to this time, but since he is a Zaydī, his argumentation receives little notoriety among more mainstream Islamic scholars.<sup>334</sup>

The text outlines three basic arguments: the Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd*, Christian trinitarian doctrine as opposed to *tawḥīd*, and proofs defeating the divinity of Jesus. As

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<sup>331</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 347-353.; cf. al-Nadim and Dodge, 264.

<sup>332</sup> Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 51.

<sup>333</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 542-543.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 542-543.; for dating see Thomas in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas, *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations.*, vol. 5 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 259.



Thomas notes, the author recognizes that his audience was not one but three branches of trinitarian doctrine. Thus he describes each of them. He writes of the Melkites,

that the Son took from Mary a nature, and so the Messiah was two natures, *ṭabī'a*, in one hypostasis, *uqnūm*; of the Jacobites that the divine and human became one when the Son became a body from Mary, *tajassada bihi*; and of the Nestorians that the Son became a body which was perfect and complete in its nature and hypostasis, and so the Messiah was two natures and hypostases. The purpose of this action was to free mankind from the power of Satan through the stratagem of the cross.<sup>335</sup>

This is a remarkably accurate presentation of the three Christologies. As Thomas points out, al-Qāsim's presentation of the two natures of Christ in Monophysitism was by the phrase "*fa-ṣāra jamī'an wāḥdan*" (they became completely one). A clear phraseology like this is rarely seen from Muslim scholars outside of al-Qāsim and Abū Isā.<sup>336</sup>

His refutation of the Son of God employs Qur'anic references not seen before now: Q21:22, "If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins: God, Lord of the Throne, is far above the things they say," and 23:91, "God has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him— if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others. May God be exalted above what they describe!" The argument from these verses is such that, "if there were more than one Divinity they would have to be capable of frustrating one another's activities and so could not be all-powerful." Yet as Thomas continues, this degradation of trinitarianism as polytheism is, "surprising in view of the thorough knowledge of Christian doctrines, including the Trinity, that he reveals later in the *Radd*."<sup>337</sup>

Thomas has also noted the abruptness with which al-Qāsim, having described the doctrine of the Trinity with painstaking accuracy, simply ignores his work in favour of a simplistic interpretation of the Qur'an which is employed to show that the Christians believe that God had a son. His use of simplistic interpretations of the Qur'an to refute elegant interpretations of the Gospels (which he seems uniquely gifted in explaining in dialogue), is incongruous.

More effective is his later presentation of the argument for Jesus' humanity as found in the Gospels. He suggests that dialogue should be based on an open interpretation of the Gospels, free from Christian commentary. In this endeavour he finds the voices of God, the

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<sup>335</sup> Abū Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*, 39.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>337</sup> Grypeou, Swanson, and Thomas, 262.

angels, Jesus, Mary, and the disciples to, “attest to the humanity of Jesus, and no more ... The solution al-Qāsim offers here to the difficulty of finding agreement over the person of Jesus is original and impossible to reject in its own terms.”<sup>338</sup>

In the last part of al-Qāsim’s refutation, he makes extended appeal to the Gospels, quoting at length from the *Sermon on the Mount*. The texts he chooses are to present the Gospel-based counter-argument to the divinity of Christ, and it is a compelling argument. He even goes so far as to change in his text any references of God as ‘Father’ to either ‘God’ or ‘Lord’.<sup>339</sup>

The impression al-Qāsim leaves in this examination of the divinity of Christ is that there is a serious disjunction between the contemporary teachings of the churches on the one hand, and on the other any rational understanding of the divine nature of God and a fair reading of the very scriptural sources to which Christians refer.<sup>340</sup>

This work is polemical, as al-Qāsim apparently reinterprets the Christian scriptures to his own taste, ignoring the potential for flexibility in his own. It is on the whole a very intelligent piece, contains some unique argumentation, and possibly sets the tone for the *kalām* style of Islamic dialogue writing.

Abū Ra’īṭa al-Takrītī (d.c.215/830) responds to al-Qāsim’s Gospel critique, concentrating his defence of the Incarnation on the Christian scriptures rather than the Qur’an, only alluding to staple Qur’anic references like Q4:171 and 5:73.<sup>341</sup> However, he does introduce his defence of the Incarnation with allusions to Q2:117; 16:40 and a few other verses with a conciliatory discourse on God’s creative word, saying, “we, too, do not understand [God’s] making and creating by permission and speech without a tool or implement or talking, or taking great care against mistakes and error.”<sup>342</sup> This is likely meant to draw the Muslim into a discussion on Jesus as the Word of God, the unity of Gods’ Word (كلمة الله) and the body (الجسد). He also speaks of Christ having two *attributes*, divine and human. This is an innovative literary tool, once again extracted from the Islamic concept of God’s divine “attributes,” which as Mark Beaumont has already noted, Abū Rā’īṭa did not employ in his defence against the Melkites.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> See Beaumont in Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 244-245.

<sup>340</sup> Abū ‘Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū ‘Isā Al-Warrāq’s ‘against the Incarnation’*, 40.

<sup>341</sup> Keating and Takrītī, 16.

<sup>342</sup> “ليسنا ايضاً نعقل فلعلنا خالقاً بالاذن والقول من غير اله و اداة و كلمة و احتراز نالجهد عن الخطاء و الغلط.” As Keating noted, herein Abū Rā’īṭa is distinguishing between God’s creative speech (القول) and the words he uses (كلمة). Ibid., 124-125.

<sup>343</sup> Beaumont, 65.

In a lesser known work, his *Letter to the Christians of Baḥrīn*, Abū Rā'īṭa revives the analogy of the veil to explain the Incarnation.<sup>344</sup> The idea of Jesus' body as a veil (*ḥijāb*) is a theme stemming from *On the Unified Trinity*. Ammār al-Baṣrī (d.c.235/850) too, tucks the dialogical theme of Christ as the veil of God (cf. Q42:51) into his comparison between the black stone and the cross.

Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d.230/845) once again provides a bearing for the Christian understanding of Islam: "As to Christ himself, Muhammad considers Him just a man and the most honoured among the prophets, born of a virgin without intercourse, formed, as Adam out of earth, by the creative power of God's Word."<sup>345</sup> This is an accurate understanding, though a calmer version of the truth. *The Dispute of Wāṣil and Byzantines*<sup>346</sup> possibly from the same period also includes comparisons between Adam and Jesus. The Muslim Sheikh Wāṣil asks of the king, "Did they not both eat food and drink, urinate and defecate, go to sleep and awaken, experience happiness and sadness?"<sup>347</sup> The highlighting of the crudeness of humanity in contrast to the supposed exaltation of the incarnated divine 'Son of God' became a key polemical tactic. Later in the same dispute text, Wāṣil challenges the Byzantine Patriarch: "you are moved to maintain that the Lord of the Worlds took up residence in the darkness of the bowels and the narrowness of the womb, and sullied himself with menstruation."<sup>348</sup>

*The Dispute of Wāṣil and Byzantines* highlights too the humanity of Jesus in the Gospels. If Jesus who prayed and fasted was God, to whom did he pray and fast? This is repeated in the early third/ninth century text *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem* which evokes a novel Christian rebuttal from the Qur'an.<sup>349</sup> Q33:56 states that God 'prayed' for Muhammad: "God and His angels bless the Prophet—so, you who believe, bless him too and give him greetings of peace."

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

The Arabic is included here to highlight the translation of the word يُصَلُّونَ as "[they] bless" by Haleem. It seems the Christian voice in this dialogue is incorrectly reading the Qur'an

<sup>344</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 580.

<sup>345</sup> Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, 132-133.

<sup>346</sup> This is a ninth century dispute text. An edition and translation is provided in Sidney H. Griffith, "Bashīr/Bēsér: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo iii: The Islamic Recension of His Story in Leiden Oriental Ms 951 (2)," in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, ed. Sidney H. Griffith (Aldershot, UK; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002)., cf. Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 169-174.

<sup>347</sup> Griffith, "Bashīr/Bēsér: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo iii: The Islamic Recension of His Story in Leiden Oriental Ms 951 (2)," 316-317.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 322-323.

<sup>349</sup> Newman, 322.

here. The Arabic *ṣalla'ala* (صَلَّى عَلَى) is more accurately translated as 'to invoke blessing upon'. Numerous Qur'anic references and subtle allusions in the dialogue reveal the likelihood of an intentional misrepresentation of the Qur'an, and thus a polemical work.

Though Q4:171 was now the dominant Qur'anic reference on the topic, not all Qur'anic commentators felt that the verse necessarily applied to Christians alone. *Tafsīr al-Ṭustarī* (w.c.245/860), commenting on Q4:171, defines "your religion" as his religion, exposing a curiously inclusive stance. He defines the warnings against excess in the interpretation of religion as innovations, "deviating from the truth, which is the Book, the Sunna and consensus."<sup>350</sup> He clearly includes Muslims in his definition of the People of the Book, and is adhering to a Qur'anic textual view of The Book (*al-kitāb*) as including the Torah, *Zabūr*, *Injīl*, and the Qur'an together. He has included both Muslims and Christians in his understanding of the target of this instructive verse, and defined the rules by which it is to be responded to as including the Sunna and consensus. There is no mention of trinitarian doctrine here, certainly a surprise this far along into the Christian-Muslim relationship. He interprets this clearly dialogical verse without a single reference to Christianity. Surprisingly, Q5:73; 3:45; 4:157; 5:75; and 5:17 do not receive a commentary in this *tafsīr*.

Nonnus of Nisibis (c. 246/860) also draws religions together, stating that all of the four major religions recognize Jesus as a real historical character: the polytheists (the old pagans), the Jews, the dualists and triadists, and the Muslims (the new pagans).<sup>351</sup> The Muslim view he states well:

The new [pagans] are much more right-minded than the others. For they confess that he was born of a virgin and she was chaste (Q3:47; 19:20), and that he is the Word and Spirit of God (Q3:45; 4:171). They add many miracles, even this one, that he is the Creator who created a bird out of clay (Q3:49; 5:110), just as the Creator [created] Adam of old. They acknowledge that he ascended into heaven (Q4:158) and that he is ready to come a second time into the world. But being excessive in paying honour, they will not accept the fact that he was crucified and died (Q4:157).<sup>352</sup>

As Griffith describes this statement, "It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was the Islamic Christology, if one may so use the term, that in fact inspired Nonnus to structure his argument in precisely the way he does..."<sup>353</sup> Nonnus presents the divinity of Christ on the innovative foundation of his attributes of goodness, wisdom, power, and justice. Showing

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<sup>350</sup> "وتعدلوا عن الحق، وهو الكتاب والسنة والإجماع، ميلاً إلى هوى نفوسكم"

<sup>351</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, IV, 125.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 127.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 127.

Christ to have manifested these in a way that was only creditable to God, proves his divinity.<sup>354</sup> The concept and its language appear intended to incarnate the *ṣifāt Allah*.

Abū Isā begins his challenge of the Incarnation with a muted appeal to Q21:22, and an echo of al-Qasīm's proposal above that persons capable of acting on their own could not be concurrently omnipotent, as they would be capable of hindering each other.<sup>355</sup> On Q4:157, as with other Qur'anic challenges to Christianity, Abū Isā argues not appealing to the Qur'an directly, but addresses the philosophical problems posed by the Qur'an to Christians in philosophical terms. It is clear that Abū Isā interprets the doctrine of the Incarnation and the event of the crucifixion as incompatible. If the Messiah did not die with the body of Jesus, then the Incarnation is unproven, yet if the Messiah died with the body of Jesus then the unity within the Trinity is unproven.<sup>356</sup>

Abū Isā rejects the interpretation of Jesus' divinity from the story of the clay bird in Q3:49 and 5:110. To Abū Isā the breathing of life into the clay bird is a sign of delegated and temporary power within creation, not intrinsic or eternal power over creation. As he says, the event, "conforms to extraordinary signs, not to control over creation."<sup>357</sup>

The virgin birth is likewise attributed to God's will (Q2:117; 3:47), having little to do with Jesus' identity and nothing to do with his nature: "[Jesus] is only distinguished from those who came from a male by not having an earthly father, while others do."<sup>358</sup>

One of the few direct references to the Qur'an from Abū Isā comes from a verse not seen before now in our study: Q42:11, "The Creator of the heavens and earth. He made mates for you from among yourselves—and for the animals too—so that you may multiply. There is nothing like Him: He is the All Hearing, the All Seeing."<sup>359</sup> As Thomas indicates, this is likely chosen for a particular purpose, as Abū Isā quotes the Qur'an rarely. Thomas asserts that he, "may have intended tacitly that there was no need for God to be either trinitarian or incarnate to enjoy a full relationship with his creation."<sup>360</sup> It may also have been a simple benediction, as

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid., IV, 129-132.

<sup>355</sup> Abū Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*, 97.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 117-118, 155-165. This is a well-known theological problem. Abū Ra ṭṭa responded to this already in his *Proof*. The Miaphysites may be said to have the most difficult time in resolving this quandary. Abū Ra ṭṭa presents the nature of Christ as like that of any single human, which is made of both body and soul, inseparable in life, but separated upon death. Jesus too died in body but not in spirit, and the Incarnation of the Person of the Trinity is not unlike the 'incarnation' of the soul in the body of man. See Keating and Takrītī, 124-127.

<sup>357</sup> Abū Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*, 170-173.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 192-193.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 270-271. Abū Isā only quotes the last part of the verse.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 303, n. 86.

the quotation of Q1:2 follows it, leading to a transition into the concluding arguments of the refutation.

The only other Qur'anic reference that Abū Isā quotes in the refutation of the Incarnation is the closing statement, "God is the one, the self-subsistent be praised, nothing resembles him, who has never begotten nor been begotten, none is like him,"<sup>361</sup> which is taken from Q112, a surah not universally agreed to be addressing Christians at all.

Abū al-Ḥasan Alī ibn Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī (a.k.a. Ibn Rabban; d.c.246/860) was born a Christian, but reportedly converted to Islam when he was about seventy years old.<sup>362</sup> With intimate knowledge of Christianity, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī provides a most compelling refutation of the Incarnation. In his *Refutation of the Christians*, 'Alī asks seven questions which he calls "the Silencers, *al-muskitāt*."<sup>363</sup> As Thomas has already noted, 'Alī's fifth question is most revealing of his style as a polemicist. He divides between the three options for Christ as human, divine, or a combination of the two, and provides possible answers from the Christian side. To say that Christ is human is to agree with Islam. To say that Christ is God is to disagree with the Gospel:

For Matthew says in Chapter 8 in his Gospel, citing Isaiah on the prophethood of Christ (peace be upon him), for he says from God, great and mighty, 'this is my servant whom I have chosen, and my beloved with whom I myself am satisfied. Behold I place my spirit upon him, and he will call the nations to the truth.' This is clear, and it is no evidence because Isaiah is a prophet.<sup>364</sup>

Al-Ṭabarī makes his case on the servanthood of Christ. By logical deduction, God cannot be a servant of God. Christ's designation as a servant of God disqualifies him from divinity. He then highlights Jesus' descriptions and addressing of God as an independent entity from himself. Jesus' own words then implicate himself as a servant, and therefore necessarily not God. Further, if Christ was divine, his consumption of food meant that creation would have become constituted in the Creator. Besides, the humanity of Christ, the created part, could not have existed prior to creation itself, hence as Thomas summarizes, "the Creator was non-existent and the world came into being without a Creator."<sup>365</sup>

In his logic al-Ṭabarī recalls the works of al-Qāsim and Abū Isā al-Warrāq, but what makes 'Alī's argument so compelling is his total respect for the Christian scriptures, and his

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 274-275.

<sup>362</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 669-674.; cf. David Thomas, "Ali Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari: A Convert's Assessment of His Former Faith," in *Christians and Muslims in Dialogue in the Islamic Orient of the Middle Ages*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Berut: Orient-Institut, 2007), 137-155.; Adang, 23-30. After his conversion, he wrote two works of interest: *The Refutation of the Christians* (c.235/850), and *The Book of Religion and Empire* (c.240/855).

<sup>363</sup> Thomas, "Ali Ibn Rabban Al-Tabari: A Convert's Assessment of His Former Faith," 142.

<sup>364</sup> The translation is that of David Thomas in *ibid.*, 143.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

total disrespect for the confessions of faith that the three main branches of Christianity draw from them. He is, as Thomas coins, in dialogue with his former self.

In this phase Abū Qurrah begins with the incongruity between the Gospels and the Qur'an, and is refuted by Ammār al-Baṣṣrī's extended work on the incongruity between the Gospels and the doctrine of the Incarnation. Abū Ra'īṭa refutes Ammār based on the same Gospels, almost totally ignoring the Qur'anic voice, except to employ the innovation of *On the Unified Trinity* in the allegory of Christ as the "veil" of God (Q42:51). Nonnus cleverly employs the *ṣifāt* Allah to defend Christ's divinity based on attributes that he exhibited that could only reveal divine nature. 'Alī al-Ṭabarī returns to the methodology of Ammār al-Baṣṣrī, refuting the incongruence of the Gospels with the doctrine of the Incarnation, but this time with seventy years of prior experience as a Christian himself.

### Concluding Remarks on the Incarnation in Dialogue

As Griffith has already noted,

By the mid-eighth century it was already clear to writers such as Anastasius of Sinai, John of Damascus, the writer of the dialogue of the Syrian Patriarch John III with the Emir Umayr ibn Sa'd al-Ansari, and the composer of the dialogue between the monk of Bet Hale and an Arab notable, to name only a few, that Christology was the main issue between Muslims and Christians. In the theological vocabulary of all the contemporary Christian denominations, the label 'Arian' fairly well expressed the intra-Christian theological judgment about the Islamic view [of] Isa ibn Maryam.<sup>366</sup>

As in the case of the Trinity, the topic of the Incarnation grew and developed over time in our available sources. In the early days, Isho'yahb III remarks that Nestorian doctrine is closer to Islamic Christology than Jacobite. In spite of this, *The Disputation of John and the Emir* just a few years later does not reveal much concern at all from the Emir on the Jacobite Patriarch's view of Jesus. The Emir appears more concerned with whether or not the Christians are following Jesus' teachings, than with what those teachings might be exactly or the nature of the Jesus who taught them.

Christians seem to have struggled to present the Incarnation to Muslims. Innovations such as Christ as the veil of God in the tract *On the Unified Trinity* (and later in Abū Ra'īṭa and Ammār al-Baṣṣrī) attempted to describe the Incarnation in Islamic terminology. The Muslims however, beginning with Ibn'Abbās, held to the idea that Jesus was a simple human messenger, who ate food and was born of a woman. Ibn'Abbās presents Jesus as a

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<sup>366</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, VII, 153-154.

consequence of God's spoken Word rather than the Word of God. The Qur'an provides Ibn'Abbās' refutation against the Incarnation in Q3:47. God is able to create a man without a father, "He only says, 'Be!', and it is." This logic is reversely applied by Leo III in his defence to 'Umar II concerning the Incarnation. If the God who revealed Q3:47 wills himself to be expressed incarnated through a human body, born of a woman and eating food, he must certainly be capable of doing so.

Ibn al-Layth questions why if other Biblical prophets performed miracles, divinity was not accorded to them, and why when Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he placed himself on par with them by addressing God as, "our Father." Theodore Abū Qurrah uses the Incarnation with apparent intention to irritate his Muslim readership, crudely saying that God, "took up residence in the belly of a woman." He uses the Bible to defend the doctrine rather than the Qur'an.

Al-Qāsim is possibly the best Islamic scholar at clarifying the three major Christologies during these early years of dialogue. Al-Qāsim also displays profound understanding of the Incarnation, and yet interprets the Qur'an as refuting a literal son of God, a theology he accredits to Christians in spite of his skill in presenting the Incarnation in their own terms. This is incongruous, and a disappointingly shallow argument considering his knowledge of Christology, but nonetheless finds echo later on in the works of Abū Isā.<sup>367</sup>

His later presentation on the humanity of Jesus in the Gospel is more effective as he presents a Gospels-based argument, noting the scarcity of Gospels content on Jesus' divinity compared to the mountain of evidence for his humanity. Yet he alters the text of the Gospels in doing so, and sacrifices scholarly integrity in the process. In his quotations he even replaces 'Father' with 'Lord' or 'God'. Al-Qāsim also presents the doctrine of mutual hindrance based on Q21:22 and 23:91, to show that two equally powerful beings could not be congruently omnipotent.

'Alī al-Ṭabarī pits the Bible against the Christians to defeat the Incarnation while upholding the Gospels. This is perhaps his innovation. Nonnus of Nisibis once again reverses the trend by using Islamic language, the attributes of goodness, wisdom, power, and justice in Jesus, to prove Jesus' divinity, something akin to using the attributes of God to identify God. However, Abū Isā retorts with simple logic, no scripture proof-texting. He proposes that the Incarnation is disproved by the crucifixion. If the Messiah died, then God died, but if the

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<sup>367</sup> Abū Rā'īṭa already warned against this about a half century prior. He warns that there are two categories of Islamic theological opponents: those who are unaware of Christian doctrine and whose ignorance is forgiven, and those who, like al-Qāsim would become, those who, "exhibit knowledge and learning without careful attention or restraint..." Keating and Takrīfī, 103.



Messiah did not die in the body of Jesus, then the Incarnation never really took place. This leads into the development of the topic of the crucifixion.

### I.2.iii The Crucifixion

#### I.2.iii.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

*The Apocalypse of Shenoute* (a.k.a. *Life of Shenoute*; w.c.75/695) is a work of prophecy alleged to have been composed by a fifth century Egyptian author.<sup>368</sup> Jos van Lent has indicated that this is perhaps the earliest document to interpret Islamic Christology as denying the event of the crucifixion of Christ, and appears more than sixty years after the death of Muhammad.<sup>369</sup> Mark Swanson indicates that the text refers to the “children of Ishmael” who deny the suffering of Jesus on the cross.<sup>370</sup> It is perhaps anachronous that so stark a disparity between Christians and Muslims on the historicity of the key event of Christianity would suddenly appear in an isolated reference this late in our collection of extant texts, and that this topic of debate would not be seen again for another four decades, until the writings of John of Damascus in 115/734.<sup>371</sup>

#### I.2.iii.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

John of Damascus writes that the Qur’an claims, “that the Jews unlawfully determined to crucify [Jesus], and when they seized Him, they crucified Him in appearance only; but the Christ Himself was not crucified, nor did He die, for God took Him into heaven unto Himself

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<sup>368</sup> A partial English translation is available in Hoyland, 279-282.; cf. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 182-185.

<sup>369</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 184.

<sup>370</sup> Swanson, “Folly to the Hunafa: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy,” 239.

<sup>371</sup> The date given by Jos van Lent in *Christian-Muslim Relations* is a challenge. This text is the first known source to introduce docetism as a part of the Islamic view of Jesus, and it does so without mention of the Incarnation, trinitarianism, or the Prophet Muhammad. The next text chronologically to address Docetism would be that of John of Damascus. *The History of Heraclius* and *The Chronicle of John bar Penkaye*, both predating 75/695, were aware of Muhammad in some detail. The works of Isho’yahb III and John Sedra too are far more aware of Islamic doctrine than this apocalypse. The coinage of Marwān and the inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock too present Islamic Christology without the Docetic view, and it was not a topic of discussion for *John and the Emir* in c.23/644. After 75/695, *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* addresses Muhammad and almost everything Christological (the Trinity, the divinity of Christ), including the crucifixion, but without the docetic interpretation. Thus we have in the extant dialogical history, texts both before and after 75/695 that discuss Muhammad, the Trinity, and Incarnation, but not Docetism, and now we have one in 75/695 that discusses Docetism but not Muhammad nor the Christological controversies. If this Apocalypse is truly from 75/695, its sudden isolated introduction of, and selective attention paid to, the docetic view of Islam, seems out of sync with other works of its time.

Outside of this apocalypse, the earliest mention of Docetism as Islamic by any textual source, is the works of John of Damascus, who it seems has access to a text (or portion of a text) of the Qur’an. The *Apocalypse of Shenoute*’s concentration on Docetism and ignorance of Muhammad, the Incarnation, and Trinitarian concerns, is disturbingly anachronous. This author believes it is highly likely that the *Apocalypse of Shenoute* comes from after the publications of John of Damascus, though this still does not explain its vagueness on other Christological issues.

because He loved Him.”<sup>372</sup> In this are allusions to Q4:157, and the clearest interpretation of the Qur’anic denial of Jesus’ death known until this time.

Ibn’Abbās places Tatianos (a.k.a. Natyanus) on the cross at the scene of Jesus’ crucifixion in Q4:157. This is the first Islamic interpretation of this verse from our survey in line with the replacement theory of the crucifixion.<sup>373</sup> Yet as Todd Lawson points out, “The Qur’an’s assertion that the Jews did not crucify Jesus ... is obviously different from saying that Jesus was not crucified.”<sup>374</sup> Neal Robinson posits that the origins of the substitution theory lie in pre-Islamic traditions and in *ḥadīths* concerning Jesus’ return. Ibn’Abbās then imposes these extra-Qur’anic materials onto the Qur’an. “If however, the other passages are examined without presupposition and Q4:157-9 is then interpreted in light of them, it can be read as a denial of the ultimate reality of Jesus’ death rather than a categorical denial that he died.”<sup>375</sup>

Ibn’Abbās makes some interesting comments on Q19:30-34 about Jesus’ death and his status among Christians. Verses 33-34 are thus:

*(Peace on me the day I was born) safety to me from Satan’s touch when I was born, (and the day I die) and safety to me from the compression of the grave when I die, (and the day I shall be raised alive) when I am resurrected alive from the grave. (Such was Jesus, son of Mary) such was the event of Jesus, son of Mary: ((this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt) i.e. the Christians, for some of them said he is Allah, and some said he was the son of Allah and some of them claimed he was Allah’s partner!*<sup>376</sup>

Regarding Jesus’ death, though as we have seen Ibn’Abbās denies the event of Jesus’ crucifixion, he supports here Jesus’ ability to die and be resurrected. Secondly, and more interestingly, Ibn’Abbās here breaks up a possible noun-adjective phrase to create two separate statements out of one. The Qur’an in 19:34 reads, “ *ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ* ” (Such was Jesus, son of Mary. [This is] a statement of the Truth about which they are in doubt), which as Parrinder and others have noted can be understood as a single statement. In other words, Jesus *is* the Word of Truth concerning which they are in doubt.<sup>377</sup> The Qur’an already calls Jesus the Word of God (4:171), to call him the Word of Truth would not be

<sup>372</sup> Newman, 139.

<sup>373</sup> As Todd Lawson points out, “research has been unable to produce any *aḥādīth* on the crucifixion of Jesus that go back to the Prophet (*ḥādīth nabawī*)...” Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 47.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>375</sup> Robinson in *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>376</sup> (وَأَسْلَامٌ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ) (السَّلَامَةُ عَلَيَّ حِينَ وُلِدْتُ مِنْ لَمَزَةِ الشَّيْطَانِ (وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ) حِينَ أَمُوتُ مِنْ ضَغْطَةِ الْقَبْرِ (وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا) حِينَ أُبْعَثُ مِنَ الْقَبْرِ حَيًّا) (ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ) خَيْرَ عِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ (قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ) خَيْرَ الْحَقِّ (الَّذِي فِيهِ) فِي عِيسَى (يَمْتَرُونَ) يَشْكُونَ يَعْنِي النَّصَارَى وَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ هُوَ اللَّهُ وَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ هُوَ ابْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَ بَعْضُهُمْ هُوَ شَرِيكُهُ

<sup>377</sup> Parrinder suggests a change of vowel is possible, from *qaūla'l-ḥaqqi* to *qaūlu'l-ḥaqqi*. This vowel change could possibly have been missed as there were no vowels on early texts of the Qur’an. Parrinder, 46.

stretching the text, and perhaps find a parallel in John 14:6 wherein Jesus refers to himself as “the Truth.”

Leo III accepts the interpretation of the Qur’an which posits that Jesus’ crucifixion did not take place. He cleverly suggests that the Islamic idea that Jesus was a mere man should be evidence enough that Jesus was in fact capable of dying. The two Qur’anic ideas of Jesus being a simple messenger and yet unable to die are for Leo incompatible.<sup>378</sup> He addresses the Islamic criticism of the Christian veneration of the cross, by drawing attention to the Islamic veneration of the Ka’ba.<sup>379</sup>

After Timothy’s defence of the deity of Jesus in his debate with Caliph al-Mahdī (164/781), the Caliph challenges him regarding the crucifixion, “Can God then Himself die?” To which Timothy replies, “The Son of God died in our nature, but not in his divinity.” The Caliph responds with Q4:157 with the interpretation that this verse denies the crucifixion. Evidently Timothy does not believe the Qur’an to deny the event, as his first response is to draw on Q19:34 and 3:48, with the meaning that Jesus is able to die and God is able to cause his death. As Swanson writes, “It is therefore on Qur’anic grounds, Timothy argues, that one cannot affirm that the ascension of Jesus into heaven has already occurred without also affirming that his death has already occurred.”<sup>380</sup> Timothy further concludes that, “it is incongruous to God that He should deceive and show something for another thing.”<sup>381</sup> The Caliph later proceeds with a very interesting question:

Which of the two things would you be willing to admit? Was the Christ willing to be crucified or not? If He was willing to be crucified, the Jews who simply accomplished His will should not be cursed and despised. If, however, He was not willing to be crucified and He was crucified, He was weak and the Jews were strong. In this case, how can He be God; He who found Himself unable to deliver Himself from the hands of His crucifiers whose will appeared to be stronger than His?<sup>382</sup>

What is interesting about this question is not Timothy’s answer, but that it was asked. The solution to the problem seems to have escaped both al-Mahdī and Timothy. As noted above, Q4:157 can be understood to deny the Jews the credit for the crucifixion without denying the event. Here however, al-Mahdī’s desire to deny the event and Timothy’s desire to blame the Jews possibly prevented them from entertaining a potentially congruous

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<sup>378</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III," 314.; cf. Q4:157.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 322-323. John of Damascus did this as well, paralleling the cross for Christians to the Black Stone for Muslims.

<sup>380</sup> Swanson, "Folly to the Hunafa: The Crucifixion in Early Christian-Muslim Controversy," 249.

<sup>381</sup> Newman, 198-199.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

interpretation of the Qur'an. In any case, Timothy's defence of the Qur'an as supporting the historicity of the crucifixion is compelling.

At the close of the 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century the Islamic position on the crucifixion was well-known, and Theodore Bar Koni (w.c.176/792) once again summarizes thus in the Muslim voice,

I certainly do not say that he was crucified. It would be a disgrace for him and for us: for him as the one for whom the abuse was prescribed; for us because it is not fitting that we should acknowledge a crucified man.<sup>383</sup>

### 1.2.iii.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d.230/845), speaking for Muhammad, summarizes the Islamic view of the crucifixion in greater detail:

[Muhammad] admits that [Jesus] worked miracles and raised the dead, but not that He was crucified; for he maintains that when the Jews 'laid hands on him,' they actually crucified someone else who appeared to them identical with Him, whereas Christ Himself was raised up, alive, to the fourth heaven. There He will stay until the end, when He will come a second time to earth. At God's command He will be the Judge of mankind on the Day of Resurrection. They also confess the resurrection and the requital of deeds.<sup>384</sup>

Abū Rā'īṭa makes what is by now a fairly standard defence of the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is sure to clarify that it is the body that died only, not the divinity of Christ, responding to the now commonly anticipated critique of God having died in the crucifixion.<sup>385</sup> Regarding the challenge of who was responsible for Jesus' death, he replies that Jesus was a willing martyr, but it was the Jews who accomplished it.<sup>386</sup> This is echoed in *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem*, wherein the Muslim in the dialogue suggests that if Jesus truly allowed himself to die, the Jews should not be blamed.<sup>387</sup>

The event as told by Dionysius of Tel-Mahre and the rebuttal of Abū Rā'īṭa provide the stock narrative in the known dialogue on the crucifixion at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, and would later become a part of *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīra*, in which Q4:157 is interpreted

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<sup>383</sup> As translated by Griffith in Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity," 181-182.

<sup>384</sup> Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, 132-133.

<sup>385</sup> Keating and Takrītī, 247ff.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 289-290.

<sup>387</sup> Newman, 304-305.

by Baḥīrā to have meant, “that Christ did not die in his divine nature but rather in the substance of his human nature.”<sup>388</sup>

In Ammār al-Baṣṛī’s reference and reply to Q4:157 on the crucifixion, he does not draw the Jews into the commentary at all. He does however recall the accusation of Q19:88-90 in his acknowledgment of the Islamic claim, “that we forge [lies] against God and ascribe to Him that ‘on account of which the heavens are on the point of opening, and the earth is to split, and the mountains will fall down flat’.”<sup>389</sup>

In his defence of the use of the cross in worship, Ammār again refers his readers to the Islamic practice of kissing the black stone in the Ka’ba at Mecca. On this he asks, “Do you venerate a stone on account of Abraham, and refuse to venerate a piece of wood on account of the Creator’s veil, I mean Christ’s humanity?”<sup>390</sup> This has now become a standard comparison in dialogue.

Surah 19:30-34 in al-Ṭustarī’s commentary (w.c.245/860) only receives a brief comment about the general nature of pride. Verses 33-34 regarding Jesus’ death and raising up, surprisingly do not receive a commentary at all.

Abū Isā al-Warrāq’s logical refutation of the crucifixion has already been discussed. The crucifixion is at logical odds with the Incarnation. If the Incarnation is true, then the death of God is true. If the death of God is not affirmed, then the Incarnation was never complete.<sup>391</sup> What is exceptional about Abū Isā’s presentation is that he has made allowance for specific nuances between the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians, and provided refutations for each.

In this phase, the casual accusation by Muslims that the crucifixion indicates the death of God is developed into the brilliant conundrum of Abū Isā, that the crucifixion and the Incarnation are mutually exclusive doctrines for each of the three main branches of Christianity. This gives us a good idea of the depth to which this topic was dealt by Muslim writers, even considering the scarcity of materials available from this time. The Qur’an, employed by Timothy I in support of the crucifixion, appears no longer needed, and so possibly declines as an authority on the subject.

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<sup>388</sup> Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 463.

<sup>389</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, 177.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>391</sup> Abū Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abū Isā Al-Warrāq’s ‘against the Incarnation’*, 116-125, 154-165.

## Concluding Remarks on the Crucifixion in Dialogue

Muslims may in general feel it is unfitting for God to allow his prophets to die a death as terrible as a crucifixion, but this was not always the case.<sup>392</sup> As Cumming, Lawson, and Parrinder have shown above, the text of the Qur'an does not categorically deny the event of Jesus' death, rather it denies the reality of his being dead at present. The earliest suspected mention of the Islamic denial of Jesus' death is from the *Apocalypse of Shenoute*. But even then this was not innovative, as it was not abnormal for various Christologies to deny Jesus' death. Long before the advent of Islam, various kinds of Christian Docetists had already done so, and often in the same language as Ibn'Abbās, with a theory of Jesus' replacement on the cross, a theory responded to as late as Dionysius of Tel-Mahre.

Nevertheless, the Qur'an seems understood from at least the writings of John of Damascus to deny the event of Jesus' death. Leo III, Timothy I, and Theodore Bar Koni all respond to this. Timothy I appears the sole among them to see that the denial of Jesus' death may be internally incongruous with the Qur'anic testimony that the Messiah is certainly able to die, and that God is able to have him killed (Q19:34, 3:48).

Timothy I and Abū Ra'itā both clarify that it was Jesus' humanity that died, not his divinity, a declaration that as al-Qāsim notes, weakens the doctrine of the Incarnation. Islamic commentators overwhelmingly interpreted the Qur'an as a denial of Jesus' death after the first century of Islam. With the exception of Timothy I, their Christian counterparts accepted this interpretation and set to the task of defending history against it, dominantly from Christian scriptures under a developing charge of corruption. The Qur'an became viewed as an authority balanced with reason, as Muslims turned to philosophy in presenting the mutual inconsistency between the doctrines of the crucifixion and the Incarnation.

### I.2.iv Tahṛīf

#### I.2.iv.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

The earliest informative text we have is *The Disputation of John and the Emir* (c.23/644) which seems to indicate that the Emir accepted not only the Torah, but the input of

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<sup>392</sup> Though as noted above, this attitude began in the early period of Christian-Muslim dialogue. See Beaumont's summary in Mark Beaumont, "Debating the Cross in Early Christian Dialogues with Muslims," in *Jesus and the Cross: Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, ed. David Emmanuel Singh, Global Theological Voices (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Jews on its interpretation as well.<sup>393</sup> This may allude to the Emir's knowledge of Q42:13 in which Christianity and Judaism are included with Islam as the same religion. The indication of the Patriarch to the Emir that Christians follow the instructions of the Gospel seems to have satisfied the Emir's questioning. The meeting was subsequently adjourned and nothing further was requested of the Patriarch. The letter also claims to record only a few of the things discussed during the meeting. It is noted in a report by Dionysius of Tell-Mahre that subsequent to this meeting, the Emir commissioned an Arabic translation of the Gospel.<sup>394</sup> Perhaps the Emir took an agnostic position himself on the main issues, to wait for the witness of the *Injīl* to sort out the truth.

It may be that the Emir's purpose in the meeting was to establish the Patriarch's position according to the Qur'anic teaching, "So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers" (Q5:47), and, "If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have been given abundance from above and from below: some of them are on the right course, but many of them do evil" (Q5:66).<sup>395</sup> This disputation indicates possibly that the Emir valued the Torah and the *Injīl* as authoritative texts. This is the starting point for the evolution of *tahrīf*.

*The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* (c.101/720) is regarded by historians to be the first known non-Islamic mention of the Qur'an. As Thomas and Roggema have noted, though the monk recognizes the Qur'an as the scripture of the Muslims, he also seems to understand "The Cow" (*Sūrat al-Baqara*) as a separate authoritative text from the Qur'an along with the *Injīl* and Torah.<sup>396</sup> Also, some allusions to Q4:171 are detectable, as well as use of the Qur'anic term 'Isā b. Maryam for Jesus.<sup>397</sup>

This text is polemical, though not as much so as the works of either Jacob of Edessa or John of Nikiu (for example). It seems to suggest that the only insurmountable difference between Christians and Muslims, according to the author, is the recognition of a trinitarian theology by Arabs and the Qur'an as authoritative by Christians. The fact that the Muslims value the Torah and *Injīl* appears assumed.

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<sup>393</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in its Historical Context*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Routledge Studies in the Quran (New York: Routledge, 2008), 219-220.

<sup>394</sup> Hoyland, 462-463.

<sup>395</sup> There is no direct reference to the Qur'an, Muhammad, or Islam in the letter, presumably as the Qur'an had not yet been compiled, and the religion of Islam was still forming.

<sup>396</sup> The text mentions the *gygy* and the *twrh*, which Hoyland explains is very likely intended to refer to the Gospel and the Torah. Hoyland, 471-472., especially n. 57.

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

## 1.2.iv.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

Ibn'Abbās (d.68/687) seems a more inclusive voice than the Emir was forty years earlier. As mentioned above, Q4:46 according to Ibn'Abbās refers specifically to, “Malik ibn al-Sayf and his friends,” who allegedly changed the, “traits and description of Muhammad after these were exposted upon in the Torah.”<sup>398</sup> This indicates that textual corruption was not in Ibn'Abbās' mind at the time of writing. In addition, his attitude toward those of other faiths, highlighted in his commentary of Q5:66, seems utterly opposed to the idea of *tahrīf* as it developed later, should it have occurred to him.

Commenting on Q5:66 Ibn'Abbās lists among those, “on the right course:” “Abdullah Ibn Salam and his followers, the monk Bahirah,<sup>399</sup> the Negus and his followers, and Salmān al-Fārisi and his fellows.”<sup>400</sup> 'Abdullah Ibn Salam was reportedly one of the Banū Qaīnuqā', a converted Jew.<sup>401</sup> The “Negus and his followers” likely refers to the Abyssinian Monophysite Christians, many of whom still lived in Arabia at this time. Therefore, either Ibn'Abbās is unaware of the tritheism of Monophysite doctrine in interpreting the Qur'an as understanding Monophysitism to be salvific, or he differentiates between the Monophysitism of the Abyssinians and that of the Najrānians. The former is most likely.

It is transmitted that Salmān al-Fārisi was a companion of the prophet Muhammad, also known as Abū 'Abdullah.<sup>402</sup> He is credited with the suggestion of building a ditch after which The Battle of the Ditch is named. According to EI, he was known later as a near deity of the *Nuṣayriyya*, a Shi'a sect. The *Nuṣayriyya* worshipped 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as the essence of God incarnate, with Muhammad as his “veil,” and Salmān al-Fārisi as his “gate.”<sup>403</sup> Either Ibn'Abbās was not aware of the doctrine of the fellows of Salmān al-Fārisi, or he interprets the Qur'an as upholding an Islamic doctrine similar to that of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Again, more likely the former than the latter.

Thus, in Q5:66 Ibn'Abbās may have provided here evidence for either his discreditation as an interpreter of the Qur'an, or for the Qur'anic inclusivity of both doctrines of incarnation, and doctrines of tritheism. If we do not wish to label Ibn'Abbās ignorant of other religions, or incompetent as an interpreter of the Qur'an, then Ibn'Abbās' interpretation of Sura 5:66 seems to be highly inclusive, even pluralistic.

<sup>398</sup> Ibn'Abbās, *Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, 107-108.; cf. “اليهود مالك بن الصيف وأصحابه.” in Fayrūzābādī and Ibn'Abbās, 71.

<sup>399</sup> Bahirah refers to the monk Bahīrā, discussed below in the section on Muhammad's prophethood..

<sup>400</sup> “جماعة عادلة مستقيمة يعني عبد الله بن سلام وأصحابه وبحيرا الراهب وأصحابه والنجاشي وأصحابه وسلمان الفارسي وأصحابه”

<sup>401</sup> Ibn'Abbās, *Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, 5, n.4.; cf. Q2:4.

<sup>402</sup> He is mentioned in the *ḥadīth* of Abū Dawūd 27:3752, and in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* Vol. 3, Book 31, No. 189.

<sup>403</sup> See Gibb and others, Vol. 8, 145-148.



As we view other inter-religious references like Q2:62; 5:69; 22:17, for Ibn'Abbās , “those who believe in God and the Last day,” (Q5:69) are those Jews who repent of Judaism, those Sabaeans who repent of their religion, and those Christians who repent of Christianity, yet this seems incongruous with his reading of Q5:66. Q2:62 is read by Ibn'Abbās with a large commentary gap between “The believers” and, “the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians.”<sup>404</sup> The author inserts into the gap he creates an explanation intended to break up the two halves of the list, opposing the latter half against the former. This interpretation is inconsistent with the Arabic text, in which no pause or break is detectable within the continuous list of, “those who believe in God and the last day.” The third verse in this trio is interpreted by Ibn'Abbās more stoically. He simply comments that God is aware of the differences between the religions and sects listed.

The polemical tone of Q2:62, 5:69, 22:17 is clearly inconsistent with the pluralistic interpretation of Q5:66, and yet the pluralistic interpretation seems the only position that favours the interpreter's coherence. Ibn'Abbās thus presents a conundrum in tone. If we are to understand Ibn'Abbās as a coherent and competent Qur'anic interpreter, then it must be that he accepts the Qur'an's intentional ambiguity, and further his ability as an interpreter to apply meaning to the words of the Qur'an that suit his own theology and contemporary context. In any case the possibility of *tahrīf* must be understood as a foreign concept to Ibn'Abbās.

In the correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III, the textual corruption charge is introduced for the first time in our suvey sources. In his opening passage, 'Umar questions how Leo can deduce the divinity of Jesus from the scriptures. From this he questions the accuracy of the works of Christian men, “whose writings, in any case, have been falsified by people unknown to you. How, indeed, are you able to justify these same Scriptures, and follow them in what suits your intentions?”<sup>405</sup> Among other details, the accusation is also borne on the crediting of Jesus with the prophecy of Muhammad in the Paraclete, a matter which will be dealt with more below.

Leo simply dismisses the charge of *tahrīf*, questioning if it even originates with Muhammad, “if it is the head of your religion who has taught you this, he has forgotten himself, and if it is some other, he only lied the worse.”<sup>406</sup> Leo is careful not to make the accusation directly against Muhammad. It may be that he is familiar with Qur'anic texts which uphold the accuracy of the Christian scriptures. He also appeals to the argument that the Old

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<sup>404</sup> See also the summary of early commentary on this verse in Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, 109-113.

<sup>405</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar li and Leo lii," 277.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 285.

Testament is equally accurate in the hands of Christians as their enemies, the Jews.<sup>407</sup> Further, *tahrīf* does not fit with progressive revelation, as Leo asks: "If God ought to have ordained all by a single Prophet, why should He send others? And if He was going to let everything get falsified, why then ordain it?"<sup>408</sup> Lastly, he remarks on the multitude and variety of Gospel copies, listing twelve languages in which they exist, and wondering how it would have been possible for someone to have altered them all at once.<sup>409</sup> He then reverses the charge of corruption, saying that the Qur'an was composed by 'Umar Abū Turb and Salmān al-Farsī.<sup>410</sup>

Caliph Al-Madhī questions Timothy I on *tahrīf* in the Old Testament, centering on the prophecy of the conqueror of Babylon (Isaiah 21:6-7).<sup>411</sup> He interpretes the rider on the donkey as Jesus, and the rider on the camel as Muhammad. Timothy clarifies that the donkey symbolizes Medes, and the camel, the Elamites. For Timothy, these are symbolic of nations, not prophets.

Theodore Bar Koni also addresses the accusation of *tahrīf*. In his dialogue, the student raises questions about the integrity of the New Testament, dividing between what is from Christ and what is falsified. The Qur'an defends the Gospel of Jesus and the Torah which preceded it (Q5:46), but as Griffith noted, does not defend the book of Acts or the Epistles. Theodore's defence of the New Testament indicates the strengthening of the debate over the doctrine of *tahrīf*, but his tactic is clever. He simply disregards the New Testament with the exception of the Gospels in his defence of Christian doctrines, "because of our suspicion that you would regard us doubtfully."<sup>412</sup> Theodore finds all the materials he needs for his presentation then in the Gospels alone.

Yet not all Muslim writers subscribed to the charge of *tahrīf*. Writing at the close of the century, Muhammad b. al-Layth relates on behalf of the Caliph Hārūn to Emperor Constantine. Shboud outlines that:

The religion of the Byzantine emperor is acknowledged as authentic; the premises of both universal reason and revelation are presumed as common ground between the two sides. Both the Christian scriptures and the Qur'an are equally God's preserved books, and His treasured proofs: addition nor deletion has affected them with the passage of time.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 297-299.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 292.; cf. p. 298, n. 48.

<sup>411</sup> Newman, 195.

<sup>412</sup> Griffith, "Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni's Apology for Christianity," 178-179.

<sup>413</sup> A. M. H. Shboul, "Arab Islamic Perceptions of Byzantine Religion and Culture," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*, ed. J. Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129.

Hence al-Layth asks in the letter, “why should your own consensus be accepted but not ours, although both Books are similar in the circumstances of their transmission?”<sup>414</sup> It is also notable that in this letter, the accusation of *tahrīf* is not that of altered texts, but of, “misorientation of the meaning of the speech and misdirection of the interpretation of the books (*tahrīf ta’wīl al-kalām wa tahrīf tafsīr al-kutub*).”<sup>415</sup> In spite of the political issues at the end of the letter, it is as Shboul has noted, a rather inclusive document, and we can see here that at the close of this phase, Muslims at the highest level defended the accuracy of the scriptural texts of the Christians.

The charge of textual corruption of the Christian scriptures may have been introduced for the first time in the voice of ‘Umar II in the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. It is borne out of discussions on the Incarnation, and the Qur’anic introduction of prophecies concerning Muhammad in the Bible (Q7:157, 61:6), considered by ‘Umar to be the Paraclete of John 14:16, 26; 15:26, and 16:7.<sup>416</sup> The already available commentary of Ibn‘Abbās does not connect either verse to the idea of textual corruption, the Qur’anic verses supposed to question the textual integrity of the Christian and Jewish scriptures (Q2:75; 4:46; 5:13) had not yet been referenced, and it appears that no sooner is the charge made than it is reversed against the Qur’an. The first response to the charge against the Qur’an seems to be the Caliph’s defence of the Christian scriptures and a clarification that corruption is taking place in interpretation only.

### 1.2.iv.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c.204/820) in his *On the Confirmation of the Gospel*,<sup>417</sup> opens this phase by concluding his work in refutation of the charge of *tahrīf*:

It has thus been confirmed that the Gospel is divine, pure, correct, and unadulterated. ‘In it, there is no doubt.’ Against it, no charge can be brought. It is ‘the religion of truth’ that God has commanded. Apart from Christianity, there is no other true religion.<sup>418</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>416</sup> For a study on the interpretation of these two Qur’anic verses in the exegesis of *al-Ṭabarī* see Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “The Prediction and Prefiguration of Muhammad,” in *Bible and Qur’an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves, Symposium Series (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). McAuliffe adds Q2:129 to the Qur’anic prophetic references of Muhammad.

<sup>417</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 456-457. English translation in Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 49-53; *ibid.* This is an originally Arabic text.

<sup>418</sup> Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 51.

Here Theodore clearly employs the language of the Qur'an to refer to the Gospel.<sup>419</sup> This may be an appeal to the Qur'anic inclusion of the Gospel as text in its understanding of scripture (Q2:2-4).

*The Apology of al-Kindī* (c.204/820) too addresses the doctrine of *tahrīf* after spending a great deal of time on a delivery of the Gospel message. Al-Kindi makes appeal to the fact that the Jews as enemies have the same scriptures, and challenges his friend to produce in the Qur'an an unedited text, finally appealing to the Qur'an's own words in Q10:94, "So if you [Prophet] are in doubt about what We have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you. The Truth has come to you from your Lord, so be in no doubt and do not deny God's signs." To this he adds Q5:50, 70, and 72, before closing with a return to the Gospel message and the Incarnation.<sup>420</sup> It seems that al-Kindi cannot decide which is better, to defeat the authority of the Qur'an, or to defend it by employing its teachings on the accuracy of the Bible.

In refuting the authority of the Qur'an, al-Kindi refers to Q17:90; 2:21; and 59:21, to which he offers the Bible as a reply to the challenge of producing a work like the Qur'an.<sup>421</sup> He then tells the story of Sergius, whom he indicates is also known as Nestorius, Gabriel, and 'the faithful spirit',<sup>422</sup> who gave Muhammad a book,<sup>423</sup> which is why Christians are respected in it (Q5:85).<sup>424</sup> The book, however, fell into the hands of the Jews, 'Alī, and Abū Bakr who according to al-Kindi all tampered with it, which is why it includes suras 16, 27 and 29,<sup>425</sup> and why there were so many different versions by the time of Uthman.<sup>426</sup> Al-Kindi concludes,

You have read the Qur'an and know how the material has been put together and the text corrupted, a sure sign that many hands had been busy on it, and that it has suffered additions and losses. Indeed each one wrote and read as he chose, omitting what he did not like. Now by the

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<sup>419</sup> Theodore here is of course referring to his own interpretation of the Gospel, and not the text in isolation. Also see Q2:2; 9:29, 33; 10:37; 32:2; 48:28; 61:9.

<sup>420</sup> Newman, 498-499.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 452-453. He returns to this topic later, p.460ff.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 455.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 453. A discussion on the legend of Baḥīrā in *The Apology* can be found in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 158-161. As a note to the reader, at the bottom of p. 160 Roggema makes the statement, "The fact that Baḥīrā is not called Sergius by pseudo-al-Kindī is, of course, surprising." This statement contradicts *The Apology*, and Roggema's previous commentary on the character of Sergius in it. It is therefore likely a typographical error and it should be understood that Sergius is named in *The Apology*, and not Baḥīrā. The inclusion of the legend of Baḥīrā in *The Apology* raises questions about the chronology of the two works. Graf supposes the Legend to come after the Apology, but Roggema sees no reason to make this assumption. The precise dates are unknown, and in any case it has been established that the legend had likely entered Christian-Muslim dialogue in an early form by the time of *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* in c.1011/720. See *ibid.*, 159., esp. n. 6.

<sup>424</sup> Newman, 454.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., 454-455.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 456.

grace of God, are these what you consider the marks of an inspired book?<sup>427</sup>

Al-Kindi is an apologist. He compares and contrasts the scriptures, making no attempt to reinterpret them. He explains their differences by referring to the influences of Sergius, the Jews, 'Alī, Abū Bakr, and the final corpus of 'Uthman. Abū Rā'īṭa takes a totally different approach, building on common stories between Christianity and the Qur'an, notably that of Moses, whom he refers to as the son of 'Imrān. According to Abū Rā'īṭa, Moses received the *sunan* and *sharā'i'* (practices and law) from God as a mercy to the people.<sup>428</sup> This resembles Q6:154.

In one instance, he appeals to the Qur'anic doctrine of abrogation to clarify the relationship between the Torah and the Gospel. The new covenant of Jesus abrogates (ناسخ) the old.<sup>429</sup> It is clear that Abū Rā'īṭa is reaching out with Islamic terminology, but the consequences of this argument seem uncalculated. Firstly, in the gospel of Matthew 5:17, Jesus explicitly states, "I have not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets," but rather to fulfill their purpose. Abū Rā'īṭa is on precarious ground here in his interpretation of Jesus' words. Secondly, as it is an Islamic claim that the Qur'an arrogates the Gospel, Abū Rā'īṭa has opened himself up to the principle of whole scriptures abrogating previous scriptures.

Along the same lines, that of invoking Qur'anic literary devices against itself, Abū Rā'īṭa proposes that the God of the Qur'an is Himself in doubt. He quotes the unconfident terminology in several suras (i.e. Q20:44 "perhaps"; 60:7 "perhaps"; 5:116 "did you") to indicate that God in the Qur'an, "is doubtful or is hiding [something]."<sup>430</sup> In his *Letter on the Holy Trinity*, Abū Rā'īṭa provides the expected rebuttal to the accusation of corruption:

If these books were in only in our possession, and not [also] in the hands of our enemies the Jews, then, By my life! One could accept your teaching that we have changed [them] and substituted [words for other words]. However, if the books are also in the hands of the Jews, no one can accept your teaching, unless it were found that the books that we possess differ: [but] what is in the hands of the Jews is in harmony with what we possess.<sup>431</sup>

This provides us with the now standard response to the standard charge, though Dionysius of Tel-Mahre still believes Muhammad (if not the Muslims) to uphold the accuracy of

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 458.

<sup>428</sup> Keating and Takrītī, 95, 99.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., 209.

the Torah and *Injīl*: “He recognizes Moses and his book and he even recognizes the Gospel, though he declines to confess that Christ was crucified.”<sup>432</sup>

Echoing Leo III in his correspondence to ‘Umar II, *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem* critiques the Qur’an’s own potential corruption. The Christian comments,

And what you have said about the Qur’an, well, if you (God grant you long life) ask about its destiny and remain true, you will realize that a prophet has really brought it, but that after his death many of his companions have written (it) down ... The revelation had come, but ‘Uthman was not satisfied with it, concerning that which one had agreed, until he had written it again and had corrected it according to his own desire.<sup>433</sup>

The Christian then moves from the ‘Uthmanic compilation to the sectarian divisions within Islam to show the Qur’an’s corruption. Interestingly, however, the Christian upholds Muhammad’s prophetic voice, and proposes a pure kind of ur-Qur’an which was adulterated by ‘Uthman.

In *Questions and Answers*, Ammār al-Baṣrī contributes a potentially new approach, proposing six principles for identifying inauthentic religious texts. Beaumont has listed them:

Firstly, they permit what God has forbidden; secondly, they are forced on people by the sword; thirdly, they are promoted by financial inducements; fourthly, they are believed in out of ethnic loyalty; fifthly, they are believed in as a result of magic arts; sixthly, they are promoted by rulers and so accepted.<sup>434</sup>

Ammār addresses Muslim concerns about Christianity and the Gospels to each item on the list. As Beaumont further notes, the fact that Ammār does not view the Qur’an by this lens is a subtle way of putting pressure on Muslims to do so. If they wish to claim any of these complaints against the Gospels, they must be willing to view the Qur’an through the same lens for criticism.<sup>435</sup>

Ammār’s well-developed rebuttal against *tahrīf* also employs the possibly unique element of accusing the Qur’an of being the corrupted Gospel. He contrasts the Gospel’s view of the crucifixion and afterlife against what he understands to be the Qur’anic teachings on them. He adopts the Islamic interpretation of the Qur’an and shows that the Qur’an denies that God had a son (Q19:90-91; 5:18), which is in contradiction to the Biblical view of Jews and Christians being the sons of God. He also allows the interpretation of Q17:85 to deny the

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<sup>432</sup> Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, 132-133.

<sup>433</sup> Newman, 293.

<sup>434</sup> Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 251.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

Sonship of Christ.<sup>436</sup> His intent in doing so is to show that the text of the Qur'an and the Gospels are incompatible, and that the Qur'an cannot be interpreted as intending that only the meaning in the Gospels had been changed and the text was sound. As Mark Beaumont has said, "Therefore the allegation that Christians have a sound text but cannot understand it accurately is even more absurd than the allegation that they corrupted the text itself."<sup>437</sup> For Ammār, the Islamic (specifically Mu'tazilite) interpretation of the Qur'an in view of the concept of *tahrīf* is self-defeating: the only known corrupted Gospel text is, in fact, the Qur'an.

Al-Ṭustarī presents Q5:66 as a general reference to believers. It is interpreted that if any believers had acted according to the Torah and the Gospel, they would have also been acting according to the Qur'an. This is an interesting bridge. He adds that if believers turn to God as their provider (*al-Razzāq*), they will be provided for. The discussion on the verse then includes two short stories on trusting God for the provision of food.<sup>438</sup>

By this time in the Christian-Muslim relationship, the proposal of corruption of the Torah and the Gospels has been repeated. There are three core Qur'anic verses which lend to this line of thought: 2:75; 4:46; and 5:13. Ibn'Abbās' interpretation has been reviewed already and none of these verses receive commentary in al-Ṭustarī.

Al-Jāhiz (d.255/869) provides some fresh contributions to the discussion. Abū Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Fuqāimī al-Jāhiz was probably a prolific Mu'tazilite writer, skilled in *kalām*, and recognized for his works by Caliph al-Ma'mūn.<sup>439</sup> Here we are concerned with only two of his more than two hundred works: *The Proof About the Confirmation of Prophethood*, and the *Refutation of the Christians*.<sup>440</sup>

His opinions on *tahrīf* are clear, and innovative. After reminding his audience that there has been no one to produce a book like the Qur'an, al-Jāhiz once again invites fair controversy, defining the terms thus: "if [our opponents] quote against us traditions equal to ours in weight, authority and reliability, then they refute us, and controvert us with arguments

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<sup>436</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, 167.

<sup>437</sup> Beaumont in Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 248.

<sup>438</sup> It should be noted that this is a radically different interpretation than that of Ibn'Abbās, who saw nothing of provision in the verse, but concentrated rather on defining the 'they' of whom the verse speaks.

<sup>439</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 706-712. Newman suggests that al-Jāhiz was accepted to the Caliph's court not so much on account of his quality as a writer as due to the lack of good Muslim scholars available. It is clear enough that Arabic was al-Jāhiz's only language, and he seems certain that by this time the Greeks were an extinct race. See Newman, 686, 699, 703-704.

<sup>440</sup> A partial English translation of *The Proof About the Confirmation of Prophethood* can be found in Charles Pellat and Jāhiz, *The Life and Works of Jāhiz*, trans., D. M. Hawke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 39-48. A partial English translation of the *Refutation of the Christians* can be found in *ibid.*, 86-91., and also in Newman, 699-709.

of equal weight and validity."<sup>441</sup> The implication is that there is no such source. A Christian interlocutor at this point might expect the accusation of *tahrīf*, but it does not come. In fact, he says of the prophets (including Moses and Jesus) that, "their teachings were not upset or diminished or corrupted during the whole period from Jesus to the Prophet. But when they were on the point of becoming weakened and enfeebled and spent, God sent Muhammad, who renewed [their] teachings ... and added further detail to them."<sup>442</sup> Thus for al-Jāhīz, the Gospels have not been corrupted, they are simply out of date, and therefore do not carry the same weight and validity as does the Qur'an. His tactic, far from refuting Christianity seems to be to abrogate it altogether.

The last piece taken from this work is al-Jāhīz's comment that Christian converts to Islam from all the corners of the empire tell of the prophecies of Muhammad in the previous scriptures, noting that, "when a Christian or a Jew embraces Islam in Syria he uses the same reasons and arguments as a new convert in Iraq, and similarly in the Hejaz or the Yemen."<sup>443</sup>

From the *Refutation of the Christians* a few interesting Qur'anic references emerge. Al-Jāhīz quotes Q5:85-88 regarding the Christians being closer to the Muslims than the Jews. The author asserts that, "in the very verses lies the proof that here God is not referring to the Christians we are acquainted with [i.e. Nestorians] nor to their associates the Melkites and Jacobites, but rather to the type of Bahira and the kinds of monks Salman used to serve."<sup>444</sup> For al-Jāhīz, the kind of Christians referred to in the Qur'an is the Arab kind. It is a racial rather than doctrinal delineation, "thus what filled our hearts for affection for the Christians were the ties of blood and our regard for royalty."<sup>445</sup>

This apologetical work is aptly named the *Refutation of the Christians* as it in almost no way refutes the claims of Christianity. Even the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are left unaddressed. The Christian faith is dismissed summarily rather, citing that Christians themselves disagree on basic issues of the divine. "As a result, we cannot comprehend the essence of Christianity to the extent that we know the other faiths."<sup>446</sup> Of course, as shown in the examples of Abū Isā and al-Qāsim above, it is clearly not the case that Islamic scholars

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<sup>441</sup> Pellat and Jāhīz, 44.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>444</sup> Newman, 701. *The Legend of Bahīrā* is circulating by this time, and will be addressed in detail below. *The Apology of al-Kindi* identifies the monk as Nestorian. Ibid., 453. This was an Arabic apology, but written in Karshūni, unlikely to have been discernable by the monoglot al-Jāhīz. Ibn Sa'd records the monk's name as Nasūr. Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Tabaqat Al-Kubra*, Vol. 1, pp. 97, 122-123. It seems the doctrinal stance of Bahīrā was known by Christians and Muslims alike to have been Nestorian, precisely the kind of Christians that al-Jāhīz was surrounded by. The racial interpretation which he presents of Q5:85-88 is his only way of distancing the Qur'an (and himself) from the Nestorian Christianity that he is refuting.

<sup>445</sup> Newman, 703.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., 709.



were unable to articulate Christian theologies in Arabic, even differentiating between those of the Melkites, Jacobites, and Nestorians.

*The Affair of the Qur'an* (late 3<sup>rd</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> Century) is the last major attempt in our survey to find an appropriate backstory for the Qur'an in a Christian context. This short story is intended as an addendum to the East-Syrian recension of *The Legend of Baḥīrā*.<sup>447</sup> The story begins,

After the death of Sergius, Ka'b the Scribe rose up and changed the writing of Sergius Baḥīrā and he handed down another teaching to them. And he put in it confusion, corruption, superstitions, ridiculous and arbitrary things, circumcision, ablution, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' and 'a killing for a killing' and divorce, and that when a woman is repudiated, if another man does not take her, he cannot return to her. He gave them this name and one order of demons that lives down on the earth and that they call 'Jinni', and all that they adhere to from the teaching of Ka'b.<sup>448</sup>

This was the alleged content of the Islamic scriptures, until the time of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, governor of Iraq (d. 95/714), built the city of Wāsīt. The story continues that he summoned books and scholars from the surrounding cities, including Baṣra and Kufa. The conference examined the Qur'an and, "found all of it to be full of error. And there was nothing of use in it – it was all corrupted and laughable and absurd. Not the slightest fear of God was to be found in it, because all that Sergius had handed down to them had been changed by Ka'b the Jew."<sup>449</sup> Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf then burned all the books which had been brought, and requested Christian teachers and priests to come. The Christians taught him the Old and New Testaments, and whatever he liked from what he heard, he wrote down into the Qur'an. The tale is certainly fabricated. Its unique purpose is to provide an alternative polemical history for the development of the Qur'an in line with *The Legend of Baḥīrā*.

Ali al-Ṭabarī (d.c.246/860), the Christian convert to Islam, in *The Book of Religion and Empire* mounts an epic defence of the prophethood of Muhammad.<sup>450</sup> It contains numerous Qur'anic and Biblical references, once again defending the accuracy and validity of both sources. Immediately the author uses the Qur'an to build a bridge between his old faith and new, quoting those verses which establish Muhammad as a prophet, supporter, and corroborator of the previous books of God (Q2:136, 285), adding that, "nobody can change His

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<sup>447</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 595-596. The story can be found in Syriac with an English translation in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 302-309.

<sup>448</sup> Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 303, 305.

<sup>449</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>450</sup> This study is made from the edition and English translation of A. Mingana reprinted in Newman, 547-684.

words.”<sup>451</sup> He continues by highlighting those verses which challenge the relationship between the faiths (Q3:64; 9:109; 112), before clarifying his intent to prove Muhammad’s prophetic office.<sup>452</sup>

By now the standard defence of the Christian scriptures lies in the fact that it is owned and propagated by enemies, the Jews, and the three estranged branches of Christianity, who would not have been able to conspire an emendation should they have ever wanted to. In this final phase, Abū Qurrah, al-Kindi, Abū Rā’iṭa, and Ammār al-Baṣrī all defend the Christian scriptures, but not by a common approach. Al-Kindi takes the step of reversing the *tahrīf* charge against the Qur’an. Abū Rā’iṭa builds the relationship between the Qur’an and the Bible by telling mutual stories, but in applying the doctrine of abrogation against the Torah to defend the *Injīl*, he opens himself up to the abrogation of the *Injīl* by the Qur’an. Ammār al-Baṣrī proposes an objective test for the validity of scriptures, but he provokes no known reply in defence of the Qur’an, which he curtly identifies as the only known corrupted Gospel. *The Affair of the Qur’an* provides a view of the intentional corruption of the Qur’an in the context of the *Legend of Baḥīrā*, to add explanation to Ammār’s accusation.

At the close of this phase, it seems that Muslims are backing away from the charge of *tahrīf* and dealing with the Christian scriptures in new ways. Al-Jāḥiẓ raises no accusation of *tahrīf*, but far from conceding the Gospel’s validity he takes Abū Rā’iṭa’s bait and proposes the total abrogation of the Christian scriptures by the Qur’an. The most ecumenical voice on *tahrīf* ends up that of the apostate, Ali al-Ṭabarī, who is again far from the charge of textual *tahrīf*. He instead employs the Bible alongside the Qur’an in a defence of Muhammad’s prophethood.

### Concluding Remarks on *Tahrīf* in Dialogue

The earliest known reference to the Islamic charge of *tahrīf* is in John of Damascus, whose only mention is that of the Muslims lack of faith in the Old Testament prophecies concerning Jesus. There is nothing of Muhammad, or the alteration of the Gospel to be found. Ibn’Abbās clarifies that the *tahrīf* charge applies to the meaning of scripture interpreted, and not to the text itself.

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid., 569.; cf. Q6:115. The author makes allusions here also to Q33:45 and 41:42, as well as the name of Muhammad in the previous books: Q7:157. Mingana uses the 1880 edition of the Qur’an as translated by E.H. Palmer. The quotes which appear in the text are indicated here in the content according to M.A.S. Abdel Haleem which do not consistently agree with the citations given by Mingana in the text. The Mingana references where different will be recorded in the footnotes, in the same order in which they appear in both the translated text and the content here, in the following format: Mingana/Palmer Q2:130, 285.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., 569-570. Mingana/Palmer Q3:57; 9:110; 112.

It is not until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> century, in the dispute of Leo III and 'Umar II that we have extant evidence of the charge of textual corruption laid against the Christians. 'Umar II is the first to accuse the Christians of ignoring Muhammad as the Paraclete in the Gospel and the camel rider in Isaiah 21. Timothy I faces the same accusations in his dialogue with al-Mahdī. Leo and Timothy both clarify that the Paraclete cannot have been Muhammad, as the Paraclete is both an etymologically distinct word from Muhammad, and the Paraclete is a Person of the Trinity.

The Christian Theodore Bar Koni employs Q5:46 to defend the Gospel and Torah, and the convert to Islam Ali al-Ṭabarī agrees, no one can change the words of God. Even the apologist, al-Layth, concedes that any Qur'anic accusation of corruption of the Bible refers to the meaning only and not to the text. Al-Qāsim and al-Jāḥiẓ too agree that the Torah and Gospel are uncorrupted texts, "their teachings were not upset or diminished or corrupted during the whole period from Jesus to the Prophet,"<sup>453</sup> though they are outdated in the era of the new Qur'an, and improperly interpreted by Christians.

Though most Islamic scholars may have in this period agreed that the charge of *tahrīf* was not rendered against the text but against its interpretation, the very discussion of a textual corruption charge led Christian scholars to reverse the accusation of *tahrīf* back onto the Qur'an. Leo III, al-Kindī, Abū Qurrah, al-Baṣrī, and the narrative of *The Affair of the Qur'an* all attest to the development of this counter-charge. However, as Clare Wilde has noted, "evidence of human tampering with the Qur'anic text did not necessarily invalidate all claims to a divine origin for the holy book of Islam," especially for Abū Qurrah who despite his criticisms counted it among the "books of God," when it was properly understood.<sup>454</sup>

As Wilde further expounds, while most Arabophone Christians wrote to expose the human element in the process of Qur'anic assembly, only the Christian Arabs it seems, notably al-Kindī, challenged the inimitability of the Qur'an itself. This was because their Arabness was at stake in their refutation of Islam, they had to explain how an Arab could not recognize the perfection of the Arabic language of the Qur'an.

Ammār al-Baṣrī was possibly the greatest of the defenders of the Christian scriptures against *tahrīf* during this period. He set out six criteria for the identification of revealed scripture, and measured the Gospel against these criteria. However, it is not his use of the Bible in his great defence that was innovative, but his use of the Qur'an against itself in his defence of the Gospel. Ammār showed that the text of the Qur'an was incongruous with that

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<sup>453</sup> Pellat and Jāḥiẓ, 45.

<sup>454</sup> See Wilde in Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 239.

of the Gospel, making no attempt at a Christian reading of the Qur'an. In defending the integrity of the Gospel, and then highlighting the incongruencies of the Qur'an with it, he essentially set out to prove that the Qur'an was indeed the corrupted Gospel that its followers read about therein.

The discussion on *tahrīf* appears to have begun slowly, only really gaining speed more than a century and a half after Muhammad's death. The charge appears to be based on the Christian denial of the prophethood of Muhammad. The end of this period left the Islamic charge against textual corruption of the Gospel and Torah finding opposition in a counter-charge of the textual corruption of the Qur'an.

## I.2.v Muhammad's Prophethood

### I.2.v.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

The *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* (c.13/634) is an anti-Jewish tract consisting of more than a hundred pages in Greek. Its brief mention of the Arabs represents hardly more than a footnote in such a massive tract, yet it is possibly the earliest known text which opines on the Arab prophet.<sup>455</sup> In terms of Christian-Muslim relations, it can be considered little more than the opportunistic dismissal of the prophet of the Saracens in order to bolster the position of Jesus in a tract intended to convert Jews to Christianity. The relevant section reads:

I, having arrived at Sykamina, stopped by a certain old man well-versed in scriptures, and I said to him: "What can you tell me about the prophet who has appeared with the Saracens?" He replied, groaning deeply: "He is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword. Truly they are works of anarchy being committed today and I fear that the first Christ to come, whom the Christians worship, was the one sent by God and we instead are preparing to receive the Antichrist. Indeed, Isaiah said that the Jews would retain a perverted and hardened heart until all the earth should be devastated. But you go, master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared." So I, Abraham, inquired and heard from those who had met him that there was no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only the shedding of men's blood.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>455</sup> The dating is from Hoyland, 58. For reference on this tract see Kaegi: 139, 141-142.; and, Peter W. van der Horst, "A Short Note on the *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*," *Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture* 6, no. 1 (2009). Speck suggested that the text's unity is questionable, and that it may not have been completed until as late as the 10<sup>th</sup> century. See Paul Speck, *Beitrage Zur Thema, Byzantinische Feindseligkeit Gegen Die Juden Im Fruhen Siebten Jahrhundert*, *Poikila Vyzantina* 15 (Bonn, Germany: R. Habelt, 1997), 267-439.; cf. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 117-119., Hoyland, 56-61.

<sup>456</sup> Hoyland, 57.

The prophet of the Saracens here is interpreted in the context of the Jewish messianic concept. The Jews heard rumours about an Arab prophet and are interpreting the military success of his followers as potential evidence that the unknown prophet is the Jewish Messiah. The Christian author of the tract dispels the rumour, and instead propagates the messiahship of Jesus to its Jewish audience. The tract is highly informative on Jewish-Christian relations, and is a very early mention of the prophet of the Saracens, but carries very little if any useful information on Christian-Muslim relations as the author himself has little if any direct experience with the Arabs.

The later *History of Sebeos* (Pre-41/661) is a more informative text.<sup>457</sup> *The History* states:

At that time a certain man from among those same sons of Ismael whose name was Mahmet, a merchant, as if by God's command appeared to them as a preacher [and] the path of truth. He taught them to recognize the God of Abraham, especially because he was learned and informed in the history of Moses. Now because the command was from on high, at a single order they all came together in unity of religion. Abandoning their vain cults, they turned to the living God who had appeared to their father Abraham ... [Muhammad] said: 'With an oath God promised this land to Abraham and his seed after him forever ... you are the sons of Abraham, and God is accomplishing his promise to Abraham and his seed for you. Love sincerely only the God of Abraham...'<sup>458</sup>

Here the teachings of Muhammad are affirmed as he is called a "preacher," "by God's command." Sebeos alludes to Muhammad's teaching to be the fulfillment of the Ishmael promises in the Genesis text (above). He certainly affirms that Muhammad represented the one God of Abraham, and led the Muslims in the "path of truth."

*The Chronicle of John bar Penkaye* (67/687) opines on Muhammad, whom John calls *mhaddyānā*. To Muhammad's teachings John attributes the Islamic honouring of Christianity, continuing that, "Also as a result of this man's guidance (*mhaddyānūtā*) they held to the

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<sup>457</sup> *The History of Heraclius* is commonly attributed to the Monophysite Armenian Bishop Sebeos. Hereafter: *The History*. The authorship is uncertain, but the content is clearly focused on the period 572-40/661, and written by a senior member of the Armenian Miaphysite clergy. As Hoyland has done and for ease of communication the author is herein referred to as Sebeos, though it is conceded that the authorship is unconfirmed. See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 139-144.; Hoyland, 124-132. An English translation and commentary can be found in Robert William Thomson, James Howard-Johnston, and Tim Greenwood, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos: Vols. 1-2*, Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 31 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

<sup>458</sup> Thomson, Howard-Johnston, and Greenwood, 95-96. In *The History* following this quote, Sebeos refers to Genesis 25:13-18, and Numbers 31:4-5 to support his position.

worship of the One God.”<sup>459</sup> This is again very affirmative language, though it notably avoids the title “prophet.”

In *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* (c.101/720), the monk attributes Muhammad’s monotheism to the influence of one Sargis Bahīrā,<sup>460</sup> a character which will be dealt with in greater detail below, but receives its first non-Islamic mention here. The monk describes Muhammad as, “a wise and God-fearing man who freed [the Arabs] from idolatry and brought [them] to know the one true God.”<sup>461</sup>

*The Addendum to the Chronicle of 640* (w.c.105/724), also known as *The Chronicle of Thomas the Presbyter*, is a most informative text. What is of interest to us here is not the chronicle itself, but a later addition to it containing a list of Muslim rulers ending with Caliph Yazīd (d.105/724).<sup>462</sup> Penn indicates that it is a Syriac copy of an originally Arabic text. What is most compelling about this text is the section title: “A notice of the life of Muhammad, the *rasūl* of God.”<sup>463</sup> As Penn has shown, subsequent scribes made erasures to this title to re-render it as, “The notice that Muhammad (is) of God rejected,” on the manuscript.<sup>464</sup>

As Penn and others have already noted, what is stunning here is that a Christian scribe translated and recorded Muhammad as a “prophet of God” in this Syriac text subsequent to the first century of Islamic expansion. Penn notes that in spite of a reoccurring willingness to make serious changes to Syriac texts when the scribe’s views differed with those of the text’s author, “Syriac Christians did not take manuscript changes lightly.”<sup>465</sup> However, on a matter as serious as prophethood, a Syriac scribe would most likely have omitted the prophetic title were they to have in fact disagreed with it, as evinced in the later erasures.<sup>466</sup> Why then was Muhammad’s prophethood not controversial for the Syriac scribe in c.105/724 and yet controversial enough to warrant edits to the text subsequently?

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<sup>459</sup> S. P. Brock, “North Mesopotamia in the Late Seventh Century: Book Xv of John Bar Penkaye's *Ris Melle*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 9, no. (1987): 61.

<sup>460</sup> Hoyland, 479.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 468.

<sup>462</sup> The added chronicle of Muslim rulers is most likely to have been written shortly after Yazīd’s death in 105/724 and certainly before the death of Hisham (d.125/743). An English rendering of the addendum is in *ibid.*, 395-396.

<sup>463</sup> Michael Philip Penn, “Monks, Manuscripts, and Muslims: Syriac Textual Changes in Reaction to the Rise of Islam,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12, no. 2 (2009): 241. See p. 241, n.21 for a discussion on the rendering of *rasūl* in this title.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>466</sup> Penn has noted that Syriac scribes wrote upside-down the names of Christians they believed to be heretical in texts they were copying. They also inserted, removed, and changed words in copies of the Bible whose rendering they disagreed with, erased large sections of texts pertaining to other branches of Christianity than their own, and renamed “wicked” the “Holy Council of Chalcedon,” and even “despised” its “illustrious” participants. Certainly the title of ‘prophet’ to the leader of another religion would be easily discarded in the Christian Syriac rendering of an Arabic text were the scribe to believe the title inappropriate. See *ibid.*, 237-239.

As shown in the above development of Christian theology of Islam, it is possible, even likely, that Muhammad had not in phase 1 been considered a false prophet by Christians, at least not in any intelligent way besides having earned the title “the beast” from John of Nikiu in c.80/700.<sup>467</sup> In addition, although there was considerable distaste for the methodology of Islamic expansionism, this distaste seems not yet to have been applied to either the person of Muhammad or the religion of Islam in any concentrated way. The available sources seem to indicate that Christian commentators up to this point in history are not any more inclusive or exclusive of Islam than they are of other branches of Christianity to their own. Therefore it may be argued that not only did Christians until this point view Islam as a new Christology and not a separate religion, but they recognized a distinction between the teachings of Muhammad and the behaviours of his followers to the degree that Muhammad himself may have been considered a prophet from a Christian perspective, as in the later testimony of Timothy I in 164/781 (below). The scribe of *The Addendum to the Chronicle of 640* therefore possibly records Muhammad as a prophet in this text simply because Muhammad’s prophethood had not yet been challenged by Christian theologians.

The Christian theology of Islam seems to change dramatically with the subsequent work of John of Damascus (below). As John of Damascus’ work to our knowledge was rapidly disseminated, widely accepted, and the first to concretely challenge Muhammad’s prophethood, it is very likely that the addendum to *The Chronicle of 640* was written prior to *De Haeresibus* in 115/734. Subsequent to John’s writings, Muhammad would be commonly (though not universally) described as a false prophet by Christians, explaining the subsequent erasures in the above mentioned sub-title in *The Chronicle of 640* at the hands of its future Syriac scribes. The power and intensity of John’s work appears to have shifted the gears of the preceding Christological debate within Christian-Muslim relations, to that of a true inter-faith dialogue between the religions of Christianity and Islam.

### 1.2.v.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

John of Damascus designates to Muhammad the title of ‘false prophet,’ and suggests that Muhammad knew Christian doctrine through direct contact with the Old and New

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<sup>467</sup> John equated the violence of the expansionism of Islam with the teachings of Muhammad. It seems from the text that John did not have an understanding of Muhammad’s teachings, and was left to interpret them through the violence of his followers. This and the casual dismissal of Muhammad’s prophetic status in the *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati* seem the only real rejections of the prophethood of Muhammad by Christians, and these two authors seem among our sources the least exposed to the teachings of Islam, rendering their judgments solely based on the behaviours of the Muslims. The quote is in John of Nikiu and Charles, 201.

Testaments, and through the influence of an un-named Arian monk.<sup>468</sup> The Qur'an is to John a fabrication of Muhammad, and composed of "ludicrous doctrines."<sup>469</sup>

In *The Chronicle of 741*, only seven years after *De haeresibus*, the author's description of Muhammad is interesting. Muhammad is described as the leader of the Saracens, of noble birth, and as one who can see the future. The author seems to have an empathetic view of the Muslim prophet, writing that, "[it is] he whom they hold in such great honour and reverence that they affirm him to be the apostle and prophet of God in all their oaths and writings."<sup>470</sup> The author makes no corrections or other personal comments of any other kind regarding the character of Muhammad.

In *On the Unified Trinity* (137/755), the Christian author reverses a Qur'anic phrase which refers to Muhammad, "mercy and guidance," to read "guidance and mercy," in reference to Jesus, creating a curious parallel between Jesus and Muhammad. This phrase refers three times to Moses, and ten times to Muhammad in the Qur'an.<sup>471</sup>

Surah 5:47 was mentioned above as a possible link to the context of *The Disputation of John and the Emir*. Ibn' Abbās interprets this verse in reference to the content of the Gospel on the identity of Muhammad, and the punishment of stoning. Regarding the mention of Muhammad in the Christian scriptures as told in Q7:157, 61:6, Ibn' Abbās makes no debate on the matter. It seems the verses are self-evident, and no references are given to the Gospel verses in question.<sup>472</sup>

In the discussion between 'Umar II and Leo III, Leo addresses the accusation of the falsified Paraclete directly, on etymological grounds.<sup>473</sup> He states the proper translation of the Greek word Paraclete (*paraklétos*, meaning advocate or counsellor) as "consoler" and contrasts this to "Muhammad," meaning "to give thanks" or "to render grace."<sup>474</sup> Later, Leo addresses the prophecy of Isaiah 21:6-7, which Muslims have also interpreted as a reference

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<sup>468</sup> The Arian monk may have been a reference to the story of Bahīrā (below).

<sup>469</sup> Hoyland, 486.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid., 617.

<sup>471</sup> Q6:154; 7:154; 28:43 (Moses), and Q6:157; 7:52; 7:203; 10:57; 12:111; 16:64; 16:89; 27:77; 31:3; 45:20 (Muhammad); see Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 75-76.

<sup>472</sup> This commentary was compiled sometime after *The Disputation between John and the Emir*. Muhammad's qualities and the instructions on stoning in the Gospel seem intended by Ibn' Abbās to be the criteria by which Christians are measured as "lawbreakers."

<sup>473</sup> The Greek word appears five times in the New Testament: John 14:6, 26; 15:26; 16:7; and 1 John 2:1. Paraclete was interestingly transliterated rather than translated in the Arabic *On the Unified Trinity* (above), in which the word appears *al-baraqīlīt* (البرقيليت). This may indicate that confusion concerning the term's meaning in Arabic had already begun by that time. See Samir and Nielsen, *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period, 750-1258*, 98. The Greek word *paraklétos* (advocate or counsellor) would be mistaken by Muslims for *periklutos* ("praised one") in later dialogue, furthering the charge of textual corruption.

<sup>474</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III," 293.



to Muhammad. Again, Muhammad is understood to be the prophet riding on the camel, and Jesus, the prophet riding on the donkey. Leo dismisses the interpretation casually, believing the two riders to be the same man in the text.<sup>475</sup>

In 164/781 Caliph al-Mahdī asks Timothy I about the corruption of the Gospel, again centering his argument around the Biblical concept of the Paraclete as a prophecy of Muhammad in the Gospels, revealed in Q7:157 and 61:6.<sup>476</sup> To this Timothy replies, “If Muhammad were the Paraclete, since the Paraclete is the Spirit of God, Muhammad would therefore be the Spirit of God ... the Paraclete searches the deep things of God, but Muhammad owns that he does not know what might befall him and those who accept him.”<sup>477</sup>

As this is the second known reference to Muhammad as the Paraclete in Christian-Muslim dialogue, and Timothy’s view of Muhammad is most inclusive, it is fitting to address this here.<sup>478</sup> The Qur’an says:

Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be **Ahmad**.’ Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obviously sorcery.’

وَأِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ  
وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدُ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ

Q61:6, emphasis mine

Ibn’Abbās on Q7:157 makes no mention of the Paraclete. He says simply that Muhammad’s traits and description will be found in the Torah and the Gospel. Q61:6 mentions Muhammad’s name, but gives no further context. To Ibn’Abbās, the name of Muhammad is spoken by Jesus, but the reference in the Gospel seems unknown. The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is silent on an interpretation of either verse. The *Sīra* quotes John 15:23-27, using the word *munahḥamannā* (المنحمنًا) in place of Paraclete in the verse, but makes no mention of Q61:6. The *Sīra* also provides the translations *muḥammad* (محمد) given for Syriac, and *baraqlīṭas* (البرقليطس) for Greek.<sup>479</sup> Parrinder comments on the *Sīra* that firstly,

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., 327-328.

<sup>476</sup> Newman, 190.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 192. The reply includes allusions to Q6:50; 7:188; 11:33.

<sup>478</sup> This argument has proved persistent, revived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century David B. Keldani (a.k.a. Abū al-Ahad Dawūd) in his work *Abd al-Ahad Dawud, Muhammad in the Bible* (London: Al-Kitab, 1991), originally published in 1928.

<sup>479</sup> Of the quotation of John in the *Sīra* Guillaume notes that it is derived from the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary, and not from the original Bible of the Syriac churches. The *munahḥamannā* in Syriac meant ‘life-giver,’ specifically one who could raise the dead, a clearly different meaning than that expected here. See Ibn Ishāq, 103-104., esp. p. 104, n. 1.; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 169. The Syriac Bible used the word *paraqlēto*’ and Arabic Bibles have rendered it *fāraqīṭ*; Parrinder, 98. In an eighth or ninth century collection of Pauline Epistles in Arabic, 1 John 2:1 renders the term *al-baraqlīṭ* (البرقليط). See

...there is no mention of a name Ahmed in this passage. Secondly, neither Ibn Ishāq nor Ibn Hishām, who edited and enlarged the Life later, make any reference to sura 61 ... The implication is that neither Ibn Hishām nor his predecessor knew anything about the surmised reading Aḥmad. Their concern was not for any similarity in name.<sup>480</sup>

Parrinder's observation seems exaggerated. Though it is true that there is no reference in the *Sīra* here to Q61:6, the concern for similarity in name is rather clear. The translations given in Syriac and Greek are followed in the *Sīra* by the blessing *صلى الله عليه و على آله و سلم* (*ṣallā Allahu 'alā'hi wa 'lā ālihi wa sallam*), an Islamic benediction reserved for Muhammad himself. It is clear that Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām, with or without reference to Q61:6 saw this quote in John as a direct reference to Muhammad by name. If this is true then we have a name (Muhammad) along with Q61:6, but without a reference to John in Ibn' Abbās , and a name (i.e. Paraclete = Muhammad) along with a reference to John but without a connection to Q61:6 in the *Sīra*. The connection between Q61:6 and John 15 appears more implied than overt before the debate between Timothy and al-Mahdī.

W. Montgomery Watt notes that the interpretation of *aḥmad* in Q61:6 was not considered to have been reference to a proper name until the equation between Paraclete and Muhammad was made in the late-2<sup>nd</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> century. He makes this observation with the concession that the proper name Aḥmad was in fact in use (though rare) in pre-Islamic times.<sup>481</sup> According to Parrinder, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* reports that, "it has been concluded that the word aḥmad in Qur'an 61:6 is to be taken not as a proper name but as an adjective ... and that it was understood as a proper name only after Muhammad had been identified with the Paraclete."<sup>482</sup> This finding is upheld in the recent Qur'anic translation of The Monotheist Group which renders the phrase, "a messenger to come after me whose name will be 'most acclaimed'."<sup>483</sup>

Even though Timothy denies the possibility that Muhammad should be equated with the Paraclete, he nevertheless says of him, "Muhammad is worthy of praise by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign. He walked in the path of the prophets and trod in the track of the

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Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles : From an Eighth or Ninth Century Ms. In the Convent of St. Catharine on Mount Sinai : With a Treatise, on the Triune Nature of God, with Translation, from the Same Codex*, 63. Of this quotation from the *Sīra*, one helpful observation remains. The *Sīra* uses the Greek *parakletos*, not *periklutos*. Some theories have circulated about the word *periklutos* having been changed in the Bible to *parakletos* to avoid the associated meaning and its clear translation into Arabic as Aḥmad. Evidently, Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām were not concerned with the integrity of the text of John that they were working with. This will be addressed in greater detail below.

<sup>480</sup> Parrinder, 97.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>482</sup> The quote comes from *ibid.*, 99. See entry Aḥmad in Gibb and others.

<sup>483</sup> The Monotheist Group, 371. Of the thirty-five English translations that this author reviewed, only three translated the Arabic adjective into an English adjective rather than a proper noun. The other two are Pickthall who renders *aḥmadu* as 'The Praised One', and the Progressive Muslim Translation which renders the word 'acclaimed'. This illustrates how pervasive the interpretation is in recent times.

lovers of God.” Timothy provides evidence in Muhammad’s good works, his preaching of the unity of God, his separation from cults and polytheism, and, “Muhammad taught about God, His Word and His Spirit, and since all the prophets had prophesied about God, His Word and His Spirit, Muhammad therefore walked, in the path of all the prophets.”<sup>484</sup> Timothy does not stop there, praising Muhammad’s leadership even in war,

Who will not praise, honor and exalt the one who not only fought for God in words, but showed also his zeal for Him in the sword? As Moses did with the children of Israel ... so also Muhammad evinced as ardent zeal towards God and loved and honoured Him more than his own soul, his people and his relatives ... those who worshipped idols and not God, he fought and opposed and showed to them the torments of hell and of the fire...<sup>485</sup>

...And what Abraham, that friend and beloved of God, did in turning his face from idols and from his kinsmen and looking only towards the one God and becoming the preacher of the one God to other peoples, this also Muhammad did ... because of this God honored him exceedingly and brought low before his feet two powerful kingdoms which roared in the world like a lion ... the kingdom of Persia and that of the Romans... Who will not praise, O our victorious King, the one whom God has praised, and will not weave a crown of glory and majesty to the one whom God has glorified and exalted? These and similar things I and all God-lovers utter about Muhammad, O my Sovereign.<sup>486</sup>

The dialogue continues:

Caliph: You should, therefore, accept the words of the Prophet.

Timothy: Which words of his, our victorious King, believes that I must accept?

Caliph: That God is one and that there is no other besides Him.

Timothy: This believe [sic] in one God, O my Sovereign, I have learned from the Torah, from the prophets and from the Gospel. I stand by it and shall die in it.

Caliph: You believe in one God, as you said, but one in three.

Timothy: I do not deny that I believe in one God in three and three in one, but not in three different Godheads, however, but in the persons of God’s Word and His Spirit. I believe that these three constitute one God, not in their person, but in their nature.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> Newman, 218.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>487</sup> This dialogue is extracted from the text. It continues in a long discussion on the Trinity. Ibid., 219.

In this we can see the crux of the interfaith debate in the two major issues at hand, the prophethood of Muhammad and trinitarian monotheism. If al-Mahdī had been aware of the likelihood of the Qur'anic context of Q4:171 and 5:73 having been specific references to Philoponian Monophysites, and not to the other Christians that Muhammad had contact with prior to the Najrānians, then this debate may have been settled here, as Timothy seems to have conceded the prophethood of Muhammad,<sup>488</sup> and therefore implicitly stated the *shahāda*, though the Caliph did not receive it thus.

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<sup>488</sup> Samir disagrees with this interpretation, helpfully providing nine categories for the interpretation of Timothy's rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad. See Samir in Thomas, *Syrian Christians under Islam : The First Thousand Years*, 91-104. Samir's position is respectable, but speculative. It is not intended here to debate fully the arguments, rather only to honour Samir by presenting possibilities for interpretation that he may not have considered. Here there is only space for a short response on the nine categories, following Samir's outline: 1) The textual problem mentioned does not address Timothy's stance on Muhammad. 2) It can just as easily be said that to walk in the path of the prophets is to be a prophet. Timothy is shrewd, and his shrewdness he displayed in his concession of Muhammad's prophethood in a way that those within his church later reading the account could deny that he had done so overtly should they wish. If he had wished to deny Muhammad's prophethood, certainly the Patriarch would have done so most forcefully, or even recorded the conversation differently. Timothy's ambiguity should be considered ecumenical. It is known that Timothy I did not live in fear of the Caliphate. 3) Timothy's comparison of Muhammad with Abraham and Moses is not necessarily a rejection of prophethood. Timothy's exclusion of anything from these equations with Abraham and Moses which he thinks is dissimilar is for the sake of prudence. It is more likely that in the presence of the King of the Muslims that he has excluded certain details (i.e. Abraham's relationship with his wife's slave, or Moses' act of murder), simply because these kinds of equations are unflattering to prophets in general. 4) Samir writes, "when the question is clearly asked [concerning Muhammad's prophethood] he refuses to answer it positively ... He is quoting certain aspects of the Muhammad's life which are similar to those of the prophets, and is not quoting others when he thinks they are not similar" (p. 96). Again, it is perhaps appropriate to compare Muhammad's several wives to Solomon's several hundred, or Muhammad's battles to the genocide led by Joshua, but it is not appropriate to do so in the audience of a King. Furthermore, in Timothy's own words: God honoured, God glorified, and God praised Muhammad. God extended the power of Muhammad's authority. This cannot be said to be mere flattery from the mouth of the Nestorian Patriarch. Timothy had a strong relationship with the Caliphate, and had no need for flattery to accomplish his ecclesiastical goals. 5) Timothy certainly knows that a lack of prophecy from the Torah and the Gospels is not reason enough to deny the prophethood of prophets, as not all of the prophets were themselves prophesied (Jonah, for example). This is possibly why Timothy answers the question of prophethood with scripture, he expounds with what he does know, and does not here add scripture where there is none available which predict Muhammad. It is notable that on the issue of Muhammad's prophethood, Timothy changes his language, speaking at times on his own behalf: "I have not received a single testimony from the Gospel about him," and at other times, on behalf of his Christian community, "we have not accepted Muhammad because we have not a single testimony about him in our Books." When Timothy speaks on behalf of his community, a rejection of Muhammad's prophetic office is appropriate based on the evidence, but when he speaks on his own behalf, it is not, based on the same evidence. In any case, one may note his tone more inclusive when using first person singular and more exclusive when speaking in first person plural. It may be that Timothy explores the prophethood of Muhammad to a greater degree personally that he does as a representative of his community. Mingana, 39. Thus when the Caliph challenges him directly: "If you accepted Muhammad as a prophet your words would be beautiful and your meanings fine." Timothy replies, "We find that there is only one prophet who would come to the world after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven and His descent from heaven. This we know from the prophet Malachi and from the angel Gabriel when he announced the birth of John to Zechariah." Emphasis mine. *Ibid.*, 54. He was speaking of Elijah, and here evinces his community's acceptance of the possibility of prophethood after Christ, notwithstanding their reservations concerning Muhammad. Further, he dismisses the equation of Muhammad with the Paraclete as he would the equation of any prophet other than Jesus with the Paraclete. 6) Timothy says, "after the Christ there was no prophecy, nor did any prophet arise" (p. 99), which he bases on Matthew 11:13. Yet even as Samir notes, toward the end of the debate Timothy corrects his meaning and concedes that even the Bible predicts the return of Elijah. Timothy says, "Both messengers John the Baptist and Elijah are from one power of the Spirit" (p. 101) which as Timothy interprets is the Spirit of God to which he refers when quoting Q4:171 when presenting his Qur'anic trinitarianism. Could he have not considered the Spirit of God in the "divinely inspired" words of the "sacred" Qur'an to be the same Spirit that he applies to John and Elijah, thus through the Spirit of God which in the future would bring Elijah, other 'divinely inspired' prophets could come? Certainly this is a possibility. It must be conceded that Timothy's presentation of the

It is reasonable to infer that Timothy cautiously concedes the prophethood of Muhammad and divine inspiration within the Qur'an, and founds his concessions on an understanding of trinitarian monotheism as an acceptable Qur'anic doctrine. Any hesitation apparent in Timothy's concession is based on two things: 1) the contingency that his recognition of Muhammad as prophet be attached to his trinitarian interpretation of the Qur'an, and; 2) his representation of a faith community that will no doubt appreciate enough ambiguity that they would be able to deny him having made the concession.

The Caliph is influenced by the interpretations of his Muslim predecessors of the Qur'an's opposition to any notion of plurality within God, and not swayed by Timothy's presentation, and so the opportunity for congruence here passes. It is interesting to note here how close the two men's theologies came to each other, perhaps due to their personal relationship.<sup>489</sup>

Samir highlights the two references that Theodore Bar Koni (176/792) makes to Muhammad. In one instance, Theodore questions Muhammad's teaching on baptism. He accuses Muhammad of teaching a doctrine against that of Jesus, and thus Muhammad is a false prophet.

Theodore means that Christ delivered authentic teaching from God, so if what Muhammad proclaimed is also authentic the earlier revelation to the Christians must have disappeared and only reappeared six hundred

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possibility of prophethood after Christ is somewhat contradictory in the debate. 7) Timothy quotes Mark 13:21-23 (cf. Matthew 24:23-25), and Samir is right to interpret this verse as denying the future of any Christ. However, carefully read, this text does not deny the possibility of future prophets. Jesus taught his disciples to recognize false prophets (Matthew 7:15; 24:11), but he did not say that there would be no further prophets. In fact, Paul the Apostle clarified this ambiguity by determining that there would most certainly be prophets in the future both true and false (1 Corinthians 14:32, 37), as did John (1 John 4:1). Presumably Timothy knew this, and that the objections that he raised from Daniel and Ezekiel too refer to Christ and not to prophethood in general. Timothy certainly presses the Caliph to prove Muhammad's prophethood, and outlines his community's objections, but that does not preclude that Timothy himself has not crossed the line of acceptance in spite of continuing concerns. 8) Christ's position as the climax of human history is not challenged by the Qur'an or Muhammad's prophethood, as Muhammad did not claim himself to be the Messiah (thus also separating him from Timothy's reference to false Christs in Mark 13:21-23). Christians today still look backward to Christ as the pinnacle of humanity, chronology is not a factor in this. Timothy defined this distinction numerous times in his treatment of the differences between the roles of Muhammad as prophet, and Jesus as Christ, Word and Spirit of God. 9) When asked which religion is true, Timothy replied that the true religion, "is the one whose laws and commandments are similar to God's doings in the creation," (p. 104) after which Timothy defined no religion, not even his Nestorian orthodoxy, which earned the admiration of the Caliph. The Biblical references which follow are inserted by the scribe, and were apparently absent from the conversation.

<sup>489</sup> Timothy notes of the Caliph in his own words, "He is a lovable man, and loves also learning when he finds it in other people ... he began to address me and converse with me not in a harsh and haughty tone, since harshness and haughtiness are remote from his soul, but in a sweet and benevolent way." Mingana, 60.

Rendel Harris noted too, that what we notice of the closeness between Mahdī and Timothy in the dialogue is, "not merely an artificial approximation, caused on the one hand by the courtesy and grace of a prince, who has the very life of his opponent contingent upon a word that he might say, but is too good a Moslem to say, and on the other hand evoked by the courage of the Patriarch, and the clearness of his utterance. The two are at one in a number of fundamental points, and this underlying unity so well expressed and so generously admitted on both sides, is what gives the document something more than a passing value." *Ibid.*, 6.

years later. Since such an idea was implausible, what Muhammad says about baptism must be wrong, with the consequence that the message of Muhammad could not have been from God.<sup>490</sup>

The second reference is to Muhammad being influenced by a Christian (an allusion to Sergius Baḥīrā), a story which will be discussed in greater detail below. Theodore refers to Muslims by the term *hanpe*, which in Syriac is used to mean “pagans,” but carries an etymological relationship to the Arabic *hanīf*.<sup>491</sup> Thus the term carried a double entendre which allowed its use by Syriac writers as a particular kind of insult to Muslims.

Muhammad b. al-Layth defends Muhammad’s prophethood with reference to miracles. This may have been a direct response to Timothy I’s earlier observation to Caliph al-Madhī that Muhammad did not perform miracles.<sup>492</sup>

There are certainly mixed reviews on the prophethood of Muhammad in this phase. Though John of Damascus’ *pseudoprophetus* influenced the Nestorian Theodore Bar Koni, it had no effect at all on the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I just nine years earlier. The prediction of Muhammad as the Paraclete of the New Testament is by now a major point of departure between Christians and Muslims, and was the innovation of the voice given to ‘Umar II in his dialogue with Leo III, a century and a half after Muhammad’s death and sometime after the publication of several early works of *tafsīr*. Yet Muslims themselves do not agree on the textual emendation of the Bible in the charge of *tahrīf*, as al-Layth defends the accuracy of the Bible on behalf of Caliph Hārūn.

### 1.2.v.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

Theodore Abū Qurrah, in his *Refutation of the Saracens*,<sup>493</sup> is heavily critical of Muhammad whom he calls, “the insane false prophet of the Agarenes.”<sup>494</sup> He accuses Muhammad of being a liar, and demon possessed. He refers specifically to the story of the forgiveness of Aisha during which Theodore sees it clear that Muhammad’s revelatory ‘trance’ was demonic possession.

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<sup>490</sup> See Samir in Thomas, *Syrian Christians under Islam : The First Thousand Years*, 76.; cf. Griffith, “Chapter Ten of the Scholion: Theodore Bar Koni’s Apology for Christianity,” 172.

<sup>491</sup> Q3:67 relates *hanīf* to Muslim.

<sup>492</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 351.

<sup>493</sup> This is from a Greek text. The full title of the text is *The Refutation of the Saracens by Bishop Theodore of Harrān, called Abū Qurrah, as Reported by John the Deacon*. It is supposed that this is a compilation made by John the Deacon, who had direct access to Theodore’s materials. See *ibid.*, 474.; cf. Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 218-227.

<sup>494</sup> Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 224.

*The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem* at about the same time takes a softer position. The author remarks that, “a prophet has really brought [the Qur’an],”<sup>495</sup> which was corrupted by ‘Uthman later. It is the absence of Muhammad in the Christian scriptures that cause Christians to deny him.<sup>496</sup> And yet Muhammad had position in God’s plan. The Christian in the dialogue finally denies that the Qur’an is revelation and Muhammad God’s genuine prophet, “rather he is only an angel, in whom God found pleasure, and fulfilled His promise through him which (promise) He had given Abraham concerning Ishmael.”<sup>497</sup> Thus Muhammad is a tool in the hand of God for the fulfillment of the Hagarene promises in Genesis.

It may be inferred that the tone of the Christian treatment of Muhammad solidifies sharply in phase 2, beginning with Theodore siding with John of Damascus rather than Timothy I, though one major attempt to affirm Muhammad’s prophethood from a Christian perspective is made in phase 3, with *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīra*.

*The Legend of Sergius Baḥīra* in the early 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century could be called a benchmark for dialogue on Muhammad’s prophethood. The legend is a back projection of the historical events of the early history of Islam, through a Christian apocalyptic lens, with the story of Baḥīra the monk woven in.<sup>498</sup> What is interesting about this piece is its novel attempt to explain the rise of Islam from a Christian perspective, even at this late date and by Christians under Islamic rule. It is an, “artfully conceived exercise in apocalypse and apologetic, carefully plotted and well-articulated.”<sup>499</sup> *The Legend of Baḥīrā* is derived from the content of Ibn Ishāq who tells of Muhammad’s visit to a Christian Monk in Bostra that identifies him as a prophet at the age of twelve,<sup>500</sup> which is then superimposed onto the history of the first seven Caliphs. Though the story is only highly developed in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, it was presumably known since

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<sup>495</sup> Newman, 293.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>498</sup> Hoyland, 270-276; 476-479.; Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 600-603. Hoyland dates the original text from the latter half of the reign of Ma’mūn (d.218/833), Hoyland, 276. There are three major versions of this legend. The East and West Syriac versions disagree on whether Baḥīra was Nestorian or Jacobite, but they both focus heavily on the apocalyptic interpretation of Islam and the prophecies concerning its political end. These are focused on a Christian audience. The Arabic version (which is itself in both a long and short version), retold for an Islamic audience, is less concerned with Baḥīrā’s Christology and the apocalypse, concentrating mostly on the Christian core of Islam and Baḥīrā’s influence on its foundation. On the development of the text see, “Muhammad and the Monk Baḥīra: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times” in Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, VII, 146-160. An English translation of all of the texts can be found in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*.

<sup>499</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, VII, 151.

<sup>500</sup> Ibn Ishāq, 79-81. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 136ff.; cf. Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh Al-Ṭabarī (Tarīkh Al-Umum Wa Al-Mulūk)*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Hayyah, 2008), Vol. 2, p.177ff., cf. Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 124-130.

John of Damascus referred to the unknown Arian monk.<sup>501</sup> The story of Baḥīrā from Ibn Ishāq is retold thus in *The Legend of Baḥīrā*:

And one day, I was standing at the well ... when I saw them approaching towards me. And with them was an eloquent, astute young man with a sharp tongue, who behaved like a leader. He was bright, well mannered, and quick witted, and he had command over the camel drivers, and the tradesmen obeyed him as well. And I said to myself, while asking my Lord for guidance and protection: 'This man is bound to become the head of the Sons of Ishmael. He will become their king and he will have the power, because he is a young man perfectly fit for leadership. He is respected and has authority.' I said to him: 'Young man, what is your name?' And he said: 'Muhammad'.<sup>502</sup>

This legend expands on the Islamic story of the monk Baḥīrā by detailing the ongoing relationship between the monk and Muhammad. Baḥīrā is portrayed as a monk with good intentions to reach the Arabs through a child he believed to be a prophet. He is an outcast who fled to Mecca from Syria later teaching Muhammad the Christian scriptures in exchange for Muhammad's pledge of respect for Christian clergy. Muhammad is concerned that he is illiterate, so Baḥīrā slowly composes for him a book called the *Furqān*.<sup>503</sup> He tells the young Muhammad to visit him at night, and to tell his followers that the wisdom he receives from the monk came from the angel Gabriel. In this way, the legend alleges that the Qur'an was in large part crafted by Baḥīrā through Muhammad.

The differences between the Bible and Baḥīrā's *Furqān* are explained differently in the Syriac and Arabic recensions. In Syriac, a Jew named Ka' b al-Aḥbār later influences Muhammad and changes the teachings of Baḥīrā, including, "changing the identity of the Paraclete from Christ to Muhammad."<sup>504</sup> In Arabic, the Arabs are portrayed as so simple-minded that Baḥīrā has no choice but to make a number of compromises, ending with Baḥīrā weeping in regret for his actions. The Arabic text is clear that Islam is to be understood as preordained by God, though it challenges the divine revelation of the Qur'an by suggesting that the material therein was in large part given to Muhammad by Baḥīrā.

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<sup>501</sup> As Hoyland noted, Theophanes (d.818) mentions the influence of an outcast Monk on Muhammad. See Hoyland, 479. Before that *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* (c.101/720) mentions Sargis Baḥīrā as a monk who influenced Muhammad (above), and John of Damascus labels the monk Arian (above). It is clear that though possibly the first notable written version of the story originates here, rumours of it had been present for more than a century already.

<sup>502</sup> From the long Arabic recension in Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 449.

<sup>503</sup> In the Arabic recension. In Syriac it is called the *Qur'an* or simply *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. See Hoyland, 476-479.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 478. The Paraclete argument is addressed also in *The Religious Dialogue of Jerusalem*, though nothing innovative to the discussion is therein added. See Newman, 311-312.



The text affirms the divine origin of Islam as a temporary political kingdom, and an Arabicized (simplified) but, “misunderstood form of Christianity.”<sup>505</sup> It also notably upholds the status of Muhammad as a prophet. This is especially clear in the Arabic recension:

And on a certain day, while the teacher was outside his cell, he saw people from far away approaching the water well, and [Muhammad], still a small boy, was with them. And when [Baḥīrā] looked at him, he recognized him and he said to me: “A great and glorious person is with them. ... That one, who is approaching the well with the Ishmaelites, will acquire the standing of prophethood.”<sup>506</sup>

In the latter part of the text, in the context of Muhammad’s alleged rejection of the Trinity, Baḥīrā strips Muhammad of the prophetic title, citing Matthew 24:11.<sup>507</sup> A full study of the Syriac and Arabic texts is available now.<sup>508</sup> Barbara Roggema has also produced a paper ideal for insertion into this place in the study, focusing on the use of the Qur’an in the long Arabic recension.<sup>509</sup> Only a few key items will be highlighted here.

In case other Christian meanings need clarification after he is gone, Baḥīrā also includes along with Q5:82, 10:94, “So if you [Prophet] are in doubt about what We have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you. The Truth has come to you from your Lord, so be in no doubt and do not deny God’s signs.”<sup>510</sup>

A rather strange interpretation of Q43:81 is presented in this story. The surah reads, “Say [Prophet], ‘If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring I would be the first to worship [them]” (قُلْ إِنْ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَلَدٌ فَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْعَابِدِينَ). *The Legend* here tells that Muhammad wanted to say ‘first of the deniers’ in place of the end. Baḥīrā clarifies the surah again to him. This small exchange comes from the challenge of Islamic exegetes to deal with the verse. Some, such as Abū Ubayda in the *Kitāb al-Majāz* even suggest emendations to the Qur’an to deal with it.<sup>511</sup> The Christian writer of *The Legend* is here holding the *mufassirūn* to their text.

Surah 112 is given by Baḥīrā in a moment of hopelessness, and God is “*al-ṣamad*” due to the Arabs continuously returning to their idolatry. *Al-ṣamad* in Baḥīrā’s interpretation

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<sup>505</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic : Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, VII, 148.

<sup>506</sup> From the short Arabic recension. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 393.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>509</sup> The reader is directed there, however, a few findings from that study will be highlighted here to ease the flow of information for the reader. Barbara Roggema, “A Christian Reading of the Qur’an: The Legend of Sergius-Bahira and its Use of Qur’an and Sira,” in *Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>510</sup> Cf. Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam*, 469.

<sup>511</sup> Roggema, “A Christian Reading of the Qur’an: The Legend of Sergius-Bahira and its Use of Qur’an and Sira,” 60.

means 'massive' and 'lifeless,' like a stone, though in reality the word is nearly impossible to translate. Ibn' Abbās gives the term five definitions, *Tafsīr al-Ṭustarī* gives two totally different definitions, and the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* simply ignores it.

Having assimilated the Islamic story of Baḥīra into a manufactured Christian history of Islam, affirming Islam's divine origin, and working toward Qur'anic understanding based on a reinterpretation of history and scripture, it may be said that there are two interpretations of this legend in Christian-Muslim dialogue. At its best it sits as a creative work of hope for both the failure of Islamic politics, and the ecumenism of the Islamic and Christian religions, at the ecumenical end of the spectrum: a story intended to present the possibility of Christian-Qur'anic congruence. At its worst it represents a diabolical polemic, a story fabricated to confuse the Muslim into believing an untrue history of the events which brought into existence their own scripture.

*The Apology of al-Kindi* (c.204/820) approaches the prophethood of Muhammad with Q93:6-7. He tells the story of Muhammad's humble beginnings and goes on to detail the life of Muhammad, drawing attention to unflattering tales, such as when 'Abdullah b. Rawha was sent by Muhammad to kill Usayr the Jew at Khaybar, and Muhammad's taking one fifth of the booty from the raids on the Quraysh during the sacred month.<sup>512</sup> He tells the tale of Zayd and Zaynab quoting Q33:37, and of Aisha and Safwan quoting Q24:11, and proceeds to list all of Muhammad's fifteen wives and two concubines (according to him).<sup>513</sup> He then quotes 1 Corinthians 7:32-33 to support that a man should have one wife, and Matthew 6:24 (out of context) to show that multiple wives are a divided loyalty.

Now if a man cannot serve one wife and please her without forgetting his Maker, how much less can he bend all his energies to please 15 wives and two concubines? Besides he was, as you know, absorbed in other pursuits; I mean the management of war, plans for taking the lives of his enemies, the capture of women, plunder of property and the dispatch of scouts. There were troops to be handled, roads [to be] infested and raiding parties [to be] sent out. Now, while he gave due attention to such constant claims, how could he find time to fast and pray, to collect his thoughts and turn himself to other matters which were involved in his sacred duties? Certainly we have here a novel and original conception of the prophetic office.<sup>514</sup>

He then uses Biblical examples of prophets to question Muhammad's ability to tell future events and perform miracles as proofs of his prophethood, quoting from Q17:61,<sup>515</sup> and distinguishes Muhammad's wars from those of Moses and Joshua on the basis of miracles. He

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<sup>512</sup> Newman, 430-431., cf. Q2:214.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 433-434.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid., 434-435.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid., 439.

quotes Matthew 11:13 and John 10:8, altering the former completely to show that Jesus claimed no prophets would follow him.<sup>516</sup> In support of the Biblical Jesus, al-Kindi then quotes Q5:50.<sup>517</sup>

The next section of *The Apology* addresses Islamic customs. He touches on circumcision (male and female), dietary restrictions, the pilgrimage and the kissing of the Black Stone. "Still more dreadful than this," al-Kindi continues, "is the custom that a woman when divorced, should have intercourse with another man who is known as her *mustaḥil*. He tastes her sweetness and thereafter she returns to her husband."<sup>518</sup>

Al-Kindi then responds to the invitation to convert.

Then you say, 'I summon you to the ways of God,' by which you mean raiding those who differ from you, smiting the idolaters with the edge of the sword and plundering them, till they accept the true religion and testify that there is no God but one and Muhammad is His Prophet ... do you not rather summon me to the ways of Satan? ... What are the ways of Satan if not slaughter, plunder and thieving?<sup>519</sup>

For al-Kindi then, Muhammad is a false prophet, a power hungry politician who fuelled his success by fear of religious punishment and promises of earthly riches. Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d.230/845) returns the dialogue to a less emotional tone, simply recasting what he knows to have been Muhammad's teachings:

As for Muhammad's conception of paradise, it is sensual and crude in the extreme. He envisages food and drink, copulation with glamorous courtesans, beds of gold to lie upon with mattresses of coral and of topaz, and rivers of milk and honey. They also maintain that there will be an end to torment. Their view is that every man suffers torments commensurate with the sins he has committed, then comes out of that Place into Paradise.

Muhammad emancipates the man and permits him to marry as many freeborn women as he wishes – and he is permitted as many concubines as he can cope with. He may divorce his wife by giving her a letter of annulment, just as in the Law of Moses. He also taught them to pray five times a day and he made it an absolute obligation to wash themselves before prayer. Thirty days of the year, constituting a special month called *Ramadān*, are set aside for fasting. They fast by day, but are permitted to eat all night. They practice circumcision of both males and the females of their own number. Their prostrations at prayer-time are

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<sup>516</sup> He says, "All the prophets prophesied till the time of My coming, and at My coming prophecy ceased, and no prophet shall arise after me. Those who come after me and claim to be prophets are thieves and robbers; ye shall not hear them." The actual Biblical text reads: "For before John came, all the prophets and the law of Moses looked forward to this present time" (Matt 11:13) and, "All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them" (John 10:8). Timothy I fell into a similar error as well, though he corrected it. *Ibid.*, 448.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 475., cf. Q2:230. This practice is still carried out today in some parts of the Arab world.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

directed to the south. A document was drawn up of which Muhammad said that a copy had been transferred onto his mind by God himself through the mediation of an angel and that he, Muhammad, had used his own language to render it comprehensible to human ears. This they call the Divine Book.<sup>520</sup>

For the most part, Dionysius refrains from personal commentary, though he reports that, “Muhammad, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar had lived in modesty and self-abasement, as a prophet ought to live.”<sup>521</sup> It is interesting that he contrasts the lifestyle of these men against the arrogant leadership of Uthman, as earlier he had reported on Uthman’s collection of the Qur’an.<sup>522</sup> He seems to have a completely different view of Muhammad than that of al-Kindi. Dionysius may be seen as largely apologetic, not conceding or altering any scripture for the sake of dialogue.

Ammār al-Baṣrī insists that the right religion is not only the one with the prophets of God, but accompanying miracles to prove their authority, returning the debate over Muhammad to the apparent absence of the miraculous. Noting miracles in prophets of other religions, he further clarifies that miracle performing prophets must further be judged as absent of: “the sword, bribes and cajolery, ethnocentricity (*al-aṣabiyyah*), personal preference (*al-istiḥsān*), and tribal cohesion (*at-tawāṭu*).”<sup>523</sup> He then presents Q17:59 and 6:109 as Qur’anic concessions that there were no miracles accompanying Muhammad, and contrasts the violence that accompanied Muhammad with the peaceful spread of Christianity.<sup>524</sup>

Surahs 61:6 and 7:157, regarding Muhammad’s place in the Bible, contentious verses in the Christian-Muslim dialogue by now, receive no comment in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭustarī (w.c.245/860). But perhaps this should not be surprising as Abū Isā al-Warrāq (d.c.250/864) too did not employ the Qur’an. Despite the length and impact of his refutation, remarkably few Qur’anic references can be found in it, as Abū Isā also challenged conventional Islamic thought on the nature of prophethood and of the Qur’an. Thomas notes that he proposed that miracles were not a sign of prophethood, as simple tricks could be interpreted by people as miracles. In Muhammad’s case, his apparent divine knowledge of the Jews’ not seeking his death (Q2:94ff) and his knowledge of Biblical stories as an illiterate man (Q29:48) could both be explained naturally. Thomas explains:

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<sup>520</sup> Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, 132-133.

<sup>521</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>523</sup> Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period*, 163.

<sup>524</sup> As Griffith also notes, this observation that no miracles accompanied Muhammad led to the development of the *ijāz al-Qur’an*, its literary form as a miracle. *Ibid.*, 165.

Most significantly, the inability of Muhammad's opponents to imitate the style of the Qur'an was not because of its miraculous origins but because they had different standards of literary style, or were too busy fighting him, or were not learned people, or even because Muhammad had special literary gifts, which were his by nature and not divinely endowed.<sup>525</sup>

And as if to underline this attitude, he argues that the Qur'an must be inconsistent if in one place it urges those who are unclear about the prophets before Muhammad to ask the People of the Reminder (Q16:43; 21:7), while in others it accuses these people of concealing the truth (Q3:71; 2:42), and also mockingly asks why, if it declares that the angels were with Muhammad at the victory of Badr (8:9 and 12), they were not present at the defeat of Uḥud.<sup>526</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ (d.255/869) presents that it is the Qur'an itself that is to be understood as Muhammad's prophetic miracle. He writes:

Since God did not create men in the image of Jesus, son of Mary, John, son of Zacharias, and Adam, father of humankind, but created them imperfect and unfit to provide for their own needs, ... He sent His messengers and set up His prophets against them, saying: 'That man should have no argument [with which to prevail] against God after [the coming of] the messengers.'<sup>527</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ quotes here from Q4:163-165. It is interesting that al-Jāḥiẓ in this list of three prophets, includes Jesus among the only other man who was born without an earthly father (Adam), and Jesus' prophetic forerunner, John. This seems clearly meant for a Christian readership, and to subtly instruct them not about who Muhammad is, but about who Jesus is not. His affirmation of Muhammad's prophethood appears later, the proof of which is the Qur'an, which could not be reproduced by anyone upon the challenge to do so (Q2:23).<sup>528</sup> It is thereby via the miracle of the Qur'an that Muhammad is to be recognized as a prophet.<sup>529</sup>

In *The Book of Religion and Empire*, the convert Ali al-Ṭabarī (d.c.246/860) outlines three main Christian objections to Muhammad's prophethood: 1) there are no prophecies of Muhammad in the previous books, 2) there are no miracles accorded Muhammad in the Qur'an, and 3) Jesus said that no prophets would come after him.<sup>530</sup> Again, 'Ali employs the authority of the Bible in defence of Muhammad and the Qur'an. The first charge is dismissed on the grounds that there were no prophecies concerning Moses, David, Isaiah or Jeremiah,

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<sup>525</sup> Abū 'Isā al-Warrāq and Thomas, *Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity : Abū 'Isā Al-Warrāq's 'against the Incarnation'*, 28.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 29. Thomas continues the discussion on Abū 'Isā's religious stance in the pages following. Though Thomas warns against labelling Abū 'Isā's doctrinal stance concretely, he does show that though not orthodox, he was a Muslim, perhaps closest to the *Rāfiqīs*.

<sup>527</sup> Pellat and Jāḥiẓ, 42.

<sup>528</sup> Cf. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, 65-69.

<sup>529</sup> Pellat and Jāḥiẓ, 44.

<sup>530</sup> Newman, 580.

thus no prophecies are necessary. The second is dismissed on the basis that miracles are neither accorded David in the Psalms, nor to Ezekiel, Hosea, Malachi, Haggai, or Nahum in their books. The third rejection is answered with references to the prophecies of Agabus in Acts 9:28, the five prophets of Antioch listed in Acts 13:31, Philip's four daughters (prophetesses) in Acts 21:9, and Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). The three main objections out of the way, 'Alī al-Ṭabarī's task is then to show that Muhammad was himself a prophet.<sup>531</sup> His demonstration is based on ten proofs concerning Muhammad, with a strong Qur'anic foundation:<sup>532</sup>

**1. He was one with the prophets in calling worship to one God.** To establish the character of God in the Qur'an with the God of Abraham Alī al-Ṭabarī quotes: Q112; 3:18, 26; 2:28; 41:46; 42:23; 99:7-8; 4:79; 2:286; 4:40; 11:101; 61:5; 63:3; 6:160; 3:25.<sup>533</sup>

**2. He was of moral character.** Alī al-Ṭabarī writes:

As to the dictations and prescriptions of his religion, they are: love of God the Most High; love of parents; strengthening of the ties of relationship; generosity with one's possessions; devotion to gratuitous benefactions; asceticism; fasting; prayer; general alms; legal alms; forgiveness of the culprit; fulfillment of engagements; avoidance of deceit and falsehood; getting rid of wrongs by the kindest way; prohibition of intoxication, immorality, adultery and usury; ordinances for spreading safety and justice; striking off the head of the recalcitrant unbelievers, and other points without which there is no firm religion and world.<sup>534</sup>

He follows with Qur'anic quotations: Q3:134; 2:274; 7:199-200; 31:18-19; 2:225; 10:49; 2:185; 33:35; 16:90; 68:10-13; 65:2; 3:135-136.<sup>535</sup> A number of *ḥadīths* are also quoted to support this proof.

He refers at one point to the Biblical injunction of *lex talionis*,<sup>536</sup> citing Q4:93 as a Qur'anic limitation to this. However, this seems forced as he is talking in terms of earthly punishment and the Qur'an discusses here eternal punishment.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 580-582.

<sup>532</sup> The list of the ten proofs is given succinctly in *ibid.*, 579. They are then subsequently elaborated on throughout the book. Here we will use the author's outline for the argument, citing the Qur'anic references and interpretations as they appear in the text. References directly quoted by the author will be listed in the content, references alluded to will appear in the footnotes. All will be listed in the order in which they appear in the text.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., 583-585. Mingana/Palmer Q112; 3:16, 25; 2:26; 41:46; 42:22; 99:7-8; 4:81; 2:286; 4:44; 10:103; 61:5; 63:3; 6:161; 3:24.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid., 585. Alphonse Mingana and 'Ali ibn Sahl Rabbān al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire. A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam* (Manchester, UK: University Press, 1922), 21. Here we see Alī al-Ṭabarī's view of the prophet in its precision. It is interesting that he does not seem to view 'striking off the head of the recalcitrant unbelievers' to be at odds with 'strengthening of the ties of relationship' or even 'forgiveness of the culprit'.

<sup>535</sup> Newman, 586-591. Mingana/Palmer Q3:128; 2:275; 7:198-199; 31:17-18; 2:225; 10:50; 2:181; 33:35; 16:92; 68:10-13; 65:2; 3:129-130.

3. **He performed miracles.** In this section the author refers to the Night Journey (Q17:1).<sup>538</sup> He also refers to a story of five polytheists who had mocked Muhammad. He cursed them and they all died except for one, who became blind and whose son died instead. The Qur'anic reference is in Q15:94-95.<sup>539</sup> The remainder of the citations for this proof come from the *ḥadīths*.

4. **He prophesied about events within his lifetime that he had no knowledge of.** The author quotes Q48:27.<sup>540</sup> He claims this prophecy concerning the entering of the Sacred Mosque was fulfilled before Muhammad died. One might be confused about which mosque the Qur'an refers to here. If it is the 'Sacred Mosque' of Jerusalem (cf.Q17:1), then this claim is untrue, as the Muslims did not enter Jerusalem until after Muhammad's death.<sup>541</sup> It may be that the author intends the Ka'ba in Mecca as the Sacred Mosque of Q48:27. The author continues, listing Q8:30; 33:9; 8:12; 59:11; and 9:14, claiming, without specific historical references to any event, that these had been fulfilled.<sup>542</sup>

5. **He prophesied about events which took place after his death.** Q94:1-4 is quoted as a prophecy of Muhammad's name being mentioned in Islamic worship practice.<sup>543</sup> Q110:1-3 and 24:55 are quoted as prophetic of the success of Islam in the world.<sup>544</sup> Q30:1-2 is quoted in reference to the Persian – Byzantine wars.<sup>545</sup> Q9:33 supports the supremacy of Islam

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<sup>536</sup> i.e. 'eye for an eye', see Exodus 21:2-25; Leviticus 24:19-21; Deuteronomy 19:21.

<sup>537</sup> Newman, 590. Furthermore, the Qur'an seems to support *lex talionis* in Q5:45, as did Muhammad take the lives of those whom he wished, such as al-Ḥārith b. Suwa'īd b. Šāmit, Abū Afak, and Asmā' the daughter of Marwān. See Ibn Ishāq, 675-676.; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat Al-Nabawiyah*, 486-490. A concrete example of an alternative or limitation to *lex talionis* in the scriptures would be that of Jesus in Matthew 5:38-39, where after the direct quote 'eye for an eye' he provides the alternative instruction: 'turn the other cheek'.

<sup>538</sup> Newman, 591. Mingana and al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire. A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam*, 25ff. Ibn 'Abbās indicates that the journey was from the house of Umm Hani', daughter of Abū Ṭalib to the mosque in Jerusalem. Al-Ṭustarī and the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* are both silent on this text.

<sup>539</sup> Newman, 592. It is verified that Ibn 'Abbās is Alī al-Ṭabarī's source as he is directly referred to on p. 593. Ibn 'Abbās tells the story recited here. Al-Ṭustarī gives an entirely contradictory interpretation: that is that this verse is a simple encouragement to continue to openly recite the Qur'an in prayer. The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is silent on this verse.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 596.

<sup>541</sup> Ibn 'Abbās does not clarify which mosque is in question. Al- Ṭustarī contains a very different interpretation of this verse than Ibn 'Abbās or our author. The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is again silent.

<sup>542</sup> Newman, 596-597. According to Ibn 'Abbās Q8:30; 33:9; 59:11 and 9:14 all concerned events which took place during Muhammad's lifetime, while Q8:12 refers to God's help in war in general, and makes no specific prophecy. Al- Ṭustarī and the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* are both silent on all five of these verses.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid., 599. Though this was already taking place in the call to prayer which had begun during his lifetime. The Qur'an also speaks of this in past tense, referring to things already completed rather than things yet to be fulfilled. It is not a prophecy, but a reminder. Ibn 'Abbās and Al- Ṭustarī agree that this concerned events within Muhammad's lifetime, specifically the content of the call to prayer. The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is again silent.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., 599. Mingana/Palmer Q110:1-3 and 24:54.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid., 599. The *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* gives the summary of the wars in the context of this verse. Ibn 'Abbās agrees with the context. Al- Ṭustarī makes no comment.

over other religions.<sup>546</sup> Q48:16 is quoted in reference to men who had turned their backs on the Muslim army.<sup>547</sup> The remainder of the appeals for proof in this section come from the *ḥadīths*.

**6. He produced a book, which is a sign of his prophethood.** In this section the author spends considerable time in general praise of the Qur'an, referring to it as a mercy from God (Q3:129; 39:53).<sup>548</sup> He then quotes the famous challenge in Q10:38, casually asserting that it had not been met.<sup>549</sup>

**7. He conquered the nations.** 'Alī al-Ṭabarī begins with Muhammad's humble beginnings, Q93:6-8.<sup>550</sup> He then expounds on Muhammad's life and rise to success, comparing him to Old Testament prophets. He ends the section with a string of Qur'anic warnings against, "those who say of the Prophet – may God bless and save him – what the Jews said of the Messiah – peace be with him." He cites: Q58:19; 35:6; 38:78-79, 85; 24:21; and 114:1-4.<sup>551</sup>

**8. His successors and friends were righteous and moral.** "His missionaries who transmitted his history are the most honest and righteous men, to whose like nobody can attribute falsehood."<sup>552</sup>

**9. He is the last of the prophets, fulfilling prophecies concerning himself and Ishmael.** 'Alī al-Ṭabarī begins his discussion on the Ishmael promises thus:

The Most High God does not contradict His promise, nor does He belie His words and disappoint the man who puts his trust in Him. He had announced to Abraham – peace be with him – and Hagar – God's mercy be with her – clear and joyful messages, which we do not see fulfilled and realized except by the appearance of the Prophet – may God bless and save him. Indeed, to Hagar messages have been announced such as no wife of ancient men can claim the like of them, after the virgin Mary, mother of the Christ – peace be with him.<sup>553</sup>

He then tells the Genesis story of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael in the context of the first impression of Christians concerning Islam (outlined above). It is notable

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid., 600.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., 600. In Ibn 'Abbās it is given as a warning to the people of al-Īmamah, the Banū Ḥanīfa, and the people of Musā'īlimah, not to retreat again as they had in the battle against al-Hudaibīyyah. Al-Ṭustarī and the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* are silent.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., 609. Mingana/Palmer Q39:54.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid., 609. Mingana/Palmer Q11:16.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid., 612.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid., 614. Mingana and al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire. A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam*, 39-41. Mingana/Palmer Q58:20; 35:6; 38:78-79, 85; 24:21; and 114:1-4.

<sup>552</sup> This section is missing in the edition in Newman. Mingana and al-Ṭabarī, *The Book of Religion and Empire. A Semi-Official Defence and Exposition of Islam*, 41ff.

<sup>553</sup> Newman, 615.



that when the author mentions Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, he takes the Qur'anic position of not identifying which son it was on the altar: Isaac or Ishmael.<sup>554</sup> He also defends God's use of the term "wild ass" for Ishmael as a compliment carrying implications of independence and strength.<sup>555</sup>

**10. He fulfilled prophecies concerning his mission, country, time, and political success.** Alī al-Ṭabarī quotes some Old Testament passages as prophecies concerning Muhammad: Deuteronomy 18:15; 18:18-19; 23:2-3; Genesis 21:20-21; Psalms 110:5-7; and Isaiah 42:11-13.<sup>556</sup> From Psalms 45:2-5; 48:1-2; 50:2-3, 78:8-12; and 149:4-9 'Alī al-Ṭabarī reads the terms *Ḥamd* and *Maḥmud* in these verses as foretelling of Muhammad.<sup>557</sup> There are following a total of twenty-nine citations from the book of Isaiah which the author believes to refer to Muhammad.<sup>558</sup>

'Alī al-Ṭabarī then turns his attention to the gospels. He quotes John 14:26; 16:17-8, 13; and 14:16, rendering the Paraclete as Muhammad, in line with the renderings already addressed above.<sup>559</sup> He also then makes an interesting parallel in meaning between 1 John 4:1-3 and Q4:171, noting that Muhammad believed as the Qur'an testifies that Jesus the Christ came in the flesh and was from God.<sup>560</sup>

The end of the text contains a few more New Testament allusions to Muhammad. It is fitting to complete this survey of Muhammad's prophethood with the works of a Christian convert to Islam, and more specifically with one which turns our attention back to the original context for the Christian-Muslim relationship, the first impression of the Muslims as the fulfillment of God's *Old Testament* prophecies concerning Ishmael. 'Alī al-Ṭabarī is a polemicist for Islam, but unique in his knowledge of the Bible and his prolificacy in prooftexting from both the Bible and the Qur'an.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid., 617.; cf. Q37:99-111.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., 619-620.; cf. Genesis 16:12. Alī al-Ṭabarī further mentions that the "wild ass" appears in Persian as "Gor," a common nickname for courageous warriors.

<sup>556</sup> Ibid., 621-622, 625-626.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 623-625.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid., 626-645. A full discussion on these references is not warranted here. However, it may be noted that direct relationships are made between Is. 9:2-4 and Q7:157; Is. 40:10-11 and Q9:128; Is. 55:1 and Q47:15; Is. 62:10-12 and Q12:82. Mingana/Palmer Q7:156; 9:129; 47:16; 12:82.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid., 646.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 647. Mingana/Palmer Q4:169. 1 John 4:1-3 says, "Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God."

<sup>561</sup> This defence by 'Alī al-Ṭabarī bears similarities to Ibn Qutayba's (d.276/889) *Proofs of Prophethood*. *Proofs of Prophethood* also uses a number of Biblical quotes, but unfortunately only survives as fragments in the collections of Ibn Jawzī, Ibn Ḥazm, and others. This work has not been surveyed here as only these fragments remain, and due to the similarity between Ibn Qutayba's *Proofs* and *The Book of*

During this phase, Abū Qurrah accuses Muhammad of demon possession, but though this is becoming a popular accusation, a new explanation for Muhammad's teachings was in the works. *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* sought to explain the prophethood of Muhammad by giving the credit for his truncated Christianity to a monk from the Islamic source stories behind Muhammad's rise to authority.

Muhammad's life then grows as source material in this discussion. Al-Kindi begins to draw on the theme of Muhammad's humble beginnings, which would develop into a major theme of Christian commentators in later centuries.<sup>562</sup> Al-Kindi too concentrates on the lifestyle of Muhammad, agreeing with John of Damascus, though Dionysius still describes Muhammad's life as appropriate to a prophet.

Ammār al-Baṣrī employs the Qur'an to defeat Muhammad's prophethood, an unlikely source of such an argument. He suggests that miracles should be a test of prophethood and shows from the Qur'an that Muhammad had none. Surprisingly, Abū Isā al-Warrāq agrees that the Qur'an does not prove miracles for Muhammad, but he argues instead that miracles are not a sign of prophethood. al-Jāḥiẓ refutes them both, for him the Qur'an is the miracle of Muhammad.

### Concluding Remarks on the Prophethood of Muhammad in Dialogue

Muhammad's prophetic position was a topic of considerable debate between Christians and Muslims, and indeed within Christianity itself. Up until the *Chronicle of John Bar Penkaye* in 67/687, Christians seemed to be considering the possibility of Muhammad's prophethood from their Christian perspectives. He and his people were possibly generally understood to be the fulfillment of the Ishmaelite promises of God.

From among our sources, it is John of Nikiu in c.80/700 that first refers to Muhammad in unfavourable terms, calling him "the beast" on account of the violence of his followers. The Monk of Bet Hale and the *Addendum to the Chronicle of 640* seem to temper John of Nikiu, referring to Muhammad as a, "wise and God-fearing man," and, "the Prophet of God." Their congeniality, however, is not to last.

John of Damascus in 115/734 labels Muhammad a false prophet, and probably influences subsequent authors to do the same. He also proposes the idea of Muhammad having been influenced by an Arian monk, a story which a century later would become *The*

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*Religion and Empire*, as Thomas has already noted. See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 816-818.; c.f Adang, 267-277.

<sup>562</sup> Norman Daniel explores this theme in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Daniel, 100-130.

*Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*. Again, a tempering Christian voice from the *Chronicle of 741* calls him a noble man, and one who can see the future.

Perhaps the most stunning description comes from Timothy I before the Caliph al-Mahdī. Timothy, though not finding Muhammad to be accompanied by miracles, notes that even God himself honoured, glorified, and praised Muhammad. Timothy's concern for Muhammad's lack of miracles would be echoed by Theodore Bar Koni, and answered by Ibn al-Layth who for the first time begins the discourse with Christians about Muhammad's miracles.

Theodore Abū Qurrah is clear: Muhammad was either insane or demon possessed, however, there is growing popularity among Christians behind an alternative explanation. Perhaps they wonder how someone insane or possessed could have gained so much in terms of authority and success, and their explanation is the imaginative *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, which becomes the voice behind Muhammad's Qur'an in the works of Theodore Bar Koni and al-Kindi, among others.

Ammār al-Baṣrī is again more concerned with Muhammad's lack of miracles, and the penchant for violence in his followers' behaviour. He cites Q17:59 and 6:109 as his proofs that God could have given Muhammad miracles if he wanted to. Al-Jāḥiẓ agrees with his Christian counterpart, and proposes what would become a standard response to Muhammad's need for miracles in order to be considered a prophet by Christians, the Qur'an. The Qur'an is Muhammad's miracle.

A circular argument concerning the Qur'an thus developed that had little to do with Muhammad's prophethood, yet had a tremendous influence on its acceptance by later Christian commentators during this period. Muhammad's prophethood was rejected by Christians perhaps because of the violence of his followers. Q61:6 however was presented by Muslims as proof that Muhammad's name was mentioned in the Bible. The Muslims went searching and found the Paraclete. The Paraclete was clarified by Christians to not have been Muhammad. Thus the Christians were accused of *tahrīf*, thus the Muslims were accused of *tahrīf*. A corrupted Qur'an could not be a miracle, and yet the Muslims proposed it as Muhammad's greatest. It followed therefore that Muhammad could not be considered a prophet by Christians, and the two main authorities of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad, were locked into a self-defeating/self-supporting cycle.

There are two possible exits from this loop explored above. Firstly, the Christians Joshua the Stylite and Dionysius of Tel-Mahre offered the possibility of a pure form of Islam, which distances Muhammad from the violent behaviours they saw in the Muslims. Secondly,

as literary criticism has recently shown, the word *aḥmadu* in Q61:6 cannot be interpreted as a noun. These two ideas release the Muslims from the burden of proving Muhammad's prophethood from Biblical content, and allow Christians to release Muhammad from the responsibility of having set the tone of violence for his followers.

## I.2.vi Islamic Expansion

### I.2.vi.1 Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)

*Letter 48 of Isho'yahb III of Adiabene* (pre-16/637) is a very early source, rich with information on the beginnings of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Hoyland notes that Muslims are not regarded by Isho'yahb as a "separate phenomenon" from Christianity, but addressed primarily as a political power. However, interpreting this new political power through Christian filters, the patriarch records his first impressions:

As for the Arabs, whom God has at this time given rule (*shūltānā*) over the world, you know well how they act towards us. Not only do they not oppose Christianity, but they praise our faith, honour the priests and saints of our Lord, and give aid to the churches and monasteries.<sup>563</sup>

From *The History of Sebeos* (Pre-41/661) Moorhead and Goddard have already noted that Sebeos' presentation of Islam and Muhammad was in the Genesis context outlined above, and the direct relationship between the Genesis context and *The History* is clear.<sup>564</sup> Hoyland notes the absence of the specific mention of an inheritance in the Genesis promises.<sup>565</sup> However, the promise made to Abraham concerning Ishmael is by Culver labelled a "covenant corollary" to the covenant given to Abraham in Genesis 12. As Culver states,

Ishmael's promises are dynamically related to the covenant oaths that God extends to Abraham ... the blessing to Abraham brings about a parallel blessing to Ishmael and his descendants ... Therefore, I believe that Genesis 17:20 may very well be the foundational cause for the existence of more than a billion Muslims today.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Hoyland, 181.

<sup>564</sup> Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations*, 35.; John Moorhead, "The Earliest Christian Theological Response to Islam," *Religion* 11, no. (1981).

<sup>565</sup> Hoyland, 131.

<sup>566</sup> Culver is again writing from a modern Christian theological perspective. Culver, 81.

It seems that Sebeos' position is that of Culver, affirming the covenantal right of the Ishmaelites to the land. Yet Sebeos also notes the terrible way in which they claimed it, equating the Ishmaelite army to the fourth beast of Daniel 7.<sup>567</sup>

A developing picture of the Christian-Muslim relationship emerges here from a Christian perspective, that of Islam as divinely formed by God for two purposes: 1) to fulfill the Ishmael covenants; and 2) to exact God's judgment on sinful Christians as the Fourth Beast of Daniel. Sebeos is very likely ecumenical in his interpretation of Islam, as he reforms his own Biblical understanding to accommodate what he believes God is doing through the followers of the preacher of "the path of truth."

*The Chronicle of the Anonymous Nestorian Monk* (c.49/670) also affirms Islam in the light of the Ishmael promises, as an Iraqi Nestorian monk connects the Arabs with Abraham remarking that, "the Arabs are doing nothing new when they worship God there..."<sup>568</sup> The Chronicler connects the city of Hazor from Joshua 11:10 with Medina, an Arab city whose name the author suggests is derived from Midyan, Abraham's fourth son. These comments, however brief, may be regarded as inclusive, as the author concedes that the Arabs in Medina are indeed worshipping the same God as the Christians.

G. J. Reinink has suggested that *The History of John bar Penkaye* (67/687), a Nestorian Mesopotamian historian, is in fact less about history than about giving his contemporary Christians a worldview through which to interpret the rise of Islam.<sup>569</sup> The historical context is a response to the defeat of the rebels under Mukhtar b. 'Abī' Ubayd b. Mus'ab b. al-Zubayr, and the subsequent death of Mukhtar in 67/687. A devastating plague broke out in the same year, and the Christians were looking for religious meaning to add to these events. John determines these things to be the judgment of God on the wickedness of the Christians, yet he writes:

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<sup>567</sup> Thomson, Howard-Johnston, and Greenwood, 105-106. Cf. Daniel Ch. 7; Hoyland, 532-535. The Fourth Beast comment was made by Sebeos in the context of the Muslim conquest of Byzantine Emperor Constans II (d.47/668), in c.20/641. In 12/634, less than a decade earlier, the Byzantine Empire itself was identified as Daniel's Fourth Beast in the *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, which identifies Muhammad as a "deceiving prophet" due to the violent conquests of his followers. The Byzantines, considered to be heretics, were thought to have suffered the judgment of God in the Muslim conquest of Byzantium. "Thus Anastasius, like Sophronius, perceived the Arab conquest as a divine retribution for Christian sins, in this case, the sins of Emperor Constans II (20/641-47/668)." See Kaegi: 141-143. Various, the common classical understanding of the Fourth Beast of Daniel can be said to have been the Roman Empire.

Sebeos believed Islam to be the fulfillment of both the Genesis covenant and Daniel's Fourth Beast prophecy. Sebeos' suggestion that Islam is Daniel's Fourth Beast has proven persistent. It can be found for example in the Jewish writings of Moses Maimondes (d.600/1204), and on polemical websites even today. See Sabato Morais, "A Letter by Maimonides to the Jews of South Arabia Entitled 'the Inspired Hope'" *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 25, no. 4 (1935).; and Assyrian Horn, "Daniel's Fourth Kingdom (Part 3)" <http://www.assyrianhorn.com/2009/06/daniels-4th-kingdom.html> (accessed January 28 2010).

<sup>568</sup> Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations*, 36. The quote is from Moorhead: 266-267. The Latin text is in Ignazio Guidi, *Chronica Minora*, C.S.C.O., 2, *Scriptores Syri*, vol. 2 (Louvain: C.S.C.O., 1907).

<sup>569</sup> See Reinink in J. J. van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-van den Berg, and T. M. van Lint, *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta (Leuven ; Paris ; Dudley: Peeters Publishers, 2005), 77-89.

We should not think of the advent (of the children of Hagar) as something ordinary, but as due to the divine working. Before calling them, (God) had prepared them beforehand to hold Christians in honour; thus they also had a special commandment from God concerning our monastic station, that they should hold it in honour.<sup>570</sup>

According to John, the Muslims are responding to the divine calling of God, he remarks that Islam was honouring of Christianity, and notes God's support of them in that, "God put victory into their hands in such a way that the words written concerning them might be fulfilled, namely, 'One man chased a thousand and two men routed ten thousand.'"<sup>571</sup> As John accepts that the Arabs are God's judgment on sinful Christians, he also believes that Islam is not a foreign tool of God's but an extension of God's own acting against the Christians.<sup>572</sup> By describing God's action through Islam as not so much a tool in God's hand but rather the hand of God himself, John adopts what appears to be an ecumenical approach to the Christian-Muslim relationship. His dissatisfaction with Islamic methodology of expansion has not detracted from his belief in Islam's divine origin.

His criticisms of Islam's methodology of war and their harshness toward their Christian subjects are the reasons he gives for God providing a counter-punishment for their violence. The counter-punishment was the Islamic civil war which led to the division of Sunni from Shi'a Islam. Mu'awiya (r.40/661-60/680) won the war, and on the rule of Mu'awiya John remarked that, "Justice flourished during his time and there was great peace in the regions under his control; he allowed everyone to live as they wanted."<sup>573</sup>

*The Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius* came a decade later (w.c.71/691). The apocalypse was attributed to Methodius, bishop of Olympus (d.312), and follows a similar line of thought to the works of Sebeos, connecting Islam with the book of Daniel.<sup>574</sup> The work capitalizes on a negative interpretation of Genesis 16:12, linking the title "wild ass" with the anger and violence with which the Ishmaelites have been successful in war against the Byzantines.<sup>575</sup> The author also attributes the success of the Ishmaelites to the sexual sins of the Byzantines: "Thus not because He loved them did the Lord God give to [the Muslims] the

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<sup>570</sup> An English translation of *Book XV* is available in Brock: 57.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-58. The internal quotes are a reference to Deuteronomy 32:30.

<sup>572</sup> Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*, 85.

<sup>573</sup> Brock: 61.; cf. Hoyland, 194-200.; Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 177-181.

<sup>574</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 163-171.; Kaegi: 143-146.; cf. Hoyland, 263-267; 532-535. For an English translation see the dissertation of Francisco Javier Martinez, "Eastern Christian Apocalyptic in the Early Muslim Period : Pseudo-Methodius and Pseudo-Athanasius" (Catholic University of America, 1985).

<sup>575</sup> See the quote in Kaegi: 143. The term "wild ass" (Genesis 16:12) cannot be interpreted as an insult from a Biblical perspective. Not only did Hagar thank the angel of the Lord for the revelation, but the only other mention of the wild ass in the whole of the Bible is in Job 39:5-8 in which in God's own voice the wild ass is praised for its independence and resourcefulness.

power to seize the land of the Christians, but because of the lawlessness of the Christians."<sup>576</sup> This may be the beginning of the distancing of the direct involvement of God from the actions of the Muslims from a Christian perspective. The author sites the Byzantine love for cross-dressing, prostitution, and homosexuality as root causes of the Ishmaelite dominance over them. He then attempts to shock his audience with a most bloody rendering of the present and future dominance of the Arabs.<sup>577</sup> Eventually, the author envisions the coming of a new Christian king and the fall of the Muslim empire.

Here we can see the development of the concept of Islam as the divinely ordained judgment of God on sinful Christians, but now with a developing indication that Islam itself is not of God. God simply allows the Muslims to take over. Christians who convert to Islam are depicted as goats, separated from the sheep, ultimately cleansing the church.<sup>578</sup> This may mark a major shift in the development of Christian theology of Islam, in that it is clearly soteriologically exclusive, and yet shows interpretive flexibility. It is according to the typology above the beginnings of polemical thought, yet as Thomas, Reinink and others have indicated, this apocalyptic crisis narrative is not void of influence from its historical context. In 71/691-72/692 the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik dramatically raised the taxes for non-Muslims shortly after the defeat of the Syrian Christian rebellion of al-Mukhtar in 65/685-67/687.<sup>579</sup>

*The Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (d.c.80/700) also interpreted the Islamic expansion in terms of God's wrath, attributed to what John called the Byzantine Chalcedonian heretics. Both John's context of war and his resulting theology of Islam are plain in the text:

And now many of the Egyptians who had been false Christians [Chalcedonians] denied the holy orthodox faith [Monophysitism] and lifegiving baptism, and embraced the religion of the Moslem, the enemies of God, and accepted the detestable doctrine of the beast, this is, Mohammed, and they erred together with these idolaters, and took arms in their hands and fought against the Christians.<sup>580</sup>

It may be said of John's interpretation of the religious history that in spite of their violent methodology, he respects the Muslims' obedience to God's will over the disobedience of the Chalcedonians. The author of *The Disputation of the Monk of Bet Hale and the Arab Notable* (c.101/720) seems to agree with his recent predecessors on the success of Islamic

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>577</sup> See an extended quote of this section in English in *ibid.*, 144.

<sup>578</sup> See Matthew 25:32-33.

<sup>579</sup> It was also 'Abd al-Malik that built the Dome on the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

<sup>580</sup> John of Nikiu and Charles, 201. Readers who are proficient in Ethiopic may wish to consult both Charles and Zotenberg together. See for details the reviews of W. E. Crum, "Reviewed Work: The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 4, no. 2/3 (1917).; and, E. W. Brooks, "Reviewed Work: Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu," *The English Historical Review* 32, no. 127 (1917). For Zotenberg's full Ethiopic text (from Ge'ez) see H. Zotenberg, *Chronique De Jean De Nikiou, Notices Et Extraits Des Manuscrits*, vol. 24 (Paris: 1883).

expansion, attributing Islamic political success to the sins of Christians, not to the greatness of Islam.<sup>581</sup>

John's view is developed in the context of the Islamic takeover of the Byzantine Empire, and it is possible from here to begin tracing the widening gap between Christianity and Islam. It may be noted that the wedge of Islamic expansionism has now influenced the inter-religious dialogue in incremental fashion, having moved Christian dialogicians from a cautiously ecumenical stance to one of growing polemics.

### I.2.vi.2 Phase 2 (115/734 – 184/800)

From the available sources, John of Damascus (115/734) once again appears to raise the stakes by lowering the estimation of anything Islamic in the eyes of Christians in what may be as dramatic a fashion as possible. On its successful expansion, Islam is rendered by John to be the, "fore-runner to the anti-Christ."<sup>582</sup>

*The Chronicle of 741* (c.123/741) is an interesting counter-voice from about the same time. Sometimes identified as the continuation of the chronicle of John of Biclar, it compiles historical information from 601 to 105/724.<sup>583</sup> The chronicler is clearly aligned with the Marwānids, as 'Alī's rule as Caliph is not mentioned (r.35/656-40/661). Cyrille Aillet describes it as, "a rather enthusiastic portrayal of the powerful Umayyad Empire through the eyes of a non-Muslim."<sup>584</sup>

This chronicle is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, the writer is so positive toward the Muslim line of Caliphs that as Hoyland notes, he has at times been mistaken for a Muslim himself. Yazīd I is described as, "a most pleasant man and deemed highly agreeable by all the peoples subject to his rule. He never, as is the wont of men, sought glory for himself because of his royal rank, but lived as a citizen along with all the common people."<sup>585</sup> We know that the author is not a Muslim by his description of the rise of Islam as a rebellion against the

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<sup>581</sup> Hoyland, 469.

<sup>582</sup> Newman, 139.

<sup>583</sup> It may be noted that due to the lack of Spanish history included, the chronicle is not a strict continuation of the work of John of Biclar. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 284-289. An English translation can be found in Hoyland, 611-630. See also John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 78-83. Tolan describes well the relationship between the *Chronicle of 741* and the *Chronicle of 754*, which Hoyland believes were both derived from the same source. On dating see Hoyland, 627.

<sup>584</sup> Aillet concludes the text to have been written by a pro-Umayyad Syrian Christian of either Melkite or Monophysite background. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 286.

<sup>585</sup> Hoyland, 620.



Byzantines.<sup>586</sup> The rise of Islam is presented by the author as a political uprising, a departure from the religiously infused meaning given by chroniclers before him of Islam as an actor of God on sinful Christians. The religion of Islam is nowhere specifically addressed in this work, which is limited in its inter-faith commentary to the respectful and admirable descriptions of Muhammad and his successors.

Into this milieu of disagreement between Christians on the heavenly purposes of Islamic military success, Ibn'Abbās provides his Qur'anic commentary. In Ibn'Abbās' polemical commentary we see again, as in the case of John of Damascus, what looks like the interpreter's context clearly overlaid onto the Qur'anic text. In these highly likely cases of interpreters using the text for their own cause, the historian's question is not, "what is the correct interpretation?" but rather, "why is this the correct interpretation in the mind of this interpreter at this point in history?" Some speculations may be made here about Ibn'Abbās .

Christians at this time are interpreting the Qur'an, and seem to be disputing amongst themselves how to approach Islam, ecumenically or polemically. Written commentary on the Qur'an has likely been available amongst the Christians for decades already. An Islamic voice is needed to settle the interpretation, and to keep the faithful believers and new converts on the *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*. The *tafsīr* of (pseudo-) Ibn'Abbās is such a work, but it appears to take on an interpretive posture influenced by its milieu. The Christians are to the Muslims either enemies or subjects at this time, and so an interpretation of the Qur'an which contradicts, corrects, subjugates, and abrogates Christianity is likely favourable to rulers who may use their new religion to justify their superior political power. This early *tafsīr* chose a polemical posture not necessarily because it was concerned with the accurate explication of the Qur'an, but likely because it was appropriate in the context of war, and more specifically, Islamic victory over Christians.

In *The Chronicle of Joshua the Stylite of Zuq'nīn* (158/775),<sup>587</sup> Joshua's treatment of Islam starts thus: "The first king was a man among them named Muhammad, whom they also called Prophet because he turned them away from cults of all kinds and taught them that there was only one God, creator of the universe."<sup>588</sup> He later continues:

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<sup>586</sup> The text describes, "the Saracenes, in rebellion and hostile to [the inhabitants] of the provinces of the Romans..." Ibid., 615.

<sup>587</sup> This text is formerly known as *The Chronicle of Dionysius of Tell-Mahre*, and is often still referred to as the *pseudo-Dionysius*. It is Part IV of *The Chronicle of Zuq'nīn*, and covers the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, concentrating on the period of 132/750-158/775. Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 324-326.; cf. Hoyland, 409-414. An English translation is available in Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuq'nīn, Parts Iii and Iv, A.D. 488-775 : Translated from Syriac with Notes and Introduction*, 138-334.

<sup>588</sup> Harrak, *The Chronicle of Zuq'nīn, Parts Iii and Iv, A.D. 488-775 : Translated from Syriac with Notes and Introduction*, 141.

This nation is very lascivious and sensual. Every law instituted for them, be it by Muhammad or by any other God-fearing person, is despised and dismissed if it is not instituted according to their sensual pleasure. But a law which fulfills their wishes and desires, even if it is instituted by a nobody among them, they accept, saying: 'This has been instituted by the Prophet and Messenger of God. Moreover, it was commanded to him in this manner by God!'<sup>589</sup>

What is curious about Joshua's view of Islam is that he seems to have noticed an apparent disconnection between the teachings of the God-fearing Muhammad and his now lascivious followers a century and a half after his death. Joshua does not blame Islam, Muhammad, or the Qur'an for the behaviours of the Muslims, but rather their habit of wrongly attributing their wishes and desires to their prophet. It seems that Joshua concedes the possibility of a kind of pure form of Islam that does not permit the hedonism that he sees in his Muslim contemporaries, or in the violence he records from his Islamic rulers.<sup>590</sup> Joshua likely views Islam as an apologist. He sees Islam as a distinct religion rather than a Christian cult, and converts from Christianity to Islam as apostates to paganism.<sup>591</sup> He makes little effort to explain Islam in Christian terms, and no effort to reinterpret the Islamic worldview.

Muhammad b. al-Layth (w.c. 181/797) enters here as a brilliant dialogue piece, in that as Shboul writes, "The epistle makes it clear that the conflict with Byzantium was not essentially about wishing to convert the Byzantine subjects from Christianity to Islam nor to destroy them. The epistle expresses concern, in no uncertain terms, for their prosperity as well as their freedom of religion."<sup>592</sup> In this apologetical example, al-Layth possibly models a rational secularism, that politics and religion can be discussed in the same conversation, and yet remain mutually exclusive subjects for discussion.

At the close of this phase, and the end of Leo III's letter to 'Umar II, Leo briefly questions the violence of the Islamic expansion and whether the carnal vices promised in the Qur'an as heavenly riches are appropriate for the, "Way of God."<sup>593</sup> It is Leo's question which plagues Christian theologians of Islam during this phase. It may be surmised that there is a continued degradation of the attribution to God of any influence in the Islamic expansion, and

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>590</sup> This is also clear in Joshua's interpretation of the laws of Yazīd II. In 105/724, Yazīd II ordered that all pigs should be killed, as well as white dogs and white birds. He then ordered the death of all blue-eyed people (though this order was not carried out). He determined that the testimony of Syrians were not to be accepted against Arabs, and that the (blood) value of a Syrian life was half that of an Arab. He also ordered that thieves should lose their arms rather than just their hands. Joshua remarks that, "The Arabs despised him and his regulations." Here too, as in his telling of the Islamic civil wars, Joshua recognizes disconnection between the Arabs in general and their political leaders. See *ibid.*, 155-156. Further, regarding the collection of growing taxes under Mūsā (r.c.152/769) Joshua notes that those who collected the taxes, "did not wander around because they cared for Islam but in order to satiate their greed through the love of money." *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, 322, 323 n.1.

<sup>592</sup> Shboul, 131.

<sup>593</sup> Jeffery, "Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between Umar II and Leo III," 328-329.

the difference between the teachings of Muhammad and the behaviours of his followers seems apparent to Christian observers. Christians are possibly beginning to question the direction of the *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*.

### I.2.vi.3 Phase 3 (184/800 – 287/900)

Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c.204/820) also took issue with the methodology by which Islam spread, though instead of contrasting the teachings of Islam with its method of expansion, he highlights that Christianity spread by miracles and Islam by the sword. By Abū Qurrah's day, the Islamicization of the former Byzantine Empire was probably pervasive. During the reign of 'Abd al-Malik (r.685-705), public Christian symbols were reportedly replaced with Islamic ones, including road signs containing the *shahāda*, and of course the largest example, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Al-Malik's brother, 'Abd al-'Azīz decreed the destruction of all of the crosses in Egypt. Al-Malik's successor, Walīd I (r.705-715) decreed Arabic the official language of public administration. The Caliph 'Umar II (r.717-720) offered to cancel the *jizya* tax to encourage conversion to Islam. Yazīd II (r.720-724) ordered the destruction of crosses and removal of icons throughout the empire.

It is not surprising then that Abū Qurrah was on the defensive for Christianity. He published a tract defending the use of icons and the worship of Christ. In it, he draws attention to God's having, "hands and a face and other such things" in the Qur'an (Q10:3; 3:73; 30:38). He highlights that God ordered the worship of Adam by the angels in Q2:34, and uses Q12:100 as an example of prostration as an expression of honour instead of worship.<sup>594</sup> Abū Qurrah appears clearly irritated not just by Islam, but by its ruling representatives and their apparent growing lack of tolerance for the Christian faith of their subjects.

*The Apology of al-Kindi* (c.204/820) returns to drawing contradictions between the behaviours of the Muslims and the teachings of their Qur'an, quoting from the Qur'an on being peaceful (3:100), and freedom of religion (2:274; 10:99-100, 108-109, 11:120; 2:57; 3:19; 2:254; 109:6; 29:45).<sup>595</sup> In what seems now a growing effort among Christians to return Muslims to their own teachings, Dionysius of Tel-Mahre (d.230/845) highlights the specific instructions Muslims are given for war:

In the land you invade kill neither the aged, nor the little child, nor the woman. Do not force the Stylite from his high perch and do not harass the solitary. They have devoted themselves to the service of God. Do not cut down any (fruit) tree, neither damage any crop, neither maim any domestic animal, large or small. Whenever you are welcomed by a city

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<sup>594</sup> See Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, 65-68.

<sup>595</sup> Newman, 478-479.

or a people, make a solemn pact with them and give them reliable guarantees that they will be ruled according to the practices which obtained among them from before our time. They will contract with you to pay in tribute whatever sum shall be settled between you, then they will be left alone in their confession and in their country. But as for those who do not welcome you, make war on them. Be careful to abide by all the just laws and commandments which have been given to you by God through our prophet, lest you excite the wrath of God.<sup>596</sup>

Hagiographical and martyriological texts had also until this point been popular in Christian writings. They serve the dual purpose of faith-builder and polemical commentary on the ruling Muslims. Perhaps the most famous of them is *The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ* (c.246/ 860). It is the story of Qays ibn Rabī' ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī,<sup>597</sup> a Christian from Najrān who spent thirteen years as a Muslim, wandering with Muslim men.

The story tells us that, "he participated in the *jihād* with them. He fought, killed, plundered, burned, and trampled every taboo as they did. And he prayed with them. He surpassed them in the severity of his rage and in the hardness of his heart against the Byzantines."<sup>598</sup> While passing through Baalbek, Syria one day, he converted back to Christianity. He served five years in the monastery Mār Saba as a monk and moved between monasteries for a while before settling at Mt. Sinai where he became the Oeconome. After several years he decided to make his apostasy from Islam public, so he wrote his story out, and left it in a mosque in al-Ramla, telling them that he would be waiting at the church of St. Syriacus. No one could claim him, since God hid him from their sight. He then returned to Mt. Sinai and became Superior of the monastery, changing his name to 'Abd al-Masīḥ. Seven years later he returned to al-Ramla to discuss tax issues with the Muslim governor, but was arrested as an apostate on the way, and was brought to al-Ramla a captive. He refused to recant his Christian faith and was beheaded. His body was burned at the bottom of a well, and his remains recovered nine months later.<sup>599</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> Palmer, Brock, and Hoyland, 145.

<sup>597</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 684-687. Hoyland dates the text to c.256/870, see also Hoyland, 381-383. A commentary along with the Arabic text and an English translation can be found in Griffith, *Arabic Christianity in the Monasteries of Ninth-Century Palestine*, X.

<sup>598</sup> The quote is from the translation of Mark Swanson in Thomas, *Syrian Christians under Islam : The First Thousand Years*, 109. Swanson provides some corrections to Griffith's translation, and a few helpful observations regarding the text.

<sup>599</sup> There is no mention of the Qur'an, Muhammad, or specific Islamic doctrine in the text, and so it is can easily be missed as a text informative for Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is included here as it makes some very interesting subtle comments about the state of the Christian-Muslim relationship into which it was written. The names of the martyr, both his civilian name (Qays ibn Rabī' ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī al-Najrānī), and his ecclesiastical name ('Abd al-Masīḥ) are very important. It is important that Qays was from a notable Arab tribe, the Ghassānids, with whom the Byzantines (whom he was persecuting in the story) had a three hundred year working relationship prior to Islam. The tribal name is the highest among Christian Arabs, and would have been heard with respect by both Christians and Muslims. It is also interesting that Qays is from Najrān, the epicentre of one of the most famous martyrdoms in Christianity,

The Martyrdom of 'Abd al-Masīḥ sits ninth in a line of martyrologies originating with the beheading of Michael of Tiberias of Mār Sabas in Jerusalem by 'Abd al-Malik (65/685-86/705).<sup>600</sup> Not only are the locations of the stories all similar, but they all contain something of the core story of a Muslim apostate to Christianity who appears before the highest Islamic ruler in the land, is offered a chance to recant Christ, denies the opportunity, and is martyred for it.<sup>601</sup>

As Swanson has shown, this story and those in its genre achieve for the Christian community three edifying purposes: firstly they, “mark off and shore up the community,” by reinforcing the boundary between Christianity and Islam.<sup>602</sup> In this example, Qays experiences life both as a Muslim, which is portrayed as a violent and immoral lifestyle, and as a Christian, which is portrayed as faithful and honourable. It gives the reader the opportunity to identify with a Christian who has chosen Islam, regretted it, and died in the conviction that Christianity was always a better way.

Secondly they, “hold open the door of repentance,” to Christian converts to Islam that wish to reconsider their choice.<sup>603</sup> As regular Christian conversions to Islam were likely a social reality by this time, the authors may have wished to express their openness to the re-conversion of those who wish to re-enter the church. The focal point of the story is not the conversation between Qays and the governor, but that of Qays and the priest at Baalbek.

Thirdly they, “instil a right understanding of martyrdom.”<sup>604</sup> The story of 'Abd al-Masīḥ makes it especially clear to the reader that to seek martyrdom is an act of pride. If God does not wish it, it will not happen. As in the case of Qays' letter in the mosque, he provoked his martyrdom at a time that was not chosen by God. And if God wishes it, martyrdom cannot be avoided, as in the end of the story.

Though this is not directly a dialogue piece, it is an apologetical work likely intended to train the Christian audience on the proper stance toward Islam as a separate religion, its unworthiness of allegiance, and the worthiness of recanting Islam even at the threat of death.

In summary, in this phase, Abū Qurrah quickly contrasts the miracles of Christianity and the sword of Islam as methods of expansion. The continued use of the sword by Muslims

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that of the Najrān Christians at the hands of the Dhū Nūwās Masrūq in the early sixth century. The combination of the two designations evokes respect, especially in a martyrology.

<sup>600</sup> The list of martyrologies is given by Swanson in Thomas, *Syrian Christians under Islam : The First Thousand Years*, 116-118.

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-125.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-129.

is attested to in martyrologies like that of Qays which highlight just how deep the religious chasm between Muslims and Christians was in everyday life. Al-Kindi and Dionysius try to distinguish between the religion of Islam and the sword of the Muslims however, by contrasting the violence of the Muslims with the peaceful teachings of the Qur'an. The Qur'an in the hands of Christians appears as an authority against the violence of Islamic *jihād*.

### **Concluding Remarks on Islamic Expansionism**

The reason this is listed as a major topic here is because of the very curious inversion it seems to have taken in Christian interpretation. Islam in its early expansion appears to have been understood as both from and of God in the Christian sources of *The History of Sebeos*, *The Chronicle of the Anonymous Nestorian Monk*, and *the Chronicle of John Bar Penkaye*. The military and often violent successes in war which led the Muslims to victory over massive areas of land were, according to our available sources, at first interpreted as the acting of the hand of God, and only later as blessed by God but not of him. Sebeos and pseudo-Methodius interpreted the Muslims as the fourth beast of Daniel 7 which indicate the possible beginnings of a slow transition from an interpretation of the movement as a movement of God, to John of Damascus' later evaluation of Islam as the predecessor to the anti-Christ.

Joshua the Stylite, Leo III, and al-Kindi question whether or not the violence of the Muslims really is a reflection of Islam. Dionysius of Tel-Mahre records the instructions for war given to the Muslims, highlighting their abhorrent behaviours in disregarding those instructions. Later, Theodore Abū Qurrah disqualifies Muhammad on the account that the violence of the Muslims is from their prophet, and al-Kindi notes that Moses and Joshua waged wars as well, though theirs were accompanied by miracles.

Islamic military success seems to have started out as evidence of its divine origin to Christian observers. This devolved into an understanding that possibly the violence of the Muslims was ordained, but not their religion. Then, neither were ordained and the violent Islamic expansion was contrasted against the peaceful spread of Christianity. Toward the end of our surveyed materials, the violence of Islamic expansion was seen by Christians to not even have been ordained in orthodox Islam.

### **I.2.vii Comments on Tone in the Phases of Dialogue**

A historical narrative on dialogical tone is discernable from the sources covered above, but must be understood to be hypothetical. It is unreasonable to claim to know the minds of these authors, some of whose very existence remains in question. Certainly these authors,

varied in location, language, and separated by decades did not often converse with one another, and yet their materials which have survived allow for some educated speculation on the possible development of the Christian-Muslim dialogue in both topic and tone. It is our aim here to introduce, as W. C. Smith encourages, “new concepts that will be adequate to our rich and subtle material - that will both penetrate and make coherent, will analyse and synthesize,”<sup>605</sup> and so the following narrative on tone is based on the information from above.

The general tonal movement may be interpreted as progressing from ecumenical through polemical towards apologetical, according to the typologies from the Introduction. As interpreters become less friendly with each other, they become less flexible in their interpretation of their own scriptures, and over time as polemics fail, feel it less necessary to produce flexible or alternative interpretations of the scriptures of the other.

### **Phase 1 (11/632-114/733)**

The first century of the Christian-Muslim dialogue is covered by exclusively Christian sources, as these are all that are known to have survived apart from the Qur’an. All of these sources may be said to address Islam as a Christian heresy, and may be interpreted as ecumenical in tone. They are concerned with differences in theology, but look to reinterpret their own scripture in order to accommodate what they see God doing in the other. This reinterpretation of the Bible took place firstly in the context of the Ishmaelite promises, which prompted Christian authors to understand the Muslims as a movement from and of the Christian God, led by his prophet.

The potentially common recognition of Muhammad as a prophet by Christians early in this phase is noted with the exception of the *Doctrina Jacobi*, which rejects Muhammad not because of any knowledge of Muhammad, but on the basis of the violence of his followers, and more acutely, because the Jews to which the *Doctrina* is addressed are considering him a candidate to compete with Jesus for the position of Messiah. The *Doctrina* may more accurately be said to reject a Jewish consideration of Muhammad’s Messiahship than his prophethood, even though the term prophet is what is used in the text.

Starting with *The Apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius* in the last decade of the seventh century, the inferred tone of dialogue becomes more polemical. Pseudo-Methodius is the first of our sources here to describe Islam as a movement from God, but not of God. There then seems to be agreement between the commentators that Islam is a punishment from God for

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<sup>605</sup> Smith: 487-488.

Christian sins, and the interpretation of Islam as a movement stems from a Biblical perspective, including the Fourth Beast of Daniel 7.

Accompanying this discernable shift from ecumenism to polemics is the first known mention of the Islamic denial of the crucifixion of Jesus in the *Apocalypse of Shenoute*, and the first known mention of the Qur'an by a non-Muslim. There is also disagreement among Christian authors about who Muhammad was, John to the Emir calling him a, "wise and God-fearing man," John of Nikiu calling him a, "beast," and the Christian scribe of the addendum to *The Chronicle of 640* labelling Muhammad, "prophet of God."

Pseudo-Methodius, John of Nikiu, and Jacob of Edessa all appear to exclude the Muslims soteriologically; however, soteriological exclusion should not be understood at this point in history as sufficient grounds for interpreting Islam as a religion separate from Christianity in the minds of these commentators. The Chalcedonians, Nestorians, and Monophysites all exclude each other soteriologically, and yet dialogue under the banner of Christianity. At this point in the conversation, it seems Islam is addressed Christologically. These authors address other branches of Christianity in the same exclusive tone as they address the Christology of Islam. John of Nikiu is the first known to label Islam a 'religion', yet he refers to Muslims as the 'enemies of God', and Chalcedonians as the 'enemies of Christ'. Jacob of Edessa recognizes that Muslims are closer to Christians than the Jews, and yet they are different from pagans, and are treated similarly by Jacob to the Chalcedonians in his writings.

The monk of Bet Hale notes that Muhammad did not clarify trinitarian doctrine better, not because he did not know how to, but because the minds of his Arab audience were too simple to comprehend it. Thus it may be posited that the Islamic Christology developed in a milieu of intra-Christian debate, and was welcomed to the debate as a competing Christology.<sup>606</sup> This may have changed with the advent of two influences, the disappearance of John from Damascus, and the appearance of a written Qur'an.

## Phase 2 (115/734-184/800)

Transitions are discernible during this phase within an intra-Christian debate between ecumenical, polemical and apologetical voices, where each tone was vying for space in the embryonic Christian theology of Islam. The Islamic movement became more defined during

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<sup>606</sup> This is not an original conclusion. Bertaina too remarks that, "Initial Christian observations of the Islamic conquest, beginning in 634, did not demonstrate knowledge of the emergence of a new religion." Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 74.



this phase with the advent of the Qur'an, Islamic commentary, and undoubtedly in part due to the challenges it faced from the persistent strength of Christianity within the expanding Islamic Empire.

Many new ideas were apparently introduced by John of Damascus, and the spread of his writings forced both Christians and Muslims to review their theologies of the other. John was possibly excluded from what may have been an inherited high political position in Damascus, by the policies of Caliph 'Umar II. It is possible that those policies put an end to John's family's multi-generational heritage of power in the city. If this is considered, John may have studied theology subsequently with a bias against the Caliphate, and perhaps against Islam. Given these possibilities, his comments on the 'heresy' of Islam in 115/734 might very well have been his reply to the Caliph. John's innovations included the first known mention of Muhammad as a false prophet,<sup>607</sup> Muhammad's learning under an Arian monk, Islam's association with the advent of the anti-Christ, and the first known anti-trinitarian interpretation of Q4:171-172.<sup>608</sup>

*The Chronicle of 741* and *On the Unified Trinity* entered the debate and seem to temper John's polemical stance with more ecumenical tones, including an interpretation of 4:171-172 as compatible with trinitarianism, a possibly original presentation of Christ as the veil (*hijāb*) of God, and a re-evaluation of Muhammad as both noble and prophetic. However they did not appear to receive the same widespread Christian readership as the Greek masterpiece of John of Damascus.

Nevertheless, the first Islamic voice in our dialogue materials here, silenced the Christian ecumenists. The *tafsīr* of Ibn'Abbās clarifies that neither John nor the tract *On the Unified Trinity* were correct. The Qur'an speaks to tritheists in 4:171-172, those who worship three gods: Father, Son and either Wife or Holy Spirit, and according to Ibn'Abbās, all Christians fall under this banner. Jesus to Ibn'Abbās is a consequence of revelation, spoken into existence as the Word of God; and it was not Jesus, but Tatianos who died at the crucifixion.

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<sup>607</sup> This is again noted with the exception of the *Doctrina Jacobi*, which as mentioned above was written without any knowledge of Islam or Muhammad, and was written to Jews who were considering Muhammad's Messianic candidacy.

<sup>608</sup> Given the lack of information from this time, it is possible that John was simply reflecting for the first time in writing the general view of his contemporaries concerning Islam. However, given the rapid dissemination of John's work, and the subsequent appearance of what seem to be his innovations in the subsequent writings of other commentators, as mentioned above, it appears very likely that these ideas came from John. In any case, it may be surmised by John's theological innovations on other topics which eventually led to his anathematization by the Iconoclastic Council of 136/754, that John was given to independent thought and dramatic ideas. It is impossible to know the mind of John or his influences in his comments on Islam, therefore the narrative presented here comprises at best a very likely possibility.

Joshua the Stylite and the author of the *Christian Arab Disputation* enter the conversation with final questions before a verdict is made on the status of Islam from a Christian standpoint: the former distinguishing a pure and respectable form of Islam from the abhorrent behaviours exhibited by Muslims, and the latter awkwardly failing at finding a bridge for the title “Son of God” in the Qur’an.

The third chronological phase below finds Qur’an literate Christians in a developed and academic debate with Biblically literate Muslims. Beginning with the correspondence of ‘Umar II and Leo III, the transition to what may be a new kind of interaction, comes into focus. The rational dispute, with the exception of Timothy I, likely took place in either a polemical or apologetical tone. The topics of interest become more widely varied as bodies of evidence are built out of scriptures and logic into growing barriers between the two faiths. Everything from Islamic expansion to the veneration of the cross by Christians is now open for discussion.

The ‘Umar II vs. Leo III and Timothy I vs. Al-Mahdī disputes set the bar of thought distinctly higher than in previous available sources. The Apostle John’s Paraclete and Isaiah’s rider on the camel are claimed by the Muslims as their own prophet, and when their claim is rejected, new allegations of *tahrīf* as textual corruption are made against the Christians. The Torah and Gospels are put on the defensive, and counter-arguments of textual corruption of the Qur’an then quickly follow. The retort is that the Qur’an, it is claimed, was written not by God, nor even by Muhammad, but by Sergius, Ka’b, ‘Alī, Abū Bakr, and even al-Hajjāj. The perpetual accusation that all of the scriptures have been corrupted follows, as the Bible is understood to exclude the possibility of Muhammad, and the Qur’an the possibility of the Trinity.

### **Phase 3 (184/800-287/900)**

In this last phase, the Christians seem to find new terminology for their Islamic interlocutors as ‘heretics’ become ‘pagans’. Muhammad is then weighed and measured by Christian scholars, and found to be lacking, without miracles, sometimes called insane or even demon possessed. He is nowhere to be found in Biblical scriptures, which are interpreted to deny the coming of any prophet after the Christ. So a new history is written by Christians for Muhammad, to explain his successes in religion and war, and the credit is given to a wayward Nestorian monk, named Sergius Baḥīrā.

Islam may have widely adopted the *tafsīr* of John of Damascus. The South Arabian history of the Philoponian tritheist heresy appears forgotten, and Muslims agree with John that trinitarianism is at odds with the Qur’an in Q4:171. John’s *tafsīr* furthermore possibly

contributed to the interpretation of the Jewish slander against Jesus in Q4:157 as a denial of the event of the crucifixion. And the foundational Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is measured against both of these interpretations, and disregarded as contradictory, as the Qur'an is considered by both Muslims and Christians alike incapable of distinguishing between Son of God in metaphor and the crude literal implications of divine genetics.

The Christians are often subjugated, and most likely on the defensive. Abū Ra'itā in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> Century tries once again to explain the nuances in Christian doctrine, this time using Islamic concepts. The Incarnation is framed as the veil of God, reviving the ecumenical language of *On the Unified Trinity*, now nearing eighty years old. The trinitarian Persons are explained in the terminology of the Most Beautiful Names of God. However, these potentially fruitful ideas are delivered in an apologetic tone, one critical of the Qur'an, and thus appears to find little fertile ground among Muslims.

Islamic dialogicians in our surveyed sources seem preoccupied with defending their founder's prophethood, creating miracles to accompany his story, convinced that miracles are the key to proving Muhammad's position. Facing historical and literary criticism, Islamic scholars prop the two sources of their faith against each other for support, and the Qur'an becomes Muhammad's primary miracle.

## Conclusion to Part I.2

The relationship between Christianity and Islam likely began as a dispute between Christologies. *The Disputation of John and the Emir* (23/644) highlights ecumenically that even Chalcedonians had praised the Monophysite John to the Islamic Emir, and were praying for him. The author then entreats his audience to pray for the Emir's wisdom.<sup>609</sup> As neither the Emir nor the Patriarch enter into soteriological debate, the text may be understood as inclusive, and as there seems an attempt to understand the religious other in light of each their own theology, the exchange may be understood as ecumenical.

This ecumenical attitude toward Islam seems to continue in texts like *The Chronicle of John bar Penkaye* as John understands Islam to be both from and of God himself. Despite the religious differences between them, he appears to regard the Muslims as more a part of God's design, and perhaps a closer Christology to his own than the Chalcedonian Christians, for whom he has palpable distaste.

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<sup>609</sup> Newman, 27.

The nature of the dialogue may have changed dramatically with the work of John of Damascus (115/734). John's comments appear to have had immediate and widespread impact on the forming Christian theology of Islam. Hoyland notes this in the subsequent use of John's designations for Islam as a cult (*threskeia*) and Muhammad as a false prophet (*pseudoprophetes*), in other writings following his. John's detailed and highly negative response to his isolated interpretation of Islamic Christology, the Qur'an, and the prophethood of Muhammad all appear to have become foundational influences for subsequent Christian dialogicians.<sup>610</sup> In Rienhold Gleis's more categorical observation, "As the earliest known Christian document to deal with Islam in some detail, the significance of Ch. 100 of *De haeresibus* can hardly be overestimated. It formed the image of Islam, at least in the Greek world, for many centuries, and exerted wider influence among Christian readers."<sup>611</sup> For unrelated heresies, John of Damascus was later anathemized by the Iconoclastic Council of 136/754 in Constantinople. It is certainly ironic that the works of, "a traitor of Christ, an enemy of the empire, a teacher of impiety, and a perverter of the scriptures," should exert such an enduring influence on the Christian theology of Islam.<sup>612</sup>

Yet even John's attitude toward Islam, strong as it is, is also tempered by his attitude toward other branches of Christian faith. As Sahas noted, if Islam is the forerunner of the Antichrist, Nestorius is labelled both the, "Antichrist," himself, and the, "son of Satan." "It is obvious therefore, that the epithet 'forerunner of the Antichrist' was a condemnation of those who perverted the basic doctrines of the Church especially with regard to the divinity of Christ, and such it was used against Islam."<sup>613</sup> So though John had seemingly set a new aggressive tone for the dialogue between the Melkites and the Muslims, he may not be said to have viewed Islam as a wholly other religion.

Theodore Abū Qurrah (d.c.204/820) too views the heresies of the Nestorians and Jacobites as also outside of true Christianity, which he agrees with John is restricted to Chalcedonianism.<sup>614</sup> He writes of the Monophysites, "As for you, Jacobite, haughty brute that you are, I want you to know that you have surpassed the beasts in coarseness and Satan and his armies in insolence toward God ... It is not your ignorance that disgusts me, but the

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<sup>610</sup> Hoyland, 488.

<sup>611</sup> Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 299.

<sup>612</sup> The quote is in the words of the council itself. See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. IV (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1886), 458.; cf. Sahas, 4-5, especially p.4, n. 2. It is a notable insult that the Iconoclastic Council reportedly did not refer to John by his Christian name, but by his Arabic family name, Mansūr, which he had left behind in becoming a priest after leaving Damascus. See *ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>613</sup> Nestorius' sin, according to John, was to ascribe to Mary the title *Christotokos*, rather than use the Chalcedonian *Theotokos*. See Sahas, 69.

<sup>614</sup> Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 61. For more on Abū Qurrah's Christology see Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims : A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*, 94-97.

hideousness of your monstrous devilry.”<sup>615</sup> The commensurate exclusion of both Islam and other branches of Christianity seems a reoccurring feature of Christian theologians of Islam during this time, though it cannot be said that after John of Damascus, were they to exhibit some capacity for ecumenism toward other branches of Christianity, that they would likewise have applied that capacity toward Islam. In any case it is notable that exclusivity and negativity toward Islam is generally mirrored by a similar distaste for other branches of Christianity, and in this we see the isolated and isolating nature of the polemical form of dialogue.

One voice in all three centuries stands out in tone, the apparently ecumenical voice of Timothy I. Timothy I, in this author’s estimation, offers to concede the prophethood of Muhammad and the divine inspiration of the Qur’an from a Nestorian perspective, perhaps the closest of the three main Christologies to the new Islamic Christology. His concessions are offered in spite of his defence against the prophecies of Muhammad as the Paraclete or the camel rider. They are made under the condition that the trinitarian interpretation of Q4:171 is allowed, and that Q4:157 is understood not to deny the event of the crucifixion. He does not offer conversion here, but congruence, a dialogue context to replace that of the strengthening polemics in the Christian-Muslim relationship.

Timothy I is ultimately unsuccessful, and the bricks of the Qur’an are subsequently and increasingly thrown by both Christians and Muslims at the other, used to build walls instead of bridges. Eventually these first three centuries of declining congeniality in dialogue provide direction which leads to the use of scripture as fuel for the political wars that end the Byzantine Empire and launch the Crusades.

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<sup>615</sup> Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 115-116.

When the field of the unthinkable is expanded and maintained for centuries in a particular tradition of thought, the intellectual horizons of reason are diminished and its critical functions narrowed and weakened because the sphere of the unthought becomes more determinate and there is little space left for the thinkable.

- Mohammed Arkoun<sup>616</sup>

## II. Modern Scholarship in Christian-Muslim Relations

### Introduction

From the third/ninth century onward, Nestorians and Monophysites declined steadily under Muslim rule. The divides between the major Christologies deepened and new fractures appeared. The Chalcedonians divided into the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox in 446/1054. Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation in 923/1517 became another great fissure in the Church, separating Protestants from Catholics. The Protestants grew rapidly in number, and arguing amongst themselves on the finer points of theology they too divided into dozens of denominations.

Centuries of division between branches of Protestant Christianity perhaps began to heal in 1262/1846 with the formation of the Evangelical Alliance from some 800 representatives of 50 denominations, an ecumenical vision of William Carey (1174/1761-1250/1834). Protestant Christians then began to unite in mission at the Edinburgh Conference of 1328/1910, where 1200 delegates of 160 different expressions of faith agreed to pursue unity in co-operation with each other, and evangelism of the whole world as a corporate goal. In 1367/1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) formed with most major branches of

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<sup>616</sup> This quote comes from one of Arkoun's many treatises on Islamic thought. His corpus is a compelling revisioning of what is possible in Islamic historical criticism, and a powerful critique of the assumptions of commentators on what Islam is, who speaks on its behalf, and how the Qur'an should be interpreted. He vies for a non-reductionist historical view of the Qur'an, rich in both literary-historical anthropology and phenomenological and metaphysical meaning. He may be best known for his unique vocabulary (book-book, fact/event, unthinkable and unthought, etc.) including the defining of orthodoxy as a primarily historico-political creative product rather than the oft-assumed dispassionate revelatory-discovery of objective truth. Arkoun, *Islam: To Reform or to Subvert?*, 19. Arkoun is a powerful historical philosopher, and notoriously difficult to decipher. A helpful introduction to his work was prepared by Ursula Gunter in Suha Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim Intellectuals and the Qur'an*, Reprint ed., Qur'anic Studies Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 125-167.

Christianity in participation, with the exception of the Catholic Church which in 1388/1968 formed a joint secretariat with the WCC focused on peace and social justice.<sup>617</sup>

The nature of inter-faith dialogue was being explored as formal bodies formed during the fourteenth-fifteenth/twentieth century. Evangelicals defined inter-faith dialogue from a Christian perspective at the Lausanne Conference in 1394/1974 in the succinct wording of G.W.Peters,

Purpose is evangelism, the procedure is dialogue – the friendly exchange of views and convictions, the ultimate sharing of experiences, needs, aspirations, and frustrations, with a view of dissolving the difficulties, obstacles, and prejudices in the heart and mind of the unsaved person.<sup>618</sup>

To Evangelicals, dialogue is evangelism. The WCC had moved from this position in 1381/1961 to a position of dialogue as a more general obligation of Christians by 1388/1968, distinguishing the two concepts. In 1384/1964 the Vatican established the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, and on the purpose of dialogue, the Vatican sided with the WCC that dialogue in and of itself was of value apart from evangelism.<sup>619</sup>

The most recent century introduces to the dialogue a third major voice, that of the modern secularist. The removal of the supernatural from discourse on religions in general in the secular academy has seen a surge in the use of science and history as weapons against the metaphysical. Though rationalism has been a dialogue bridge for centuries, only in most recent times has it begun to supersede the basic claims of the religions themselves, i.e. the existence of God, the revelatory value of scripture, and the reliability of claims to the miraculous.<sup>620</sup> So it is not that Muslims and Christians are dealing with each other alone in the Christian-Muslim

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<sup>617</sup> On the dialogue teachings of the WCC since Vatican II see Aydin, 89-131.

<sup>618</sup> See G.W. Peters in James Dixon Douglas, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice : International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, July 16 - 25, 1974 ; Official Reference Volume, Papers and Responses* (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), 186. This is a good example of a strict apologetical stance: compare, contrast, and ultimately, convert.

<sup>619</sup> This author recognizes a debt to the work of Ataulah Siddiqui, whose treatment of the information in this introduction is far more developed than found here, and whose work is recommended. See Ataulah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (Houndmills Basingstoke Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 23-48. For another good introduction to the Christian view of Islam in the early fourteenth-fifteenth/twentieth century see the *Series Forward* in Ignaz Goldziher and others, *Mohammed and Islam*, Exploring the House of Islam : Perceptions of Islam in the Period of Western Ascendancy, 1800-1945, vol. 2 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), vii-xxii., Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies : The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 125-158., and especially Risto Jukko, *Trinity in Unity in Christian-Muslim Relations : The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations, vol. 7 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007).

<sup>620</sup> See for example Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 1st Mariner Books ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2008).; David Mills and Dorion Sagan, *Atheist Universe : The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2006).; Bertrand Russell and Paul Edwards, *Why I Am Not a Christian, and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967)., Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great : How Religion Poisons Everything*, 1st ed. (New York: Twelve, 2007)., and Daniel Clement Dennett, *Breaking the Spell : Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006).

dialogue, but they must also contend with the shared anchor of atheism at work to reduce or even disprove both religions on scientific grounds.

The Muslims, as the Christians did, also endured great division within the movement as well as pressure from outside. Triggered by the death of 'Alī ibn 'Abī Ṭālib in 41/661, the Shi'a and Sunni divide deepened over time. The first of the nine major Christian crusades captured Jerusalem temporarily in 492/1099. But the Muslim warrior hero Saladin reportedly returned much of the Christian crusader lands back to Islam a century and a half later, just in time for the Mongol invasion in 618/1221. Baghdad burned, and the Abbasid Caliphate ended in about 656/1258. Much of the Islamic Empire was then ruled by the Ottomans from about the time of Osman Bey (d.726 /1326) until 1336/1918. The Ottomans realized long term gains in Northern Africa, and temporary gains in Southern Europe. The Shi'ite Safavid Empire stretched over former Persian lands from 906/1501-1134/1722.<sup>621</sup> The Mughal Empire in India fell in 1273/1857. The Ottoman-Russian wars dominated the scene from 1148/1735 until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Egypt became independent in the very early 14<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century, followed by Greece and the Balkans in the century following. On 14 Muharran, 1337 / October 19, 1918 the Ottoman Empire surrendered in WWI, and the League of Nations divided some Islamic lands up between France and Britain, whose colonial reigns there lasted until 1365/1946.

In many ways, the struggle of Muslims to deal with Christianity and secularism philosophically began to crystalize in India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "In the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Muslim leadership remained with the 'Ulamā'. They became the vanguard in preserving Islamic identity, especially when political leadership was almost non-existent."<sup>622</sup> These leaders likely began to recognize the early Christian missionary movement as targeting Muslims with the publication of *Mizān al-ḥaqq* (*The Balance of Truth*) by Karl Pfander (1218/1803-1282/1865) of the Church Missionary Society in India in the mid-fourteenth/nineteenth century. An Islamic response was led by Rahmat Allah Kairanawi (1233/1818-1307/1890) and Maulana Sanauallah Amritsari (1285/1868-1367/1948). The former debated Pfander publically in 1270/1854, and then went into hiding in 1273/1857 when a warrant was issued for his arrest on charges of revolution. The latter employed the Bible in defence of Islam in his *Tafsīr Sanai*.<sup>623</sup>

Two schools were founded to address the challenges of missionary Christians and modernization. The Deoband School, founded in 1284/1867 took a conservative approach,

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<sup>621</sup> For the reader's benefit, a map of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires in the late 13<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century is included in Marvin E. Gettleman and Stuart Schaar, *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2003), 43.

<sup>622</sup> Siddiqui, 6.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid., 7-8.



rejecting *itjihād* and returning to Ḥanafī orthodoxy from modernizing tendencies. A decade later, the Oriental College was founded by Syed Ahmed Khan, who embraced the English language and Western thought, seeking to incorporate them into a consistently developing Islam. Khan wrote an Islamic commentary on the Bible, in which he claimed that to the degree that the Biblical text could be proved authentic, it could also be viewed as revelatory.<sup>624</sup>

A third school, *Nadwat al-‘Ulamā’*, sparked by the writings of Shibli Numani (1273/1857-1332/1914), sought to reconcile the Deoband School and the Oriental College approaches. This middle ground approach concentrated less on Christianity and more on how the Qur’an rather than the history of the *Ummah* provided the central focus for finding Islam’s way forward. This approach was supported by Muhammad Iqbal (1290/1873-1357/1938), who generally valued the spirituality of Christians and urged the Islamic community to receive with caution the varied modernisms of the West.<sup>625</sup> Such was the stage set for three dominant approaches by Muslims toward Christianity and modernism.<sup>626</sup>

As Siddiqui notes, the term ‘dialogue’ and its meaning were developed by Christians, some of whom wanted reconciliation, and others of whom were more evangelistically motivated. The Qur’an says in Q5:51, “You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them – God does not guide such wrongdoers,”<sup>627</sup> and in the surah of *The Disbelievers* it says that, “you have your religion and I have mine” (Q109:6).<sup>628</sup> These two verses seem to preclude the necessity for dialogue altogether, except that neither verse in its historical context seems to have any application to dialogue in the sense that the Christians defined it or for which they were applied above. Q5:51 is most likely political, and Q109:6 may be related to tolerance for

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<sup>624</sup> Ibid., 8-9. Siddiqui notes the approaches of the two schools as modernist and preservationist. These are useful categories for delimitating the approaches of Muslim scholars to both secularism and the Christian missionary movement. Khan’s commentary will be explored below.

<sup>625</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>626</sup> These three schools bear some resemblance in their navigation of text and context to the very early development of Islamic jurisprudence in the schools of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* of Mālik ibn Anas (d.179/795), the Ḥanafī *ahl al-ra’y*, and the middle ground struck by Muhammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī (d.820/1417).

<sup>627</sup> As the historical context is important, we will return from time to time to the early history and *mufassirūn* for the revelatory context of Qur’anic verses. *Tafsīr* Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767) mentions two men disputing over whether or not to accept protection from the Jews. Al-Wāḥidī’s *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* clarifies the context, that of Ubaīda ibn al-Ṣāmit and ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy who disagreed about whether or not to accept protection from Jews. The verse was applied to this example, and the latter man who remained under Jewish protection was considered the “perverse at heart” in Q5:52. *Tafsīr* al-Ṭabarī upholds this interpretation. This verse in its Islamic historical context is not likely related to any kind of inter-faith dialogue as described in the Christian definitions above. This verse most likely addresses the propriety of political subjugation of Muslims to Jews and Christians. On dating Muqātil see Thomas, *The Bible in Arab Christianity*. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2003), Vol.1., p.305.

<sup>628</sup> According to *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās* this seemingly peaceful verse was abrogated by instructions for war. Al-Ṭustarī and Muqātil agree, both mentioning the sword verse (Q9:5). Al-Wāḥidī’s *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* does not mention abrogation, and rather places this whole Surah in the context of Qurayshi idolaters, making no reference to Christians at all. The two Qur’anic references in application to Christian-Muslim dialogue are found in Siddiqui, 51., cf. Sulaymān, 529.

the Qurayshi idolaters or abrogated by the sword verse (Q9:5) depending on the interpretation followed. In any case, dialogue by sword or from under subjugation may not be considered dialogue at all, and so proof-texting the Qur'an has added mistrust to the posture of Muslims toward Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Siddiqui notes several further reasons for Islamic mistrust of dialogue. Firstly, it may be said that Christianity in the West was becoming increasingly syncretised with secularism as there became fewer and fewer divides between the moral code of Christians and their atheist counterparts in Western societies.<sup>629</sup> Therefore it became increasingly doubtful to Muslims that in Christian-Muslim dialogue, it was Christians in fact sitting at the table. Secondly, Muslims themselves have struggled with who should represent Islam.<sup>630</sup> To what degree the '*Ulamā*' represents Muslims has been in constant debate. Thirdly, as Christians dominated the intellectual landscape and may be better educationally prepared, the dialogue was mistrusted as an extension of intellectual colonialism. Fourthly, the historical equation of Christianity with colonialist powers and a political agenda was a continuing challenge. Fifthly, the Orientalists of the most recent century were commonly associated with the agenda of the intellectual defeat of Islam.<sup>631</sup>

Despite the challenges, Muslims in the most recent century worked toward a singular voice. From 4 – 10 Safar, 1345 / August 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 1926, Al-Azhar University organized a major conference in Cairo. From 27 Dhū al-Qa'da – 25 Dhū al-Hijjah, 1344 / June 7 – July 5, 1926 in Mecca, Abdul 'Azīz ibn Sa'ud organized a second conference. The second conference established the Muslim World Congress (*Mu'tamar al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*) which has met regularly ever since.<sup>632</sup> Disagreements between Al-Azhar and the Saudis led to the establishment of the Medina University (est. 1382/1962), King Abdul 'Azīz University (est. 1384/1964) and the Institute for Islamic Law (est. 1386/1966) in Saudi Arabia. The Muslim World League (*Rabitat al-'Ālam al-Islāmī*) also came at the same time (est. 1382/1962).

Though the *Mu'tamar's* objectives were not focused on Christian-Muslim dialogue *per se*, it began to nevertheless participate in dialogue under the leadership of its president Inamullah Khan since the Bhamdoun Consultation in 1373/1954. Khan's attitude toward dialogue is summarized by Siddiqui thus:

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<sup>629</sup> For an interesting study of this phenomenon see Ronald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience: Why Are Christians Living Just Like the Rest of the World?* (Grand Rapids Mich: Baker Books, 2005).

<sup>630</sup> This is the title question and primary inquiry in John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam?: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

<sup>631</sup> Siddiqui, 50-56.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

That the Christian-Muslim dialogue is an effort to promote common values of two great religions. This includes belief in one Humanity and one great human family. Dialogue provides an opportunity to ‘settle all our differences ... through discussions’. Dialogue is about the defence of ‘human rights of all citizens of the country – the basic rights assured by all religions. Dialogue is about soul searching and having the courage to admit past mistakes and discuss freely various issues of mutual accommodation.’<sup>633</sup>

Through the *Mu’tamar*, Christians and Muslims were in dialogue in Amman in 1389/1969, just two years after the Israeli capture of part of Jordan in 1387/1967. In Colombo in 1402/1982, the *Mu’tamar* joined the WCC in a dialogue programme themed, “Christian-Muslim Living and Working Together,” but there were also two other major organizations on the scene by this time. The Muslim World League (*Rabitat al-‘Ālam al-Islāmī*) formed in 1382/1962 out of the ashes of the declining International Cultural Islamic Organization (ICIO) to propagate Islam and defend it against Western Imperialism, heresy, and innovation (*bida’*).<sup>634</sup> The World Islamic Call Society (*Jam’iyat al-Da’wa al-Islamiyya al-‘Alamiyya*) was formed by the Libyan government in 1402/1982, and has taken up dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, as well as invested heavily in humanitarian interests through UNESCO.

Muslims in formal dialogue tend to define the purpose of dialogue as a, “Process wherein people with diverse faith backgrounds come together and recognising each other’s confessional identity and integrity, joining hands in equality and respect to resolve a common and mutually perceived threat to all.”<sup>635</sup> This shares in definition with the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Faith Dialogue, but differs from the missionary intent of dialogue retained by the Evangelicals as noted above. The most recent century thus sees Muslims in formal dialogue with Catholic and Protestant Christians who gradually develop a shared view that dialogue in and of itself is of value. To a lesser degree Muslims begin to dialogue with Evangelicals who retain that dialogue without evangelical intent misses its purpose.

It may be noted that the Islamic value of dialogue apart from proselytism may be of a Qur’anic foundation. Q29:46 instructs Muslims to debate with Christians, declaring their Islamic faith, and yet does not contain an imperative for conversion but rather a declaration of equity: “Say, ‘We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him.’” In Q3:64 as well, the Qur’an encourages the pursuit of common ground between Muslims and their Christian counterparts.

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<sup>633</sup> Khan in *ibid.*, 177.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, 180-181.

<sup>635</sup> From the WCC’s *Muslim Minority Affairs Journal*, extracted from *ibid.*, 57.

It is from this brief history of the development of formal dialogue,<sup>636</sup> and these two major understandings of the meaning of dialogue, that we begin our survey and analysis of prominent voices in Christian-Muslim dialogue from the late 14<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Century until now. In this dialogue now as in 1324/1906 in the voice of theologian Abbé Loisy we will view the tensions of relativistic interpretations of the absolutes of the other.<sup>637</sup>

As in PART I, this section will not attempt to engage every voice in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. We will focus here on a survey and analysis of strong representative voices and innovative voices. For example, the voice of Louis Massignon is included here for both reasons. His influence on the Vatican II documents is evidence of his broad influence. His departure from the traditional Catholic narrative concerning Islam, and his acceptance of Muhammad as prophet, are deeply innovative. His mentor, Charles de Foucauld, and one of his students, Giulio Bassetti-Sani, are included as well, as the relationship between the three men reveal an evolving ecumenical trend, which is of special interest to this study.

From the Islamic voices, for example, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Sayyid Qutb are chosen as apologetical and polemical voices representative of their traditions, Sufi Perennialism and Sunni Traditionalism respectively. Mahmoud Ayoub and Mohammed Arkoun are chosen for their innovations contributing to ecumenical thought in the Christian-Muslim dialogue. Other voices are added to these below based on the same criteria.

Some representative polemical voices are included as well to provide calibration and contrast to highlight the ecumenical or pluralistic voices. There are many thousands of voices in the Christian-Muslim dialogue during this century. Though an attempt is made in this survey to present faithfully main representative voices and noteworthy innovators, especially those ecumenical in tone, not all broadly influential voices or innovative voices are included. The following contributors highlighted are to be considered exemplary according to these two criteria; they do not represent an exhaustive list.<sup>638</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> A more in depth study of the history of Muslim-Christian dialogue is in Daniel. One may also consult W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters : Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991).; and Goddard, *A History of Christian Muslim Relations*. Further, James W. Sweetman has produced a masterful comparative religion study in his four volume work, *Islam and Christian Theology*. An attempt here is only made to highlight the key waypoints during our period of study, innovations that have not yet been documented in surveys of this kind, the general direction in Qur'anic interpretation of key representatives, and ecumenical trends.

<sup>637</sup> The reference is to a quote from Abbé Loisy in the works of Ignaz Goldziher: "One can say of all religions that they possess for the consciences of its adherents an absolute, and for the comprehension of the philosopher and critic, a relative value." From Goldziher and others, 15.

<sup>638</sup> It is a particular challenge to determine what makes a voice representative. For instance, since there is no formal clergy *per se* in some large branches of the Islamic faith, how does one judge a dialogical voice to be representative? Is it a number of formal adherents or followers? The size of the group which one claims to represent? Or perhaps the number of times one is cited supportively by other scholars? In any case, it is conceded here that the voices which appear below are exemplary and not

Our history of Christian-Muslim dialogue will be constructed thematically. Temporally, our beginning point is with a Christian *kalām* refutation. The 1322/1904 volume of William Tisdall's *A Manual of the Leading Muḥammadan Objections to Christianity* reveals that not much has changed in the dominant topics of departure between Christians and Muslims in the millennium between 287/900 and 1318/1900 CE.<sup>639</sup> Tisdall's table of contents is quite like our section headings here, focusing on *tahrīf* (Chs. 2 and 3), the Incarnation (Ch. 4), the Trinity (Ch. 5), the Crucifixion (Ch. 6), and Muhammad's Prophethood (Ch. 7). This section is partitioned according to the six major themes of dialogue previously identified: The Trinity, The Incarnation, The Crucifixion, *Tahrīf*, The Prophethood of Muhammad, and Islamic Expansionism. Notes will be made along the way identifying the tone of the dialogue participants, and as before, the use of the Qur'an and ecumenical trends in the dialogue will remain our primary concerns. Agreement or disagreement between those interpretations and a non-reductionist Qur'anic contextual interpretation may be noted in some cases where the Qur'an appears to have its own voice in the dialogue. In projecting trends in Qur'anic interpretation from the first three centuries of Islam through the most recent century, how is the Qur'an being used in Muslim-Christian dialogue, and what are some modern innovations in Qur'anic interpretation that could further develop this inter-faith relationship?

## II.1 The Trinity

William Tisdall (d.1347/1928) begins where the early dialogue left off, the division between trinitarian versus unitarian monotheism, and the Islamic impression of trinitarian monotheism as tritheism. In Tisdall's text, Jesus repeats Moses' words in the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4, Mark 12:29).<sup>640</sup> Q5:73 and 4:171 are immediately in question, and according to Zwemer, these along with 5:116 are the only Qur'anic verses directly refuting the Trinity.<sup>641</sup> Q5:116 too represents for Tarif Khalidi "the most

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exhaustive, and the challenge of finding those who speak on behalf of Islam in any way that is meaningful to the general lives of Muslims is compellingly difficult.

<sup>639</sup> William Tisdall, *A Manual of the Leading Muḥammadan Objections to Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1904). It should be noted that Islamic scholars at this time were not as interested in dialogue as they were in the early centuries of Islam, the Islamic voice in the twentieth century seems to grow in response to Christian scholarly and missionary provocation. It should also be noted that Tisdall's Qur'anic references are to the Fluegel enumeration standard. In this work, all references will be given according to the Egyptian standard. A conversion table is available in Richard Bell and W. Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an*, Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 202-204.

<sup>640</sup> Tisdall, 146. For a well-developed standard Christian defence of the Trinity, see Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam : The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 12. The non-specialist reader may also benefit from modern explanations of Trinitarian monotheism. The reader is directed for a Catholic view to Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans., Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad, 2010), 80-120.; and for a Protestant view to Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity* (Vancouver, Canada: Regent College Publishing, 2002).

<sup>641</sup> Samuel Zwemer, *Moslem Doctrine of God* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010), 79.

confrontational” passage in the Qur’an.<sup>642</sup> But do these passages refute the Trinity, or tritheism, or both?

Ismail Raji al-Faruqi (d.1406/1986) tells Christianity that Islamic unitarianism was simply a theological upgrade,

It brought a refreshing iconoclasm at a time and place where dualism and trinitarianism were the higher, and polytheism the lower state of religious consciousness. And, in order to purge that consciousness free once and for all, Islam demanded utmost care in the use of language and percepts [sic] appropriate to the unique God. ‘Father’, ‘intercessor’, ‘saviour’, ‘son’, etc., were utterly banished from the religious vocabulary...<sup>643</sup>

The particular upgrade that Islam provides, according to al-Faruqi, is in the clarification of what is ultimately a Hellenistic misunderstanding of Semitic philology. From Tertullian (d.c.220) to Karl Barth (d.1388/1968), Christians begin with the misinterpretation of Genesis 3:22: “Then the Lord God said, ‘Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!’” The use of the majestic plural pronoun here is understood by Christians as an admission of the Trinity in the earliest Jewish texts. Similar texts are used by St. Augustine as well (Genesis 1:26-27; 3:8, Exodus 33:23) which for al-Faruqi add up only to evince Augustine’s great Hellenistic error of imposing literalism on allegorical Semitic texts, and thus trinitarianism upon God. The tragedy is that Augustine was not Semitic himself, and thus unable to understand the Hebrew and Aramaic texts in their cultural fullness.<sup>644</sup> So it is that al-Faruqi says that Christianity, having mistakenly created ‘three’ from ‘We’, deified Jesus, and will never be able to reconcile the transcendent and the imminent in that deification of humanity.

When pinned down every Christian will have to admit that his God is both transcendent and immanent. But this claim of transcendence is *ipso facto* devoid of grounds. To maintain the contrary, one has to give up the law of logic. But Christianity was prepared to go to this length too. It raised ‘paradox’ above self-evident truth and vested it with the status of an epistemological principle. Under such principle, anything can be asserted and discussion becomes idle.<sup>645</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus : Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, Convergences : Inventories of the Past (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>643</sup> Ismail R. Al-Faruqi and Ataullah Siddiqui, *Islam and Other Faiths* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation and the International Institute for Islamic Thought, 1998), 12. As Cragg noted elsewhere, al-Faruqi was an apologist. His posture in dialogue was to disprove the other. He expressed his dialogue positions with ‘belligerence’ and ‘impatience’ in Cragg’s evaluation. See Cragg in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Z. Haddad, *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1995), 399-410.

<sup>644</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 40-42.

<sup>645</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

To this Darrell Johnson may respond: “We may not be able to fully explain the Trinity, but that does not mean that it’s absurd. And conversely, just because something is a mystery is no excuse to throw up the hands and shut down the brain.”<sup>646</sup> The ultimate inexplicability of Trinitarian Monotheism seems conceded by both sides of the dialogue, and yet our inquiry here is not whether or not the Trinity is logical, but to what degree is its mystery a conception of God acceptable to, or forbidden by, the Qur’an.

The plurality of the first person pronouns referring to God in the Qur’an is a persistent thread in Christian commentary. Whether in the polemical voice of Tisdall<sup>647</sup> or the later ecumenical voice of Bassetti-Sani,<sup>648</sup> many Christian commentators on the Qur’an prefer to interpret the first-person plural references to God in light of their trinitarian theology rather than the majestic plurality in formal Semitic languages.

There is an apparent difficulty in this view as taken by polemicists. There does not seem to be a reason for polemicists to assume the trinitarian interpretation of the first-person plural references to God in the Qur’an. If their desire is to defeat the Qur’an logically, then accepting a unitarian interpretation of the majestic plural form seems more rational. Yet this is not the dominant presentation. It seems that for polemicists, to agree with the unitarian interpretation (majestic plural), and therefore with the Islamic interpretation of the Qur’an, is the worse of the two evils. If polemicists were to accept the unitarian interpretation of majestic plural pronouns in the Qur’an they may find it easier to present Allah of the Qur’an as distinct from Yahweh of the Bible. Curiously, however, they tend to side with Christian ecumenists rather than the Muslims in this regard.

In recent times, association of trinitarian ideas with the influence of Roman mysticism on the Christian religion has gained ground among Muslim dialogicians. In Sayyid Quṭb’s (d.1386/1966) commentary on Q4:171, for example, he explains that the idea of the Trinity made its way into Christianity from pagan religions, perhaps having its origin in the Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus. He further states that unitarian Christians suffered persecution under the trinitarians until the time of Islam.<sup>649</sup>

It is variously thought that the trinitarian concept was the product of syncretism between Christianity and neoplatonic philosophy. The proposition is that the neoplatonic

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<sup>646</sup> Johnson, 40.

<sup>647</sup> Tisdall, 153-154.

<sup>648</sup> Bassetti-Sani writes: “Coming, as it did, after the revelation of the mystery of the Trinity, the koranic ‘revelation’ used this *We* as a step toward the three divine Persons, rather than merely as a majestic plural.” Emphasis his. Bassetti-Sani, 74.

<sup>649</sup> Sayyid Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an, 18 Vols.*, trans., Adil Salahi and Ashur Shamis (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), Vol. 3, p. 402., cf. Sayyid Quṭb, *Fi Ḍalāl Al-Qur’ān*, 6 vols. (Cairo: Dar Ashorouk, 1972), Vol. 2, p. 815. A short biography of Quṭb can be found in Watson, 25-29.

pagan trinitarian ideas of the One, Soul (*Nous*), and Spirit; or of Being, Intelligence, and Life, became the Augustinian template for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>650</sup> This parallel is advanced recently by Muhammad Abū Zahrah (d.1394/1974) who asserts that if, “we were to consider the first cause or the One as the father, the nous [reason or logos], emanating from the One as the son, and the universal soul or spirit as the Holy Spirit ... we would not have gone wrong in our analogy.”<sup>651</sup>

Yet as Mahmoud Ayoub cautions his Muslim colleague, “The main difference between the two is that Christianity finally asserted the divinity of the Son and the Holy Spirit, while Neoplatonism did not regard the nous and the universal soul as divine.”<sup>652</sup> Hans Küng recognises Hellenistic philosophy in Christianity as a syncretism that Muhammad tried to correct. As Kerr summarises, “If Muhammad, as the Qur’an insists, recapitulated an original understanding of Jesus’ message, the church – Küng argues – needs to embrace Muhammad’s insights in order to retrieve that which was obscured in its own Hellenistic development.”<sup>653</sup>

Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim takes a different approach, calling Christianity back to its roots in unitarianism, roots that Christian dialogicians are quite willing to concede. Ata ur-Rahim is accurate in his identification of the unitarian presentations of some of the early church fathers, but makes serious errors in generalizing their theologies as such.<sup>654</sup> Irenaeus, for example, who spoke of Christ and the Holy Spirit as the ‘hands of God’ leant toward unitarian theology in his refutation of the Gnostics, but to blanket his theology as unitarian Christianity as Ata ur-Rahim does fails to account for Irenaeus’ pre-Nicean trinitarian leanings.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> The historicity of the neoplatonic influence on Christian trinitarianism is outside the scope of this research, but the reader is directed to the following study: Dominic J. O’Meara, *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, Studies in Neoplatonism (Norfolk, VA: State University of New York Press, 1981).

<sup>651</sup> Translation of Abū Zahrah by Ayoub in Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 224.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>653</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 438.; cf. Aydin, 187-193. Aydin also summarizes Küng’s view of the Qur’an as comparable with that of W. C. Smith, that it is the word of God for Muslims, and should be viewed phenomenologically. See *ibid.*, 156-161.

<sup>654</sup> Ata ur-Rahim highlights the unitarianism of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Lucian, Arius, and Donatus. Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim, *Jesus Prophet of Islam*, Rev. ed. (Elmhurst NY: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an Inc., 2003), 77-83. It is beyond the scope of this research to highlight in contrast the trinitarian leanings of each of these theologians. At this time in the development of Christian theology it is perhaps fair to say that each of these presented God in both unitarian and trinitarian language, as the concept of Trinity was in its formative stage in the minds of Christian theologians. It is correct for Ata ur-Rahim to say that in general these theologians emphasized the unity of God, but it is incorrect to state that they did not also in general emphasize that unity as occurring in the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Cf. M. Faruk Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism* (London: Saqi, 2003), 85-87.

<sup>655</sup> For example, from *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, V, Irenaeus states: “One God, the Father, not made, invisible, creator of all things; above whom there is no other God, and after whom there is no other God. And, since God is rational, therefore by (the) Word He created the things that were made; and God is Spirit, and by (the) Spirit He adorned all things: as also the prophet says: By the word of the Lord were the heavens established, and by his spirit all their power. Since then the Word establishes, that is to say, gives body and grants the reality of being, and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity



Seyyed Hossein Nasr describes the triune God of Christianity as a “Divine Relativity” the Incarnation of who became a distraction for Christians from other equally valid prophetic voices in the Semitic chain.<sup>656</sup> Kenneth Cragg responds that, far from a distraction, the historical struggle from unitarianism to trinitarianism is evidence of the latter’s accuracy:

...it was a decision by monotheists within monotheism. It was made and maintained by those who were by all their deepest traditions confessors of the faith that ‘the Lord our God the Lord is One’. When they made room in their theology for what they believed to be the theological significance of Jesus, they were tenacious of their faith in the divine unity.<sup>657</sup>

Much more accurately does Ata ur-Rahim represent later Christian unitarians, among them John Biddle (d.1072/1662), who may be considered the father of modern Western Christian unitarianism. There is a long history of unitarian thought in Christianity, the proponents of which have been variously tolerated or persecuted by trinitarian Christians throughout the centuries. The official movement stretches throughout the Western world, and perhaps began in 1188/1774 with the first permitted unitarian congregation in Britain. It began as a nonconformist Christianity, and has now also in many places evolved into a universalist unitarian faith, accepting of individualistic approaches to faith and sacred texts. Ata ur-Rahim traces unitarianism in the West through notable characters like John Locke (d.1116/1704) and Sir Isaac Newton (d.1139/1727), finally concluding that in general, Islamic theology confirms Christian unitarianism, and just as Islam has been rejected by trinitarian Christians, so too have the unitarians.<sup>658</sup>

### Modern Theories About the Christian Sects to Which the Qur’an Responds

Giulio Bassetti-Sani sides with the early ecumenists in the study above, finding in Q4:171 and 5:73 a testimony of Jesus as a Person of the trinitarian God, though he suggests that these verses were directed to the Jews, who have mocked the trinitarianism of their Christian neighbours by accusing them of tritheism. Thus the Qur’an corrects the Jews that it is inappropriate to speak of the Christian God in terms of “three,” as trinitarianism is of

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of the powers; rightly and fittingly is the Word called the Son, and the Spirit the Wisdom of God. Well also does Paul His apostle say: One God, the Father, who is over all and through all and in its all. For over all is the Father; and through all is the Son, for through Him all things were made by the Father; and in us all is the Spirit, who cries Abba Father, and fashions man into the likeness of God. Now the Spirit shows forth the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God; and the Word utters the Spirit, and therefore is Himself the announcer of the prophets, and leads and draws man to the Father.” The full text is available online at Robinson and Irenaeus.; cf. Jukko, 171-172.

<sup>656</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William C. Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, The Library of Perennial Philosophy (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2007), 56. Cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles to Be Pondered and Overcome,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 11, no. 2 (2000): 214-215.

<sup>657</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 193.

<sup>658</sup> Ata ur-Rahim, 157-248. Reverend Peter Hughes of the East Lancashire Unitarian Mission expressed concern in 2004 that recently the movement seems to be in danger of extinction. See Ruth Gledhill, “The End Is Nigh for Unitarians, Minister Warns,” *The Times*, May 24 2004.

monotheistic premise.<sup>659</sup> The Qur’anic text then is presented by Bassetti-Sani as not directed to Christians at all, but this is most certainly not correct. It has already been shown above that ‘People of the Book’ can refer to Christians as well as Jews and Muslims, and the particular contexts of revelation for Q4:171 and 5:73 are extremely likely to have been the meetings in which Muhammad met with the Najrānian Christians.

Tisdall directs the Qur’an to Arian followers of Marcion,<sup>660</sup> and is alone in his proposal. George Sale (w.c.1147/1734) addresses the Qur’an to the Collyridian Mariolatry sect.<sup>661</sup> Samuel Zwemer (d.1371/1952) defeats Sale’s proposal noting that the only source in which the Collyridian sect’s existence is mentioned is that of Epiphanius (d.403), who according to scholars, “was lacking in knowledge of the world and of men, in sound judgement and critical discernment. He was possessed of boundless credulity, now almost proverbial, causing innumerable errors and contradictions in his writings,” and, “an ignorant man who committed the greatest blunders, told the greatest falsehoods, and knew next to nothing about either Hebrew or Greek.”<sup>662</sup> According to C. F. Gerock (w.1255/1839), “Even had such a sect existed at the time of Epiphanius in Arabia, it is far from probable that, consisting only of women, it would have continued for three centuries until the time of Mohammed and become so extended and strong that Mohammed could mistake it for the Christian religion.”<sup>663</sup> Thus although Collyridianism has entered the debate at times as a proposal by Christian scholars, it is an extremely doubtful candidate as its very existence is in question. This is noted notwithstanding some evidence for Mariolatry in the Meccan area.<sup>664</sup>

François de Blois recently proposed that the Qur’an responds to the Jewish-Christian sect of the Nazoraeans. The Jewish-Christians followed Jewish food restrictions addressed in Q5:5, and believed in a holy family consisting in a Father, Son (Christ) and Sister (Holy Spirit) in the Elchasaites branch, and a Father, Son (Christ), and Mother (Holy Spirit) in the Nazoraean branch. De Blois suggests, “that one should seriously consider the possibility that the *naṣārā* of the Quran were indeed Nazoraeans and that it is consequently likely that there was a community of Nazoraean Christians in central Arabia, in the seventh century, unnoticed by the outside world.”<sup>665</sup>

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<sup>659</sup> Bassetti-Sani, 174-177.

<sup>660</sup> Tisdall, 147-150.

<sup>661</sup> Zwemer, 88-89. Collyridians were named after the cylindrical cakes which they made as offerings to Mary. Though it may be that Collyridians influenced the Philoponian doctrine of South Arabia, this cannot be shown based on the available materials.

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*, 89, n. 2.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>664</sup> Shahîd refers to “Masājid Maryam” near Mecca, from the *Geography* of al-Muqaddasi. See Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, 391.

<sup>665</sup> de Blois: 16.

Though de Blois' proposal does solve the eating restriction in Q5:5 and the Mariolatry in 5:116, it does not adequately address the apparent tritheistic issues in 4:171 and 5:73. The Nazoraeans fit well in some places and not in others, in the same way that it is notable that Muhammad's first twelve years of prophecies did not correct the Christianity of his Meccan family-in-law, and yet made serious corrections of the Christians who visited Muhammad from Najrān in the final years of his life. It is conceivable that the Qur'an responds to the sect of the Nazoraeans and the sect of the Philoponian tritheists in critical voices that return them both to its own seemingly more Nestorian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, as de Blois admits, there is no known extra-Qur'anic historical evidence of Nazoraeans among the Arabs of pre-Islamic Arabia, and the name *naṣārā* in the Qur'an is not enough evidence on its own to indicate the Nazoraean sect specifically, as the term, "could conceivably represent an attempt by the ancient Arab Christians to re-etymologize Aramaic *nāṣrāy-* (or *\*naṣrāy-*) as an Arabic *naṣrānī*, in the same way that they re-etymologized the biblical name Yuḥannā, 'John', as Arabic Yaḥyā, 'he lives'."<sup>666</sup> The Nazoraean sect contends as the recipients of the critiques in Q5:5 and 5:116, though there is no known independent evidence to place the sect on the peninsula in the early seventh century.<sup>667</sup>

Griffith prefers to simplify the answer:

The most likely case is that the Christians whose doctrines and practices are subject to critique in the "Arabic Qur'an" are Arabic-speaking Christians associated with the largely Aramaic-speaking denominations, the existence of whom to Arab tribesmen in the early seventh century is a matter of historical record. They are the "Melkites", "Jacobites" and "Nestorians" of whom the later Syriac and Arabic sources, both Muslim and Christian, regularly speak.<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid., 12. Shahîd disagrees with de Blois on this, arguing that, "The Naṣārā, the Christians of the Qur'an, were not a sect, but those of the Christian *oikoumene* in the seventh century..." Shahîd, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," 23. Griffith too disagrees, writing that it, "seems reasonable to presume that by means of the term *Naṣārā* the Qur'an intends to refer to Christians actually present in its own Arabic-speaking milieu of the early seventh century, and not to any earlier group who may have been designated by the Greek form of this name in the works of Christian heresiographers who wrote in Greek with reference to a much earlier time and a different place." Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?," 85.

<sup>667</sup> The Nazoraean sect seems an acceptable solution to contemporary Islamic historian M. Faruk Zein as well other Muslim apologists surveyed by Kate Zebiri. See Zein, 73ff.; cf. Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 67-71.

<sup>668</sup> Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?," 85-86. Griffith's proposal is addressed directly in Section I.1 above under the heading 'Christian Tritheism'. Bertaina agrees that it is the three main branches in their orthodoxies that the Qur'an responds to: "Some theorists claim that Jewish-Christian groups or other heretical Unitarian Christians lived in the area, although this adds an unnecessary complication, since all of the evidence of Christianity in the Qur'an can be explained in terms of the predominant communities of the region." Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 55, n. 120. This statement from Bertaina is surprisingly dismissive and exposes a possible weakness in his study. It is understandable that this simplistic answer makes historical exegesis of Qur'anic dialogues easier, but it does not account for real historical evidence of heretical Christian doctrines that fit with the Qur'anic corrections. Contrary to Bertaina's claim, the eating restrictions in Q5:5, the Mariolatry in 5:116, and the specific refutation of tritheism in 4:171 and 5:73 (if understood as a correction of tritheism) cannot be explained by any of the three main orthodoxies of the time. Bertaina's interpretation of the Qur'anic

One can find no real historical traces of primitive "Jewish Christians", Elchasaites, Ebionites or heretical "Nazarenes" in the Qur'an's Arabia. ... the suggestions of their presence there by many scholars, both early and late, are all based on perceived doctrinal parallels between passages in the Qur'an and the reported teachings of one or another of these groups.<sup>669</sup>

Yet even the combination of all three orthodoxies of all three of main branches of Christianity, could not account for all of the Qur'anic corrections of Christians, as discussed above. The responses elicited in the Qur'an by the beliefs of the *naṣārā* requires a more mosaic approach to the identity of those *naṣārā*. In this case, what seems to Griffith like Occam's razor, that Qur'anic Christians were simply the three mainstream branches, does not fit the evidence. The fact of the existence of so many sects of the branches of Christianity at the time suggests the investigation of those sects in light of the Qur'anic critique as a historically appropriate enterprise, even though some may finally be found to have never existed at all.

Thus we must return to the evidence presented above, that Najrānian sects, perhaps of the three main branches, Philoponian Monophysites for example, are the recipients of the Qur'anic tritheistic critique, which as noted, the Meccan Monophysite Christians did not receive during the previous decade of revelations. The distinctions within the Qur'an between its response to Monophysites in Mecca and Monophysites in Najrān, requires a more elaborate approach than Griffith suggests. Thus, though Tisdall is mistaken about the doctrine of the Christian audience, he is correct that this verse is not directed to trinitarian monotheists (any of the three main branches in their orthodoxy).

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dialogues under the limited light of the three main orthodoxies does not honour the diversity of doctrines historically present, nor the witness of the Qur'an as to the specific doctrines to which those groups adhered. Certainly the historical inquiry into these doctrinal groups is not yet concluded. Further, should we limit the Christian doctrine in South and West Arabia to Monophysite orthodoxy, it must then be acknowledged that the Qur'an addressed the Meccan Monophysites in a very different tone than the Najrānian Monophysites, while dismissing the historical evidence that unorthodox Monophysites were present. The very difference in tone between the Meccan and Medinan Qur'anic dialogues as they pertain to Christians extremely likely to have been dominantly Monophysite, reveals the difference in doctrine. Plainly, the Meccan Monophysites did not believe as the Najrānian Monophysites believed, though both were known by the name of one of the three main branches of Christianity. To suggest otherwise attributes to the Qur'an both a devolving inclusivism of Christians, and a growing ignorance of Christian doctrine over time. This is certainly opposed to a non-reductionist historical view of the Qur'an. Thus the coherence of the Qur'an is in question to those who propose that the three main orthodoxies, *in their orthodoxies*, were the only doctrines to which the Qur'an responds. This amounts to the historical reductionism that W. C. Smith warns of, which we are herein endeavouring to avoid. It may even be polemical historianism, as it alters or ignores both the voice of the Qur'an and the evidence of heterodoxies in its historical context, in order to, ironically, more accurately interpret the Qur'an in its historical context. At the least it is both a limited view of the historical evidence and a limited view of the Qur'an. This reductionism leads Bertina, following Griffith, for example, to miss the possibility of Philoponian Tritheism as a potential catalyst for the Qur'anic response in Q4:171, in spite of the historical contextual evidence presented earlier in this study. *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>669</sup> Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?," 99.

Though the accusation of polytheism against Christianity is still present as well, some Islamic commentators know that Christians, (Melkite, Jacobite, or Nestorian) are not by Qur’anic definition, polytheists. As Zwemer noted, al-Bayḍawī for example clarifies that the Christians and Jews are different from the unbelievers. He distinguishes between the two groups in his commentary of Q98:1 which says, “Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters were not about to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence...” Al-Bayḍawī comments that unbelieving Christians and Jews are not in the same Qur’anic category as the polytheists (*mushrikūn*).<sup>670</sup> Quṭb disagrees, including Christians and Jews among the idolaters.<sup>671</sup>

### Three Persons and 99 Names

Tisdall parallels the unity in plurality of trinitarianism to the unity in plurality of the Islamic attributes of God, an idea originating in *On the Unified Trinity* above. The many attributes are similar to the three hypostases.<sup>672</sup> In metaphorical terms, Tisdall uses the common Spirit, Soul, and Mind metaphor, but then reveals something new. Possibly the product of the scientific age, a new metaphor has developed, that of Cause, Form, and Effect. Based on scientific principles of cause and effect, and with a parallel in the Islamic name of God ‘The Causer of Causes’ (*Musabbib al-Asbāb*), the Father may be regarded as the Cause, the Son as the Form, and the Holy Spirit as the Effect.<sup>673</sup>

In more modern times, some Islamic voices have indeed described in possibly trinitarian terms the multiplicity in unity of God in His 99 Islamic Attributes.<sup>674</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes:

But the galaxy of Divine Names and the multiplicity of Divine Qualities reflected in the cosmos and within the being of men and women do not distract the Muslim for one moment from the oneness of God, from that Sun before whose light all multiplicity perishes. Striving after the realization of that oneness, or *tawḥīd*, is the heart of Islamic life; and the measure of a successful religious life is the degree to which one is able

<sup>670</sup> Al-Bayḍawī, *Tasfir Al-Bayḍawī*, 2 Vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Alamiyya, 1988), Vol. 2, p. 612.

<sup>671</sup> “وكان الكفر قد تطرق إلى عقائد أهلها جميعاً سواء أهل الكتاب الذين عرفوا الديانات السهاوية من قبل ثم حرفوها...” Quṭb, *Fī Ḍalāl Al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 6, p. 3948., cf. Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 18 Vols., Vol. 18, pp. 286-288.

<sup>672</sup> Tisdall, 151-152. In fact, H. A. Wolfson presents the likelihood that the Islamic concept of the Divine Attributes has its conceptual origin in the Christian concept of the Trinity. Early presentations of the Attributes focus on ‘knowledge’, ‘life’, and ‘power’, three dominant terms used by early Christians in the description of the Persons of the Trinity. Muslims eventually denied Godhood to the Attributes, and any causal relationship between God and his Attributes, and the primary distinctions between the Christian and Islamic concepts was clarified. Nevertheless, Wolfson concludes that, “the orthodox Muslim belief in the reality of attributes is traceable to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.” H. A. Wolfson, “The Muslim Attributes and the Christian Trinity,” *Harvard Theological Review* 49, no. 1 (1956): 18.

<sup>673</sup> Tisdall, 156-157.

<sup>674</sup> Zwemer prepared a list of these names along with a commentary. As he noted, the list itself varies between Islamic sources. Zwemer, 34-63, esp. p. 35, n. 1.

to realize *tawḥīd*, which means not only oneness, but also the integration of multiplicity into Unity.<sup>675</sup>

Nasr also clarifies that the multiplicity of religions represented by many prophets is actually a, “reflection of the richness of the Divine Nature.”<sup>676</sup> These descriptions of multiplicity in unity run parallel to common descriptions of trinitarian monotheism. One cannot help but notice the employ of the Sun as a metaphor, which in Christian tradition is used in the triune language of object, heat, and light, to describe the triune God from a Christian perspective. Conversely, Protestant theologian Darrell Johnson recently sought to clarify the trinitarian relationship in a list of seven divine attributes: Intimacy, Joy, Servanthood, Purity, Power, Creativity, and Peace.<sup>677</sup>

The grasping of the concept of the integration of multiplicity into unity is for Nasr something to be realized in the personal perfection of religion, whereas for Johnson, it may be said to be a mystery, religious respect for which simply accepts what the mind cannot yet understand in the paradox. Thus religious piety for the Muslim may be the pursuit of understanding of multiplicity in the Unity of God, whereas for the Christian it is acceptance regardless of understanding of multiplicity in the Unity of God.

For al-Faruqi, the 99 Names of God are a natural expression of God’s ultimate transcendence in the Qur’an. Yet as al-Faruqi criticises the Christian elevation of paradox as an epistemological principle in the presentation of trinitarianism, he is curiously congenial toward the same principle in his presentation of the Divine Names, and so he slips into his own trap. He quotes Q18:109, 22:47, and 24:35, saying that, “Anything belonging to His realm or associated with it – like His words, His time, His light, etc. – the Qur’an described as something to which empirical categories cannot apply ... Thus, empirical language – figures and relations can be used; but with the unmistakable denial that they apply to God *simpliciter*.”<sup>678</sup> If we are to understand al-Faruqi correctly then, the Divine Names of God are used to describe God in

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<sup>675</sup> Emphasis mine. Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 44-45. Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn (a.k.a. Martin Lings) writes similarly from a Sufi perspective concerning the multiplicity in unity in God, revealing a common thread in Islamic theology. He writes that, “Before extinction [Unity of Being], the being is veiled by the Qualities from the Essence, that is, by multiplicity from Unity, and at extinction he is veiled by the Essence from the Qualities, whereas in eternity after extinction He is veiled neither by the Qualities from the Essence, nor by the Essence from the Qualities, yet the Qualities are not other than the Essence. The Greatest of all Mysteries, the Mystery of the Infinitely Rich Who is One, is expressed in the Supreme name Allāh (God, the Divinity), which signifies the Essence together with all the Qualities in Indivisible Unity.” The Sufi doctrine of extinction (Unity of Being) will be discussed more below, but what is clear here is the continuation of Nasr’s representation of the multiplicity within unity in Islamic theology. See Abū Bakr Sirāj ad-Dīn, *The Book of Certainty: The Sufi Doctrine of Faith, Vision, and Gnosis*, Golden Palm Series (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2010), 5.

<sup>676</sup> Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 53.

<sup>677</sup> Johnson, 77-84.

<sup>678</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 47-48.

His own revealed Qur'an, but do not apply to Him. This presents a challenge for a Muslim who as Kenneth Cragg notes is rather opposed to the idea of paradox in theology.<sup>679</sup>

Mahmoud Ayoub finds himself in a similar paradox as he explains that, "Muslims believe that God, in his essence, is unknowable, inconceivable. He is above all categories of time and space, form and number, or any other material or temporal attributions. Yet he can be known through his attributes, called in the Qur'an 'God's most beautiful names'."<sup>680</sup>

The Divine Names are for Zwemer an incomplete picture of God. Commenting on the four moral attributes (The Holy, The Just, The Truth, and The Equitable), Zwemer notes that only two of these (The Holy and The Truth) are used in the Qur'an (Q59:23 and 22:62 respectively). This in contrast with the numerous uses of the 'terrible attributes' in the Qur'an indicates for Zwemer a lack of understanding in Muhammad of the nature of sin and its consequences.<sup>681</sup> Indeed, Zwemer is confused by some of these titles, namely: The Proud, The All-Compelling, The Slayer, The Deferrer, The Indulgent, and The Harmful.<sup>682</sup> They are to Zwemer incompatible with the goodness and compassion of God in the Qur'an. As these six names of God exemplify those which may challenge Christian commentators, they will be addressed here, according to Zwemer's titles.

1. The Proud (*Al-Mutakabbir*) can be found in Q59:23. The title is translated into English by Abdel Haleem as, "the Truly Great," by Rashad Khalifa as, "the Most Dignified," by the Monotheist Group as, "the Dignified," and by Yusuf Ali as, "the Supreme."<sup>683</sup> None of these translations are consistent with the translation of *al-mutakabbir* in Q39:72, in which it is rendered "the arrogant" by all four translators in these same translations of the Qur'an. Due to these inconsistencies, further study is appropriate here. The Qur'an uses this verb eight times. Once it is in verb form (Q7:146), thrice in nominative singular (Q40:27, 35; 59:23), and four times in nominative plural (Q16:29, 39:60, 72, 40:76). The translations appear thus:

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<sup>679</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 400.

<sup>680</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub, *Islam : Faith and History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 47.

<sup>681</sup> Zwemer, 49.

<sup>682</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>683</sup> See Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 11 ed. (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2006); Khalifa; The Monotheist Group.; Haleem. Unless otherwise noted, all Qur'anic references in English will be provided from the Haleem translation, and page numbers will not be given where the surah references are provided.

	Abdel Haleem	Rashad Khalifa	Yusuf Ali	The Monotheist Group
7:146 (verb)	[those who act] Arrogantly	Arrogant	[those who behave] Arrogantly	Arrogant
16:29 (nom. pl.)	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant
39:60 (nom. pl.)	Arrogant	Arrogant	Haughty	Arrogant
39:72 (nom. pl.)	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant
40:27 (nom. sing.)	Tyrant	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant
40:35 (nom. sing.)	Arrogant tyrant	Arrogant tyrant	Arrogant/Obstinate	Arrogant tyrant
40:76 (nom. pl.)	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant	Arrogant
59:23 (nom. sing)	The Truly Great	The Most Dignified	The Supreme	The Dignified

There appears to be stark incongruity between the translation of *al-mutakabbir* in Q59:23 and in all other references in the Qur'an. Haleem and Badawi define the term: "one who is arrogant, proud or haughty," in their *Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, where they add, "[an attribute of God] Possessor of all glory, the truly Great, the Proud."<sup>684</sup> This does not resolve the inconsistency of what seems to be the translation in a positive tone when it refers to God and in a negative tone when it refers to humans.

It may be said that to the Muslim, it is not possible to interpret *al-mutakabbir* in its traditional meaning in Q59:23 as it refers to God, yet the commentaries disagree. Ibn'Abbās clarifies that in Q59:23 God is *mutakabbir* toward his enemies. This is more congruent with the negative interpretation than the positive. The early *tafsīr* of Muqātil also clarifies that God is boastful or haughty over all things ( المتعظم على كل )

<sup>684</sup> El-Said M. Badawi and M. A. Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*, Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 1, the near and Middle East, vol. 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 793.



شئىء).<sup>685</sup> Muqātil's use of *al-mut'azzim* (المتعظّم) as a synonym here is helpful. The nominative of this form is also translated: proud, arrogant, boastful, flaunting, presumptuous, and haughty.

Recently, David Bentley produced a study of the 99 Beautiful Names from the Christian scriptures. His ecumenical contribution is helpful from a dialogue perspective. For Bentley, God is the only one deserving of the title The Proud because of his greatness, and thus justified divine pride is divorced from unjustified human arrogance.<sup>686</sup> This offers an explanation for the distinction in presentation between the description of God in the positive and humanity in the negative using the same title.

For the sake of Christian-Muslim dialogue it may be offered that both Muslims and Christians have struggled in the reverse-engineering of definitions for seemingly negative anthropomorphic references to God in their scriptures. For example, the Bible refers to God as jealous and even hating. Exodus 34:14 says, "You must worship no other gods, for the Lord, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who is jealous about his relationship with you" (cf. Psalm 78:58; 1 Corinthians 10:22). Proverbs 6:16-19 says, "Here are six things the Lord hates — no, seven things he detests: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that kill the innocent, a heart that plots evil, feet that race to do wrong, a false witness who pours out lies, a person who sows discord in a family." It is noteworthy that these last two items in the list are presented as categories of people whom God hates.

Though jealousy and hatred are decidedly negative attributes of humanity in Christian doctrine, they are nonetheless defended as positive attributes of the divine. Similarly, God as The Proud, an accurate translation, may be understood as a positive divine title in Islam, and need not be creatively translated so much as doctrinally explained. Though the clear concern may be whether God's pride in Islam is the kind to which He is opposed in Christianity (1 Peter 5:5), Bentley denies this possibility. Even if so it is perhaps possible that this pride is another example (like jealousy and hatred) of divine attributes that are sinful only in humanity.

2. The All-Compelling (*Al-Jabbār*) is also found in Q59:23. It is translated, "the Powerful" (The Monotheist Group), "the Irresistible" (Yusuf Ali), "the Most Powerful" (Khalifa),

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<sup>685</sup> Sulaymān, Vol. 3, p. 345.

<sup>686</sup> David Bentley, *The 99 Beautiful Names of God for All the People of the Book* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 10.

and “the Compeller” (Haleem). This name highlights God’s control over all things, and thus draws attention to Islam’s tendency toward fatalism. Zwemer asserts that the extreme fatalism of the *Jabarīyah* sect of Islam exemplifies the term’s meaning.<sup>687</sup> Though some Christians may disagree with this title, other branches (particularly Calvinistic) of Christianity do not struggle with it. Bentley highlights the Hebrew root (*gabbor*) which describes in the Bible both God and, “courageous men of strength,” such as Cush, Nimrod (Gen 10:8-9), and Naaman (2 Kings 5:1). The title is for Bentley: the Mighty One, which aligns with the translators above.<sup>688</sup>

3. The Slayer (*Al-Mumīt*) is drawn from Q2:28 in a couplet with the title *Al-Muḥiyy* (The Life-Giver). The translation “The Slayer” by Zwemer betrays his polemical tone, as the meaning of the verse from which it is extracted simply affirms God’s power over life and death, something Christians would not deny. Bentley’s ecumenical rendering, “Giver of Death,” preserves better the tone of the Qur’an, whose meaning cannot be said to be other than that of 1 Samuel 2:6: “The Lord gives both death and life; he brings some down to the grave but raises others up.”<sup>689</sup>
4. The Deferrer (*Al-Mu’ākhkhir*): In Q11:8, unbelievers ask about the Day of Judgement, “What is holding it back?” A form of this word is used here. The implication of the term is only that God holds power over how the future will unfold. Bentley translates: The Delayer, the Postponer, and interprets this title in line with God’s foreknowledge and forbearance blended, as in 2 Peter 3:8-9.<sup>690</sup>
5. The Indulgent (*Al-Ra’ūf*) is found in Q2:143. It is translated: merciful (Yusuf Ali), kind (Haleem), and compassionate (Khalifa and the Monotheist Group). The term is used eleven times in the Qur’an. A survey here is unnecessary as the clear meaning is akin to ‘gentle’ and ‘kind’ as appropriate translations. Bentley concurs, describing the term as a blend of all of the Divine Names highlighting God’s mercy and compassion, as in Psalm 103:8.<sup>691</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> The strict *Jabarīya*, “will not allow men to be said either to act, or to have any power at all, either operative or acquiring, asserting that man can do nothing, but produces all his actions by necessity, having neither power, nor will, nor choice, any more than an inanimate object.” See Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam : Being a Cyclopaedia of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, Together with the Technical and Theological Terms of the Muhammadan Religion* (New Delhi, India: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1994), 223.

<sup>688</sup> Bentley, 9.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>691</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

6. The Harmful (*Al-Dār*) only occurs in the Qur'an as the noun, not as a title of God (Q10:107), and is translated "harm" (Haleem and The Monotheist Group), "hardship" (Khalifa), and "hurt" (Yusuf Ali). Bentley renders the title: The Distresser / The Destroyer, and yet admits that though God's love is his dominant attribute in Christian theology, there is certainly Biblical evidence for times when, "the Lord's anger burned against his people, and he abhorred his own special possession" (Psalm 106:40). Jeremiah too writes of the coming harm and hardship of God, "'You have abandoned me and turned your back on me,' says the Lord. 'Therefore, I will raise my fist to destroy you. I am tired of always giving you another chance'" (Jeremiah 15:6).<sup>692</sup>

Whether working to understand the paradox or working to accept it without understanding, it appears that Christianity and Islam wrestle with similar paradoxes in their presentations of the immanence of the transcendent in the Trinitarian Persons and the Divine Names. There is room for dialogue in the mutual recognition of this shared challenge.

### Is Allah Yahweh?

Mathias Zahniser notes plainly: "It is almost embarrassing to have to make the case for the fact that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, but the case has to be made."<sup>693</sup> Since Nicetas of Byzantium's (d.299/912) declaration that Muslims do not worship the Christian God, the issue of whether or not the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an are indeed the same entity, though certainly described and approached variously, remains.<sup>694</sup>

The Qur'an states clearly on behalf of Muslims to Christians: "We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same];

<sup>692</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>693</sup> A. H. Mathias Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity*, Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 3.

<sup>694</sup> Nicetas of Byzantium translated the Arabic term *ṣamad* in Q112 as *holosphyros* in Greek. Daniel Sahas presents this mistranslation as having originated with Theodore Abū Qurrah, who rendered *ṣamad* as *steiropēktos* with the English meaning rendered "barren-built" by Lamoreaux's translation. The terminology of Qurrah was blended with the interpretation of John of Damascus, "maker of all things," to render *holosphyros* in the Greek text of Bartholomeos of Edessa's *Contra Mahomet*. Bartholomeos assigns to Muslims the designation of *Jamet* to Allah, which he says is a variant of *Jamid*, indicating that Allah is *holosphyros* and *holobolos*, with shape and able to be held. Bartholomeos seems aware that this is not an accurate translation of *ṣamad*. Nicetas of Byzantium took up the mistranslation boldly, rendering *ṣamad* as *holosphyros* in Q112, with the implication that Allah of the Qur'an had now a physical form, of a spherical shape. Ironically, in Nicetas' *Refutation of the Qur'an*, while defeating his own misinterpretation here, he presents a rather accurate view of Islamic theology as his rebuttal. Nevertheless, the anathema against 'the God of Muhammad' was subsequently attached to the *apotaxis* required for conversion to Christianity. Manuel I Comnenos (d.576/1180) tackled this misinterpretation two centuries later. See Sahas in Haddad and Haddad, 109-125. , cf. Lamoreaux and Abū Qurrah, 224, esp. n. 80.; and Newman, 139. *Contra Mahomet* dates from between the Islamic conquest of Syria (107/725) and Theodore the Stoudite's Discourses in Verse Against Heresies (c.182/798-192/808). See Thomas and Roggema, *Christian-Muslim Relations : A Bibliographical History, Volume 1 (600-900)*, 424.

It should be noted that the word "Allah" appears in at least one known pre-Islamic Christian inscription, dating from the early sixth century. The inscription is made by the Kindite princess Hind. See Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century, 2 Vols.*, Vol. I, 696-697.; cf. Irfan Shahîd, "The Women of Oriens Christianus Arabicus in Pre-Islamic Times," *Parole de l'Orient* 24, no. (1999). The original can be found in Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu Jam Al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dar al-Sadir, 1977), Vol. 2, p 542.

we are devoted to Him" (Q29:46). Thus Muslims, though differing with Christians on the nature of God, do not dispute that Christians indeed follow Allah of the Qur'an. Some Christian leaders continued to affirm this throughout the centuries. For example, within two decades of the first crusade, Pope Gregory VII (r.465/1073 – 478/1085) affirmed in a letter to Al-Nāṣir, the Mauretanian Sultan that, "This affection we and you owe to each other in a more peculiar way than to people of other races because we worship and confess the same God though in diverse forms and daily praise and adore him as the creator and ruler of this world."<sup>695</sup> The attitudes of Gregory VII and Timothy I have not always been held by Christians, however, who have been in vigorous internal debate over whether or not Allah of the Qur'an is Yahweh of the Bible.<sup>696</sup>

Zwemer offers that, "Insofar as Moslems are monotheists and in as far as Allah has many of the attributes of Jahweh [sic] we cannot put Him with the false gods. But neither can there be any doubt that Mohammed's conception of God is inadequate, incomplete, barren and grievously distorted."<sup>697</sup> He continues that the Islamic conception of God differs from the Christian in four major deficiencies: 1) The Fatherhood of God is missing; 2) The attribute of love is lacking; 3) The justice of God is arbitrary rather than moral; and, 4) The 99 attributes are disharmonious.

Zwemer's view coincides with Giulio Basseti-Sani's early view expressed in his *The Koran in the Light of Christ*, who relates his early understanding in profoundly polemical terms:

Allah, the "god of the Koran," is anti-God, the enemy of the one true God, the God of the gospels. The Trinity of the Christians has no point of contact with the Koranic Allah for he is excluded absolutely and explicitly from the Trinity, from the divine natural paternity (the generation of the Word, Christ, the Son of God) and from adoptive fatherhood. The fatherhood of God has no place in Islam. The concept of the God of love is denied. The god of the Koran bears all the personal characteristics of Satan. He *is* Satan, clothed with pseudo-divine light, who has managed to attract a cult of divine adoration from a part of the human race. The awesome conclusion to all this is that millions of Muslims, without knowing it, adore Satan himself in their false god.<sup>698</sup>

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<sup>695</sup> Ephraim Emerton, *The Correspondence of Pope Gregory VII: Selected Letters from the Registrum*, Records of Western Civilization (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 94. The letter is also translated by Basseti-Sani and included here: Basseti-Sani, 193-194.

<sup>696</sup> Only 130 years after Gregory VII, the Crusades were in full force, and had been professionalised. Pope Innocent III wrote in 612/1215 during the Fourth Lateran Council his longest decree, *Canon 71* on the *Affairs of the Holy Land (Negotium Terrae Sanctae)*. In it, those Christians who participate in waging war on the "ungodly" Muslims are granted "full remission of their sins" for their help. See Paul Halsall, "Internet Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215", Fordham University Center for Medieval Studies <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/lateran4.html> (accessed January 30 2011); Bjorn Weiler, "The 'Negotium Terrae Sanctae' in the Political Discourse of Latin Christendom, 1215-1311," *The International History Review* 25, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>697</sup> Zwemer, 107.

<sup>698</sup> Emphasis his. Basseti-Sani, 13.

Yet the distant and arbitrary God in the Qur'an according to Orientalists was not to be the final view of Bassetti-Sani, who underwent a dramatic shift in perspective:

Some Christian apologists, as well as some Orientalists, like to point out how arbitrary the God of the Koran is. They forget that the Koran is reacting against a Rabbinic exaggeration which made God, in some way, dependent upon the law. The Koran means to remind the Jews that they must recognize God's place *above* the law.<sup>699</sup>

In part due to the influence of Bassetti-Sani's mentor, Louis Massignon (d.1382/1962), the Catholic Church finally conceded the debate opting over ontological identity for a more nuanced discussion over nature and worship of the one true God.<sup>700</sup> The Vatican Council II put this debate to rest in two notable decrees. The *Lumen Gentium* (Section 16) states: "But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Moslems: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day."<sup>701</sup> Also, *Nostra Aetate* states: "The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men," and continues,

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.<sup>702</sup>

George Dardess presents a cautionary answer to the declarations of Vatican II. The central question and title of his book *Do We Worship the Same God?* is not by him answered directly. Dardess avoids direct disagreement with the Catholic Church, but instead asks a number of questions of the Qur'an and the Bible, comparing them on topics like creation and the fall. Dardess does not conceal his opinion in the contrasts he makes and leading questions

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<sup>699</sup> Emphasis his. Ibid., 182.

<sup>700</sup> On Massignon's life and thought see Giulio Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962) : Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974).; and Anthony O'Mahony, "'Our Common Fidelity to Abraham Is What Divides': Christianity and Islam in the Life and Thought of Louis Massignon," in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bowe (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2006).

<sup>701</sup> Austin Flannery and Vaticanum Secundum (Andet Vatikankoncil), *Vatican Council II : The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, New revised ed., Vatican Collection, vol. 1 (Dublin; Northport, NY: Dominican Publications; Costello, 2004), 367.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., 739-740. A full study of the documents and their development in the theologies of Louis Massignon, Karl Rahner and others demands its own monumental work, such a work as already produced by Risto Jukko. On the relationship between Yahweh and Allah as views of the same God, see especially Jukko, 106-123. Jukko concludes that, "As long as there is no profound analysis of what we mean when we say 'god', 'faith in one God', 'created human being' etc., Christian-Muslim dialogue rests on a safe level." Ibid., 145. See also Aydin, 1-47.; cf. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue : Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate, Rediscovering Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 125-241.

he asks.<sup>703</sup> He is an apologist in ecumenical clothing, though his presentation, loaded inquiry, is indeed novel.

The most interesting part of Dardess' presentation is perhaps that of the comparison between John 3:16 and Q112. He presents them as the keystones representative of God in the respective texts. We first saw Q112 approached as an anti-trinitarian passage by Theodore Abū Qurrah above, but it should be recalled that the original context of Q112, also outlined above, was not necessarily connected to Christianity at all. It seems Theodore's innovations on the meaning of this text have survived until now.

For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

Say, 'He is God the One, God the eternal. He begot no one nor was He begotten. No one is comparable to Him.' (Q112:1-4)

To these Dardess inquires, "But if John 3:16 and *al-ikhhlās* compete as accounts of who God is, what can it mean to say, as the popes and bishops of Vatican II did, that we worship the same God?"<sup>704</sup> Dardess recognizes the misinterpretation of the engendering of Jesus by God through Mary in the refutation of the 'son' in Q112, yet he expands this to include a refutation of 'begetting' in the same passage as a refutation of the biblical meaning of begotten, often included in the translation of John 3:16.

Elsewhere, Dardess parces the acts of praying to a common God, from praying to God in common. Acknowledging the overlap and highlighting the differences, Dardess notes that, "Christians and Muslims repeatedly find themselves at one moment standing side by side as believers in the One God. At another moment an impassable gulf seems to yawn between them."<sup>705</sup> Thus he concludes that praying together to God is of independent value in Christian-Muslim relations, and need not assume that Christians and Muslims are praying to the same God.

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<sup>703</sup> In comparing the Biblical and Qur'anic texts concerning Adam and Eve he quotes, "In sura 2:35 Adam and his mate, 'slip from the Garden and leave the state they had been in'. What does this wording – so different from the language used in Genesis 3 and in later interpretations of the 'Fall' – say about the Qur'an's view of the depth of human sinfulness?" These leading questions appear at the end of each chapter for the benefit of the reader and to guide group discussions regarding the content. George Dardess, *Do We Worship the Same God? : Comparing the Bible and the Qur'an* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006), 73.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>705</sup> In spite of Dardess's cautious approach to the 'same God' proposal, he is nevertheless generous in his recognition of the subjectivity that is inherent in any description of God. He writes, "while the forms of God's revelations to Muslims and Christians appear seriously to contradict each other at certain points, that circumstance cannot possibly hold the whole truth about God. Perhaps the contradictions are not stumbling blocks at all but God's way of stimulating deeper penetration into God's mystery." Dardess and Mich, *In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan : Catholics and Muslims Working Together for the Common Good*, 59.

Many Christian scholars now agree that Allah of the Qur'an is Yahweh of the Bible,<sup>706</sup> yet the debate rages on. Some Christian polemicists are still keen to prove that 'their god is not our God'. One such extended discourse by self-published author Sherly Isaac is developed in two sections, the first a narrative polemic, and the second outlining the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21).<sup>707</sup> For Isaac, the God of the Qur'an is invariably the God of Muhammad. Therefore we may see in both the Qur'an and Muhammad, exactly who God is opposed to the God of the Bible. Isaac's work need not be meditated upon here as we are more concerned with innovative and ecumenical approaches, however, it may be said that her Olympian polemic effort is of the same tone as that of John of Damascus, and equally as given to Herculean feats of proof-texting as that of Ibn Ḥazm.<sup>708</sup>

In the Evangelical West, the two strongest voices in this debate are probably John Piper and Miroslav Volf. Piper is a Reformed Baptist pastor of a church of more than 5000 attendees, and holds that the God of the Muslims, Allah, is not the God of the Christians.<sup>709</sup> He is a highly respected voice among American Evangelicals. In 2011, Volf's work *Allah: A Christian Response*, mentions Piper by name and presents an alternative view. Volf integrates the question of God's identity to the ability of Christians and Muslims to live together peacefully. He clarifies that the issue is not whether Christians and Muslims believe the same things about the one God they worship, but whether the one God they worship is sufficiently similar in description to be identified as the same object of worship. He presents what he considers, "sufficient similarity," to make this claim.<sup>710</sup> In doing so, he instructs Christians to, "concentrate on what is common," and, "keep an eye out for what is decisively different."<sup>711</sup> The

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<sup>706</sup> See for example Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

<sup>707</sup> Sherly Isaac, *Allah & Elohim: Are They the Same God?* (USA: AuthorHouse, 2002).

<sup>708</sup> It may be noted here as well that in general those Christian authors who show Allah to be a distinct God from Yahweh seem to this author to be of lower education and experience in Islamic culture and history than those who affirm that Allah is Yahweh.

<sup>709</sup> Piper is best known for his *Desiring God* series of books, and website of the same name. The website states plainly, "Ever since 9-11 and the upsurge of Islamic awareness, and the more manifest religious pluralism of the world, we have wanted to be more openly clear that, when we say "God," we don't mean Allah, we mean Jesus Christ." John Piper, et al., "The Meaning of Our Logo", *Desiring God* <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/our-distinctives/the-meaning-of-our-logo> (accessed June 14 2011). Piper's conclusion is founded partly on the violence of Allah in the Qur'an. Whereas Piper concedes overlap between God in the Old Testament and Allah's wars in the Qur'an, he does not see either to be consistent with the teachings of Jesus. The teachings of Jesus to love one's enemies, and his declaration that his kingdom was not political but spiritual (John 18:36), for Piper abrogates the violence of God against pagans in the Old Testament, and precludes that God will never act in that way after the revelation of Christ. The violence of Allah in the Qur'an then is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus and thus Allah of the Qur'an is not the God of Jesus. John Piper, et al., "How Are Yahweh and Allah Different?", *Desiring God* <http://www.desiringgod.org/about/our-distinctives/the-meaning-of-our-logo> (accessed June 14 2011).

<sup>710</sup> Volf, 89. Volf also makes a defence of the Trinity, and thus does not shy away from the Christian-Muslim debate over the nature of God. He states that God's creativity presupposes the pre-co-existence of God's creative Word, and "Divine creative activity presupposes internal distinctions in God, and that implies the Trinity." *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>711</sup> Volf presents two guidelines along with these two rules. On the identification of God he notes: "to refer to the same object, descriptions of God need not be identical," and, "to refer to the same object, descriptions of God may not be radically different." *Ibid.*, 90-91.

commonalities he presents between the Muslim and Christian conceptions of God are as follows:

1. There is only one God, the one and only divine being.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is radically different from everything that is not God.
4. God is good.
5. God commands that we love God with our whole being.
6. God commands that we love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>712</sup>

He further notes that,

1. God loves.
2. God is just.
3. God's love encompasses God's justice.
4. Human beings should love their neighbors as themselves.<sup>713</sup>

Volf does not avoid the differences he notes in each of these conclusions. He notes particularly on the expressions of love that Christians and Muslims differ on four key issues.

1. Christians affirm that God *is* love.
2. Most Christians say that God's eternal love includes love of the other, the divine other within the triune godhead and, derivatively, a creaturely other.
3. Christians affirm that God loves "the ungodly," and that this love cannot be earned.
4. Christians must love even their enemies.<sup>714</sup>

Love is thus highlighted as a key focus in the discussion on the nature of the God which Christians and Muslims share.

## Love

For Gairdner, the distinction between Islamic and Christian understandings of God is founded on love. The love of God for Muslims is the favour shown by the blended will and power of a monarch to do so, but the love of God for Christians is much more intrinsic to the ontology of God. Will thus bends to love, as shown in Jesus' prayer, "not my will, but yours be done."<sup>715</sup> Nasr says that, "The assertion that Muslims do not know Divine Love is as absurd as claiming that Muslims know nothing of Divine Compassion ... Islam states that God is Love,

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<sup>712</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>713</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid., 182-183.

<sup>715</sup> Gairdner continues that, "modern Christian thought has more and more come to feel that loveless will-force is the contradiction, the very opposite, of Christ's revelation of God." See W. H. T. Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 102-108., cf. Luke 22:42.



since this is one of His Divine Names, but it does not identify God solely with love...<sup>716</sup> Though Nasr does not clarify which of the 99 Divine Names he is referring to here, it may be gathered from the text that *Al-Ra'uf* (The Compassionate) is his intent.

In 2007 the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Jordan published *A Common Word Between Us and You*, an open letter generally addressed to Christian leaders around the world.<sup>717</sup> The *Common Word* project began as an *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI* in 1427/2006 in response to the Papal address which included comments on Islam at the University of Regensburg that year.<sup>718</sup> The original letter is an apology of the Islamic faith, addressing misconceptions that the Pope presented of Islam. Q2:256, "There is no compulsion in religion..." is clarified to be a directive to Muslim leaders in a position of power over others, not to use that power for religious coercion.<sup>719</sup> Another misconception, of Islamic theology as ultra-transcendent, is addressed with Qur'anic correctives such as Q50:16, "We are closer to him than his jugular vein," and Q57:4, "He is with you wherever you are."<sup>720</sup> The letter also introduces the theme of love as a common foundation for Christians and Muslims.

The subsequent *Common Word* document, originally signed by 138 Islamic leaders,<sup>721</sup> can be understood as something of a response to the Vatican's recent shift in stance toward Islam in dialogue. The document's title derives from Q3:64, "Say, 'People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.' If they turn away, say, 'Witness our devotion to Him.'"<sup>722</sup>

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<sup>716</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam : Enduring Values for Humanity*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 210.

<sup>717</sup> The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "A Common Word between Us and You". The open letter, details on the signatories, responses to the letter, and other helpful pieces of dialogue are presented on the official website: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "The Official Website of a Common Word", The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought <http://www.acommonword.com/> (accessed March 27 2011).

<sup>718</sup> Various Authors.

<sup>719</sup> Ayoub notes that though commentators disagree about the occasion of its revelation, the meaning of the verse as presented in the *Open Letter* mentioned here is upheld by those who do not believe the verse to have been abrogated by the sword verse (Q9:5). Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, 252-256.

<sup>720</sup> Various Authors.

<sup>721</sup> Among the signatories are several Grand and Chief Muftis; scholars like Seyyed Hossein Nasr; and even conservative leaders like Shaykh Al-Habib Ali Mashhour bin Muhammad bin Salim bin Hafeeth, Head of the Fatwa Council and Imam of the Mosque in Tarim, Yemen; and Shaykh Salim Falahat, Director General of the Muslim Brotherhood, Jordan. The letter was well received by many Christians. Dr. Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said that, "The appearance of the A Common Word [Open Letter] of 2007 was a landmark in Muslim-Christian relations and it has a unique role in stimulating a discussion at the deepest level across the world." See The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "The Official Website of a Common Word".

<sup>722</sup> This verse was likely originally revealed during the meeting of Muhammad with the Najrānian Christians, and its conciliatory tone the likely foundation of the treaty that came out of the meeting. That the Christians in the meeting were very possibly blatant tritheists does not seem to have either escaped

The *Common Word* document relates the instructions in Q3:64 with the two great commandments of Jesus. An expert in religious law questioned Jesus on the most important commands from the Law of Moses, and

Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”<sup>723</sup>

The Islamic authors of the *Common Word*, having begun with the correction of the Christian view of the Islamic ultra-transcendence of God, then turn to the focal point of love as a bridge between the faiths. Love of God and love of neighbour are proposed and defended vigorously as the fundamental points of agreement and primary commands for both Christians and Muslims in the exercise of their respective faiths. Reza Shah-Kazemi draws attention to the divine dimension of the two great commandments, and explores the degree to which ‘God is love’ in Islam as he is so described by Christians.<sup>724</sup> The objection that Shah-Kazemi addresses is the Christian perception that,

Muslims do not place love at the center of their faith as we Christians do; they do not see God primarily as love, as we do; the God in whom the Muslims believe is a God of anger, not love. According to this caricature, all too prevalent in the West, the very notion of a loving God in Islam is a contradiction in terms ... Thus *Allāh* is but a transcendent law-giver at best, an arbitrary dictator at worst ... *Allāh* loves only those who submit.<sup>725</sup>

Shah-Kazemi corrects this misunderstanding. He begins with the Qur’anic description of God as ‘The Loving’, linking it to *al-Wadūd* in Q11:90 and 85:14. He notes that though ‘The Lover’ (*al-Muḥibb*) is not one of the 99 Divine Names, great classical scholars like al-Rāzī equated the two terms. He surveys other commentators as well, noting that though they recognized God as loving, their struggle in commentary was to disassociate the conception of God’s love from that of love between humans which could be misunderstood as sexual.

This semantic issue is also common to English readers of the Bible, as the four Greek terms for love in the New Testament are all translated under the single English word, love.<sup>726</sup>

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the Qur’an’s critique, nor its instruction to its followers to seek reconciliation and common ground in dialogue with them.

<sup>723</sup> Matthew 22:37-40; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>724</sup> Reza Shah-Kazemi, “God, ‘the Loving’,” in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*, ed. Miroslav Wolf, Ghazi bin Muhammad, and Melissa Yarrington (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>725</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>726</sup> The Greek terms are *Eros* (ἔρως) meaning passionate, sensual, or erotic love; *Agape* (ἀγάπη) as unconditional or sacrificial love; *Philia* (φιλία) meaning friendly or virtuous love; and *Storge* (στοργή)

Thus 'love' in English is unspecific and can lead to misunderstanding. So too, Qur'anic scholars have not wished to associate God's affection toward his people with something erotic, and have thus been careful in their description of this quality of him. Shah-Kazemi clarifies for Christians that,

It is not just the Sufis, but also every sensitive Muslim who concretely feels the all-embracing love of God, this, in the very measure of their receptivity to the spiritual substance of the qur'anic revelation. This love may be indefinable in its ultimate essence, but it is undeniable as regards its penetrating presence; it is evasive conceptually, but all-pervasive existentially; it is disclosed by everything beautiful, yet enclosed by nothing; expressed by every loving subject and lovable object, yet exhausted by none.<sup>727</sup>

Ultimately, in dealing with the problem of form and meaning in the Arabic identification of love and God, Shah-Kazemi contends that, "As regards the qur'anic basis for the assertion that God is inherently and overwhelmingly loving, one should focus first of all on the two names for mercy: *al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahīm*."<sup>728</sup>

## Conclusion

In dialogue, it may be remembered that the term "Trinity" does not occur overtly in either the Biblical, or the Qur'anic texts, yet clues that lead to it have been derived from both. From a literary-historical perspective, trinitarian theology seems nowhere explicitly described in the Bible and possibly nowhere explicitly denied in the Qur'an. From a revelatory perspective, the author of the texts must be awarded credit for the term's absence. It is difficult to say whether trinitarianism is true or untrue from a historical perspective, as those are positions of faith. However, it may be noted that the degree to which Christians and Muslims believe the Bible or the Qur'an to be the divine Word of God has limited bearing on the truth or untruth of trinitarianism, for Christians and Muslims may also agree that the author of their texts does not regret his revelation, or the mystery inherent in their ambiguity.<sup>729</sup>

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meaning affectionate or familial love. Christian philosopher C.S. Lewis wrote a treatise on the subject. See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960).

<sup>727</sup> Shah-Kazemi, 101.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., 103. On the topic of love in textual and interpretive comparison, the reader is also directed to the following study: Gordon Nickel, "The Language of Love in Qur'ān and Gospel," in *Sacred Text: Explorations in Lexicography*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala and Angel Urban (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>729</sup> The intentional ambiguity in the Qur'an has already been shown through Islamic sources founded in the Qur'an's own words. However, Christian readers may find offensive here the implication that the Bible is intentionally ambiguous on even core tenets of the Christian faith. The intent of the present author in the phrase: *the intentional ambiguity of scripture* is only to communicate that God as defined by both Christians and Muslims is sufficiently powerful to produce a revelation that is unambiguous to its interpreters, and thus its meaning agreed upon regardless of the contexts of its readers. This is not the case with the Bible, and the gap in the expression of Christian faith between the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and Pastor Joel Osteen in America, for example, both reading the same gospels, is

For the Christian, scripture does not automatically produce trinitarian theology without some interpretive reinforcement. Perhaps similarly, for the Muslim, the Qur'an cannot be said to overtly deny trinitarianism without some interpretive reinforcement. On this bridge, both Christians and Muslims have opportunity to be humble, and to expect humility in the other, for both agree that God is all-wise, all-powerful, and therefore fully capable of having clarified or denied trinitarian monotheism in plainer terms had he chosen to do so in either of their sacred texts. It is on agreement in the omnipotence of God, and his mystery inherent in both texts, that Christians and Muslims have found in this discussion the most shared meaning.

## II.2 The Incarnation

The Incarnation remains a primary point of departure between Christians and Muslims. From disagreement over the nature of Jesus stems the debate on the Trinity above and the debate on the crucifixion below. We here explore once again the names of Jesus in the Qur'an and their meaning in dialogue. We will focus on the title 'Son of Mary' and 'Word of God' as new studies have illuminated these. We here begin, however, with that most controversial of declarations.

### Son of God

Tisdall acknowledges the now standard Islamic objections to the Incarnation. He starts with the title 'Son of God' to which he responds that, "the Qur'an denounces *carnal ideas* like those which led the Arabs to attribute daughters to God, but these are not what the Gospel inculcates when it calls Christ God's Son."<sup>730</sup> Neither did God have a wife in the begetting of the begotten. Tisdall defers to T. R. Wade, who concedes that, "The question ultimately turns not upon metaphysics, but on the Divine authority of the Biblical teaching on the subject, upon which rests our doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>731</sup> What the Bible declares true, does not need to be rationalised. "We accept it because God has revealed it."<sup>732</sup>

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evidence that the context of the reader reveals the ambiguity of scripture. The degree of interpretive disparity between equally God-fearing readers of scripture, is inversely congruent to the degree of intentional ambiguity in the scriptures they are interpreting.

In any case, Fazlur Rahman believes that it is improper to view the Qur'an as a discourse on God and his nature. The Qur'an is fundamentally a book that, assuming God's existence, is aimed at guiding mankind (Q2:85). The conduct of man in response to God's existence, not the nature of God, is the primary focus of the Qur'an. See Christian W. Troll, *Dialogue and Difference : Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 88-89.

<sup>730</sup> Tisdall, 117. Emphasis his. For a good apologetical example of a defence of the deity of Christ see Geisler and Saleeb, Ch. 11.

<sup>731</sup> T. R. Wade in Tisdall, 118, n. 1. It is notable that a translation of the Synoptic Gospels and Acts has been published recently which attempts to address the controversy. In what is known as the *True Meaning Translation* of the Gospels and Acts into Arabic, all of the references to "Son of God" are translated literally (ابن الله) and immediately followed in brackets by the phrase "Beloved of God" (حبيب الله), as a prompter for the reader to think of the title in metaphorical terms rather than carnal. This intention of the

Sayyid Quṭb asserts that trinitarianism is not as simple as Tisdall presents it.

At the time when Islam was revealed, the Christian faith, including all denominations, was based on the concept of god in three elements or manifestations: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is considered the son. Beyond that there are great differences among Christian sects with regard to Jesus Christ and whether he has a dual nature: Divine and human, or a single Divine nature; whether he has a single will despite his dual nature; whether time does not apply to him in the same way as it does not apply to the Father; and whether or not he was created. There are numerous concepts which vary much and which have led to persecution by one sect or another.<sup>733</sup>

Commenting on Biblical content, al-Faruqi notes that in the synoptic Gospels, Jesus calls himself by the title 'Son of Man' but does not refer to himself as the 'Son of God'.<sup>734</sup> It is others who refer to Jesus as the 'Son of God', though al-Faruqi does not address that in Matthew 3:17 it is God Himself who refers to Jesus as his son by title. Nevertheless, al-Faruqi does challenge the trinitarian interpretation of John 10:30, "The Father and I are one," placing it in Jesus' own philosophical framework for the familial metaphor in relationship to God: "Jesus asked, 'Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?' Then he pointed to his disciples and said, 'Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!'" (Matthew 12:48-50, cf. Mark 3:33-35). Al-Faruqi continues, "Consequently, unity with God must be a spiritual communion whose only base is righteousness or virtue, doing God's will. Certainly there is a sense in which a lover can say, 'I and my beloved are one' without any implication of ontological unity, of loss of personality or fusion of individuality."<sup>735</sup>

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translator and an explanation of the term "Son of God" from a Christian perspective is provided in the introductory materials (pp. 63-67). Al-Hadi Khaṭṭāwī, *The True Meaning of the Gospel of the Messiah* (Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 2008). It is clear from the introductory materials, which also address the accusation of the corruption of the Christian scriptures, that this particular translation is intended for an Islamic audience. The translation has received some criticism from Christians for its congenial tone toward Muslims, which its editorial committee responded to here: The al-Kalima Editorial Committee, "A Response to Jay Smith's Criticisms of Common Ground and of the 'True Meaning of the Gospel'," *St. Francis Magazine* 5, no. 5 (2009).

<sup>732</sup> Tisdall, 122. A Muslim character in a fictitious debate is referenced by Gairdner in which 'Abdu'l-Fattah redefines the revelatory relationship as follows, "The function of revelation is, first of all, to confirm authoritatively the intuitions and deductions of the reason; and secondly, to give knowledge of truths not so intuitive or deductible, such as future life." In essence then, this is perhaps the opposing view, that God revealed it because we accept it. Again, this presentation of an Islamic view comes from a Christian pen. Incidentally, this work and that of Tisdall are both fictitious dialogues between Muslims and Christians, a clearly favoured methodology for communication remaining since the very early dialogue. At the end of the dialogue the Christian dies, and three of his interlocutors are baptised. See W. H. T. Gairdner, *The Muslim Idea of God* (Colombo: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1925), 3.

<sup>733</sup> Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an, 18 Vols.*, Vol. 3, p. 402., cf. Quṭb, *Fī Ḥalāl Al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2, p. 815.

<sup>734</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 32. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus is accused of calling himself the "Son of God" in Matthew 27:43, and used the term of himself in John 10:36. There are, however, many many references to Jesus calling himself the "Son of Man" in contrast to those few in which he may be said to affirm the title "Son of God". *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

Predictably then, Jesus is to the Muslim in Tisdall's dialogue, only a prophet. And predictably, Tisdall invokes the Qur'an to defeat this idea, Jesus is the 'Word of God' (*kalimatuhu = kallimatu 'llāhi*, Q4:171), a 'Spirit from God' (Q4:171), and sinless (Q3:45). The Muslim counters with Q3:59, that Jesus is just like Adam, and with Luke 3:38, that Adam was also 'Son of God' in the Gospels. The Christian blocks with a concession that their likeness is in human fatherlessness, and counters with Adam's sinfulness as a dividing quality. The Christian and the Muslim are then back to the title Son of God, and its carnal meaning in the Qur'an versus its spiritual metaphorical meaning in the Gospels. The Qur'an denies the deity of Christ, and the Bible asserts it. The Muslim denies the Christian's claims based on the authority of the Qur'an, and the Christian refutes with the authority of the Bible. Tisdall's argument becomes circular.<sup>736</sup> Tisdall develops two innovations here: his interpretation of Q3:59 as meaning that Jesus was the second Adam, as in 1 Corinthians 15:45;<sup>737</sup> and his defeat of the commentaries of al-Razī and Jalālayn who say that Jesus is the 'Word of God' because he was fatherless. To this second point, Tisdall says that Adam was too fatherless, and was not called the Word of God in the Qur'an.<sup>738</sup>

Mahmoud Ayoub recalibrates the discussion, "Christians would certainly agree with Muslims that Jesus is not an offspring by generation, *walad*, of God, but that he is our brother and the older son in the family of God of which we are all members."<sup>739</sup> He then begins his commentary conceding that the birth story of Jesus in Luke 1:35 confirms that no sexual union took place between God and Mary, and thus at least it may be offered that the accusation that Christians believe such a union took place is not based in their own scriptures.<sup>740</sup> He adds a brief and very helpful survey of the *tafsirs* of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubi, Abū Ja'far al-Tusī and others to highlight the carnal interpretations of Islamic commentary on Q66:12: "and Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit." These commentators, wanting to protect the total transcendence of God, made the event out to be carnal, i.e. that it was the angel Gabriel who breathed into her breast, or through a hole in her gown, and, "His breath went down and penetrated her genital organ, and thus caused her to conceive Jesus."<sup>741</sup> Ayoub notes that these carnal interpretations are inappropriate to both the Biblical and Qur'anic texts, and that contemporary commentators make almost no

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<sup>736</sup> Tisdall, 125-130.

<sup>737</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>738</sup> Ibid., 133. This is again repeated by Moucarry about a century later. See C. G. Moucarry, *The Prophet & the Messiah: An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 177. This argument is unoriginal. Muslims relate that Adam was better than Jesus because he was born without a father or mother, and Christians retort that Jesus was better still because though both are fatherless, Jesus is called the Word of God and Adam is not.

<sup>739</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 115.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid., 119. Ayoub's translation of Ibn Kathīr's commentary is preserved here.

comment at all about this verse. Ayoub distances himself from tradition here by conceding that, "In both scriptures, it is God and not an angel who manifests His power directly in the conception and birth of Christ," and, "neither the Qur'an nor the Gospel nativity story implies that God had a female consort in Mary, or physically engendered son in Christ."<sup>742</sup>

Having established this, he reviews the traditional commentary on Q2:116-117.<sup>743</sup> Ayoub concludes that these verses do not in fact speak about Jesus.<sup>744</sup> He makes the distinction between *ibn* as a metaphorical sonship and *walad* as an engendered sonship, noting that at times Christians have argued for both, and that the Qur'an speaks to the use of both terms. It should be noted that though *ibn* may have allegorical meaning, it also has literal meaning. The term in relation to Jesus occurs in Q9:30, "The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son [*ibn*] of God', and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the son [*ibn*] of God'..." As Ayoub notes, the term *ibn* can have both literal and allegorical meaning, so the original Qur'anic context here is important. The meaning of 'Son of God' here should have the same philosophical base for both the Jewish view of Ezra and the Christian view of Christ in the context of the Qur'anic revelation. This poses a challenge, as this seems to be the only verse in the Qur'an which cannot be reconciled as a Qur'anic correction strictly of the carnal interpretation of Christ's sonship to God. Contrarily, it seems to be correcting the metaphysical association, thus it is of strategic importance to Christian-Muslim dialogue that this verse be explored here.

Parrinder suggests that Ezra may be the object of Jewish saint-worship, but otherwise dismisses the problem altogether, grouping this '*ibn*' reference with the other '*walad*' references.<sup>745</sup> Parrinder's contribution may be highlighted here. He suggests that Ezra and Jesus are in this verse the objects of saint-worship, and thus the meaning ascribed to the Christ-God relationship and the meaning ascribed to the Ezra-God relationship, though metaphysical, is that of a saint, as indicated in the following verse, "They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners!" (Q9:31). This parallels Jesus and Ezra in the venerating view of sainthood, and highlights a competition between Ezra and Jesus in the minds of Jews and Christians respectively. As Louis Feldman writes on the Jewish tradition concerning Ezra that,

Ezra is said (Kohleth Rabbah 1.4) by the rabbis to have had such stature that he would have been high priest even if Aaron himself were then alive. Furthermore, we are told (Yoma 69b) that he reached such a level of holiness that he was able to pronounce the divine name "as it is

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>743</sup> Cf. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, Vol. 1, 148-149.

<sup>744</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 126-128.

<sup>745</sup> Parrinder, 128, 157.

written". Indeed, he is one of five men whose piety is especially extolled by the rabbis (Midrash Psalms on cv 2). ... In short, it is not surprising that this glorification of Ezra reached such proportions that in the Koran (Sura 9.30) Mohammed accuses the Jews of regarding Ezra as the veritable son of God.<sup>746</sup>

Jewish pre-Christian literature contains a number of cases of the terms 'son of God' or 'sons of God'. In many cases these are groups of angels or other supernatural beings (i.e. Genesis 6:2,4; Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7, Psalms 29:1; Daniel 3:25). Yet as Erminie Huntress notes, the most common use of the metaphor in the Old Testament is its reference to the nation of Israel as the 'Son of God' (Exodus 4:22-23, Deuteronomy 1:31, 8:5; Hosea 11:1, 13:13; Jeremiah 3:19, 31:9, 20; Malachi 1:6, Ps 80:16). She notes that in the inter-testamental period, the Targum in many cases changed the renderings of these scriptures, to eliminate the title 'son(s) of God' and to, "not only to repudiate the idea that the Messiah was to be the Son of God, but to deny that God could have a son at all."<sup>747</sup> She concludes that,

...while such usage still existed in the second century B. C. there is no certain evidence of it in the first century B. C. or A. D. The reaction against it may, then, have started even before the controversy with Christianity; it might well result simply from the logic of Judaism. The Targums rule out this use of the phrase completely. It implied a participation by created beings in the nature of God, which the Jews came to consider impossible, all the more so since some of these angels had sinned.<sup>748</sup>

It may also be that the Qur'an is answering the apocryphal text of *4 Ezra* here (a.k.a. *The Apocalypse of Ezra, 2 Esdras*), which dates from after 70 CE, and contains a number of references to "My Son the Messiah" (4 Ezra 7:28-29; 13:32, 37, 52; 14:9).<sup>749</sup> This text is likely the first which equates the titles 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', and it does so in a Jewish text clearly altered by Christians.<sup>750</sup> The phraseology in *4 Ezra* is easily read with the Qur'anic carnal

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<sup>746</sup> Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Ezra," *Vestus Testamentum* 43, no. 2 (1993): 192-193.

<sup>747</sup> Erminie Huntress, "Son of God' in Jewish Writings Prior to the Christian Era," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54, no. 2 (1935): 118.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid.*, 121. An Arabic version exists in a manuscript dating from the tenth or eleventh century. The Arabic text is evidently a copy of an older Kufic version, which places *4 Ezra* as a text whose Arabic develops in parallel with the Qur'an, also originally recorded in Kufic. See F. Leemhuis, Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, and G. J. H. van Gelder, *The Arabic Text of the Apocalypse of Baruch* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 5., cf. P. Sj. van Koningsveld, "A New Manuscript of the Syro-Arabic Version of the Fourth Book of Ezra," in *Selected Studies in Pseudepigrapha & Apochrypha: With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition*, ed. Michael Stone (Leiden: Brill, 1938). In any case, *4 Ezra* was contained in the Peshitta Syriac version of the Bible, and thus where the Bible existed in Syriac in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, *4 Ezra* was likely contained in it. This includes South Arabia, and the texts of the Najrānian Christians, who as shown above had their liturgy in Syriac. It is thus posited that the Bible as held by Abū Ḥarīṯha very likely contained the *4 Ezra* text.

<sup>750</sup> Joshua Bloch highlights one such emendation in 4 Ezra 7:27-29, "And whosoever is delivered from the predicted evils will see my wonders. For *my son* the messiah will be revealed together with those who are with him and he will gladden those who survive thirty years. And it will be, after those years, that *my son* the messiah will die, and all in whom there is human breath." Here the emendations are emphasized, and as Bloch notes, the text without the emendations is of decidedly Jewish character. These simple scribal additions alter the text completely from Jewish to Christian meaning. Joshua Bloch, "Some



interpretation of Jesus' physical sonship. Huntress and Bloch note that the Ethiopic version does not contain "My Son" in 7:28 and contains in verse 7:29, "My Servant Messiah", which indicates that it has escaped edition in these verses, revealing its original content.<sup>751</sup> In this case, the Ethiopic version of *4 Ezra* is closer to the Qur'anic teaching than the edited Syriac versions. Additionally, being that as Bloch noted, the word *son* often replaced the word *servant* in the edited texts of *4 Ezra*, perhaps this provides new context for the interpretation of Q4:172, where the Qur'an specifically re-establishes the title *servant* against the title *son* for the Messiah. In this case too, it may be answering this specific text attributed to Ezra.<sup>752</sup>

As mentioned above, Ezra is a saintly hero of the Jews, and in *4 Ezra* is presented as himself having equated the Messiah with God and the implying of God's having a son. It may be posited that the Qur'an in Surah 9:30 wishes simply to clear up that whether is meant by Jews that Ezra is the Son of God, or by the Christians that the Messiah is the Son of God, the title and the two referents here are taken from particular instances of near verifiable Christian textual *tahrīf* of the Jewish *4 Ezra* text, and must be dismissed.

It is possible that the Qur'an reflects that Muhammad had access to the teachings of the Christian-altered *4 Ezra* text in the latter part of his career. The widespread inclusion of the text in Syriac Bibles, and the Syriac liturgical practices of the Najrānian Christians improve the likelihood of Muhammad's interaction with *4 Ezra* as a specifically polemical text perhaps used by Abū Ḥarītha against the Jews.<sup>753</sup> If this is the case, many problematic verses of the Qur'an for Christians, reportedly revealed during the last two years of Muhammad's life, could be under new light. More study is needed, but it is possible that *4 Ezra*, as seen here, opens up to

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Christological Interpolations in the Ezra-Apocalypse," *The Harvard Theological Review* 51, no. 2 (1958). The quote is from pp. 89-90.

<sup>751</sup> Huntress: 121., cf. Bloch: 90.

<sup>752</sup> In returning the text to its original state, the word *son* is then replaced with *servant*, which not only aligns with the Qur'anic view of the Messiah, but as Cragg notes, recovers the importance of Messiah-as-Servant in the Gospels and Philippians 2. Cragg says, "For the faith in the Oneness of God as a triune Lordship derives from the role of Christology and Christology – as always inside theology – stems from the person and deed of Jesus as the Christ. In the sense we must realize from 4:172, 'Sonship', with or without a capital 's', underwrites them all. Given the predilections of Islam about Allah, which we can also approve on their own ground, we do well to let the thrust of Surah 4:172 take all else that matters into its scope. For it is one of the rare and precious occasions when a Quranic meaning-in-place dramatically coincides with a counterpart in the New Testament vocabulary. There is a veritable meeting of theme and fact." Kenneth Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 144.

<sup>753</sup> The reader is reminded that the Jewish king Masrūq reportedly slaughtered the Monophysites of Najrān in 519, about a century prior to the meeting of Muhammad with the Najrānian Christians. When South Arabia was politically freed in 525 by the Abyssinians and re-Christianized, the Monophysites and Jews on the backs of these two wars would have likely been at odds with each other. The *4 Ezra* text is a Jewish writing altered by Christians, widely included in Syriac scriptures, and alternately in Ethiopic recension. Syriac was very likely the liturgical language of Najrān, and the Abyssinians (Ethiopians) had been those to free it from the Jewish king, as seen above as well. Though it is impossible to place the text squarely in the hands of Abū Ḥarītha, the possibility of him knowing it well and using it in theological discourse with the Jews remaining in South Arabia, and thus in his presentation to Muhammad, is very likely. See the section *Christian Doctrine in South Arabia in the Sixth and Early Seventh Centuries* above.

new interpretation the historical contexts of 4:172, 9:30, and even a provides validation of the textual argument of *tahrīf*.

The phraseology “My Son the Messiah” from *4 Ezra* is also reminiscent of that of Q7:72, “Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ have defied God. The Messiah himself said, ‘Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden, and Hell will be his home. No one will help such evildoers.”

Bassetti-Sani proposes another solution for Q7:72. He suggests that the phraseology “God is the Messiah” was chosen specifically to correct the Monophysite Christology in the same way that “to take a son” (19:34-35) was chosen to correct the Nestorians who believed that Jesus gradually became the ‘Son of God’ over time.<sup>754</sup> We will look at each of these proposals.

Firstly, the phraseology “God is the Messiah” is proposed as an intentional correction of the Monophysite formula. Bassetti-Sani argues that, “This rejected formula is not correctly rendered as ‘the Christ, Son of Mary, is God,’ because the word *Allah* (God) is the subject of the sentence and not an attribute of *al-Masīh* (the Christ).”<sup>755</sup> Monophysite Christology presents Christ as a single indivisible nature of both man and God. Thus the phrase “God is the Messiah” certainly corresponds with the Monophysite formula directly. Chalcedonians however render the Messiah both 100% God and 100% man, thus the phrase “God is the Messiah” is rejected by Chalcedonians as doctrinally incomplete. Nestorians, emphasizing the humanity of Christ too would reject this statement.

Secondly, the phrase “to take a son” in Q19:35 is rendered “to have a child” by Abdel Haleem. It occurs in Arabic as, “يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ.” The verb here *ittakhadha* is elsewhere translated by Haleem as “to take for oneself, to adopt” which seems an accurate translation in light of the verb’s reflexive tone.<sup>756</sup> The Arabic phraseology indicates that the object (the son) already exists when the subject (Allah) takes (*yittakhidha*) the object unto itself. The Arabic phrase cannot be understood to imply that the object (the son) is in any way a product of the subject (Allah), and so the phrase should not be translated in the meaning of ‘creating’ or ‘having a child’ in the sense of genesis of one from the other. This is compelling as the Qur’an certainly refutes the genesis of Christ from God in other passages. So why does the Qur’an employ

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<sup>754</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 143.

<sup>755</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>756</sup> Badawi and Abdel Haleem, 15.

phraseology here which specifically rejects the taking of the son by Allah, when it has already expressly clarified that the Messiah cannot have been born of Allah?

Interestingly, Nestorianism provides a possible solution. Nestorian doctrine holds that Jesus was gradually adopted over time as the Son of God, and became gradually aware of his divine role. This explains the Nestorian rejection of the *Filioque* (“and the Son”) addition to the Nicene Creed which changed the statement *qui ex Patre procedit* to *qui ex Patre Filioque procedit*. In the Nestorian sense, the Father indeed took the Son, and therefore the Qur’anic expression “to take a son” possibly directly refutes Nestorian Christology. Once again, Chalcedonianism presented Christ as eternally co-existent with God, and so Chalcedonianism too rejects the idea that God took unto Himself a son.

Bassetti-Sani suggests that when the Qur’an speaks for itself, it seems to have the ability to enter the complexities of the Christological debate during Muhammad’s time, correcting Nestorianism and Monophysitism in a way that may be understood to leave Chalcedonianism un-reproached.

Ayoub notes that al-Rāzī considered the Christian use of the word son (*ibn*) to be a term of honour in the Gospel. He finds that most of the early Islamic commentators too held the view that the term Son of God was a term of honour, meant to denote the special loving relationship between Jesus and God. However, due to the Christian need to defend the uniqueness of Christ to the Jews early on, the title of honour gradually became exaggerated in the early development of Christian theology.<sup>757</sup> This is apparent in the Qur’anic context of 4:172, which corrects the title “Son of God” based on Jesus’ real position as a servant. Yet as Cragg already noted, the titles ‘Servant of God’ and ‘Son of God’ are mutually supportive for Christians.

The logic by which, for the Qur’an, Jesus can never be ‘Son’ to God is precisely the logic by which for Paul and the New Testament, he is. Both scriptures affirm his being gladly ‘servant to God’. That is their unity. The Qur’an, however, denies his ‘Sonship’ on the very grounds in which the Christian sees it to consist, namely a loving obedience to God. For the latter there is a quality of service which only the ‘Son’ can bring.<sup>758</sup>

As Zwemer notes, the phraseology of Q4:172, “The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God...” bears some resemblance to the meaning of Isaiah 53 on the suffering servant as Messiah, especially verse 11 where he is referred to as the ‘righteous servant’. The Qur’an, by using the argument of ‘Jesus as servant’ against the title ‘Son of God’, reveals that it

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<sup>757</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 124.

<sup>758</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 30.

may be either ignorant of the correlation between the two concepts in Christian thought, or more likely, simply arguing against a non-Christian idea of 'Son of God' either independent from or opposed to the concept of Christ's servanthood in Philippians 2.<sup>759</sup> It should not be said that the Qur'an is ignorant of Christian doctrine, thus it most likely redresses in the correction a concept of Divine Sonship devoid of the theme of servanthood.<sup>760</sup>

Yet even as Ayoub himself noted, the metaphysical concept of Divine Sonship is not entirely anti-Islamic as it too finds a parallel in the Sufi *waḥdat al-wujūd*, the unity of Being.<sup>761</sup> Though the term came later, the concept possibly originated with Muḥyi al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullah ibn al-'Arabī (a.k.a. Ibn 'Arabī or al-Shaykh al-Akbar, d.638/1240).<sup>762</sup> Ibn 'Arabī proposed the possibility of experiencing divine Being. On his achievement of what he called 'unity of Being', he writes:

<p>وجود الحق عين وجود وجدى فانى بالوجود فنيت عنه و حكم الوجود أفنى الكل عنى ولا يدري لعين الوجد كنه و وجدان الوجود بكل وجه بحال أو بلا حال فنه<sup>763</sup></p>	<p>Being of the Ultimate Reality (<i>wujūd al-ḥaqq</i>) is identical to what is found through my ecstasy, And I was annihilated in Being and through Being The rule of ecstasy is that everything is annihilated through it Yet the eye of ecstasy cannot know the hidden reality. Pure consciousness of Being in every facet, Through a mystical state or not is from it [Being].<sup>764</sup></p>
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Ibn 'Arabī finds the ultimate reality of Being through the ecstatic mystical experience.<sup>765</sup>

His rationalism is found in his use of Qur'anic material such as Q24:39, "But the deeds of those

<sup>759</sup> See also Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, 144-145.

<sup>760</sup> Discussions on the comparative meaning of Messiah in Islam and Christianity, and the title 'servant' for Jesus have been taken up by others as well. See Moucary, 171-174, 179-180.

<sup>761</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 128.

<sup>762</sup> Ibn 'Arabī is sometimes categorized as a Neoplatonist or Theosophist, but is more accurately described as a Mystical Rationalist: "the God that one experiences ultimately in rationalistic mysticism is not above and beyond Being but is identical to thought and being-thought-itself; there is an absolute transparency between the knower, the known, and the knowledge itself." Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227.

<sup>763</sup> Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyah: Dabatahu Wa-Ṣaḥḥahahu Wa-Waḍa'a Fahārisahu Aḥmad Shams Al-Dīn*, 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1999), 537.

<sup>764</sup> Ibn 'Arabī translated and quoted in Adamson and Taylor, 233. Emphasis mine.

<sup>765</sup> This is of course not to say that Ibn 'Arabī believed mystical experience as sufficient for religion. As Ian Netton notes, though Ibn 'Arabī must be viewed primarily as a mystic, he did not divorce his mysticism from his philosophy, of which there are voluminous extant works. Netton further clarifies that Ibn 'Arabī's theology, specifically his *waḥdat al-wujūd*, is sometimes mistaken for pantheism, yet the designation is only appropriate if one erroneously reads Ibn 'Arabī's works as rationalistic rather than philosophical. Netton highlights Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy by exposing a particular paradox that is useful here. In reference to the immanent expressions of Ibn 'Arabī's transcendent God, Netton writes, "Ibn al-'Arabī is indeed saying that God is utterly transcendent – in more ways than one – but at the same time He has the capacity to 'mediate' Himself to, or 'connect' ontologically and somehow substantially with, man via the divine attributes and names. In a very real way, for Ibn al-'Arabī, man is somehow God (in the sense that he is one with God like all things) and God is similarly somehow man! (The term 'man', of course does not encompass God's *totality* for God is also much more than man)." Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, Exeter Arabic and Islamic Series (London: Routledge, 1989), 276., emphasis his. This blur between creation and creator, acknowledging God's participation in creation though not relinquishing God's transcendence (if only out of stubborn orthodox respect for God's otherness), presents a philosophical framework for Islamic exploration of the attributes of God, and indeed the participation of man in God, as expressions of the transcendent in

who disbelieve are like a mirage in a desert: the thirsty person thinks there will be water but, when he gets there, he finds only God, who pays him his account in full – God is swift in reckoning.” ‘Being’ in the monistic sense for Ibn ‘Arabī is only the self-disclosure of God, the degree to which he manifests himself within existence.<sup>766</sup> Thus total monism as in the full unity of creator and created is clearly not Ibn ‘Arabī’s plan here, but rather a distinction between creator and creation that allows for self-disclosure of creator within creation, based on three levels of Being, roughly stated: God in unknowable Principle, Being as the self-disclosure of God, and Existence as the realm in which that self-disclosure is made. If self-disclosure of God is made in existence, then existence cannot be said to be wholly other than God, or at least is composed of containers into which God’s self-disclosure can be expressed.<sup>767</sup> This philosophy extends to the divine attributes of God, which in the three classes refer to divine essence, manifestations of that essence in God’s seeing and hearing, and manifestations of the creative command which emanates from him.<sup>768</sup>

Ayoub notes that there is perhaps some room here for investigation in Christian-Muslim dialogue in the parallel between Ibn ‘Arabī’s ecstatic experience of Being and the balance between divine and human in Christology. Further exploration may provide a bridge for understanding that the momentary ecstatic experience of Ibn ‘Arabī’s unity of Being is possibly in Christ a conscious epistemological state of Being. In this the Christian concept of Divine Sonship may find its voice in Islamic philosophy.<sup>769</sup>

### Son of Mary

There is little doubt in the Qur’an that Jesus is the son of the virgin Mary. This title “Son of Mary” is the most used of Jesus. Yet Bassetti-Sani does not interpret this as a rejection

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the created world. The parallel between Ibn ‘Arabī’s *waḥdat al-wujūd* paradox and the paradox of the Incarnation in Christianity is thus apparent.

<sup>766</sup> Titus Burckhardt describes Arabī’s conception of supreme union, “as a mutual interpenetration of Divinity and man; God, as it were, takes on human nature; the Divine nature (*al-Lahūt*) becomes the content of human nature (*an-Nāsūt*), the latter being considered as the recipient of the former, and, from another angle, man is absorbed and, as it were, enveloped by Divine Reality. God is mysteriously present in man, and man is obliterated in God.” Of course, even the non-specialist reader will note in the Islamic mind of Ibn ‘Arabī, a presentation similar to what in Christianity is wrestled with as the doctrine of hypostatic union. Titus Burckhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, Library of Perennial Philosophy Spiritual Classics Series (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), 69. Cf. p.70, n.2.

<sup>767</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī’s modern Sufi counterpart, Martin Lings, describes the Unity of Being in the term ‘extinction’, which again blurs the line between creator and creation. He quotes the Sufi saying, “*Ana aḥmadun bilā mīm; ana rabīyyun bilā ‘ain; man ra’ānī faqad ra’ā l-ḥaqq*” *Aḥmad* without the *mīm* is *aḥad*, meaning ‘one’. *Arab* without the *‘ain* renders *rabb*, meaning ‘lord’. The saying roughly means that he is both Ahmad the Arab, and the One Lord, the two names corresponding to the two perfect natures in Universal Man, the perfect human nature, and the Divine Nature. The archetype of the concept is Muhammad. Again, this concept in its modern expression continues to potentially draw intimate parallels with the Christian concept of the divine and human natures in Christ. ad-Dīn, 3, n.7; 9.

<sup>768</sup> Adamson and Taylor, 233-239.

<sup>769</sup> It may further be proposed that the three levels of Being could correspond with the Persons of the Trinity inasmuch as they may be identified with the Christian trinitarian conceptions of God as Transcendent (Father as unknowable Principle), God as Immanent (Holy Spirit as Being), and God as Incarnate (Son as Being-conscious Existent).

of divinity. "Jesus is described as *Issa, Ibn Mariam* ... and must be seen in the light of the Koran's special purpose in 'rehabilitating' Jesus in the wake of the blasphemies against him and Mary."<sup>770</sup> The accusations are recorded already in the Gospels, as some Jews said to Jesus, "We aren't illegitimate children! God himself is our true Father" (John 8:41b).

So pivotal was the virgin birth that early Christians called Jesus by the title "Son of the Virgin" (*υἱός της Παρθένος*), and in mockery he was renamed by the Jews, "Son of the leopard" (*υἱός της Πάνθηρας*).

This pseudonym is certainly very old, for we learn from Origen that the heathen Celsus, about the year 178, heard from a Jew a statement to the effect that Miriam was divorced from her husband, a carpenter by trade, after it had been proved that she was an adulteress. Discarded by her husband and wandering about in shame, she bore Jesus in secret, whose father was a certain soldier, Pantheras (Πάνθηρας). And Origen himself says that James, the father of Jesus' father, Joseph, was called by the name "Panther." Origen apparently wished in this way to explain why Jesus the son of Joseph was called "Ben Pandera" or "Ben Pantere" by the Jews; according to Origen, Jesus was so called after the name of his grandfather.<sup>771</sup>

As Klausner continues, the Jews gradually forgot that the name came from his mother's side, and since 'leopard' was not a natural Jewish name, a legend developed that Jesus was the son of a foreigner. Thus it became a common story that Jesus' father was a Roman soldier, and Mary had lied about the virgin birth in order to cover up her fornication.<sup>772</sup> A 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-Semitic book refers to a Talmud tractate (*Kallah: 1b*) which allegedly relates Mary's testimony of her son's conception:

Then he said: "Tell me, what kind of son is this of yours"? To which she replied: "The day I was married I was having menstruation, and because of this my husband left me. But an evil spirit came and slept with me and from this intercourse my son was born to me." Thus it was proved that this young man was not only illegitimate but also conceived during the menstruation of his mother.<sup>773</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 145.

<sup>771</sup> Joseph Klausner and Herbert Danby, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1926), 23. The first half of this quote concerning the soldier Klausner draws from Origen's *Contra Celsum*. It must be noted however that Origen's second comment concerning James is recorded in Epiphanius, whose credibility has already been seriously challenged.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>773</sup> The name of Jesus (or any of his Jewish nicknames) is nowhere mentioned in the story. Thus the story is unlikely to have referred originally to Jesus, as many names were used for him among the Jews, and none are employed here. This story is only later applied to Mary and Jesus in the book *Tol'doth Yeshu* (*The Generations of Jesus*), in which it serves as the cornerstone of the book. Klausner dates the *Tol'doth Yeshu* not earlier than the fifth/tenth century. Nevertheless it is an example of how Jewish literature stretched to accommodate the defaming of the Christian paragon. I. B. Pranaitis, *The Talmud Unmasked: The Secret Rabbinical Teachings Concerning Christians* (St. Petersburg: Archbishop Metropolitan of Moghileff, 1892), 10-11., cf. Klausner and Danby, 30-31. An abbreviation of *Tol'doth Yeshu* can be found in *ibid.*, 48ff.

This story is attributed to Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, a first century Rabbi. The tractate is not included in the normal volumes of the Talmud, was not likely to have been composed about Jesus specifically, and Rabbi Eliezer was excluded from the Sanhedrin under the charge of heresy.

However, Bassetti-Sani highlights that in light of the continued Jewish discretization of Jesus, one of the major themes of the Qur'an, as mentioned above, became the vindication of the honour of Jesus and his mother. The repeated use of the term "Son of Mary" for Jesus is likely a direct correction of the Jewish slander against him which began with their mockery of the title "Son of the Virgin" in early Christianity. According to Bassetti-Sani then, the Qur'an thus reaches back to revive an original term of endearment for Christ from his first century Greek followers.

### The Logos in Islam

Gairdner writes of the seven primary Islamic attributes of God (Life, Knowledge, Will, Power, Hearing, Seeing, and Word) that parallels with John Chapter 1 may be found, except that the Word in John is Jesus, and the Word in Islam is, "only a Book."<sup>774</sup> Gairdner shows critical disdain for the Qur'an, which he describes sarcastically:

... from the passage describing the ineffableness of God down to the passage authorizing Mohammed's marriage with the divorced wife of his adopted son: all is equally, in kind and in degree, inspired and eternal and Divine. ... Such is Islam's main solution to the problem, how did the Infinite God project Himself into the ken of finite man? ... The contrast between this doctrine of the Logos of Islam and the Logos of the Gospel furnishes food for very abundant thought.<sup>775</sup>

Nasr clarifies from the Islamic side that though the Qur'an truly is the parallel to Christ in Islam, it is Muhammad that is the *Logos* of Islam in the metaphysical sense: "the Prophet is both a manifestation of the Logos and the Logos itself, both the beginning of the prophetic cycle and its end, and, being its end and seal, he contains from an essential and inward point of view the whole prophetic function within himself."<sup>776</sup>

Ayoub returns the Muslim voice to the parallel between Jesus and the Qur'an as Word of God, restoring to Jesus the peculiarity among the prophets that both the Qur'an and *Injil* award him: "Jesus is himself a divine sign, one to be celebrated with joy, marvel, and faith. In

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<sup>774</sup> Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam*, 101.

<sup>775</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>776</sup> Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 63., cf. p.191.

the Qur'an as in the Gospel, the angels bring to Mary the glad tidings of a great miracle – the unique birth of a unique child, the 'Word of God', the 'Son of the Most High' (Q3:45; Luke 1:32-33)."<sup>777</sup> Ayoub continues:

The Qur'an first came to Muhammad not in the humdrum of Makkah and Madinah but in the cave of Mount Hira, where the prophet was in seclusion, preparing his mind and soul for the awesome task of receiving and transmitting the Word of God to the world. It was in the same solitude, in the 'easterly place', where Mary secluded herself from her people, that the angel encountered her ... As the prophet in the cave of Hira was bewildered, so was Mary. She was afraid. But the angel reassured her.<sup>778</sup>

'God brings you glad tidings of a word from Him whose name is Jesus Christ', the angels said to Mary (Q. 3:45). It is worth noting that the word kalimah is a feminine noun. The Qur'an is here speaking not of a name but of an actual being, of the Word of God manifested in human life and history. Is this all merely metaphorical or even metaphysical? Or is there a mystery far greater than we have been able to fathom for the last fourteen hundred years?<sup>779</sup>

Ayoub offers shocking ecumenism here. Whereas the traditional Islamic projection of Jesus is as merely one among 124,000 prophets, Ayoub concedes that the language of the Qur'an does not allow for such a simplistic view of Christ. In the same way that the Qur'an is the physical expression of the Word of God through Muhammad, Jesus is the incarnated Word of God through Mary. The uniqueness of Mary too is affirmed here, and Ayoub takes a massive ecumenical step.

The work of Ayoub here may be compared to that of Cragg, who in wrestling with the concept of *Logos*, notes that far from rejecting the immanence of God in creation as John describes Christ in John 1, the Qur'an assumes such immanence in its own revelation. Cragg writes, "Were the divine and the human in dissociation, there could be neither prophethood nor Muhammad. It is not the fact of that relatedness which is in dispute between us, but only its form, its intensity, its Islamic reservations, or its Christian decisiveness."<sup>780</sup> "Muhammad constitutes the point of 'association' within Islam between God and the human world, the context in which men experience God's ways and God's mercy."<sup>781</sup>

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<sup>777</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 113.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>780</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 253.

<sup>781</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.



Zwemer comments that the title 'Word of God' in Islam is a denotation of Jesus as a communicator of God's will to men.<sup>782</sup> Though affirming Jesus' uniqueness as the living Word of God in history, Ayoub too maintains Jesus' humanity. He notes that the humanity of Christ is every bit a pillar of faith in the Christian church as his proposed divinity, reminding Christians of Jesus' own words in John 20:17, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"<sup>783</sup> Ayoub continues:

Who, then, is Jesus, the miracle of life, of love, and of healing? He is the Word of God and the servant of God and the messenger of God. He is the savior of us all, for what is salvation but healing? A savior is not simply one who dies for the sins of others but also one who heals the sickness of the human soul; one who infuses life into dead spirits by his own life and spirit. The original meaning of salvation is 'to be healed', 'to be made wholesome', 'to be truly restored to life'. This, according to the Qur'an, was the mission of Jesus.<sup>784</sup>

Ayoub corrects Nasr here, returning *Logos* to its primary parallel, the text of the Quran and the person of Jesus, though the cost of doing so is that of presenting Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets, as the counter-part of Mary *al-Muṣṭafiyya*, chosen above all women (Q3:42), rather than the counter-part of Isā, *Kalimat Allah*.<sup>785</sup> This is innovative, and an effective solution to the complications that arise from direct comparisons between Muhammad and Jesus, addressed below in Section II.5.

## Names for Jesus

The Arabic name for Jesus, 'Isā, is a growing concern. Etymological study in the beginning of the fourteenth-fifteenth/twentieth century is having a difficult time explaining the history of the name as opposed to the more common Yesu'a. Dr. Jessup supposed that it might have been for aesthetics in the Qur'an, as 'Isā occurs with Musā (Moses) in a rhyming couplet, not unlike *Habil* and *Kabil* or *Harut* and *Marut*. This only accounts for five instances

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<sup>782</sup> Samuel Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition* (Burgess Hill, UK: Diggory Press, 2005), 15.

<sup>783</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 114-115. This same verse has been popular in the dialogue. It was also quoted to Timothy I by Caliph Mahdī in their early debate. Mingana, *The Debate on the Christian Faith between Patriarch Timothy I and Caliph Mahdī in 781 Ad*, 20.

<sup>784</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 115.

<sup>785</sup> This parallel between Word as Qur'an and Word as Jesus in the Christian-Muslim dialogue has in at least one instance been exercised as a normative convention in the otherwise objective field of translation. In David Marshall's translation of Christian W. Troll's *Unterscheiden um zu klären: Orientierung im christlich-islamischen Dialog*, Marshall notes, "In the course of this book the term Word/word (of God) is used in a range of different ways, raising the question of when to use a capital *W* and when to use a small *w* for Word/word. This question arises neither in Arabic, which has no capital letters, nor in German, which capitalizes all nouns. The approach taken here has been to refer to the Qur'an in Islam and Christ in Christianity as the Word of God with a capital *W*, since both are understood within their respective faiths as the uncreated, eternal Word of God." Troll, 5-6.

though, and in other mentions of his name, 'Isā does not contribute to the rhyme *per se*.<sup>786</sup> Otto Pautz proposed that Jews had been using the name Easu as a kind of derogatory epithet to refer to Jesus, as Esau was the brother of Jacob (Israel), and they were hostile toward each other. Pautz proposed that Muhammad learned the name from the Jews in Medina, initially unaware of its meaning.<sup>787</sup> This is unlikely, however, as Muhammad's first wife's family were Christians (as shown above), and he was almost certain to have heard the name of Jesus long before reaching Medina. Shahîd proposes a simple solution, 'Isā appears in the Qur'an, along with *ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples), and *injīl* (Gospel), because the three terms are of Ethiopic Christian origin, and Ethiopic (Monophysite) Christianity was dominant in Mecca during Muhammad's lifetime.<sup>788</sup>

The titles 'Messiah' and 'Word of God' are also challenging terms in the dialogue. Zwemer acknowledges that some Muslims connect the term Messiah to the verb *sah* (to wander), and relates a couple of traditional stories that were developed to support this etymology. Some commentators, such as Fayrūzābādī related the title to *masaha* (to anoint).<sup>789</sup> Others said it was from the Hebrew: 'anointed' (מִשָּׁח).<sup>790</sup> This conclusion has gained traction in the West in spite of Arthur Jeffrey's assertion that the term is originally Syriac.<sup>791</sup> Parrinder notes that one Persian author described the title Messiah thus: "...only he who served humanity more than others and gave himself for it, could attain to this dignity."<sup>792</sup>

Christian Troll notes that the title messiah (*al-masīh*) is unclear in the Qur'an, "and the name 'Isā has no special meaning. Jesus is generally identified in the Qur'an as 'the son of Mary.' The Qur'an refers to Muhammad as 'the seal of the prophets' (33:40) and thus raises him above Jesus Christ."<sup>793</sup> This is a curious comparison from Troll. It has been argued by Ayoub that due to one of his other Qur'anic titles, 'word of God', Jesus' proper counterpart is the Qur'an, not Muhammad, according to the Qur'an itself. Here, Troll places 'seal of the prophets' above 'word of God' in terms of position. Though this may be a popular Islamic interpretation,

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<sup>786</sup> Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ : An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition*, 17.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>788</sup> Shahîd, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," 12-17.

<sup>789</sup> Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ : An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition*, 17. Fayrūzābādī notes more than fifty meanings for the term Messiah.

<sup>790</sup> A recent example is Zein, 114-115. It should be noted that Zein's critique of the Christian view of Christ is somewhat based on his distinction between the Hebrew term messiah (*masah*) and the Greek term *christos*. He states that, "the title 'Messiah' is not the same as the term 'Christ' that was translated from the Greek 'Chrestos'." This is certainly incorrect from an etymological view. The terms are equally accurately representative of the verb "to anoint" and so equally mean "annointed one". In fact, the Hebrew messiah was exactly translated *christos* in the Greek Septuagint prior to Jesus' birth. The terms are exact. However, it is clear, as Zein contends, that the meanings of the terms in pre-Christian Judaism and later Pauline Christianity, vary.

<sup>791</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, 265., cf. Parrinder, 31.

<sup>792</sup> Parrinder, 33.

<sup>793</sup> Troll, 17.

it cannot be said to be universally so, nor strictly Qur'anic. The Qur'anic view of itself as 'word of God' is most likely higher than its view of even the 'seal of the prophets'.

## Conclusion

In the apologetic tone, it is noted by Tarif Khalidi that Jesus' uniqueness in the Qur'an is clear:

He is the only prophet in the Qur'an who is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold of him ... Jesus explicitly denies any responsibility for advocating tritheism. God meanwhile denies the crucifixion. With Jesus, as with no other prophetic figure, the problem is not only to retell his story accurately. There are major doctrinal difficulties with the Christian version of his life and teachings, to which the Qur'an repeatedly returns. In sum, the Qur'anic Jesus, unlike any other prophet, is embroiled in polemic.<sup>794</sup>

Just how unique Christ is in the Qur'an is now a matter of internal debate between Muslims. There has been some movement in this discussion. It is now recognized that the Qur'an does defeat primarily the carnal interpretation of Jesus' conception by literalist readers of the name 'son of God', yet it also uses *ibn* instead of *walad* in one case (Q9:30), dealing with an apparent misappropriation of title to both Jesus and Ezra by the Christians and Jews respectively. If the Jewish-Christian polemic is the focus of this Qur'anic correction, it is possible that *4 Ezra* could provide a key to understanding the Qur'an here. In this case, the Qur'an may correct, as elsewhere, the Monophysite understanding of God as Messiah. Alternatively it may be that the Qur'an here corrects saint-worship. In either case, it is highly unlikely that the Chalcedonian view of Christ bears any resemblance to any known Jewish veneration of Ezra, and so it may be deduced that the Qur'an here, by implication of the direct parallel of Jesus and Ezra, is correcting a non-Chalcedonian view.

Sufi mysticism provides new potential metaphysical philosophical parallels for the concept of incarnation within Islam. Likewise, in the focus on *Logos* in Islam Jesus is recalibrated as the counterpart of the Qur'an as revelation, and Muhammad as the counterpart of Mary as conduit of that revelation. There is a lot of room for dialogue on these shifts in thought by Ayoub.

Perhaps the most practically useful dialogue piece is the new focus on the title 'servant of God' (*'abd-allāh*). The rejection of 'Son of God' in the Qur'an (*walad, ibn*) seems to be aimed at protecting his status as servant (*'abd*). The affirmation of 'Son of God' in the Bible can be

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<sup>794</sup> Khalidi, 12.

said to focus on precisely the same goal (Philippians 2). Thus for Christians and Muslims, ‘servant of God’ represents in anthropological, perhaps even metaphysical terms, the shared meaning behind the mutually exclusive acceptance and rejection of the literary form, ‘Son of God’. Jesus as shared revelation may be the cornerstone of Christian-Muslim dialogue. For as Hasan Askari asks, “What else could signify this deep sharing more than the fact that Jesus is the common center between Christians and Muslims? He is the word, speech, meaning and occasion of the dialogical relationship between them. He is the common ‘Sign’.”<sup>795</sup>

### II.3 The Crucifixion

There has been a considerable amount of research produced on this topic in recent years. A comprehensive survey is beyond what is necessary here.<sup>796</sup> An abbreviated survey and analysis of mainline and innovative approaches will be made. Tisdall proposes that the Qur’anic denial of Jewish responsibility for the crucifixion was perhaps due to the Biblical testimony that it was the Romans who crucified him. This is noted again predictably in conjunction with the Qur’anic testimony that Jesus is indeed able to die (Q3:55, 19:33, 4:159). Nevertheless, Tisdall eventually concedes a Qur’anic denial of the crucifixion event, though remarking that it does so in spite of the evidences that, “(1) the prophets foretold it; (2) the Gospel relates it; (3) the Apostles testify to it; (4) the Jews confess it; and (5) so do the Romans, as their historians testify.”<sup>797</sup>

The doctrine of the atonement, or the plan of salvation through the death of Christ, is an inter-related concern. For the Muslim, such a plan is unnecessary, as God can do what he wills, and forgive whom he chooses. Tisdall highlights that the idea of atonement is based on an understanding of guilt: “Christ’s atonement was needed to make us realize the guilt of sin.” Tisdall’s Muslim voice questions the justice of the innocent dying for the guilty, to which Tisdall replies that, “None but the sinless can be a substitute for the guilty, for a debtor cannot pay another’s debt, a criminal cannot pay the penalty for another criminal.”<sup>798</sup> Yet to the Muslim, denial of this kind of atonement is an affirmation of God’s holiness and ultimate power to do

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<sup>795</sup> Askari in Leonard J. Swidler, *Muslims in Dialogue : The Evolution of a Dialogue*, Religions in Dialogue (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>796</sup> In addition to sources already noted on this topic, see David Emmanuel Singh, *Jesus and the Cross : Reflections of Christians from Islamic Contexts*, Global Theological Voices (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

<sup>797</sup> Tisdall, 113-115. The quote is from p. 115. These arguments are repeated almost precisely by Moucarry 97 years later in 2001, revealing little development in the basic apologetical arguments and defences. See Moucarry, Ch. 12.; cf in this section the extended review of traditional exegesis in McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians : An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, Ch. 4.

<sup>798</sup> Tisdall, 170. Tisdall does not see his rational conundrum here. He does mention that the innocent suffer for the sake of the guilty often in human experience, though this might not be said to be justice. The metaphor he chooses here too, that of a debtor paying another’s debt, also does not evoke justice.

what he wills.<sup>799</sup> Of course, one may suppose, if God is ultimately powerful, he could theoretically accept a debtor's payment for another's debt.

To deny the crucifixion for the sake of preserving God's honour is for Gairdner a similar paradox. One cannot protect God's limitlessness, by limiting him to the inability to live or die as a man, to show his love and holiness to men. "[Islam] preserves, indeed, Allah with His unity, His majesty, and Power, but at the ruinous cost of depriving Him of Love and Holiness."<sup>800</sup> So it may be said that the crucifixion whether soteriological or not can be neither said to be required or rejected from the standpoint of God's ultimate holiness and power. As he is infinitely powerful, he could have provided salvation through the crucifixion, and he could not have.

What may be stated in general agreement by most Muslims and most Christians alike is that Jesus at the moment is not dead. Christian tradition holds that Jesus was raised to life on the third day after his crucifixion and burial. Islamic tradition retains that Jesus did not die, but was taken to heaven and will return to defeat the anti-Christ in the eschaton. For this reason, the *hujrah* in Medina reportedly contains the bodies of Muhammad, 'Umar, and Abū Bakr, with an empty grave as a placeholder for Jesus, who is still alive.<sup>801</sup> The Qur'an, according to Todd Lawson and as we have seen above, probably holds a middle ground. It supports the idea that Jesus is at present alive, supports his ability to die (Q4:155-158; 5:17; 19:30-34), and denies the Jews the right to claim responsibility for his death (Q4:155-158), yet it does not necessarily deny that Jesus died.

Maulvi Ali is one innovative exception to the mainline Islamic view here. He affirms Jesus' mortal death having occurred, and denies Jesus present life.<sup>802</sup> "If any inference as to Jesus' being alive is drawn from the words, 'And they did not kill him, nor did they put him to death on the cross' (iv.157), it can only be drawn in defiance of logic."<sup>803</sup> For Maulvi Ali, God caused Jesus to die a normal death after the failed crucifixion. Jesus was only on the cross briefly, his legs were left unbroken (John 19:31-33), the blood that came from his side was a sign of life (John 19:34), Pilate did not believe Jesus to be dead (Mark 15:44), Jesus was not buried but handed over to a wealthy disciple (John 19:38), the stone of the tomb was removed, "to enable Jesus to walk out of his resting-place when he had recovered on the third

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<sup>799</sup> The reader is directed to the work of Zahniser on this topic: Zahniser, 227-244.

<sup>800</sup> Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam*, 115.

<sup>801</sup> See the quote from Burton in Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ : An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition*, 58. A diagram of the layout of the tombs along with a good explanation can be found in Hughes, 183.

<sup>802</sup> This is a belief of the Islamic branch called the Aḥmadīn. Maulvi Ali was president of the Aḥmadiyya Anjuman al-Ishāṭ al-Islām in India.

<sup>803</sup> Maulvi Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 139.

day" (John 20:1), Jesus disguised himself as a gardener (John 20:15), appeared in the flesh (Luke 24:39), still had gaping wounds (John 20:27), and hid for fear of being discovered (John 20:19). Maulvi Ali concludes: "All these facts point conclusively to the truth of the statement made in the Holy Qur'an that Jesus was not killed, nor did he die on the cross, but was likened to one dead and thus escaped with his life, afterwards dying a natural death, as is affirmed by the Holy Qur'an."<sup>804</sup>

Lawson highlights the denial of the crucifixion as an innovation of the later Qur'anic *mufassirūn*, "The point is that much *tafsīr*, not the Qur'an, denies the crucifixion."<sup>805</sup> Yet as other researchers have recently shown, even the *tafāsīr* and *aḥadīth* do not categorically deny the event of the crucifixion, or Jesus' death from it. Joseph Cumming recently showed through survey and analysis of Sunni *tafsīrs*, that:

Throughout the centuries there has never been just one, single "correct" Islamic answer to the question of whether Jesus died on the cross. Indeed, as the wide-ranging and erudite reflections of the commentators have shown, it is not just a simple "yes-or-no" question. Among the varied answers which Muslims have given through the centuries, I believe that there is much more room to find common ground with Christians than is generally supposed by either Muslims or Christians today.<sup>806</sup>

Even the modern polemicist *mufassīr* Sayyid Quṭb takes an agnostic position on the historicity of the crucifixion. On Q3:55 he writes: "How Jesus was gathered and how he ascended to God are matters which lie beyond our human perception. They are unknown except to God."<sup>807</sup>

The Qur'an is much less ambiguous to Bassetti-Sani, who interprets it as a congruent message with the *Injīl* and Torah which came before it. Starting from the position that since

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<sup>804</sup> Ibid., 140-141. It does not seem to occur to Maulvi Ali that the survival of a Roman crucifixion in this manner is perhaps even more improbable than Jesus' being raised from the dead as attested to in the Gospels. Yet it is clear from his work that Maulvi Ali has an aversion to the possibility of the raising of the dead in general, as he states: "...when the Holy Qur'an speaks of the prophets of God as raising the dead to life, it is spiritual death and spiritual life to which it refers..." *ibid.*, 32.

<sup>805</sup> Lawson, 19.

<sup>806</sup> The *tafsīrs* specifically surveyed were those of al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Bayḍawī, and Sayyid Quṭb. The quote is from p. 35 of Joseph Cumming, "Did Jesus Die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on the End of His Earthly Life in Sunni Tafsir Literature," (2001). <http://www.yale.edu/faith/downloads/rp/Did%20Jesus%20Die%20on%20the%20Cross-English.pdf> (accessed November 21, 2010). Joseph Cumming taught this material at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, concluding that from a Sunni traditional perspective, "it is permissible to hold that Jesus did die and rise." Joseph Cumming, "Toward Respectful Witness," in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009). The invitation by Al-Azhar University, and its allowing of a Caucasian American Christian to present such findings from Sunni traditional sources, indicates the ecumenical posture of the University, and the acceptability of the findings. Zahniser too has done extensive work on Islamic commentary concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. The reader is directed to Zahniser, Chapters 3-5.

<sup>807</sup> Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, 18 Vols., Vol. 2, p. 97., cf. "فأما كيف كانت وفاته، وكتف كان رفعه .. فهي "أمور غيبية تدخل في المشابهات التي لا يعلم تأويلها إلا الله". Quṭb, *Fī Zālāl Al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1, p. 403.

the Bible and Qur'an are both revealed texts of the same God, there can be no disagreement between them, Bassetti-Sani immediately dismisses the traditional Islamic interpretation. He finds it compelling that when God in the Qur'an is speaking to Jesus, as in (Q3:55) he does not use the plural pronoun "we" as is common: "God said, 'Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to Me: I will purify you of the disbelievers. To the Day of Resurrection I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieved. Then you will all return to Me and I will judge between you regarding your differences.'" In this case Bassetti-Sani draws attention to the emphasis on all things in the Qur'an being from and by God. God is the beginning and end of all activity. The Bible variously emphasises the human role. In Q3:55 the role of God in the crucifixion is emphasised in the same way as it is in Philippians 2:8, "[Jesus] humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross."<sup>808</sup>

Bassetti-Sani presents the Qur'an in full agreement with the Biblical text, showing that Q4:157 means precisely what it says, that the Jews did not kill Jesus. As Q3:55 notes, only God is capable of that, and as Jesus himself agrees in John 1:17-18, Jesus went willingly: "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."<sup>809</sup>

Even the seemingly docetic challenge that, "it was made to appear like that to them," is not for Bassetti-Sani a departure from the New Testament. This is rather a continuation of Pauline thought:

St. Paul saw death as the "wages of sin" (Rom 6:23). For love of us, Jesus made himself "sin" (2 Cor 5:21), "a curse" (Gal 3:13). The "double," which became the object of divine justice, is "sin," as personalized by St. Paul; it is the whole humanity of the "old man" which was crucified, that the sinful body might be destroyed (Rom 6:6). All of humanity was condemned upon the cross, and Christ set aside the decree of condemnation, nailing *it* to the cross (Col 2:14).<sup>810</sup>

It appeared to the Jews that it was Jesus on the cross, but as Bassetti-Sani explains, Paul knew and the Qur'an testifies that it was sin itself, and not the second Person of the Trinity who carried it, which bore the brunt of divine judgement on the cross. This interpretation allows Bassetti-Sani to incorporate into Biblical context one of the most challenging phrases to Christian-Muslim dialogue in the Qur'an. It is a novel approach, and decidedly ecumenical in tone.

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<sup>808</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 163-165.; cf. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 29-30.

<sup>809</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 172.

<sup>810</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

As in the Gospel stories of the crucifixion, Bassetti-Sani notes that, “those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition” (Q4:157), are exactly the same people as those who after Jesus predicted his death, “were again divided in their opinions about him” (John 10:19). In the end of both renditions the Jews think they understand what happened, but, “God raised him up to Himself. God is almighty and wise” (Q4:158). The verse following is then a message of hope to the Jews who will on the Day of Judgement recognize the truth of the Qur’an and its witness of the death of Christ by his own will: “There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them” (Q4:159). Thus for Basstti-Sanui there is no need to accuse the Qur’an of docetism.<sup>811</sup>

Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ata ur-Rahim hold apologetically to the traditional Islamic view of the Qur’anic denial of the historical event of the crucifixion of Jesus. Nasr suggests the possibility that the problem exists, “providentially to preserve both Christianity and Islam as distinct religions,” thus presenting what he calls an “insurmountable obstacle,” seemingly ordered by God.<sup>812</sup> “One could say that such a major cosmic event as the end of the earthly life of Christ could in fact be ‘seen’ and ‘known’ in more than one way, and that it is God’s will that Christianity should be given to ‘see’ that end in one way and Islam in another.”<sup>813</sup> This of course does not resolve whether or not the event took place, as it may be assumed rationally possible to declare historically. It seems from Nasr’s view that it is Christianity, having ‘established’ the historicity of the crucifixion that has been allowed to ‘see’ it that way rather than in accord with Islam, which ‘sees’ and ‘knows’ of the end of Jesus’ life in a seemingly mutually exclusive way. One wonders if there is room in Nasr’s proposal for Islam to be permitted to ‘see’ the event of the crucifixion in a different, perhaps non-historical way.

Mahmoud Ayoub provides a potential solution for his Muslim colleague to the non-historical way of the Islamic ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’ of the event of the crucifixion. He agrees that the docetic interpretation of the Qur’an is excessive, and yet adds caution to Bassetti-Sani’s Christian interpretation. He notes that although the Qur’an, “denies neither the actual death of Christ nor his redemptive role in human history,” “it denies the expiatory sacrifice of Christ on the cross as a ransom for sinful humanity.”<sup>814</sup> Thus for Ayoub, the historical event of the crucifixion is conceded, but the meaning of the event from an interpretive standpoint is still very much a matter for dialogue. Historicity aside, Ayoub focuses on the theological implications of Q4:155-158, proposing a non-historical interpretation.

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<sup>811</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>812</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 464.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid., 464.

<sup>814</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 159.



In the Qur'anic text, the Jews boast about killing Jesus. Ayoub notes that it is this claim that is the focus of the text. Such a claim is intolerable arrogance to the God of the Qur'an, not because it is a claim that a prophet should die, but that the Jews who made the claim should be able to overcome the will of God.

The Qur'an is not speaking here about a man, righteous and wronged though he may be, but about the Word of God who was sent to earth and who returned to God. Thus, the denial of the killing of Jesus is a denial of the power of human beings to vanquish and destroy the divine Word, which is forever victorious.<sup>815</sup>

Any power that the Jews thought they had in the death of Jesus was just an illusion to them. It seemed to them that they had slayed him, but it was all in their imaginations. As Jesus was the Word of God, the Jews would have had to have power over God in order to do what they claimed they had done: kill the Word of God. This is just wishful thinking on their part, and something that the Qur'an flatly denies. The purpose of the text then, according to Ayoub, is to communicate clearly that God is simply too clever to fall victim to human schemes. The crucifixion therefore was the will of God, and Jesus, a submitted servant.

Throughout the trial and subsequent crucifixion Jesus showed himself as an absolute Muslim, that is to say, as one who absolutely submitted his life and his will to the will of God. The Qur'an and earlier scriptures tell us in so many words that God's mercy, sometimes called love, ... transcends all our folly and tempers even God's justice, thus making it possible for us to be called children of God.<sup>816</sup>

The Qur'anic text itself has been studied in great depth elsewhere. The works of Todd Lawson and Mathias Zahniser are particularly helpful for isolating the text within its context and producing a critical analysis. Zahniser includes in his study a breakdown of Q4:155-162 as a general instruction for the Jews, thus housing the denial verse in a discussion of Jewish positions toward Mary, dietary restrictions, and usury. The context is then the correction of the Jewish understanding of things, including Mary and Jesus,<sup>817</sup> and is closely followed by a passage clearly directed to Christians (Q4:170-175).

...in spite of the obvious interest of the *sūrah* in a polemic with believers in Jesus, it gives little or no attention to a polemic or plea about the death of Jesus and its meaning. And this is the case in spite of the fact that the killing of Jesus by crucifixion appears to be flatly rejected in the verse we have been interpreting. In addition, no other passage in the Qur'an deals with the issue of Jesus' death and the Christian convictions about its meaning. While this point shares in the weakness of all arguments from silence, it possesses some merit, given the fact that the

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<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>816</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub quoted in Zahniser, 11.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

denial verse occurs in a polemic directed at Jewish claims and not in a polemic directed at Christian claims. It would seem that if the Qur'an had any quarrel with Christian teaching about the death of Jesus, it would have shown up in this *sūrah*.<sup>818</sup>

To Zahniser then, the denial verse is not directed to Christians at all, as clearly shown in the Qur'anic text. Further, as discussed above, there are other passages in the Qur'an which speak of Jesus' mortality. Chief among them is what Zahniser calls 'the affirmation verse', namely Q3:55. The context of the verse is in the passage Q3:42-55, a section following the story of the birth of Jesus and now focused on his mission and the signs of his prophetic office. Jesus declares his purpose, and his followers affirm their loyalty to him. At the end of the passage, the narrative switches from Jesus, to the voice of God in a promise to Jesus. "God said, 'Jesus, I will *take* you back and raise you up to Me: I will purify you of the disbelievers. To the Day of Resurrection I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieved. Then you will all return to Me and I will judge between you regarding your differences" (Q3:55).

Haleem's translation here seems distant from the text itself. In the phrase "I will take you back," the verb translated 'take' here occurs as *mutawaffika* in the text, and as Cragg notes, "almost invariably indicates death".<sup>819</sup> As Zahniser points out, it also occurs in Q10:104 and 16:26 where its meaning is connected with the causation of death, i.e. 'the taking of souls' and 'the taking of lives'. Thus the *tafsīrs* of Ibn' Abbās and Wahb ibn Munabbih rendered the phrase "I shall cause thee to die". It was al-Ṭabarī that produced its contemporary interpretation, upon which Haleem's translation is possibly based.<sup>820</sup>

Cragg sees the Islamic traditional interpretation of the prediction of an apocalyptic deferred death and resurrection preceded by a "deathless rapture" untenable. "There is an immediacy about the passage in 3:55 which seems, in all normal assessment, to require real dying and prompt resurrection – in other words, what the Christian faith affirms as the climax of the very real travail the phrase implies."<sup>821</sup>

Zahniser reviews the findings of Ayoub, discussed above, before returning to the context. He finds that the affirmation verse is the climax of a section dealing, "with Jesus, the key figure for Christians, but these verses stress the sovereignty of God, not the death of Jesus

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<sup>818</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>819</sup> Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 176.

<sup>820</sup> Zahniser, 24.

<sup>821</sup> Al-Ḥallāj attributed the proposal to his teacher, Ḥasan Baṣrī. Though the court accused him of lying about it, Massignon presents complete alignment between al-Ḥallāj's Hajj proposal and the teachings of Ḥasan Baṣrī. It is not found in Baṣrī's texts, but it is certainly not contrary to Baṣrī's teachings. Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim : An Exploration*, 177.

or its meaning.<sup>822</sup> As with the denial verse then, the Qur'an seems rather disinterested in the historical event of Jesus' death and ultimately fixated on the supremacy of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus, no matter when it should take (or have taken) place.

### The Passion of al-Ḥallāj

The story of the 'passion of Ḥallāj' through the epic study of Louis Massignon, provides an interesting contribution here. The events that led to the execution of Husayn Maṣūūr al-Ḥallāj (d.309/922) are, for Massignon, an unveiled Islamic echo of the crucifixion of Christ.<sup>823</sup> Al-Ḥallāj was executed for heresy, primarily for having made the statement, "I am the Truth."<sup>824</sup> Though the title was known simply as one of the ninety-nine names of God at the time, its implication was clearly understood. This is immediately reminiscent of Jesus' similar statement in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." During his second trial he was convicted, not by this controversial statement, but by presenting an interpretation of the Hajj whereby a person who could not travel to Mecca could complete the Hajj in his home.

With a calculated slip of the tongue, the jurist Qaḍi Abū 'Umar attached the sentence of death to al-Ḥallāj's attribution of the Hajj replacement to Ḥasan Baṣrī, declaring, "You have lied about it, O you whose blood may be shed without sin..." Upon this declaration, the Vizier had in hand the formula by which al-Ḥallāj could be legally executed.<sup>825</sup> Thus he was unjustly accused and sentenced to death, through a legal loophole, as was the case with Christ. And likewise in the case of al-Ḥallāj, clues were presented along the way as to the nature of his demise.

Al-Ḥallāj had written in his letter to Shakir to, "destroy the Ka'ba (of his body) in order to rebuild it in Wisdom..."<sup>826</sup> To the same he also makes a statement of the innocent resigned to die at God's leading: "God permits you to shed my blood; sacrifice me therefore (as a victim)."<sup>827</sup> The impact of these statements may not have been known to al-Ḥallāj until he was put to death, though they bear resemblance to the statements of Jesus in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," of which he was speaking of his own body (John 2:20). Likewise, Jesus revoked from his accusers their ability to take his life except by his submissive will and the command of God: "No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it

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<sup>822</sup> Zahniser, 31.

<sup>823</sup> The full study is available in English in Louis Massignon, *The Passion of Al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam, 4 Vols.*, trans., Herbert Mason, Bollingen Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982). This present study relies on the abridged version of the same: Louis Massignon and Herbert Mason, *The Passion of Al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Abridged ed., Bollingen Series 98 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>824</sup> Massignon and Mason, *The Passion of Al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, 64-71.

<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-272.

<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded” (John 10:18). In the predicting of their own deaths through an allusion to the ‘destruction of the temple’, and the assignment of their deaths not to the evil of their accusers but to the will of God, the passions of al-Ḥallāj and Jesus are thereby intertwined in the expositon of Massignon.

The event of al-Ḥallāj’s crucifixion is no less terrible than that of Jesus either. Though he had been sentenced to a thousand lashes, only four or six hundred were administered before they stopped for fear that al-Ḥallāj would die before experiencing the remainder of his sentence. His hands and feet were cut off, and he was then hoisted onto a stake in full view of the crowd. The symbolism of the hands, the feet, and the cross cannot escape the imagination of the Christian reader of the event. Al-Ḥallāj’s head was then cut off, and his body burned.<sup>828</sup> Rumours were entertained by his followers that it was not al-Ḥallāj himself, but someone made to resemble him, who was crucified.<sup>829</sup> Among what is recorded of his final words, is this prayer:

See these people, Your worshippers: ... Forgive them (*irhamhum*). – If You had revealed to them what you have revealed to me, they would not do what they are doing, and if You had concealed from me what You have concealed from them, I would not be able to undergo the ordeal that I am enduring. Praise be to You in whatsoever You will.<sup>830</sup>

These words recall those of Christ both from the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross itself. Jesus prayed in the garden, “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine” (Luke 22:42), and from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Finally al-Ḥallāj calls out, “Kill me, O my faithful friends, for to kill me is to make me live; My life is in my death, and my death is in my life.”<sup>831</sup> Thus for Massignon, the passion is complete:

And in the center, raised above and out of himself, there was Hallaj himself, manifesting to all on the gibbet, that particular night, in a prolonged ecstasy of the body triumphant over death, the immortal personality of the Qur’anic Christ, the soulful effigy of the Spirit of God, “The one whom they have not killed, whom they have not crucified...”<sup>832</sup>

## Conclusion

The historicity of the crucifixion event is arguably established by independent historical voices such as Flavius Josephus (d.c. 100), who related that,

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<sup>828</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>829</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>831</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid., 23., cf. Q4:157.

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, [*if indeed one ought call him a man*]. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher [*of such people who accept the truth gladly*]. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. [*He was the Messiah*]. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing among us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. [*On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him.*] And the tribe of Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.<sup>833</sup>

In spite of this, the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus remains an internal debate among Muslims. Polemicists either deny or ignore the event, and English translations have been shown above to change the meanings of Qur'anic terms to suit the traditional denial narrative. Ayoub, perhaps the strongest Muslim ecumenical voice, affirms the historicity of the crucifixion, and shifts the conversation from its occurrence to its meaning. The debate is then re-framed from the historicity of the crucifixion to its soteriological significance. Bassetti-Sani asserts the traditional Christian meaning of the event in the context of the Qur'an, and Ayoub retorts that this is unnecessary. The Qur'an simply denies the Jews the ability to thwart the will of God, and nothing more need be added to the meaning of the text or the event.

The Passion of al-Ḥallāj provides potentially an Islamic echo of the crucifixion event, through which Muslims may identify with the wrongful conviction and execution of a servant of God by his own faith community. The suffering servant, having been united with God in experience of Being and declaring the self-disclosed closeness of God in relationship to humanity, becomes the target of rage from traditionalists who just as passionately guard the transcendence of God. These parallel execution narratives may provide bridges for shared meaning in the crucifixion of Christ, which may not be as great of an 'insurmountable obstacle' between Christians and Muslims as Nasr posits.

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<sup>833</sup> Emphasis mine. The sections in parentheses are likely to have been later emendations by Christian scribes and represent variants between redactions of the text. Nevertheless, reading the text with the emendations removed does not undermine the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus, only its supposed meaning to Josephus. Flavius Josephus, *Josephus with an English Translation by Louis H. Feldman*, trans., Louis H. Feldman, 9 vols. (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1965), Vol. 9, pp. 49-51. Origen (d.c. 254) stated specifically that Josephus, "did not believe in Jesus as Christ," which supports the hypothesis that the sections emphasized above were added later. However, Josephus' not being a Christian here strengthens his voice as an independent witness to the event of the crucifixion despite any interpretation of the meaning of the event. Origen, *Contra Celsum: Translated with an Introduction & Notes by Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 43. Cornelius Tacitus (w.c. 109) too, clearly not a Christian himself, recounts the death of Jesus. He writes of the Christians that, "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus..." Cornelius Tactius, "The Annals: Translated by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodrigg, Book I, A.D. 14, 15", Fordham University <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/tactius-annals.txt> (accessed May 11 2011).

## II.4 *Tahrif*

The charge of *tahrif* against the Christian scriptures was strong among “unlearned” Muslims in Tisdall’s (d. 1346/1928) day, though, “many learned Muslims confess that our Bible exists just in the same state as it did in Muhammad’s day.”<sup>834</sup> For example, Syed Ahmed Khan’s (d.1898) *Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible* had already been available for nearly half a century.<sup>835</sup> Syed outlines eight different categories of corruption, the first three are: the addition of words or phrases, the deletion of words or phrases, and the substitution of words of different meaning.<sup>836</sup> He considers, “whether all the copies of the Scriptures scattered throughout Christendom and Judaism, did really go forth with corruptions of the three kinds above indicated,”<sup>837</sup> to which he concludes:

Now it is plain from the above observations that those learned doctors of our faith, who have spoken of the first three kinds of corruptions as having been practised in Scripture, did not correctly understand the meaning of the word Tuhreef [*tahrif*], and hence other more learned doctors of our faith have stated their deliberate conviction, that no such corruptions took place in the Scriptures, and have thus rejected the opinions advanced by those above mentioned.<sup>838</sup>

Yet the corruption charge is still made in the early twentieth century, “(1) by the suppression of Muhammad’s name and of passages relating to him, and (2) by the substitution of our present Gospels ... for the supposed original Gospel.”<sup>839</sup> Chawkat Moucarray outlines the basic argument of *tahrif* still originating in the Christian rejection of Muhammad:

When called to believe in Muhammad as God’s Prophet, Jews and Christians object that nowhere in their Scriptures is there any prophecy about him. Muslims respond that if the Scriptures do not validate the Qur’anic claim about Muhammad, then they must have been corrupted, wrongly interpreted, or falsified!<sup>840</sup>

Thus even entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Islamic accusation of *tahrif* and its relationship to the Christian denial of Muhammad’s prophethood has remained unchanged in the previous thousand years. As recently as 2004, Al-Azhar University accredited a list of more than 200

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<sup>834</sup> Tisdall, 29.

<sup>835</sup> Syed was a polyglot of high calibre. In Part 1, Syed lists the texts he used to conduct his research, including Bibles and sections thereof in English, Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Persian, and Urdu. Syud Ahmud, *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible, Part. 1* (Ghazeeopore: Syud Ahmud Private Press, 1862), 249-255. More information on Khan’s life can be found in S. R. Sharma, *Life and Works of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan* (Jaipur, India: Book Enclave, 2009).

<sup>836</sup> Ahmud, 66.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, 69. To explicate, “other more learned doctors,” Syed quotes from al-Bukhārī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abbās, and other classical *mufasssirūn*.

<sup>839</sup> Tisdall, 32, n. 1.

<sup>840</sup> Moucarray, 45. Moucarray continues with a well-developed and yet unoriginal rebuttal of the accusation of *tahrif* based on the Qur’an and Islamic *tafsir*., cf. Geisler and Saleeb, Ch. 10.

corrections that the Qur'an makes of the Bible.<sup>841</sup> Tisdall rebuts with Qur'anic verses already familiar to this argument, including Q5:48, "We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and *with final authority over them...*"<sup>842</sup>

Haleem's translation of Q5:48 here is curious, and earns a brief foray. The phrase, "with final authority over them," does not occur in the Arabic text *per se*, and is thus an extrapolation rather than a literal translation of the text. This phrase is translated by others as 'confirming and guarding' (Yusuf Ali), 'confirming and conserving' (Aisha Bewley), 'confirming' and 'a watcher over it' (Pickthall). Rashad Khalifa seems to agree with Haleem's interpretation as he renders 'confirming and superseding' here.<sup>843</sup>

Tisdall proposes that it is irrational that the Torah and *Injil* are abrogated by the Qur'an: since Abraham is called a Muslim in the Qur'an, what of his Islamic faith is therefore abrogated by the Qur'an?<sup>844</sup> Nasr admits that the accusation of the Qur'anic abrogation of the Bible is simplistic and dismissive, yet popular. He likens this practice among Muslims to the Christian practice of ignoring altogether the revelatory theory and language of the Qur'an. It appears important to the dialogue that both Christians and Muslims take the meaning of the scriptures in their religious counterparts seriously.<sup>845</sup>

The distinction in the English translations of Q5:48 here is subtle, but the implications are potentially immense. Does the Qur'an in this verse authorize the previous scriptures to which it refers here, or does it override them? There are clues in the context. The previous verse (v.47) reads, "So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers." According to *tafsir* al-Ṭustarī, the context here presents Muhammad himself authorizing the Jews to judge the stoning of an adulterer according to their scriptures. The Christians too are to be judged according to their own books, says al-Ṭustarī.<sup>846</sup> Ibn'Abbās connects the story from vv. 45-47 with v. 48, as the Qur'an is to Ibn'Abbās a 'witness and a watcher' over the

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<sup>841</sup> These include in each case the Biblical reference, an explanation of the proposed error, an explanation of Christian meaning of the reference, and an Islamic rebuttal. See Mohamed Ghounem, *200+ Ways the Quran Corrects the Bible : How Islam Unites Judaism and Christianity*, 1st ed. (Newtown, CT: Multi-National Muslim Committee, 2004).

<sup>842</sup> Tisdall, 32., emphasis mine. The translation is from Abdel Haleem. The Arabic reads, " وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنْ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ 65, 68; 7:169; 10:94, 21:48.

<sup>843</sup> Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 263.; Khalifa, 116. These and other translations, including those of Bewley and Pickthall as referenced here, are available online at Iman Mohammad Kashi and Uwe Hideki Matzen, "The Online Quran Project", The Online Quran Project [www.al-quran.info](http://www.al-quran.info) (accessed July 17 2011).

<sup>844</sup> Tisdall, 95., cf. Q3:67.

<sup>845</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 460-461.

<sup>846</sup> The *tafsir* of Sahl al-Ṭustarī is available in both English and Arabic online at The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, "Al-Tafsir".

previous scriptures. He specifies the case of stoning from v.47 in the commentary on v.48.<sup>847</sup> It follows that if the two verses (47 and 48) were revealed at the same time, it should not be interpreted that the Qur'an denies authority to the text of the Gospel existing at the time in which the verse was revealed.

There is no mention in Ibn'Abbās or al-Ṭūstarī of any abrogation or superseding of the previous scriptures. Rather the opposite appears true. In light of the commentaries of Ibn'Abbās and al-Ṭūstarī, Muhammad himself upheld the authority of the Torah in the judgement of an adultery case. Thus it seems that the translations of Yusuf Ali, Bewley, and Pickthall may be closer to the original meaning here. Khalifa and Haleem therefore may be translating the Qur'an from behind the innovation of *tahrīf* as it developed later with Ibn Ḥazm, as shown above. Their translations are most likely products of their own commentaries on the Qur'an here, rather than renderings of the Qur'anic meaning in its original context.

Again, the historian's question is not whether or not the interpretation apparent in Haleem and Khalifa's translations is right, but rather why is it a correct interpretation to these translators in this age, and from where stemmed the inconsistency between the early interpretations and the more modern. This is especially interesting as it appears that the perpetual Islamic proposition of textual corruption of the Bible has ironically led, in its English rendering at least, to what appears to be the textual corruption of the Qur'an. Tisdall re-enters the conversation noting of verse 48 that, "Muslims *now* endeavour to explain these words as denoting that the Qur'an 'is a correct re-statement of the older scriptures'."<sup>848</sup>

Tisdall provides evidence for the textual integrity of the Torah and *Injīl* in the Islamic categories of evidence *'aqlī* (from reason) and *naqlī* (from testimony). From reason, Tisdall employs arguments dating back to the first mentions of *tahrīf*. The Christians and Jews have no plausible reason to alter their texts and then continue to follow them, and the texts themselves expressly forbid it.<sup>849</sup> It is further illogical to Tisdall that they would have expunged Muhammad and missed out on the early spoils of Islam. The opposite would have been more likely, that Christians and Jews would have added Muhammad to their texts out of greed. In addition, so many copies of the Biblical texts were available so widely, in many exclusive Christian sects, and in so many languages, that any alterations would have been impossible to totally collaborate and therefore easily discovered. Certainly there were in those days,

People of the Book who are upright, who recite God's revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, who believe in God and the Last

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<sup>847</sup> Ibn'Abbās, *Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, 141.

<sup>848</sup> Tisdall quotes J.T. Allnutt in this reference. Tisdall, 32, n. 2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>849</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42., cf. Rev. 22:18-19; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6.



Day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous and they will not be denied [the reward] for whatever good deeds they do: God knows exactly who is conscious of Him. (Q3:113-115)

Perhaps these righteous Christians, praised in the Qur'an, "would not have permitted, without a protest, such a crime as the corrupting of the Holy Scriptures."<sup>850</sup> From the evidence of textual history, Tisdall employs the *Codex Sinaiticus* (St. Petersburg), the *Codex Alexandrinus* (London), the *Codex Vaticanus* (Vatican), and the *Codex Ephraemi* (Paris), all from more than two centuries before the *hijrah*, which still correspond with the texts we have now.<sup>851</sup> Additionally, many versions of the Bible exist still from prior to Islam: the Greek *Septuagint*; the Syriac *Curetonian*, *Peshitta*, and *Philoxenian*; the Coptic *Buhairic*, *Sahidic* and *Bashmuric*; the Latin *Vulgate*, and the *Old Latin*; the Armenian by Mesrob; the Gothic by Ulphilas; the Ethiopic by Frumentius; and the Aramaic *Targum* of Onkelos.<sup>852</sup>

Basseti-Sani and Moucarray agree with the early Islamic exegetes, the Qur'an accuses the Jews of distortion of meaning, but not textual falsification. Basseti-Sani also reminds his readers that the accusation of textual corruption was not incredibly innovative. The Christians and Jews had accused each other of this before. "On several occasions, from the time of Justin Martyr on, the fathers warn about use of the Jewish Scriptures," and, "As for the Jewish accusations of Christian distortion of texts, it is enough to recall that from the time of the so-called Council of Jamnia [c. 90], after the destruction of Jerusalem, the use of the Alexandrine Septuagint was forbidden."<sup>853</sup>

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<sup>850</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>851</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47. Tisdall notes that there are no comparable Old Testament scriptures of ages similar to these New Testament parchments. Since the time of writing, however, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered subsequent to Tisdall's writing, which date well prior to the birth of Jesus.

<sup>852</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-52. These texts and many more are referenced by Syed Ahmed Khan in his defence of the authenticity of the Bible from an Islamic perspective. See Ahmud, 96-135. Tisdall continues with a treatment of the variances between the texts, the four questioned texts (Mark 16:9-20; John 5:3; John 7:53ff; and John 5:7), and apparent contradictions within the Bible. These variances are well-known and acknowledged in Christian scholarship. In the third chapter Tisdall addresses the Qur'anic abrogation of the Bible, based on Q98:3. A comprehensive defence of the Christian scriptures is outside of the scope of our study here. It is sufficient to say that Tisdall painstakingly details apparent contradictions in the Bible, and answers them. This is in contrast to Moucarray's approach, which in equally pain-staking detail surveys Islamic *tafsir* and *hadith* literature to expose the accusation of textual corruption as ultimately un-Islamic. See Moucarray, 44-79.

<sup>853</sup> Basseti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 121-122. The Alexandrian Septuagint was commissioned in the third century BCE, by Ptolemy Philadelphus (309-246 BCE). It was a Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures, which remained in use by Hellenistic Jews until the Council of Jamnia in about 90CE. As many of the early Christians were Greek speaking the use of the Greek Septuagint became normative for the early Christians. It has been suggested that the Old Testament of the Christians differs from the Jewish scriptures because of the synod at Jamnia during the rise of the early Church. The events of the Council of Jamnia may be conjecture, as whether or not the Council took place is in question. However, it seems the Rabbinic leaders of the city of Jamnia were successful at about that time in either producing or ratifying a normative canon of Jewish scripture, rejecting the Greek Septuagint in favour of the Hebrew original. See Robert C. Newman, "The Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament Canon, Ibri Research Report #13", Biblical Theological Seminary <http://www.ibri.org/RRs/RR013/13jamnia.html> (accessed January 25 2011), cf. Albert C. Jr.

The fact that historically the Jews and Christians were accusing the other of textual corruptions implies only more forcefully that the number of guardians of the texts was enormous. From a historical perspective, it may be supposed nearly impossible for either the Christians or the Jews to have been able to corrupt their texts had they wanted to. The Jewish leadership saw Christianity as a threat, so canonisation of the Jewish texts became a concern in the first century CE. Under persecution from the Romans and the Jews, Christians took ownership of their own texts rather quickly as a distinguishing feature of their new religion. Their enmity with each other seems to have served only to safeguard their texts.

Many learned Muslims still hold to the traditional accusation of *tahrif*, Muhammad Abū Zahrah, Ata ur-Rahim, and Tarif Khalidi, for example.<sup>854</sup> Mahmoud Ayoub however is among a growing group of those who use and re-interpret the Bible rather than discarding it. Rashid Rida is partially with him, stating directly that the Torah is, “true, it is the sacred laws and decrees which Moses and subsequent prophets of the children of Israel and their rabbis (*aḥbār*) followed.”<sup>855</sup> The *Injil* is,

in the views of Muslims, the sermons, maxims, and precepts that God revealed to Christ and with which he imparted guidance and good counsel to his people. What is contained beyond that in the books which Christians call [the] Gospel belongs, in the view of Muslims, either to history if it is a report or to its authors if it is a matter of belief or sanction.<sup>856</sup>

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Sundberg, "The Old Testament of the Early Church (a Study in Canon)," *The Harvard Theological Review* 51, no. 4 (1958).

<sup>854</sup> Khalidi, 17-22.; Abū Zahrah is addressed in Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 225.; Ata ur-Rahim, Ch. 2. M. Faruk Zein states a contemporary sceptical Islamic view well. "The first five books of the Old Testament are collectively called the 'Pentateuch' meaning the five books of Moses. They are also metaphorically labelled the 'Torah' meaning the Law of Moses. This 'Toraah' does not necessarily correspond to the 'Taurah' divinely inspired to Moses as referred to in the Qur'an ... except perhaps for a few scattered subjects and clauses of the text which may have survived from the original," and, "the Christian Bible, or any of the four gospels, is *not* the Evangel four times mentioned in the Qur'an. Rather, the Qur'an refers to the original divine revelation bestowed upon Jesus and known to his contemporaries, the Nazarenes, under its Greek name 'Evangelion' (Good Tidings), from which the Arabic term '*enjiil*' is derived." See Zein, 32, 37. Emphasis his.

To these names we may add the entire list of contributors to Zebiri's second chapter, all of whom mention the subject, "believe that the actual text of the Bible, and not just its interpretation, was corrupted in the process of its compilation." She lists seventeen Muslim authors whose works are published in the West. See Zebiri, 49-50. Thus the authors discussed here as accusing of Christians textual *tahrif* in the Bible, are exemplary of a common view of contemporary Islamic authors.

<sup>855</sup> Rida quoted in Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 217. This may also be said to be the view of Martin Lings, a prominent Sufi scholar, who is indirect in presenting his view of *tahrif*. He directly relates 'the Bible' to Q2:109, which tends toward a critical view of its usefulness, but then himself freely quotes the Bible when it is useful to him. He quotes directly the Hagarene promises from Genesis, in context, but then quotes John 16:13, traditionally associated with the Pentecost event, as a prophecy concerning Muhammad. Lings, 1-3; 17; 126, n.3. Elsewhere, Lings teaches directly from the Gospels, as in one short chapter of his *The Eleventh Hour*, in which he uses several quotes from the Gospels without even a mention of the Qur'an. See Martin Lings, *The Eleventh Hour: The Spiritual Crisis of the Modern World in the Light of Tradition and Prophecy* (Cambridge: Quinta Essentia, 1987), 9-14. This is certainly not to suggest that the Qur'an is unimportant to Lings, but only to evince that at least on this occasion, Lings has used the Gospels as his primary spiritual text for specific teachings. *The Eleventh Hour* is an ecumenical work, which draws not only Christianity into dialogue, but also Buddhism, Hinduism and others.

<sup>856</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 217.

Thus a division forms between the Torah and the historical and other prophetic books of the Old Testament, and a division between the words spoken by Christ and the reporter's commentary that surrounds them in the Gospels. The Epistles of Paul are relegated to the realm of *tafsīr*, the book of Acts to history, and the Revelation of John to apocalypse.

This bears resemblance to a recent trend in Christian hermeneutics as well, casually called 'red-letter Christianity'. In many Bible publications the words attributed to Jesus as direct speech are printed in red. 'Red-letter Christians' have made two major hermeneutical distinctions. Firstly, they divorce the Biblical text from political agendas by concentrating on the words of Jesus as instructing alignment with the poor and the oppressed in society regardless of temporal power. Secondly, red-letter Christians reorient the Pauline content of the New Testament from universally appropriate systematic theology to culturally appropriate missiological application of the words of Jesus in Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. Thus Paul becomes a universal model for the practice of interpretation of the gospel into any culture, rather than an interpreter presenting a universally appropriate presentation of the gospel to every culture.<sup>857</sup>

Abū Zahrah further notes that the synoptic Gospels were not written by Jesus, but after him, and wonders if the true Gospel of Jesus, that which was handed down to him by God, could not be the Q-gospel that some Christian researchers believe may have been the source text for the synoptic gospels.<sup>858</sup> "Can we say that this was the Gospel that was sent down to Jesus and that it is his Gospel and the Gospel of God?"<sup>859</sup>

Khalidi simply restates the traditional view, though this time taking into account some historical evidence from earlier in this study which proposed Islam as a Christology rather than a religion during its early years. Khalidi explains that the Islamic Empire was expanding very quickly and without broad access to the Qur'an for new Muslims. It was the 'pours Islamic environment' that allowed so much influence of Christianity within the empire and the ecumenical voice of unlearned Muslims to exist beside the polemical and corrective voice of the Qur'an. The Qur'an though corrects and abrogates the previous books, as Khalidi writes,

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<sup>857</sup> For an introduction see Anthony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians : A Citizen's Guide to Faith & Politics* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008).

<sup>858</sup> The Q-gospel is a proposed source text for the four synoptic gospels now contained in the New Testament. Zein agrees, "the Q gospel may be comparable, in principle, though not in detail, to the 'Enjil' mentioned in the Qur'an." Zein, 39. A detailed presentation is outside the scope of this research, but for further study see. John S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q : The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000)., David R. Catchpole, *The Quest for Q* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993); Mark S. Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, *Questioning Q : A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>859</sup> Abū Zahrah translated and quoted in Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 225.

and so only over time was this corrective and abrogative voice of the Qur'an given its full weight in the Christian-Muslim relationship, with warnings in Q2:79 and 4:46. Khalidi proposes that:<sup>860</sup>

It is probable that the overall thrust of the Qur'anic teaching on revelation – that is to say, the invitation to the 'People of the Book' to recognize and accept the finality of the Qur'an – overshadowed all other considerations. In other words, the Qur'an is the final criterion by which all earlier revelations are to be judged. In their pristine form, these earlier revelations must of necessity bear witness to the Qur'anic revelation. Where they do not, they must be judged corrupt.<sup>861</sup>

Khalidi is probably correct that the rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire left little opportunity to establish general orthodoxy among Muslims during the first two centuries, especially at its edges. However, Khalidi's proposition stems from the supposed influence of Christianity on unlearned Muslims, those without access to the texts of the Qur'an, the *mufassirūn*, or Islamic jurists. Thus as Khalidi proposes, the Qur'anic accusation of *tahrīf*, far from being unfounded, was simply largely unknown for the first two centuries.

Khalidi's proposal is in contrast with the evidence of the letter to Constantine VI (d. 181/797) from the Islamic Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809), who as shown above, in the very *milieu* described by Khalidi, yet at the center of the empire and as its highest spiritual authority, and with access to the Qur'anic *maṣḥaf al-sharīf* and *sunna* texts, defends the accuracy of the Christian and Jewish scriptures. Khalidi is well-intentioned, but ultimately outside of the historical evidence here. History, rather than supporting the notion of *tahrīf*, rules against it. Khalidi would be challenged to find a body of evidence from Islamic scholarship in the first two centuries, from the fringes of the empire to Baghdad, which prior to Ibn Ḥazm truly argues for the textual corruption of the Biblical texts, based on the Qur'an. Khalidi uses the historical period discussed in section one above to uphold the Qur'anic accusation of *tahrīf*, but it is the history to which he appeals that ultimately betrays him.<sup>862</sup>

Sachedina calls Khalidi back to the Qur'an, concluding that, "There is no statement in the Koran, direct or indirect, to suggest that the Koran saw itself as the abrogator of previous scriptures. ... even when repudiating the distortions introduced in the divine message by the followers of Moses and Jesus, the Koran confirms the validity of these revelations..."<sup>863</sup>

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<sup>860</sup> Khalidi, 17-22.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>862</sup> It should be noted that Khalidi's proposal occurs in the introductory pages of a work that focuses on the stories and sayings of Jesus in Islamic historical literature. Though his use of history in the defence of *tahrīf* ultimately falls short, the subject was an innovative tangent, and not the focus of his work here. The remainder of the work (*The Muslim Jesus*) is an exceptional collection of the vast Islamic literary heritage concerning the person of Jesus in Islamic tradition.

<sup>863</sup> Sachedina, 31.

Sachedina suggests that the origin of the concept of supersession of Islam over Christianity and Judaism was introduced to Islam by Christianity in the claim of its supersession of Judaism.

### The Corruption of the Qur'an

Tisdall predictably turns the critique of *tahrīf* back onto the Qur'an. He notes *ḥadīths* which discuss the forgetting of whole surahs, and the deletion of the stoning verse.<sup>864</sup> He continues that when the Qur'an was collected, it was fragmentary, and such was its inaccurate preservation that, "Uthmān some years later caused Zayd with the assistance of three others to make fresh copies of Ḥaḥṣah's MS., and, sending these to be kept in different places, compelled those who possessed other copies to give them up to be burnt."<sup>865</sup> Goldziher notes too that even in Islamic tradition, Qur'anic contradictions are known to the *mufasssīrūn*.<sup>866</sup>

In William Campbell's rebuttal of Maurice Bucaille he includes an extended section comparing the transmission histories of the texts of the Bible and the Qur'an, noting them to be of similar oral origin. He also compares the roles of the four authors of the synoptic Gospels to that of Zayd bin Thabit in the collection of the primary Qur'anic texts, accusing Uthman of "manhandling and suppression of evidence" in the formation of the Qur'an.<sup>867</sup> Nevertheless, at the end of his textual study, Campbell concludes that, "Neither the present Qur'an, nor the present Gospel accounts have suffered any important change. They are essentially as they were written."<sup>868</sup>

Apologists Geisler and Saleeb are less forgiving. They provide a brilliant summary of the main claims of Muslims about the Qur'an and then seek to defeat them one by one, thus revealing that little has developed in the apologetical/polemical stance of Christian thought. They attack the Qur'anic literary style, Muhammad's alleged illiteracy, and the preservation and unity of the Qur'an. There is nothing particularly innovative in this content, and the reader

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<sup>864</sup> These are addressed al-Imam, Ch. 4. Al-Imam simply dismisses the *ḥadīths* as inauthentic.

<sup>865</sup> Tisdall, 61.

<sup>866</sup> Goldziher and others, 86. One of the apparent contradictions is in the completeness of the Arabic language of the Qur'an, outlined in Q14:4; 26:192-195; 13:37; 42:7; 39:28, and 43:3. Q16:133 and 41:44 also claim that there is no foreign language in the Qur'an. In his *Itqān*, however, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī lists more than a hundred foreign words in the Qur'an, enough to warrant Jeffery's extensive treatise on the subject. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Alūm Al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: dar al-Fijr, 2 Vols., 2006), Vol. 1 (Pt. 2), pp.412-423., cf. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*. Al-Suyūṭī also addresses directly several supposed contradictions in the Qur'an, for example whether or not multiple wives can be treated equitably as commanded in Q4:3, or cannot be treated equitably as explained in Q4:129. Al-Suyūṭī struggles to reconcile the verses, as he writes: "ان الأول في توفية الحقو، و الثانية في الميل الغلبي و ليس في قدرة الإنسان". See al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān Fī 'Alūm Al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 2 (Pt. 3), p. 76. Some apparent Qur'anic contradictions are also addressed in the *tafsīr* of al-Bayḍawī on Surah 41. See Al-Bayḍawī, Vol. 2, p. 348ff. A bibliography and references to other major bibliographies of the works of Goldziher can be found in D. S. Loewinger and Jozsef Somogyi, *Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume, Parts I and II* (Budapest: Globus Nyomdai Muintezet, 1948), Pt I, pp. 419-431. Some word order and other minor differences between codices are cited in al-Imam, Ch. 4.

<sup>867</sup> William F. Campbell, *The Quran and the Bible : In the Light of History and Science* (Upper Darby, PA: Middle East Resources, 1986), 122.

<sup>868</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

is directed to the materials directly.<sup>869</sup> Perhaps the only modern addition to the polemic is that of an attack on the scientific accuracy of the Qur'an. The authors note that, "It is a serious mistake to assume that a book is inspired simply because it conforms with modern science."<sup>870</sup> This argument has merit, but it does not in itself disprove the Qur'an as it cannot be said that a scientifically inaccurate book, *The Revelation of John*, for instance, is thereby necessarily uninspired.

Muhammed Asadi defends the common Islamic claim that, "there is not a word of difference between two Korans anywhere in the world."<sup>871</sup> Perhaps the best ancient Arabic orthographer in the world, Gerd Puin, disagrees. After a study of the Sana'a manuscripts,<sup>872</sup> Puin remarks on his initial findings. He writes, "The Cairo printed edition, today considered as authoritative, with its rich inventory of diacritical points, doubling, stretch, correction and recitation signs gives an impression of what an effort is necessary, to make the original text, deprived of all these signs, to the 'to be read', which it is today,"<sup>873</sup> Puin notes that Islamic scholars too recognize some evolution in the present Qur'anic text, though according to those commentators the variances are not in meaning but in pronunciation. This is inconsistent with the actual manuscripts, however, as Puin finds that, "Neither the transmitted lists of writing variants, nor those of the verse countings, nor those of the arrangement of the surahs can at least approximately describe the variety, which is to be found in the manuscripts themselves!"<sup>874</sup> Perhaps it is best to let the texts speak for themselves here.

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<sup>869</sup> Geisler and Saleeb, Ch. 9.

<sup>870</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>871</sup> Asadi, 2, 3.

<sup>872</sup> The Sana'a manuscripts were discovered in the Great Mosque in Sana'a, Yemen in 1972. Some of them are considered to be the oldest extant manuscripts of the Qur'an in the world. See Dreißholz.; cf. Altikulac, *Al-Mushaf Al-Sharif: Attributed to Uthman Bin Affan: The Copy at Al-Mashhad Al-Husayni in Cairo*, 138-139.

<sup>873</sup> "Der heute als verbindlich geltende Kairoer Druck mit seinem reichhaltigen Inventar an diakritischen Punkten, Verdopplungs-, Dehnungs-, Korrektur- und Rezitationszeichen vermittelt einen Eindruck davon, welch ein Aufwand nötig ist, um den von all diesen Zeichen entblößten ursprünglichen Text zu dem .zu Lesenden. Zu machen, das er heute ist." Puin, Bothmer, and Ohlig: 37. Translation by Christoph Heger, available online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/402793/GerdR-Puin-II-Bedeutung-der-Koranfragmente-aus-Sanaa-magazin-forschung1-1999>.

<sup>874</sup> "Weder die tradierten Listen von Schreibvarianten, noch die der Verszählungen, noch die der Surenanordnungen können auch nur annähernd die Vielfalt beschreiben, die in den Handschriften selbst anzutreffen ist!" Ibid., 38. Translation by Christoph Heger, Op. cit.



and the Qur'an specifically, radical revisionists have recently dismissed nearly all traditional history in favour of a blank page approach to the development of the Qur'an. Gunther Lüling, for example, proposed an ur-Qur'an in a yet to be discovered pre-Islamic Christian liturgy.<sup>877</sup> Christoph Luxenberg proposed that the whole of the Arabic language, and the Qur'an as its centerpiece, developed from a Syro-Aramaic language which has been persistently misunderstood since its appearance in the Arabic script.<sup>878</sup> These works were preceded by scholars who began to question the basic sources of Islamic thought to the degree that the *hadīth* and *tafsīr* literature, and to a lesser degree the Qur'an itself, were dismissed altogether.<sup>879</sup> Though the work of these and other scholars in this genre serve their purpose in

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<sup>877</sup> Gunter Lüling, *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation: The Rediscovery and Reliable Reconstruction of a Comprehensive Pre-Islamic Christian Hymnal Hidden in the Koran under Earliest Islamic Reinterpretations*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2003). Lüling has been criticised heavily for his methodology, which Fred M. Donner describes as, "capricious and guided by a desire to prove the hypothesis he is asserting." Reynolds, 33. Cf. Böwering in *ibid.*, 74-77.

<sup>878</sup> Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran*, 1st ed. (Berlin: H. Schiler, 2007). This work earned a particularly scathing review from renowned scholar François de Blois. See François de Blois, "Book Review: Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart Des Koran. Ein Beitrag Zur Entschlüsselung Der Koransprache," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 92-97. Gerhard Böwering too concludes that, "Luxenberg's monograph is both narrowly philological in method and broadly speculative in its conclusions." Böwering in Reynolds, 77-79. Not all of Luxenberg's critics dismiss the totality of his work, however. Sidney Griffith notes that Luxenberg's conclusion that the maidens of Q44:54 and 52:20 are actually clear grapes in a Syro-Aramaic reading, holds some ground. Griffith writes that, "Whatever one might think of the verisimilitude of this interpretation, it is clear that it is certainly closer to St Ephraem [the Syrian]'s image of the grape clusters which the Syrian writer says will welcome the chaste into their bosom than to the vision of the embraces of houris as conventionally imagined." Thus Luxenberg's conclusion in this instance may indicate alliance with a common pre-Islamic Syrian view of paradise. See Griffith in *ibid.*, 113.; cf. Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said 'Allah Is Third of Three' According to Al-Ma'ida 73?," 94-98.

<sup>879</sup> It is not necessary to review all of these authors here. An introduction and review of relevant contributors is provided by Ibn Warraq, himself a radical revisionist. See Ibn Warraq, "Studies on Muhammad and the Rise of Islam," in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000). Names such as Ernest Renan, Joseph Schacht, Régis Blachère, John Wansborough, Henri Lammens, Patricia Crone, and Michael Cook may all be considered exemplary voices in this genre, all surveyed by Warraq. They are to be commended in general for their general commitment to history, but without appreciation for the subjectivity with which that history is recorded by ancient and classical authors, their reductionist approaches often over-react, producing total dismissal of otherwise potentially useful sources. Schacht proposes, for example, the absolute historical uselessness of *hadīth* by pitting its authority against itself, the stronger the isnad is in connection to the Prophet, the more suspect it is historically. *Ibid.*, 50. Cf. p. 361.

The merit of these authors is still being weighed. From a strictly objective historical perspective their works call to light the subjectivity of traditional historical sources, revealing two needs. Firstly, the historian of Islam needs a wider base of historical source materials from which to draw than simply those pillars of *hadīth*, *tafsīr* and *sira* which act as three legs of a tripod, providing strength and material each to the other in the propping up of traditional Islamic exegesis of the Qur'an. Secondly, what these revisionists highlight is the need for non-reductionist historians, and in the case of this study and others on the Christian-Muslim dialogue in particular, true historians of religion rather than what we may call (extremist) *religious* historians. For indeed, were historians to dismiss out of hand all subjective and questionable sources, as outlined in the Introduction to Part I here, we may 'know' very little of the pre-enlightenment world. Revisionistic works are to be applauded for the often helpful questions they raise of assumptions made in the study of the history of religions, but caution is needed in wrestling with their findings, for neither are these historians wholly objective observers of the historical sources which they critique.

C. H. Becker's critique of Henri Lammens' polemical historicism exemplifies this caution. Commenting on Lammens, Becker writes, "Admittedly, the greater part of the Hadith is tendentious invention, colored by the later image of Islam's golden period, and so historically useless. But there are also very numerous Hadith which exploit ancient items of news in dealing with later problems. They form the basis for a truly historical picture of the origins of Islam, and only historical instinct can sort them out from the whole. In consequence, the results achieved can always only be subjective. When the sceptic Lammens reaches very considerable positive results, we are in danger of taking this outcome of his scepticism as objective truth. ... I am concerned to show that Lammens's results are purely subjective." C. H. Becker, "Matters of Fundamental Importance for Research into the Life of Muhammad," in *The Quest*



calling into question basic assumptions and catalyzing re-examination of known history, their contributions do not fall within the non-reductionist historical framework through which this present study is conducted.<sup>880</sup> In these cases, reductionistic views of what is in the mind of these historians provable of history, have been presented in isolation, or even active exclusion, of what is in a non-reductionist view probable, and in any case often in discord with others in their same category of radical revisionists.

## Conclusion

It may be noted that from the standpoint of the *4 Ezra* text, excluded from many Bibles today but possibly included in the Bible of Abū Ḥarītha in Najrān, textual corruption is verifiable from a historical perspective. Nevertheless, Muslims disagree now about whether or not the Bible is either textually corrupted or even abrogated by the Qur'an. It should be recognized however, that whether the accusation of textual *tahrīf* is defended or rejected by Muslim scholars in contemporary dialogue, its traditional origin is most likely a late *tafṣīr* innovation, and does not likely originate with the Qur'an or its early interpreters.<sup>881</sup> Therefore, in perhaps poetic irony we discover from a historical perspective that the textual corruption of the apocryphal Bible is perhaps factually verifiable at the time of Muhammad, though one cannot easily attribute such an accusation to the Qur'an in its context.

A cautious acceptance of the New Testament text by Muslims possibly begins with the first step of accepting the attributions of the words of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, to Jesus himself. The distinction that these quotes have within the Biblical record for Christians is highlighted by their publication in red letters as a common printing feature of the Bible. A new kind of Christian socio-political hermeneutic is developing under the banner 'red-letter Christians', and perhaps common ground can be found between cautiously inclusive Muslims and these progressive Christians, based on corporate acceptance and communal study of those red letters.

## II.5 Muhammad's Propethood

A number of key authors and representatives of Christianity are reconsidering Muhammad's propethood, though popular Christian discourse is still generally unwelcoming

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*for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 331. Three of the works of Lammens which Becker critiques can be found in the same volume.

<sup>880</sup> A good introduction to the impact of the works of these and other radical revisionist authors on the field of Qur'anic studies has been written by Gabriel Said Reynolds in his Introduction to *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*. See Reynolds, 8-17.

<sup>881</sup> For a more detailed investigation the reader may also see Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World* 92, no. 3/4 (2002).

of the possibility.<sup>882</sup> Tisdall pits the Islamic charge of *tahrīf* against the claim of Muhammad's prophethood: if the Bible is not corrupt, and Jesus did not predict Muhammad, then it follows that Muhammad was not a prophet.<sup>883</sup> Similarly, one cannot use a corrupt Bible to prove that Muhammad was prophesied by it.<sup>884</sup> Thus the Biblical prophecies concerning Muhammad stand at odds with the charge of *tahrīf*. *Tahrīf* then aside, Tisdall addresses the proposed prophecies from Q3:81 and 61:6. In one example, Deuteronomy 18:18 prophecies one 'like unto Moses,' which is thought to be Muhammad,<sup>885</sup>

For (1) both of them were brought up in their enemies houses; (2) appeared among idolaters; (3) were at first rejected by their own people and afterwards accepted by them; (4) were married and had children; (5) each gave a Law (which Christ did not: John 1:17); (6) fled from their enemies, one to Midian and the other to Medina – which words are of similar meaning; (7) marched into battle against the unbelievers; (8)

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<sup>882</sup> A summary and evaluation of some main voices can be found in Aydin, 169-199., and Zebiri, 108-115. Troll provides an excellent apologetical view of Muhammad. He is not polemical in tone and yet not inclusive. He takes a very high view of Muhammad's historical character, and ultimately concludes that, "from a Christian theological perspective Muhammad can certainly be acknowledged as an outstanding religio-political founder figure, ... however, Christians cannot recognize Muhammad as a prophet without thereby denying their own faith." See Troll, 128. Troll's statement here is harsh, and his argument contains two rational flaws that may be noted. The primary is common, in that Troll pits his interpretation of the Qur'an against his interpretation of the Bible, and not their words in context necessarily and potential alternative interpretations in their respective historical contexts. In other words, his argument is based on his own subjectivity as objectivity, and does not consider the intentional ambiguity of scripture. The second flaw is that Troll takes an either-or approach to revelation as it concerns God's transcendence and immanence. He states that, "There is no fundamental disagreement between the teachings of Muhammad and Jesus over the fact of God's involvement in the human situation. What is disputed, however, is the extent of this involvement. On one side the emphasis is on the transcendence and greatness of God; on the other, on God's radical involvement with humanity." Thus for Troll, the Qur'anic emphasis on God's transcendence stands in contrast to the Gospel witness of God as immanent to the point of incarnation. Yet Troll would likely agree that God is ultimately both, transcendent and immanent. The contrast in emphases is conceded, but the mutual exclusivity that Troll defends is exaggerated. For Troll, Qur'anic revelatory emphasis on God's transcendence after the incarnation and crucifixion is inappropriate. Yet, chronology aside and omnipotence in view, it cannot be said that it is beyond rational possibility that God could reveal himself in a way similar to the legal texts of Leviticus, even after he had appeared in flesh, should he choose to do so. Thus the either-or view of the Gospel vs. the Qur'an is here unwarranted. In the Qur'anic view of revelation, the Gospel is included, and the Gospel's view of law has been said to be fulfilled rather than an abolished (Matthew 5:17). Troll posits that a follower of the Qur'an is necessarily required to reject redemption by grace and sovereign forgiveness, and yet though the Qur'an certainly proposes redemption in a more Levitical vision of law and exhortation, it cannot be said to have rejected the witness of Jesus as *Logos*, whom it holds in revelatory value akin to itself. Troll has thus missed a both-and paradigm here that may present grace and forgiveness as a fulfillment of Qur'anic law. *Ibid.*, Ch. 10. This view of the Bible and Qur'an as independently competing texts rather than volumes in a compendium, as the Qur'an states, is common in exclusive tones of dialogue.

<sup>883</sup> Tisdall, 122.

<sup>884</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>885</sup> This claim of Muhammad's prophecy from Deuteronomy 18:18 appears often in contemporary proselytizing literature intended for Christians. For example, a popular tract still circulating contains a number of pages on the similarities between Moses and Muhammad that do not apply to Moses and Jesus. Muhammad and Moses both had a father and mother, were both born normally, both married and had children, both were accepted as prophets during their lifetime, were both political as well as spiritual leaders, both delivered new laws, died natural deaths, and are still buried. In all of these ways, Muhammad is like Moses but Jesus is not. It is perhaps important to mention that though the author does deal with some particular references to the Gospels, he does not engage the prophecies of Jesus concerning the Paraclete. Ahmed Deedat, *What the Bible Says About Muhammad* (Lahore, Pakistan: Kazi Publications, 1979), 5-12. Deedat is a popular low-calibre Muslim polemicist. He is characterized by Kate Zebiri as uneducated and crude. He has a flamboyant sarcastic style that appeals to basic comedic senses and is not bothered with accuracy or sensitivity. "His arguments against the divinity of Jesus, for example, tend to focus on bodily functions, including the more intimate ones." Zebiri, 46-48.

wrought similar miracles; and (9) enabled their followers after their own death to enter on the possession of Palestine.<sup>886</sup>

Tisdall continues in the Christian voice that both Muhammad and Moses committed murder, married wives, and sarcastically, had names that start with 'M'. The root of the comparison is that the prophetic line and the covenant to Abraham would come through the line of Isaac, even according to the Qur'an which says, "We gave Isaac and Jacob to Abraham, and placed prophethood and scripture among his offspring..." (Q29:27), and, "We gave scripture, wisdom, and prophethood to the children of Israel; We provided them with good things and favoured them above others" (Q45:16).<sup>887</sup> Yet as we have seen above, these Qur'anic verses do not preclude an exclusive blessing on the line of Isaac, just as the Biblical testimony states, and Culver explains.

In the opening pages to Ignaz Goldziher's seminal work *Mohammed and Islam* in 1335/1917, he outlines for his readers what would become a dominant view of Muhammad by Christians in the following century. The voice of a Jewish ecumenist on Christian-Muslim relations is an apt place to begin here.

... Mohammed, proclaims no new ideas. He brought no new contribution to the thoughts concerning the relation of man to the supernatural and infinite. This fact, however, does not in the least lessen the relative worth of his religious conception. ... The proclamation of the Arabian Prophet is an eclectic composition of religious views to which he was aroused through his contact with the Jewish, Christian, and other elements, by which he himself was strongly moved and which he regarded as suitable for the awakening of an earnest religious disposition among his people.<sup>888</sup>

This point is conceded by the 38 Islamic authors of the apologetical *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI* which states:

The Prophet never claimed to be bringing anything fundamentally new. God says in the Holy Qur'an, *Naught is said to thee (Muhammad) but*

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<sup>886</sup> Tisdall, 196. Moucarry addresses the Moses-Muhammad parallel as well: Moucarry, 243-246., cf. Geisler and Saleeb, 153ff. Watt proposes that, "The passage in Deuteronomy 18:14-19 ... seems to state a general principle, namely, that when God's people need divine guidance or other help God will send a prophet to give them that. ... From this standpoint a Christian can admit that in a sense it also applies to Muhammad." Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions*, 36. Prominent Protestant Old Testament theologian John Goldingay, for example, agrees that this prophecy applies in a plurality of prophets. He writes that, "[the prophecy] pictures the Moses-like person who will follow him (perhaps a succession of them) as prophet rather than teacher." Later repeating that, "Moses himself also speaks of future prophets like him (Deut 18:15-22)." It should be noted that Goldingay's commentary, though admitting the likelihood of a stream of prophets rather than an individual, is made in isolation from any discussion on Islam or Muhammad. John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 384, 432.

<sup>887</sup> Tisdall, 194.

<sup>888</sup> Goldziher and others, 3. Goldziher attributes Muhammad's Islam to Apocryphal Christian sources. Unfortunately void of the hope in the "Kingdom of Heaven," Muhammad is messenger only "of the destruction of the world." *Ibid.*, 6.

what already was said to the Messengers before thee (Fussilat 41:43), and, Say (Muhammad): I am no new thing among the messengers (of God), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but follow that what is Revealed to me, and I am but a plain warner (al-Ahqaf, 46:9). Thus faith in the One God is not the property of any one religious community. According to Islamic belief, all the true prophets preached the same truth to different peoples at different times. The laws may be different, but the truth is unchanging.<sup>889</sup>

In spite of Muhammad's agreed lack of innovation, Goldziher attributes the Meccan surahs to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,<sup>890</sup> saying, "To the Mecca period belongs the messages in which Muhammad presents the creations of his glowing enthusiasm in a fantastic oratorical form coming directly from his soul."<sup>891</sup> This ecumenist then tightens to the defence of Muhammad against the excesses applied to him by Islam.

The theology of Islam has conformed to the demand for a picture which does not show [Muhammad] merely as the mechanical organ of the divine revelation and its spread among believers, but also as hero and example of the highest virtue. Mohammed himself did not apparently desire this. ... He is a guide, but not a paragon, except in his hope in God and the last day, and in his diligent devotion.<sup>892</sup>

Goldziher thus endears himself to Muhammad as prophet and distances himself from Muhammad as archetype. Muhammad's wars in the later Medinan period are the product of his humanity, when rather than calling the faithful to either ignore the unbelievers (Q15:94), or call them, "to the way of your Lord with wisdom and teaching ... in the most courteous way..." (Q16:125), he shifts to commands to, "kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post..." (Q9:5).<sup>893</sup> This devolving of prophet to opportunistic politician is reconcilable only through acknowledging Muhammad's own view of his humanity, rather than ascribing divine wisdom (which he did not claim), sinlessness, and arbitrary abrogation to behaviours he himself did not in his early message condone. Gairdner, a Christian contemporary of Goldziher, disagrees,

It is often said that from that time [the *hijrah*] Mohammed *became* a potentate invested with worldly power, and that the theocratic character of Islam was from this time determined. The Medina period gave Islam its *opportunity* to become a temporal power, but in principle it never was anything else.<sup>894</sup>

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<sup>889</sup> Various Authors. Emphasis theirs.

<sup>890</sup> This comment is noted in spite of the fact that though Goldziher often sought to build bridges between the three Semitic faiths, he remained a Jew for his entire life. Goldziher and others, 7.

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>892</sup> To this context Goldziher applies Q33:21, 45-46. *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>894</sup> Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam*, 43. Emphasis his. Gairdner appeals to the Old Testament to show that prophets in general could conceive of nothing other than a perfect blend of society, politics, and religion. It was only in Jesus that the division between these was made (p. 44, cf. John 18:36, Mark 12:17).

Goldziher again appeals to Islamic sources for his division between the Islamic view of Muhammad, and Muhammad’s view of himself. He translates two *ḥadīths* from Muhammad saying, “Return to God (perform penance) for I return a hundred times a day,” and, “my heart is often sad and I ask a pardon from God a hundred times a day.”<sup>895</sup> These highlight Muhammad’s possible recognition of his own sin.

The first of these is also transmitted in *Saḥīḥ Muslim*: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘O people, repent to Allah, for I repent to Allah one hundred times a day.’”<sup>896</sup> The *ḥadīth* before this one states as well, “The Messenger of Allah said: “There is some kind of shadow upon my heart, so I ask Allah for forgiveness one hundred times a day.”<sup>897</sup> To this we may add ‘Amr ibn Abī Salamah’s short conversation with Muhammad: “‘O Messenger of Allah, Allah has forgiven you your past and future sins.’ The Messenger of Allah said to him: ‘By Allah, I am the one who is the most pious and fears Allah the most among you’.”<sup>898</sup> This last *ḥadīth* finds echo in the Qur’an, “Truly We have opened up a path to clear triumph for you [prophet], so that God may forgive you your past and future sins, complete His grace upon you, guide you to a straight path, and help you mightily” (Q48:1-3).<sup>899</sup>

*Saḥīḥ Bukhārī* contains similar traditions. Muhammad is said to have prayed, “ فَاغْفِرْ لِي ” (O Allah! Forgive me my sins that I did in the past or will do in the future, and also the sins I did in secret or in public).<sup>900</sup> This phrase is repeated in three *ḥadīths* in al- Bukhārī, the last two place the statement immediately preceding Muhammad’s declaration that only Allah is deserving of worship. These hadiths from Muslim and Bukhārī seem to suggest that Muhammad, in agreement with Q48:1-3, believed himself able to commit

<sup>895</sup> Goldziher also references a prayer attributed to Muhammad by Abū ‘Ali al-Qāfī: “My Lord accept my repentance, and grant my request and wash away my sin (*ḥaubatī*) and give power to my proof and guide my heart, and strengthen my tongue and take all hatred from my heart.” Goldziher and others, 235. Al-Qāfī’s work is not widely recognized as historically accurate.

<sup>896</sup> “ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ! تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ، فَإِنِّي أَتُوبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ – فِي الْيَوْمِ – مِائَةَ مَرَّةٍ ” Hadith #6859/2702, see Abdul Hussain Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *English Translation of Saḥīḥ Muslim, Vols. 1-7*, trans., Nasiruddin al-Khattab, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), Vol. 7, pp. 75-76.

<sup>897</sup> “ أَنْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ قَالَ: إِنَّهُ لِيُعَانُ عَلَيَّ قَلْبِي، وَإِنِّي لَأَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ فِي الْيَوْمِ مِائَةَ مَرَّةٍ ” Hadith #6858/2702, see *ibid.*, Vol. 7, pp. 75-76.

<sup>898</sup> “ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! قَدْ غَفَرَ اللَّهُ لَكَ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ، فَقَالَ لَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ: أَمَا وَاللَّهِ! إِنِّي لَأَتَقَاكُمُ اللَّهَ، وَأَخْشَاكُمُ لَهُ ” Hadith #2588/1108, see *ibid.*, Vol. 3, pp. 173-174.

<sup>899</sup> It may be noted that the object (you) in this sentence is clearly masculine singular in the Arabic text:

إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُبِينًا لِيُغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَيَهْدِيكَ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا وَيَنْصُرَكَ اللَّهُ نَصْرًا عَظِيمًا

Sayyid Quṭb remarks of these verses that Muhammad’s political victories are evidence of God’s help and guidance. Quṭb does not address the “sins” however, except to remark that, “The Prophet demonstrated absolute trust, leaving no room whatsoever for his own judgment.” See Quṭb, *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, 18 Vols., Vol. 16, pp. 33-36., cf. “ والاستسلام الراضى لإيجانه وإشارته. والتجرد المطلق من كل إرادة ذاتية. والثقة العميقة بالرعاية ” Quṭb, *Fi Zālī Al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 6, p. 3316., cf. Tisdall, 109.

<sup>900</sup> This statement appears in three separate *ḥadīths* in al-Bukhārī, all narrated from Ibn Abbas: #7385, 7442, and 7499. Muhammed ibn Ismaiel al-Bukhārī, *The Translation of the Meanings of Saḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī (Arabic-English)*, 9 Vols., trans., Muhammad Mushin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Vol. 9, pp. 292-293, 329, 356-357.

sin, and guilty of it. Sinlessness was to him an attribute worthy of worship, a quality he appears to have rejected in himself.

For Goldziher, the tradition holding to Muhammad's sinlessness is the natural by-product of an exaggerated doctrine of the Shi'ite Imams, who were said to be sinless and infallible. The Prophet could be no less than the Imam in either Shi'ite or Sunni doctrine, and therefore Muhammad became sinless and infallible.<sup>901</sup>

Tisdall went much further than Goldziher, using the Qur'an to show that not only Muhammad, but many of the great prophets sinned. Adam rebelled against God (Q2:35-36, 20:121), a sin worthy of hell (Q72:24). Noah asked forgiveness (Q71:28). Abraham was guilty of idolatry (Q6:76-78), which is the only unforgivable sin (Q4:48, 116). Abraham also doubted God (Q2:260). Moses committed murder (Q28:15-16), confessed it (Q26:20), and begged forgiveness for he and Aaron (Q7:151). Joseph, David, Solomon, and Jonah are all also referenced by Tisdall in the same way.<sup>902</sup> Zwemer notes however that by 1330/1912, "The sinlessness of all the prophets has become a favourite dogma of Islam, in spite of the Koran testimony regarding the sins of many of the prophets, including Muhammad himself."<sup>903</sup>

Sinless or not, Muhammad is a model for Muslims (Q32:21) as Nasr clarifies, and the greatest cause of hurt for Muslims in Christian-Muslim dialogue has been the vilification of Muhammad.<sup>904</sup> "In the same way that no Christian can claim to have any virtue that was not possessed to the utmost extent by Christ, no Muslim can have any virtue that was not possessed in the most eminent degree by the Prophet."<sup>905</sup> It seems the danger of direct comparisons between Christ in Christianity and Muhammad in Islam escapes Nasr's attention here, for in Christianity Christ is deity, and so Nasr inadvertently invites a discussion on the potential deification of Muhammad in Islam.

Maulvi Muhammad Ali takes an alternative approach. Rather than lifting Muhammad up to the status of Jesus for Christians, Maulvi Ali attempts to return the Christian reader to the Qur'anic view of Jesus through the alignment of the Gospels and the Qur'an.<sup>906</sup> In much the same way as Goldziher attempts to divide between the Islamic view of Muhammad and

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<sup>901</sup> Goldziher and others, 234-238.

<sup>902</sup> Tisdall, 104-107.

<sup>903</sup> Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition*, 15.

<sup>904</sup> Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 61., cf. Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*, 27-28.

<sup>905</sup> Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 62.

<sup>906</sup> Ali, *Muhammad and Christ*. It should be noted however that his arguments are made after a thorough description of the unreliability of the Gospel texts. He concludes, "It would thus be seen that the basis of the Christian religion is laid on the most unreliable record, and the stories of the miracles wrought and the wonderful deeds done, on which is based the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus Christ and of his superiority to all mortals, can therefore be only received with the greatest caution." *Ibid.*, 15.

Muhammad's view of himself, Maulvi Ali makes the same division between the Christian view of Jesus and Jesus' view of himself. Ali's ecumenical approach is to draw Jesus into alignment with the Qur'an by using the Gospels as his source.

Muslim convert to Christianity, Mark Gabriel, provides a calibrating example of the polemical vilification of Muhammad by Christians that Nasr highlights. In his conversion from the Islamic faith, he becomes a powerful polemicist for Christianity. Many of the now clichéd Christian interpretations of the Qur'an are included in Gabriel's *Jesus and Muhammad*.<sup>907</sup> Muhammad through the Qur'an denies the incarnation and crucifixion, and wages wars to accomplish what could not be done by teaching alone. Muhammad is disqualified from prophethood based on these denials and wars, and ultimately fails in the either-or competition between the two archetypes. It does not seem to bother Gabriel that from a Christian perspective, no man or prophet could withstand a direct comparison to the incarnate God-with-us that Jesus represents to the Christian believer. The historical repetition of the comparison and its dominant categories has endured fourteen centuries, and yet the philosophical inconsistency of Christians comparing a foreign prophet to their incarnate deity is still widely unrecognized as an unfair fight.

The vilification of Muhammad by Christians, however common and also commonly harsh, cannot be seen as the project of Christianity in general. As Cragg notes,

...long Christian miscreance about Muhammad evaded the truly exploratory as a right Christian theology would have required it and revelled, instead, in wilful denigration around items of lesser relevance to faith and greater fodder to ill-will. It paid little attention to time and place, being happy to think itself scandalised by what it found.<sup>908</sup>

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<sup>907</sup> Mark A. Gabriel, *Jesus and Muhammad* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2004). Robert Spencer, director of Jihad Watch, an anti-Islamic website, became a New York Times bestselling author with his polemical biography: Robert Spencer, *The Truth About Muhammad : Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2006). Spencer's typical indication of Muhammad as a misogynistic pedophile warlord is reflective of the early polemical attitude of John of Damascus. Though the work is a well-developed restatement of standard anti-Islamic Christian polemics, there is ultimately nothing innovative in Spencer's contribution. Academic prowess does not seem to have a serious effect one way or the other on the dialogue tone of a Christian author. The apologetic work of Chawkat Moucarry is a well-developed direct comparison of Muhammad and Jesus which concludes their teachings irreconcilable. The ecumenical work of David Hitchcock is an obviously under-developed ecumenical comparison of the teachings of Muhammad and Jesus, concluding them reconcilable. Peter Kreeft's apologetical *kalām* between a fictional Muslim and a fictional Christian compares without resolution the characters of Jesus and Muhammad, though with notably deep respect for Islamic spirituality and an attitude open to learning from his Islamic counterparts. In this reader's survey, the academic proficiency of the dialogician, or command of Semitic languages does not appear to influence their tone in dialogue, only the depth of their argumentation. More influential to the tone of the dialogician is their personal interactions with representatives of the other faith prior to their writing. See Moucarry, esp. pp. 252-265., David Hitchcock, *Are the Teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Prophet Muhammad Reconcilable?* (Dublin: Authorhouse, 2009), and Peter Kreeft, *Between Allah & Jesus : What Christians Can Learn from Muslims* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010).

<sup>908</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *A Christian-Muslim Inter-Text Now : From Anathemata to Theme* (London: Melisende, 2008), 212.

Great Christian leaders like Patriarch Timothy I (d. 207/823) have honoured and even revered Muhammad from their Christian perspectives. Resolving the rejection of Muhammad by his teacher, Charles de Foucauld,<sup>909</sup> Louis Massignon awarded Muhammad the role of a man calling God to fulfill His promises to the line of Ishmael in Genesis 16, 17 and 21. The stage for the fulfilment of these promises was set by Christian complacency in the missiological imperative, and several signs of completion in the expansion and development of Christendom. Then, says Massignon:

... an Arab orphan, of whom nothing is known except his first name, Muhammad ... appeared in Mecca, in order to make manifest this Arab Islam, which was to close geographically the 'rhyme of the verse' of Christianity, whose quantity appeared thus satisfied for a thousand years. Through a process of temporal involution, through an ascent toward the furthest past, inversely symmetrical [sic] with the progressive Messianic waiting of the Jews from Isaiah to Herod, Islam announced the completion of the process of revelation, the cessation of the waiting: like a cone of shade projected in advance by the final eclipse of all created things. Like Ishmael, Muhammad too was an exile in his *Hijrah* (emigration) which was the inverse of the expulsion of Hagar by Abraham at Sarah's behest. ... Before God, Muhammad went back to Abraham and reclaimed, for the Arabs alone, all of their spiritual and temporal heritage. Ten years later (in 632) he died, after having united, with an able strategy, via incursion after incursion and pact after pact, the tribes of his race in the religious unity of Islam. Beyond descent from Ishmael, which transcends the limits of the desert ... the Islamic religion – which is based upon a supernatural 'lecture-recitation' of the sacred scripture heard by Muhammad – enlarged the new community of believers in the only God of Abraham.<sup>910</sup>

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<sup>909</sup> It should be noted that Charles de Foucauld was more adversarial in his Christian theology of Islam than was his successor Massignon. As Merad notes, de Foucauld viewed Muslims through the stereotypes of his day, and in spite of his living in community with them and dedication in service to them, he still viewed them as, "slaves of error and vice," from whose "spiritual dereliction" he was present to rescue them. See Ali Merad, *Christian Hermit in an Islamic World: A Muslim's View of Charles De Foucauld* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 72.; cf. Ian Latham, "Charles De Foucauld (1858-1916): Silent Witness for Jesus 'in the Face of Islam'," in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality*, ed. Anthony O'Mahony and Peter Bowe (Herefordshire, UK: Gracewing, 2006). An excellent biography of Charles de Foucauld is prepared in Jean Jacques Antier, *Charles De Foucauld* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1999). Antier suggests that perhaps the only reason that Charles de Foucauld rejected Islam himself was because of the worldly life of Muhammad. Antier anticipates what Charles would have seen in the Qur'an: "The prophet had become rich; he had undertaken wars of conquest and had encouraged his followers to pursue the *jihad*, without necessity. He had also indulged in all the pleasures of the senses, and his rule relegated women to the role of mother and instrument of pleasure." Charles' devotion to extreme asceticism was incompatible with Muhammad's model life in Islam, and though the religion of Islam tempted him, its prophet had spoiled for Charles the simplicity of its sacred doctrine with the profanity of human desire. See *ibid.*, 93.

<sup>910</sup> It is recorded that in the decade preceding Islam, St. Gregory declared the rule of the anti-Christ, Rome dedicated the Pantheon to the saints, and the 'true Cross' completed a journey (614-628) from Ctesiphon to Jerusalem, and was subsequently shattered and dispersed. The seven major Christian councils had also completed their Christological definitions. The quote is from Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962): Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation*, 53-54. Neither Massignon nor Bassetti-Sani divide Muhammad between his Meccan and Medinan surahs. They treat his life holistically. Massignon considered Muhammad to be an eschatological prophet, one who warns. He paralleled Muhammad to Mary, in that Mary brought Christ into being in flesh, and Muhammad re-directed the attention of believers to Christ's second coming. As Kerr outlines Massignon's view: "It is his very



Massignon's disciple Giulio Bassetti-Sani notes that, "All of Massignon's Islamological work moves out from this point of departure, the vision which recognizes in Islam an Abrahamatic mystery."<sup>911</sup> Bassetti-Sani identifies hypocrisy in the Christian view that only what can be interpreted as negative from the Genesis context of the Hagarene promises, can be applied to Islam. He admits that Christianity, "has consistently recognized and affirmed a connection," between the promises of Yahweh and the advent of Islam in Genesis 16:12, "This son of yours will be a wild man, as untamed as a wild donkey! He will raise his fist against everyone, and everyone will be against him. Yes, he will live in open hostility against all his relatives."<sup>912</sup> In this we see a return to the first impressions of Islam by Christians from section one.

Bassetti-Sani admits that the Qur'an does not reflect the entirety of the Christian message, but argues that in light of the Qur'anic content pointing to Jesus and the previous books, it was unnecessary for him to know more. Further, Muhammad admitted that when it came to the mysteries of God, he knew himself to be of limited information, as the Qur'an states, "Say [Prophet], 'I have no control over benefit or harm, [even] to myself, except as God may please: if I had knowledge of what is hidden, I would have abundant good things and no harm could touch me. I am no more than a bearer of warning, and good news to those who believe'" (Q7:188). Bassetti-Sani places his ecumenism in the context of what he sees as Muhammad's self-awareness of his limited revelation, and calls for Christianity to re-evaluate the Arab prophet with sober historical eyes and an appreciation for his nature as a messenger in the line of previous messengers.

As were Gideon, David, and Solomon, Mohammed also could have been a man of God, notwithstanding, here and there, a fierce and warlike deed in vindication of God's honor – deeds analogous to the massacres which are presented as ordered by God in the stories of Exodus or the books of Judges and Kings. In spite of his polygamy, and his sensitivity to the feminine charm, Mohammed could have been a man of prayer and worship of God, as were the 'holy king David, harp of the Holy Spirit,' and the wise Solomon, whose harems were much larger than that of Islam's prophet.<sup>913</sup>

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anticipation of the Second Coming that commends him for Christian acceptance as an authentically eschatological prophet." See Haddad and Haddad, 428-430. Michel Hayek too drew on the eschatological principle for proof of Muhammad's prophetic office, but further develops the message of Islam to be that of a confirmation of biblical truth centered on the love and compassion of a universal God, and Muhammad as a prophet on whom was God's grace, who led the Arabs to real faith. Ibid., 431-433.

<sup>911</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962) : Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation*, 55.

<sup>912</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 26.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid., 187-188.

Charles Ledit also built a Christian framework for entertaining Muhammad's prophetic office, through using the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas. Dividing between what he called theological prophecy and directive prophecy, he claims that the former ended with Christ, but that Muhammad fulfills the latter, which is a form of application of revelation to communities in context. As Kerr noted, "Ledit called upon the biblical evidence of prophets outside Israel – Adam, Noah, Melchizedek, Job, Ahikar, Daniel – as grounds for accepting Muhammad as a directive prophet."<sup>914</sup> Ledit's attempt raised little more than controversy among his Christian contemporaries.

Hans Küng too presses his fellow Christians to recognize the prophethood of Muhammad. He furthers the thought of Massignon behind the Vatican II documents, urging the Catholic Church to include in them recognition of the prophet of Islam.<sup>915</sup> The historian Watt also recognized Muhammad's prophethood. He encourages Christians to accept,

Muhammad as a religious leader through whom God has worked, and that is tantamount to holding that he is in some sense a prophet. Such a view does not contradict any central Christian belief. It has, however, to be made clear to Muslims that Christians do not believe that all Muhammad's revelations from God were infallible, even though they allow much of divine truth was revealed to him.<sup>916</sup>

It may be said to be increasingly popular among Christian scholars of Islam to validate the prophethood of Muhammad, though primarily by Christian definitions for prophethood, and for the purposes of fulfilling the Christian vision of prophetic history.

Cragg too asks Christians to review Muhammad and recognize his prophethood. Yet for Cragg, though Muhammad was a prophet, his military declaration of his message still stands in contrast to the message of grace and forgiveness in Christianity.<sup>917</sup> This 'power-

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<sup>914</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 431. Ledit's study can be found in Charles J. Ledit, *Mahomet, Israel Et Le Christ* (Paris: La Colombe, 1956). Kerr himself accepts Muhammad's prophethood tentatively, as evaluated by Aydin. Aydin, 193-196.

<sup>915</sup> Hans Küng and Peter Heinegg, *Christianity and the World Religions : Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1993).

<sup>916</sup> Watt, *Muslim-Christian Encounters : Perceptions and Misperceptions*, 148. This quote is from a book arguably as personal as it is objectively scholarly. It is, as reviewer Glenn Robinson already noted, a departure from Watt's usually strict scholarship in the direction of Christian activism. This leads Watt to sometimes present historical facts followed by his personal view on the consequences of those facts for Christians and Muslims entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century together. See Glenn Robinson, "Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions by William Montgomery Watt," *Review of Religious Research* 34, no. 2 (1992).; cf. Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today*. For a good abbreviation of the attitude of Watt toward Islam see Aydin, 137-143, 173-180. Aydin notes in his summary Watt's seeming contradictory view of the Qur'an as at once originating not from Muhammad, but from God himself, and yet contains errors. In spite of this and some ambiguities in Watt's evaluation of Muhammad's prophethood, however, Aydin ultimately commends Watt, stating that, "as Muslims we must concede that, in Western Christian scholarship Watt's position represents a great shift from the distorted mediaeval images of the Prophet Muhammad to the positive evaluation of his status." *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>917</sup> Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian : A Question of Response*, 141. Aydin evaluates Cragg's view of Muhammad from an Islamic perspective. He notes that though Cragg acknowledges Muhammad's prophethood, he does so at the expense of the Islamic view of Muhammad's prophethood, and in such a

question' requires the Christian to divide between message and method, between prophet and politician, for, "What remains irreducibly at issue, for the Christian, about Muhammad, in no way detracts from what waits authentically for confession and assent."<sup>918</sup> Even still, Cragg posits: "all prophetic religion is necessarily combative, committed to *Jihād*. The question is in no way 'Whether?' It is always 'How?' ... The Church, too, is 'militant here in earth'. In either case, the struggle is by and for a divine revelatory action believed to inaugurate and require it."<sup>919</sup> Though the military *jihād* in early Islam seems to run contrary to the Gospel's message of grace, it does not for Cragg constitute a disqualification of either message or messenger in the Islamic revelation.

### The Paraclete

We still find the predictable debate over the Paraclete in the Gospel of John as the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction of Muhammad in the Qur'an (Q7:157; 61:6). Again, standard rebuttals are applied by Tisdall, though he adds to the definitions Comforter and Sustainer, to the title Advocate (*wakīl*), drawing a parallel here to one of God's titles in the Qur'an (Q17:54; 4:81). The Biblical use of the term advocate is applied to Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Qur'an thus, for Tisdall, upholds the deity of both Christ and the Holy Spirit by referring to God alone as advocate. Nevertheless Tisdall clarifies the simple misunderstanding between the terms *parakletos* and *periklutos* in Greek, the latter of which does indeed resemble '*aḥmad*' in meaning.<sup>920</sup>

It may be noted that though only vowel changes are necessary to interchange the two terms, the terms are not easily textually confused, as unlike in Arabic and Hebrew, all vowels are written clearly in Greek. It is not easy to mistake one for the other, and both the *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Codex Alexandrinus* record *parakletos*.



Picture 5: John 16:7 in the Codex Sinaiticus

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way as to intentionally safeguard his own Christian faith. This is at once both commended and criticised by Aydin who counters that though a Christian may hold Cragg's view of Muhammad without betraying their faith, a Muslim cannot. Aydin, 180-187.

<sup>918</sup> Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian : A Question of Response*, 141.

<sup>919</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>920</sup> Tisdall, 209-210., cf. Moucarray, 246-247. Gabriel Reynolds has shown that the name of the Prophet in the Qur'an (*Aḥmad* and *Muḥammad*) only occurs four times (Q3:144, 33:40, 47:2, and 48:29), and the two terms may be read as adjectives ('more praised' and 'the praised one' respectively), thus potentially indicating epithets rather than proper names. Reynolds proposes the possibility that Muhammad is a term of honour for the Prophet of the Qur'an, whose name may not be known. This has been a matter of scholarly inquiry for decades, and Reynolds provides a helpful survey of the research which needs not be repeated here. Reynolds' innovation in the inquiry is the suggestion that if 'Muhammad' was an epithet rather than a proper name, it concords with Biblical precedents for God giving new names to chosen leaders. In the Biblical witness Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel, Simon becomes Peter, and Saul becomes Paul, for example. Muhammad is possibly the new name that God has given a chosen leader, whose first name remains unknown. Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Routledge Studies in the Quran (London ; New York: Routledge, 2010), 185-199.

The term *periklutos* ('the praised one', *ahmad*) does not appear in any known New Testament manuscript. *Parakletos* (παρακλητος) is clearly visible in lines 10/11 of Picture 5 included here of John 16:7 in the *Codex Sinaiticus*.<sup>921</sup>

This has not prevented some Islamic scholars from pursuing the misreading anyway. For example, Muhammad Ata ur-Rahim simply equates the two terms, applying both to the Prophet Muhammad. He comments on Q7:157 and 61:6 stating, "'Ahmad' is one of the names of the Prophet Muhammad, meaning, 'the Most Praiseworthy', 'the One who Distinguishes between Truth and Falsehood', and 'the Comforter'. Its equivalent in Greek is '*Parakletos*' or '*Parakleitos*', meaning 'the Comforter' or 'the Praised One'."<sup>922</sup> This error is much graver in Greek than it would be for a reader to mistake إستغلال for إستقلال in Arabic, for example. The difference between the two Arabic terms is one diacritical mark and a slight shape alteration to render the *ghayn* to a *qāf*, producing *istighlāl* (exploitation) in place of *istiqlāl* (independence), two words of near similar form and near opposite meaning. '*Parakletos*' and '*Periklutos*' are far more difficult to interchange textually, revealing a careless reading of the text by any who mistake the two terms.

Even the great scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr is among those Islamic dialogicians that continue to forward this misunderstanding of the Paraclete. Both he and apologist Louay Fatoohi recognize the distinction between the terms *parakletos* and *periklutos* in Greek, and dismiss the former as an emendation of what was originally spoken by Christ, that being the latter.<sup>923</sup> They thus dismiss the textual evidence altogether, claiming that Jesus spoke "*periklutos*" and his followers recorded it wrongly. What is not provided is a motive. What would cause disciples of Christ to render the prophecy of one future helper named 'the praised one' over another named 'advocate'?

Nasr presents the Paraclete of Christ as the anti-thesis to Christ's warning of false prophets. Nasr seems to believe that to the Christian, Muhammad must be one or the other, either the Paraclete or a false prophet. Christians, however, believe the Paraclete to be in its own category, un-human, and removed from the teachings of Christ on the prophetic office. Thus, the denial that Muhammad is the Paraclete does not preclude the denial that he is a prophet, as seen in the Christian voices above.

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<sup>921</sup> The *Codex Sinaiticus* is the earliest known complete New Testament text, dating from the fourth century. The full text in Greek, as well as frames of the entire manuscript are available online at The Codex Sinaiticus Project, "Codex Sinaiticus" <http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/codex/> (accessed February 28 2011).

<sup>922</sup> Ata ur-Rahim, 283.

<sup>923</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 459, n. 3., cf. Louay Fatoohi, *The Mystery of the Messiah : The Messiahship of Jesus in the Qur'an, New Testament, Old Testament, and Other Sources* (Birmingham: Luna Plena, 2009), 87., Louay Fatoohi, *The Mystery of the Historical Jesus : The Messiah in the Qur'an, the Bible and Historical Sources* (Birmingham: Luna Plena, 2007), 369-377.

Not all Islamic commentators are clinging to this early misunderstanding. Mahmoud Ayoub for example, in his presentation of Islam, quotes Q61:6, commenting simply, “Thus, in the Qur’an Jesus announces the coming of Muhammad.”<sup>924</sup> He makes no Biblical reference, and it may be surmised that not all of what Jesus said, is recorded in the gospels.

### Veneration of Muhammad

Tisdall lists what are now the common assertions of Muhammad’s miracles in the Qur’an: the Qur’an itself (10:37-38), the splitting of the moon (Q54:1), the night journey (Q17:1), the victory at Badr (10:10, 3:13), and the prophecy concerning the Roman defeat of the Persians (Q30:1-3).<sup>925</sup> Tisdall dismisses each of them.<sup>926</sup>

The pressure to ascribe miracles to Muhammad came, as seen above, as a reaction to the Christian charge that Muhammad’s claim to prophethood was void without them. Zwemer notes, “Feeding the hungry multitudes with a handful of dates, opening the eyes of the blind, healing the sick, turning barren lands into fruitful fields, and raising the dead,” are included among Muhammad’s accolades. The continued innovation in Islamic ascription of the miraculous to Muhammad was developed in the polemic comparison of Jesus by Christians with Muhammad by Muslims. This eventually led to the production of biographical parallelisms by Islamic scholarship, some of which are listed by Zwemer.

Pre-existence is ascribed to muhammad Mohammed [sic], and his genealogy is traced through Abraham to Adam, as in the case of Jesus Christ. An angel announced muhammad Mohammed’s conception and birth and the name which he was to bear. Muhammad Mohammed, like Jesus, was lost in his childhood and found again, and at the age of twelve he took a special journey. After the commencement of his public ministry muhammad Mohammed, like Jesus, passed through a remarkable ordeal of Satanic temptation. He, like Jesus Christ, chose twelve apostles. His enemies were those of his own household, and he was recognized by spirits from the unseen world more readily than by those to whom he was sent. The demons knew Jesus; the Jinn accepted Islam at the hands of muhammad Mohammed. The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is surpassed by the story of muhammad Mohammed’s ascent into heaven, where he had personal communication with all the previous prophets, and leaving Jesus far below in the second heaven, himself mounted to the seventh, where, according to Moslem tradition, he ate and drank with God.<sup>927</sup>

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<sup>924</sup> Ayoub, *Islam : Faith and History*, 40.

<sup>925</sup> Tisdall, 136-137. It may be noted that, as Tisdall has mentioned here, the prophecy concerning the Romans could not have been untrue. The Arabic سَيَغْلِبُونَ (they will defeat) could have just as easily been سَيُغْلَبُونَ (they will be defeated) with the change of two vowel markings which at the time of the Roman defeat of the Persians were not in any known Arabic text. When the Qur’an was eventually vowelled, it is reasonable to suggest that it may have reflected the truth of history whether the Romans won or lost. cf. Moucarry, Ch. 18.

<sup>926</sup> Cf. Geisler and Saleeb, 163-174.

<sup>927</sup> Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ : An Essay on the Life, Character and Teachings of Jesus Christ, According to the Koran & Orthodox Tradition*, 88.

By the 14-15<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> Century too, Muhammad is given 201 titles of honour within Islam, some of which Christians would only apply to God, for example: the Raiser of the Dead, the Forgiver, the Lord, the Perfect, the Answerer of Prayer, the Truth, the Bearer of Faults, the Holy One, Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the All-Sufficient, the Pardoner of Sins, and the Lord of Intercession, just to list a few.<sup>928</sup>

The development of the nature of Muhammad in Islamic thought explores veneration further in the expression of Sufi Islam. Cragg reminds Christians that in general, Muhammad for Muslims is not a simple historical character, but a “soul-wonder,” a, “heart’s love.”<sup>929</sup> As al-Ḥallāj wrote of Muhammad,

He the Master of Creation,  
By the name Ahmad, is he known,  
And his attribute, Muhammad,  
And he is the colour of Good...

Oh marvel! What more manifest?  
More powerful, more luminous?  
He is and was, and was within  
Created things when they began.

He is recalled before ‘before’  
And after ‘after’ will be more,  
Before all substances had weight,  
And qualities to differentiate,

His substance was composed of light,  
His speech imbued with second sight.<sup>930</sup>

Cragg describes that, “Muhammad is then the *Qiblah* of the soul, the focal point of the divine experience of the faithful, just as the physical Mecca is the focus of the liturgy of *Ṣalāt* itself. He thus becomes in turn the *imām* through whom one ‘faces the face of God’.”<sup>931</sup> Tension builds here between the veneration of Muhammad and the doctrine of *tawḥīd*. He is at once no more than a prophet, and yet much more than a prophet. He embodies the attributes of God, and yet is wholly creation. “We discover that something of what we thought

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<sup>928</sup> Many of the names are listed in *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>929</sup> Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian : A Question of Response*, 53.

<sup>930</sup> The quoted section here is from the translation in verse by Jabez van Cleef, Jabez L. Van Cleef and al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr Hallāj, *The Ṭawāsīn of Manṣūr Al-Hallāj, in Verse : A Mystical Treatise on Knowing God, & Invitation to the Dance ; Writings of Manṣūr Al-Hallāj Interpreted in Poetry* (Madison, NJ: Spirit Song Text Publications, 2009), 18-20. A more accurate translation may be found in Aisha Abd al-Rahman and al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr Hallāj, *The Ṭawāsīn of Manṣūr Al-Hallāj*, The Sufic Path Series (Berkeley: Diwan Press, 1974).

<sup>931</sup> Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian : A Question of Response*, 56.

to be quite at odds *between* Islam and Christianity about God-with-man is there *within* Islam, only it belongs to the person of Muhammad, not to the person of Jesus.”<sup>932</sup>

## Conclusion

It may be said by this point in the dialogue that direct comparisons between Jesus in the Christian view and Muhammad in the Muslim view cannot be fruitfully made, for to compare a Person of the Trinitarian Godhead to the Seal of the Prophets succeeds dominantly in dragging the former into uncompromised humanity or the latter into uncompromised divinity. Ironically, the Christian view of prophethood is generally very human, allowing for grave sin to be committed by prophets and forgiven, and the Islamic view of prophethood is generally of sinlessness and perfection of action, the kind that only God himself may claim in Christianity. Thus the comparison between Muhammad and Christ in the dialogue tends toward an emerging conundrum. The Christian potentially humanizes prophets in general while deifying one of them, and the Muslim potentially deifies prophets in general while humanizing one of them. In the view of the other, Christians may attempt to make God from just one man, and Muslims may attempt to make many just men into gods.

Though the defence of Muhammad’s prophethood from an Islamic perspective is still prominent, of growing prominence too is the defence of Muhammad’s prophethood by Christians as well. A discernable rift is thus developing dividing Geisler and Saleeb’s neo-archaic accusation of Muhammad’s demon possession, and Massignon and Cragg’s concession of his divine inspiration. As more Christian scholars question and review the Christian traditional rejection of Islam, the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid’s question in the opening to the Cordoba Congress (1397/1977) will likely become of greater importance. In an echo of the voice of Patriarch Timothy I, he asks, “How is it possible to appreciate Islam and Muslims without showing appreciation for the Prophet of Islam and the values which he has promoted?”<sup>933</sup>

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<sup>932</sup> Ibid., 57. Emphasis his.

<sup>933</sup> See David Kerr in Haddad and Haddad, 427.

## II.6 Islamic Expansion

The early success of Islamic expansion, used by Muslims as a proof of the divine support of Islam, has cooled by this time, and even been pushed back in some areas. Thus the early success is dismissed by Tisdall in a comparison with Buddhism, which spread over more land, just as quickly, and moreover peaceably. Islam's continued representation is for Tisdall, no more evidence of its truth than it would be for Hinduism.<sup>934</sup> And the reality of the modern retraction of the boundaries of the Dar al-Islam and the introduction of Western colonial rule onto Islamic lands forces reconsideration of the relationship between faith, politics, and war.

Goldziher inclines to Muhammad's understanding of himself as a global prophet rather than a national prophet, conceding that the message of Islam was intended to be universal.<sup>935</sup> Gairdner agrees on this point, noting his reported letters to Byzantium, Egypt, Syria, Persia, *et al*, inviting the rulers to embrace Islam, and with it himself as the prophet of God.<sup>936</sup> Gairdner continues,

Those who struck for God alone, or for God plus Paradise, or for God plus Paradise and plunder, or for Paradise and plunder without God, or for plunder pure and simple, were all the Blessed of the Lord, heroes and saints, and, if they perished, martyrs in the, "path of God," as the religious war, or Jihād, was called.<sup>937</sup>

Expansionism fed the thirst for war, wine, spoils and women, as Gairdner continues, and the second of the four was the only prohibition. The other three were sanctioned holy in this life and promised in exaggeration along with the second in the afterlife for those who participated in Islam's military expansion.<sup>938</sup> Specifically, "The readiness on the part of the Moslem to intermarry with whatsoever race he conquered or dwelt amongst was, as it still is, the most potent means of making that race Islamize."<sup>939</sup>

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<sup>934</sup> Tisdall, 191-192.

<sup>935</sup> Goldziher quotes Q21:107 and others. Goldziher and others, 27.

<sup>936</sup> Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam*, 53.

<sup>937</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. Gairdner credits Abū Bakr with the successful beginning of the Islamic expansion, as he apparently did not cancel the raid on the Roman-Arabs near Syria after Muhammad had died. The raid was successful and understood as an omen blessing ongoing forceful expansionism. This Gairdner traces through the Islamic expansion into Persia, North Africa and Spain in its first phase, India, Asia Minor and the Balkans in the second phase (473/1080-885/1480), and throughout Africa and into Europe in the third (modern) phase. The Islamic, "gospel of the mailed fist," was successful in its dominance, which continually fuelled Islam's, "dogs of war," thus Islamic victory in war and the validity of the Islamic message became a self-reinforcing loop. See *ibid.*, 60-61. The quote is from p. 62.

<sup>938</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69. In this chapter, Gairdner contrasts the Islamic expansionism of the Caliphate with the peaceful and sacrificial early Christian apostles. He stretches this to a generalized comparison between Christian and Muslim expansionism throughout history, yet though he has a firm grasp on early Islamic history, he curiously fails to evaluate the Crusades. In the same breath as he makes his comparison, the only "Crusader" Gairdner mentions, is the apostle Paul, "the chaste, the brave." This is clearly polemical. *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>939</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.



Though Gairdner acknowledges the difficulty in identifying the value or effect of the Christian religion by looking at the nations and morals of Christendom, he says that Islam cannot in the same way be divided from its social and political effect, as it claims itself to be a social and political system as well as a religion. "In countries, therefore, where Islam is supreme, it is fairly just to attribute observed results, on the whole, to Islam itself," proposing that, "If Islam were to be judged by the moral and social state of Arabia, the country of its birth, the land where it has had sole, exclusive, and all-inclusive sway, it would indeed stand condemned."<sup>940</sup> Writing in 1338/1920, Gairdner sites slavery and general ignorance as evidences of the failure of Islam, though one wonders, if he had lived to see Jeddah in the 21<sup>st</sup> century free from slaves, or Dubai, Beirut and Riyadh filled with Universities, would he have reconsidered his position? Not all Christian scholars agree with Gairdner's assessment.

Massignon sees Islamic expansion as a divine fulfillment of the Ishmaelic promises, and as an advisor to the French government, reproaches Western colonialism as the destructive expansionist element. Massignon describes the Islamic expansion thus:

Moving beyond the descendants of Ishmael, the Muslim religion, bursting forth from Yemen and Oman as far as the Sahara and the Gobi deserts, has brought to far-off places a new community of believers in the one God of Abraham. Starting in Medina, Islam, using the Koran, popularized the taste for a monotheistic revelation among so many people to whom the idea of the Living God of Abraham and the rewards and punishments of the next life had not yet arrived. In Persia, it extinguished forever its sacred fire, to light with Abraham's faith the road to the hereafter. It introduced the Indians to the notion of a personal God and broke the caste system. It extended open arms and the invitation to share in the patriarchal blessing given to the excluded, to the Turks, the Mongols, the Chinese, Indonesians, Malaysians, Berbers and Negroes. With the monotheism of the Bible, it gave them at the same time some simple acquaintance with Jesus Christ and Mary.<sup>941</sup>

## *Jihād*

Christian and secular anti-Islamic voices have not only attributed the violence of extremist Muslims to Islamic religious thought, but gone a further step in attempting to prove the inherence of such violence in the foundations of the Islamic faith. M. J. Akbar's *The Shade of Swords* is such an endeavour. Akbar argues through text, tradition, and the history of the

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<sup>940</sup> The author qualifies his judgement: "...let us begin by gladly acknowledging that a religion which, as we have seen, has retained so much that is true in its theology, can and does bring forth ethical fruits that are good. A steady world-view; patience and resignation; respect for parents and the aged; love of children; benevolence to the poor and infirm and insane; kindness to domestic slaves and to beasts; fidelity to a rule of duty; these and other virtues when found may fairly be credited to Islam; and for their absence, if they are not found, Islam could not fairly be blamed." Ibid., 139-140. See also the account of the slave trade in Mecca in 1902 (pp. 143-144).

<sup>941</sup> Massignon quoted in Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 181.

wars of Muslims that, “Jihad is the signature tune of Islamic history,” dismissing any importance that contemporary Muslims may place on the greater (inner) *jihād*.<sup>942</sup>

It is not challenging to see where these interpreters source their materials. Radical extremist Muslims provide much of the content themselves, ready for exploitation by polemical adversaries. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj, one of Anwar Sadat’s assassins in 1401/1981 preceded the event with the publication of his work *The Neglected Duty*, in which he details an academic line of reasoning behind the Jihadist interpretation of Q9:5. Appealing to Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Kathir, and Ibn Ḥazm he presents what is ultimately the view of al-Kalbi, that the sword verse is a total abrogation of any Qur’anic injunction to be at peace with infidels, of which al-Kalbi notes there are 114 verses.<sup>943</sup> All of these references are abrogated by Q9:5 and 2:216, to which Faraj comments that, “It is indeed strange that there are those who want to conclude from Qur’anic verses that have been abrogated that fighting and jihad are to be forsworn.”<sup>944</sup> This is similarly the view of Quṭb, as Watson notes, “For the *Qutbist*, this sword-verse is to be interpreted as an instruction manual in military action, rather than as an inward or mystical directive. ... In a moment of crisis a single verse is allowed to outweigh the Qur’an.”<sup>945</sup>

Yet Faraj concludes that even the sword verse is abrogated by Q47:4, “When you meet the disbelievers in battle, strike them in the neck...” The context is clearly associated with war, and as the commentary of Yusuf Ali clarifies, “When once the fight (Jihad) is entered upon, carry it out with the utmost vigour, and strike home your blows at the most vital points (smite at their necks), both literally and figuratively. You cannot wage war with kid gloves.”<sup>946</sup>

This interpretation in its most violent sense is upheld by Usama bin Laden in his *Declaration of War Against America*. In which he quotes Q47:4, commenting: “Those youths will not ask you (William Perry) for explanations, they will tell you, singing, that there is nothing that needs to be explained between us; there is only killing and neck smiting.”<sup>947</sup> Yet

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<sup>942</sup> M. J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords : Jihad and the Conflict between Islam and Christianity* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>943</sup> It is curious that the *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* is silent on such an important verse. If this verse abrogated 114 others, it is strange indeed that al-Wāḥidī made no mention of it whatsoever. For an introduction to abrogation see Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur’an : Towards a Contemporary Approach*, Ch. 7.

<sup>944</sup> See Faraj, “The Neglected Duty” in Roxanne Leslie Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought : Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 337. M. Faruk Zein clarifies that from the historical context of Q9:5 and 9:36 it is clear that, “the ruling is applicable solely to the pagans of Arabia,” thus those living in Arabia and rejecting Islam are to leave. “The intention that only the population in Arabia should be Muslim in totality is very clear.” Thus the sword verse has a geographical limit, a novel contribution of Zein. See Zein, 24.

<sup>945</sup> Watson, 40. Emphasis his.

<sup>946</sup> Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, 1315, n. 4820.

<sup>947</sup> See Usama bin Laden, “Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places” in *ibid.*, 453. William Perry was the United States Secretary of Defence in 1996.

military proof texting is not unique to Islam. The words of Jesus have also been used to justify war. Jesus said,

Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household! If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.<sup>948</sup>

Highlighted too by the authors of the *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI*, "It is noteworthy that Manuel II Paleologus says that 'violence' goes against God's nature, since Christ himself used violence against the money-changers in the temple."<sup>949</sup>

So it is that both Christians and Muslims have attempted to justify violence by the isolation of particular verses from their respective texts. Ayoub clarifies that, "Fighting, in Islam, is only one aspect of Jihad. In its basic sense, jihad is a striving against evil, whether in one's own life or that of society."<sup>950</sup> Nasr too recalibrates the meaning of *jihād* in Islam as the maintaining of social and personal equilibrium. "This equilibrium, which is the terrestrial reflection of Divine Justice and the necessary condition for peace in the human domain, is the basis upon which the soul takes flight toward that peace that, to use Christian terms, 'passes all understanding'."<sup>951</sup>

Muslims both as individuals and as members of Islamic society must carry out *jihād*; that is, they must exert themselves at all moments of life to fight a battle, at once both inward and outward, against those forces that, if not combated, will destroy that necessary equilibrium on the foundation of which normal human life is based.<sup>952</sup>

For Nasr, *jihād* is not a state of war but a lifestyle of maintaining the balance of peace (*salām*) and submission (*taslīm*). The greater *jihād* is the internal struggle to return to God's intention for personal lifestyle: the living out of the five pillars, for example. As "fallen creatures" whose souls are rooted in the ephemeral, "To overcome with perfect action the lethargy, passivity, and indifference of the soul, characteristics that have become second nature to [our mistaken reality] as a result of our forgetting who we really are, constitutes

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<sup>948</sup> Matthew 10:34-39; cf. Luke 8:19-21. Polemicalist Muhammed Asadi provides a short list of Biblical references that he says incite violence, which, predictably, he compares to the most peace-making verses in the Qur'an (2:192-193, 256; 4:75-76, 90, 114; 9:6-8; 50:45) See Asadi, 17-22.

<sup>949</sup> Various Authors.

<sup>950</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 48.

<sup>951</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 44.

<sup>952</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

likewise a constant *jihād*.<sup>953</sup> The defence of one's rights, honour, and reputation are forms of external *jihād*. The summit of external *jihād*, the 'holy war' is the lesser *jihād*. The lesser *jihād* has possibly been historically abused, as many religious scholars agree that it can be evoked in defence only. This is evinced by the summary of the Islamic rules of war in the *Open Letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI*:

The authoritative and traditional Islamic rules of war can be summarized in the following principles:

1. Non-combatants are not permitted or legitimate targets. This was emphasized explicitly time and again by the Prophet, his Companions, and by the learned tradition since then.
2. Religious belief alone does not make anyone the object of attack. The original Muslim community was fighting against pagans who had also expelled them from their homes, persecuted, tortured, and murdered them. Thereafter, the Islamic conquests were political in nature.
3. Muslims can and should live peacefully with their neighbors. *And if they incline to peace, do thou incline to it; and put thy trust in God (al-Anfal 8:61)*. However, this does not exclude legitimate self-defence and maintenance of sovereignty.<sup>954</sup>

The concepts of 'greater' and 'lesser' *jihād* likely originate in a late volume of *ḥadīth* by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) under the title *Tarīkh Baghdād*. The *ḥadīth* in question appears thus:

يحيى بن الاء قال حدثنا ليث عن عطاء بن أبي رباح عن جابر . قال: قدم النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم من غزاة له، فقال لهم رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم : "قدمتم خير مقدم ، و قدمتم من الجهاد الاصغر الى الجهاد الاكبر" قالوا و ما الجهاد الاكبر يا رسول الله؟ قال : "مجاهدة العبد هوأه".<sup>955</sup>

This *ḥadīth*'s authority is doubtful as it is not contained in any of the six major volumes of *ḥadīth*. It is largely discredited for this reason and the unreliability of redactors in its *isnad*.

Just war in Islam is not without religious or historical basis. Troll notes that, "According to the clear evidence of the text of the Qur'an, in more than 80 percent of its occurrences the term *jihād* refers to engaging in warfare for the sake of the faith."<sup>956</sup> However, the reasoning behind just war in Islam is founded primarily on *Shari'a* and *ḥadīth* literature, as John Kelsay has shown. As in all notions of just war, the debates within Islam have focussed primarily on

<sup>953</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>954</sup> Various Authors. See page 2 of the online document.

<sup>955</sup> After having returned from battle, the prophet said, "We have returned from the lesser Jihad to the greater Jihad (i.e., the struggle against the evil of one's soul)." This translation is from Suhaib Hasan, *An Introduction to the Science of Hadith* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1996), 10. The *ḥadīth* originally appears in Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Khātib al-Baghdādī, *Tarīkh Baghdād*, 14 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1966), Vol. 13, p. 493.

<sup>956</sup> Troll, 38-39.

criteria for war, right authority for declaring war, how to handle matters of attack versus defence, precedents, and how to treat non-combatants. Yet as Kelsay outlines,

The most important weakness in the militant claim to represent true Islam is the contradiction between the end professed and the means employed. Those who seek rule by the Shari‘a should themselves be ruled by its norms. If they fail in this regard, their claim to represent the cause of justice and right is placed in doubt. Militants, it appears, are their own worst enemies.<sup>957</sup>

It is the very set of laws that militants seek to impose on others, claims Kelsay, that requires of them extensive processes of dialogue and debate with their proposed enemies, and consensus and advisement from the community that they claim to represent, before any declaration of war may be made.<sup>958</sup> Thus it is perhaps only through the proper dialogical processes of an Islamic democratic government that any ‘lesser *jihād*’ may be declared Islamic at all.

### Colonialism and Mission

Western Colonialism is perhaps the inverse of Islamic expansionism, it constitutes the counter-accusation of Muslims to the Christian critique of Islamic expansionism, and its effects too warrant mention here. Al-Faruqi urges Muslims to divide between the concepts of Christianity and Christendom, to allow for a kind of Christianity divorced from the institutional Church. However, admits his own limitations in making that distinction as he views Christian mission as inseparable from the colonialist paradigm. This is in sharp contrast to his view of the relationship between Muslims and the Islamic state. Rejecting Islam is for al-Faruqi not a choice of religion, but an act of treason.

That is why Islamic law has treated people who have converted out of Islam as political traitors. No state can look upon political treason directed to it with indifference. It must deal with the traitors, when convicted after due process of law, either with banishment, life imprisonment or capital punishment . . . But Islamic political theory does allow converts to emigrate from the Islamic state provided they do so before proclaiming their conversion. . . . But once their conversion is proclaimed, they must be dealt with as traitors to the state.<sup>959</sup>

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<sup>957</sup> John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 198.

<sup>958</sup> This accusation of hypocrisy in its inverse is the crux of the letter from Ahmad Ahmadinejad’s 2006 letter to President George W. Bush of the United States. Kelsay sums up Ahmadinejad’s concerns for the same kind of hypocrisy apparent to him in the U.S. war on terror: “In the struggle against aggression, can the U.S. commit aggression? In the fight against groups that practice lying and deception, should the United States and its allies go to war under false pretenses? In the attempt to defeat groups who kill civilians and military personnel without discrimination, is it right for U.S. forces to cause civilian deaths—particularly in numbers that suggest excess, in terms of the value of the direct, military target of their operations? In defence of liberty, should the United States violate the liberties of other Muslims, denying them due process of law and other rights guaranteed in international conventions?” See *ibid.*, 214.

<sup>959</sup> Al-Faruqi as quoted by Cragg in Haddad and Haddad, 407.

Cragg responds to al-Faruqi's claim as one that exposes a curious double standard. There may be a divide between Christianity and Christendom, but no such divide exists in al-Faruqi's political Islam where, "The identity of creed and polity, of the Muslim worshipper with the Muslim subject, could hardly be more total. Faith can scarcely be religious if 'treason' is its antithesis. Exile becomes a condition of feasible doubt and, in effect, the non-Muslim world its only haven."<sup>960</sup> Just as al-Faruqi condemns the relationship between polity and faith in the Christian, he apparently requires it in the Muslim.

Al-Faruqi continues that Christian colonialists betrayed both Christianity and Islam. Their mission was not pure of heart. When the colonial powers were ejected, the missionaries changed uniforms and returned as teachers and doctors. Thus socio-economic aid was a front for the missionary endeavour, and betrayed the pure mission of Christianity, proving only the Christian's aptitude for manipulation in mission, and producing predominantly 'rice-Christians'.<sup>961</sup> Al-Faruqi thus divorces Christian mission from Christian aid as mutually exclusive. "Their continued existence and activity constitute a terrible sore in Christian-Muslim understanding and co-operation. Christian mission, to be itself, will just have to postpone itself till another time,"<sup>962</sup> for, "Perhaps nothing is more anachronistic – indeed absurd – than the spectacle of the Western Christian missionary preaching to the Muslims the Western figurization of the religion of Jesus."<sup>963</sup> Ayoub picks up the thought, remarking that:

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<sup>960</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>961</sup> Rick Love, former International Director of Frontier Mission International, a Christian missionary agency, admits this incongruity. He writes, "In the past, we thought we could live in two worlds with two identities. To the church, we were missionaries. To our Muslim friends, we were teachers, business owners, non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders, and so forth. In fact, we were trying to be both." Invoking the Apostle Paul as an example, Love proposes an integrated view of work and evangelism, suggesting that real contributors to society significantly improve their religious witness, as opposed to those primarily religious witnesses who manufacture social positions as a front for mission, as al-Faruqi accuses. Thus the teachers and doctors in al-Faruqi's critique are primarily evangelistically motivated. In Love's assessment, effective evangelism can best be accomplished by excellent, skilled, and effectively functioning doctors and teachers (for example). The distinction is agreed on by both, if a good doctor happens to also be a good Christian, then the witness is sound, but if one's primary social function is evangelistic, or if one's social function as a teacher or lawyer is as a front for witness, it is disingenuous, perhaps even un-Christian evangelism. Rick Love, "An Integrated Identity in a Globalized World," in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 337.

<sup>962</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 223. Al-Faruqi's own policy for *da wah* in America seems to expose a double standard here. As founder of the Da wah Movement in North America (DMNA; a.k.a. *Urwah al Wuthqa*), he published a manual for students and youth. Its declarations include Islamic imperialistic undertones not easily missed. For example, "The unity of the world ummah is indivisible. Arabic is its common language. The *Shari'ah* is its only law, the *adab* of Islam its common culture..." "The world ummah's government is the *khalifah* ... The *khalifah* alone will issue, mint, and control one currency for the whole ummah, maintain its reserves of foreign currencies, establish and control one system of customs, collect and spend *zakat* and other taxes, and plan and direct economic development everywhere for the benefit of the world ummah..." These are stated under the heading *Political and Socioeconomic Goals*, in the DMNA's manifesto, for Muslims living in North America, with Philadelphia as the movement's headquarters. The manifesto can be found in Muhammad Shafiq, *Growth of Islamic Thought in North America: Focus on Isma'il Raji Al Faruqi* (Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1994), 56-63.

<sup>963</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 244.; cf. Swidler, 5.

When Christ commissioned his disciples to 'go therefore and make disciples of all nations' (Matt 28:19), he did not wish them to achieve this with the help of secular authority. Nor did he intend this sacred mission of love to be carried out in the spirit of triumphal superiority and sectarian competition. Yet it was this spirit that dominated missionary activity for most of its long history.<sup>964</sup>

The proposed symbiotic relationship between colonialism and missionary activity has produced the new crusades of Christianity against Islam: colonialism as a cultural crusade, missionary activity as a religious crusade, and Orientalism as an intellectual crusade.<sup>965</sup> This is a common understanding of Islamic commentators on Christian and Western influences of the 14-15<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is not an unfounded concern, though Ayoub concedes that at times Muslim commentators, "have exaggerated what they considered to be the evil alliance between missionaries and colonialist powers."<sup>966</sup> As Ayoub notes, the colonialist mandate in the missionary voice of Gairdner is clear. Ayoub interacts directly with what he sees as Gairdner's colonialist syncretism following the British takeover of Egypt, quoting him directly:

Whether by the tens of thousands of Bibles and religious works distributed yearly from Assuan to Alexandria, or by itinerant or village missions, or preachings, visitings, disputations in the capital, or medical missions in several centers, or the steady work of the education of boys and girls, the work goes on, and success is sure.<sup>967</sup>

Ayoub describes this as an attitude of 'insensitive superiority', noting that the disputations mentioned were carried out at al-Azhar university, a more or less sacred space for the study of Islam, upon which colonial rulers forced the Christian voice of which Gairdner speaks. The Christian view of Islamic expansion in the West has conversely been understood as successful not so much because of the merits of Islam, but because Islam does not carry the sometimes weighty moral fibre of Christianity.

Yet as Ayoub notes, there is reason for hope. The Vatican Council II documents (discussed above) recognise and reject the Catholic Church's past position on Islam. They open up a framework for dialogue, and even the mutual expression of faith. "We now know that no

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<sup>964</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 50. Nasr too notes the awkward syncretisms of Western culture with Christian mission. He highlights Christian missionary activity as, "wedded to current Western consumerism and commercialism as far removed as possible from the poverty preached by Christ, or St Francis of Assisi." See Nasr, "Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles to Be Pondered and Overcome," 222.

<sup>965</sup> Cragg concedes this point, even as he sets out in his careful treatment of the Qur'an an example for how the Islamic scripture should be handled by non-Muslims, commenting that the imposition of "Western wisdoms or alien precepts" upon Islam amount to "spiritual imperialism". See Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, 9.

<sup>966</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 52.

<sup>967</sup> W.H.T. Gairdner in *ibid.*, 55. It may be noted that this quote is from the 1909 first edition. By the fifth edition in 1920, this quote is edited out of Gairdner's text, yet his attitude, it may be said, remains the same.

religion can claim an exclusive monopoly on salvation and truth."<sup>968</sup> If real Christianity, Ayoub offers, could influence its socio-political environment, then the West would already be within the *dār al-Islām*, and if the Church recognized the faith of Muslims in the God of Abraham and their veneration of Jesus, then perhaps the 'mystical body of Christ' could include Islam. Then, says Ayoub, "will the righteous servant of God and the meek 'inherit the earth' (Q21:105 and Matt 5:5)."<sup>969</sup>

Yet it is the concept of *dār al-Islām*, as exercised in historical Christendom that presents the precise problem of incongruity between Christian colonialism and the Christian message. As Georges Khodr sees it,

...because of the armed struggle in which mediaeval Christendom, Latin and Byzantine, became involved, ecclesiology was historicized, i.e. the Church took on the sociological shape of Christian nations. The Christian world, western and eastern, was the dwelling place of peace, light and knowledge. The non-Christian world was the dwelling place of war and darkness. This was a literal adoption of the Moslem distinction between *Dar el Islam* (the realm of Islam) and *Dar el Kufr* (the realm of the infidels). It was also a view of the Church as an *Umma*, a numerically and sociologically defined community. This area outside the Church had to be saved. Infidels, heretics, and schismatics had to be brought into the Church by missionary activity, by proselytism, or by cultural colonialism if persecution and war became unacceptable, so that there might be "one flock and one shepherd". The established, institutional Church becomes the centre of the world.<sup>970</sup>

Ayoub concentrates on the socio-political Islamic bridge to Christianity, but Georges Khodr dismisses politics as inappropriate, concentrating on what he thinks Christianity should find most important, spirituality. It is after all, "the authenticity of the spiritual life of non-Christians which raises the whole problem of Christ's presence in them."<sup>971</sup> For Khodr, the authentic spiritual life of Muslims is evidence *sine qua non* of the presence of Justin Martyr's (d.165) concept of *logos spermatikos*, in Islam.<sup>972</sup> Khodr disassociates politics from the Christian

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<sup>968</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>969</sup> Gairdner, *Rebuke of Islam : Being the Fifth Edition, Rewritten and Revised, of the Reproach of Islam*, 61.

<sup>970</sup> Georges Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World - the Economy of the Holy Spirit," *The Ecumenical Review* 23, no. 2 (1971): 121.

<sup>971</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid., 120. Justin Martyr presents Jesus as a particular incarnation of the pre-existing *logos spermatikos*: "the divine Logos sowed seeds throughout human history; therefore, Christ is known to some extent by non-Christians." A helpful summary is in Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions : Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives*, 56-57. Justin points to appearances of angels and the burning bush, as examples of Christ's pre-human incarnations in the Old Testament. In his *Dialogue with Trypho* he states that, "God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun). For He can be called by all those names, since He ministers to the Father's will, and since He was begotten of the Father by an act of will..." Yet his Christology cannot be said to be (pre-) Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, as he equates Christ with



theology of Islam, exemplifying instead Patriarch Timothy I, noting that, “The prophetic character of Muhammad is defined in Nestorian texts on the basis of a specific analysis of the Muhammadan message. But there is no blurring of the centrality and ontological uniqueness of Christ Jesus.”<sup>973</sup> Even though Timothy was subject to the political rule of Caliph Maḥdī, the spiritual truths in Islam were his primary concern. So Khodr says it should it be for the Christian interacting with the Muslim, whether in Christendom or in the *dār al-Islām*. Khodr concludes: “True mission laughs at missionary activity. Our task is simply to follow the tracks of Christ perceptible in the shadows of other religions.”<sup>974</sup>

It may be summarized that al-Faruḳī calls for a purification of Christian mission too, but views any potential success in the *dār al-Islām* as a declaration of war, necessitating charges of treason for its victims. Ayoub and Khodr see more eye-to-eye on the issue, divorcing faith from political identity allows for them greater freedom for the acceptance of the faith of the other without the political baggage of either Christian Colonialism or Islamic Imperialism clouding religious loyalties. Though it may be said that the slow demise of Christian Colonialism has exposed the distinction between mission and manipulation for Christians, as the *dār al-Islām* faces increasing demands for personal freedoms in its religiously pluralistic societies, the Islamic world too will be challenged by its own accusation: is the religious allegiance of the Muslim in the *dār al-Islām* a matter of personal mission, or political manipulation?

### Religious Pluralism

Ayoub offers parallels between Christianity and Islam based on the two absolute powers, the divine power of God and the temporal power. In Islam, the temporal power is the national ruler,<sup>975</sup> while in Christianity it is the Church. These authority concepts produce for Ayoub, “the two communities of ‘the Kingdom of God’ in the Gospel and God’s absolute

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the Holy Spirit here, then seems to divide him from the Father just one sentence further in his metaphor of fire: “...just as we see also happening in the case of a fire, which is not lessened when it has kindled [another], but remains the same; and that which has been kindled by it likewise appears to exist by itself, not diminishing that from which it was kindled.” Bi-theism is too harsh a critique, but his process of thought is evidence both of the complexity of grappling with Christ’s witness of himself in the Gospels, and the need to present Christ’s nature in rational terms to Hellenistic philosophers, who for Justin have experienced in their own philosophy, the witness of Christ. Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* is available online at: Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho”, Early Christian Writings <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html> (accessed February 26 2011).; cf. Jukko, 169-170.

<sup>973</sup> Khodr: 123.

<sup>974</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>975</sup> This view may be exemplified by the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (d.1409/1989), who in his treatise on Islamic government defends the co-inherence of law and autocratic leadership. “By their very nature, in fact, law and social institutions require the existence of an executor. ... The person who holds this executive power is known as the *vali amr*.” See Khomeini, “Islamic Government” in Euben and Zaman, 163-180. The quote is from p. 163.

dominion (*mulk*) in the Qur'an.<sup>976</sup> As a model for Christian-Muslim co-existence, Ayoub relates the story of Muhammad's discussions with the Christians of Najrān.

The two elements that are of interest to us in this encounter are, first, the fact that the men of Najran were allowed to worship in the Prophet's mosque and, second, that while the Prophet and the Christians of Najran did not agree theologically, they worked out a mutually acceptable relationship. The first of these two elements indicates, in my view, an acceptance by both faith communities of the essential truths of each other's faith, and hence the legitimacy of both Christian and Islamic worship. The second demonstrates an attitude of mutual tolerance in spite of profound and irreconcilable theological differences.<sup>977</sup>

This does paint a hopeful picture of the possibility of peace in spite of both theological and political differences, but if the sources we have provide an accurate history of the event, it was not what may be called a win-win situation. It may be noted that when the meeting ended, the two groups viewed each other as heretics, and the Christians found themselves politically subjugated to the Prophet, paying taxes to him, and bringing home with them one of the Prophet's representatives who would serve as judge over them.

A further question follows, if as Ayoub suggests, both Christian and Muslim worship are regarded mutually legitimate, then of what consequence is conversion between Christianity and Islam? Sachedina too disagrees with al-Faruqi as quoted above on this point, saying, "As long as apostasy remains a private matter and does not disrupt society at large, there is no particular punishment in the Koran. However, when it violates sanctity and impinges on the rights of Muslims to practice their belief, then it is treated as a physical aggression toward the faith."<sup>978</sup>

The Qur'anic reference on the topic, Q2:217, specifically states that apostasy is not a capital offence, comments Sachedina, and in any case, "The *irtidād* [apostacy] or *ridda* [treason] of the Koran is apparently a turning away from God and hence is punishable by God alone."<sup>979</sup>

Ayoub argues that religious pluralism is a mandate of the Qur'an (2:148; 5:48, 109:6), and that Christians and Muslims can not only live together tolerantly, but accepting of the

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<sup>976</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 32., cf. John L. Esposito, *The Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 108-115.

<sup>977</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 35-36.

<sup>978</sup> Sachedina, 101. A similar view is held by Nurcholish Madjid and is summarized by Johns and Saeed in Taji-Farouki, 67-96. Madjid saw the Qur'an and subsequent *fiqh* as providing contextual application of principled religious law, not normative application for every context. Thus apostasy earned capital punishment in history because it was appropriate then, the punishment (application) changes as the context changes.

<sup>979</sup> Sachedina, 100. Troll agrees, "with regard to apostacy, the Qur'an speaks 'only' of God's anger and of punishment in the hereafter; it does not speak of punishment in this life." See Troll, 58.

other religiously.<sup>980</sup> His vision for the future is founded on the Protestant pillar *sola scriptura*; as Jews, Muslims and Christians become accepting of the others' scriptures and all return to them together, they will more and more resemble the *ahl al-kitāb*, "family of the Book," becoming, "for the first time the reconciled children of Abraham, one happy family."<sup>981</sup> Again, Ayoub's idealism is commendable, but requires that the rules of interpretation for scriptures be mutually acceptable as well.

From a Qur'anic perspective, it is important to note that Q22:17 most likely occurred during the early Meccan surahs, and its counterparts, Q2:62 and 5:69 were probably revealed near the end of Muhammad's life. Chronologically spanning the whole of Muhammad's prophetic career, like bookends for managing the reality of religious pluralism, the Qur'an states early:

As for the believers, those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the idolaters, God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection; God witnesses all things. (Q22:17)

And repeats near the time of its completion:

The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve. (Q2:62)

Though many exegetes have found ways of interpreting these verses exclusive of the very groups they seem to include, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (d. 1431/2010) interprets these verses as inclusive. Tantawi does not include Q2:62 as having been abrogated in general by the advent of Islam over other faith traditions. Thus though Islam has to him superseded other religions, "Those who have faith in God with sincerity and total obedience, and in addition perform righteous deeds in this life, deeds which will benefit them on the day they meet Him, they will have their reward with their Lord."<sup>982</sup>

Issa Boullata sees a more divine purpose in religious pluralism. From a Qur'anic perspective founded in Q5:48; 11:118; 16:93; and 42:8, Boullata argues that the differences themselves were permitted by God (Q10:19).<sup>983</sup> Thus the Qur'an states:

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down. Do not follow their whims, which deviate from the truth that has come to you. We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed,

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<sup>980</sup> Cragg agrees with Ayoub here. See Cragg, *The Qur'an and the West*, 188, n.23.

<sup>981</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 39-40.

<sup>982</sup> Translation of Tantawi by Ayoub in *ibid.*, 193.

<sup>983</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 43-44.

He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. (Q5:48)

And repeats in summary:

Each community has its own direction to which it turns: race to do good deeds and wherever you are, God will bring you together. God has power to do everything. (2:148)

Boullata proposes that the key to understanding the Qur'anic position on religious pluralism is in the 'race to do good deeds'. It is for the cause of co-operative competition for the benefit of mankind that God has allowed differences in religions.<sup>984</sup> "It seems abundantly clear that there is here a manifest Qur'anic principle of inter-faith relations, based on a harmonious religious pluralism, and urging all believers of all faiths to do good."<sup>985</sup> Boullata surveys the *mufassirūn* on these two verses, from al-Ṭabarī to Quṭb, noting that they disagree on whether these references are pluralist or exclusivist. For Boullata, they form the foundation for understanding the implicit divine value in other religions, and the arena of goodwill in which Muslims are to compete with them. Boullata thus proposes a pluralism of orthopraxis.<sup>986</sup> Essentially, the good deeds of all of the religions will bear the same results in society and thus in spite of doctrinal differences, the behaviours of truly religious people toward others will look more or less the same.

A similar view is held by Abdulaziz Sachedina, who relies, "entirely on the Koran as the normative source for a theology of inclusiveness."<sup>987</sup> He begins from the Qur'anic position on the mutual truths of human variety and community. Humanity is diverse (Q49:14), and one

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<sup>984</sup> Cf. Q5:51, 2:143.

<sup>985</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 44.

<sup>986</sup> Ian Richard Netton suggests 'sacropraxis' or 'sacred multipraxis' as synonyms for orthopraxis. Netton, *Islam, Christianity, and Tradition: A Comparative Exploration*, 2. In the context of Netton's material the parallel is appropriate, but here illuminates a potential misunderstanding of what is meant. Orthopraxis (right behaviour) may be divided from sacropraxis (sacred behaviour) in splitting the philosophical hairs of ritual action as worship from ethical action as worship. By 'orthopraxy' herein is meant 'right ethical behaviour' which rings more emotional-holistic and less mechanical-symbolic in meaning than what is presumably meant by 'sacropraxis'. Later in the same work, Netton is certainly correct in questioning the appropriateness of 'orthodoxy' as self-explanatory, to which here we extend his question to ortho-anything as it applies to religious expression of either doctrine or practice. Netton's conclusion, "that the old vocabulary of 'orthodoxy' and 'heterodoxy', articulated in stark dualistic terms as a single pair of antagonists, is no longer tenable," has merit. It is therefore noted that herein the term 'orthopraxy' refers to a generalization of what religious adherents believe is *right ethical behaviour* based on their understanding of their scriptures, and not to any external, assumedly objective or universal definition of what *right ethical behaviour* is for those believers. Ibid., 45-48. It may be further noted that militant extremists (both Christian and Muslim) consider their '*praxy*' as '*ortho*', though they would find themselves excluded from the term here as their interpretation of scripture cannot be considered a generalization representative of the community for which they claim to speak. The *Common Word* and the *Yale Response to A Common Word*, in contrast, are both based on the scriptures of their respective communities, prescriptive of the *right ethical behaviours* of the communities which they claim to represent, and by nature of their respective lists of signatories, generally representative. The *Common Word* and the *Yale Response* may then (for example) be considered descriptive of the kind of orthopraxy that Boullata is encouraging.

<sup>987</sup> Sachedina, 26.

(Q2:213). Unfortunately, a great challenge to Islamic inclusivity is the doctrine of abrogation, or as Sachedina identifies it, 'supersession'. Does Islam supersede and therefore nullify all other religions? As shown above, Sachedina dismisses this as un-Qur'anic: tradition has become its own religion, and as such abrogated the Qur'anic prescription for religious freedom even in Islamic nations. "The time has come for a fresh start from the points in normative tradition where the system of Islamic law makes extensive use of the judgements of equity (*istihsān*) and public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) for the common good and where ethical theology encourages human reasoned judgements of right and wrong."<sup>988</sup> Sachedina sees the Qur'anic theology of the religious other as divinely ordained pluralism, though sometimes hijacked by extra-Qur'anic Islamic Imperialism.

...that universal narrative that emphasized the common destiny of humanity was severed from its universal roots by the restrictive Islamic conception of a political order based on the membership of only those who accepted the divine revelation to Muhammad. As this exclusivist community gained control of its public order and directed its political and military might in order to secure its dominance... the jurists formulated the rulings legitimizing Muslim dominance, if not necessarily the ascendancy of the Islamic faith, over the world.<sup>989</sup>

Thus Sachedina proposes a return to the Qur'an and a re-examination of the sources of *fiqh*. His finding in the re-discovery of the Qur'anic theology of religions is the same as that of Boullata: pluralistic orthopraxy. In the *dār al-Islām*, religious others are to be treated as political equals in every respect, and competition between the religions is to be carried out in the socio-ethical arena. "The policy of discriminatory treatment of the non-Muslim populations under Muslim political dominance is traceable neither to the Koran nor to the early community."<sup>990</sup> The challenge, as he identifies it, is whether any religion so tightly tied to politics as Islam is, can provide a source-code for democratic pluralism. Yet Islam, so tightly tied to politics as it is, is in Sachedina's estimation not only capable of producing democratic pluralism, but it is a requirement of the Qur'an that the true Islamic state does so.

This view is also upheld by the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Dr. Ahmad Al-Tayeb. Commenting on Al-Tayeb's views, L. Azuri writes,

Al-Tayeb distinguishes between the fundamentals of the faith on the one hand and religious laws (*shari'a*) on the other. He states that the three Abrahamic religions – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – share the fundamentals of faith, ritual, and morality, and differ only in their specific *shari'a* laws. He adds that since *shari'a* depends on circumstances of time and place, the existence of different *shari'as* is

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<sup>988</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>989</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>990</sup> Ibid., 81.

only natural. In saying this, he not only legitimizes Judaism and Christianity, but also implicitly sanctions the differences in *shari'a* between the Sunna and Shi'a, and among the various Sunni religious schools.<sup>991</sup>

Azuri goes on to evaluate Al-Tayeb's inclusivism as much more than political pluralism. Al-Tayeb views Christians and Jews as brothers to the Muslim. Al-Tayeb writes of the Qur'anic view that,

Pondering the verses of the Noble Koran, one realizes that 'Islam' does not refer exclusively to the message revealed to Muhammad PBUH; rather, it is the name given to all the messages conveyed by [all] the prophets in their various times and places. Therefore, it is natural that the prophets preceding Muhammad are [also] described [in the Koran] as Muslims, and that Noah, Abraham, and 'Issa [Jesus] are each called Muslim, just like Muhammad.<sup>992</sup>

Christians, Jews, and Muslims are for Al-Tayeb varied expressions of one and the same religion, differing primarily in their legal form, but bonded as members of a single family.

## Conclusion

Islam, according to its adherents surveyed, seems to allow for religious pluralism according to the Qur'an, but under the condition of its own temporal political rule. Christianity, according to *its* adherents surveyed, seems to call for religious allegiance regardless of the temporal power. Thus the axiomatic relationship between proselytization and colonialism may possibly be so summarized: You may, according to Islam, be a Christian, but you must live under Muslim rule; you must, according to Christianity, be a Christian, no matter whose rule you live under. Generally speaking then, Islam may be called to colonize and Christianity may be called to proselytize. Yet ironically the fourteenth-fifteenth/twentieth century seems to have shown the precise inverse: colonial expansion of Christianity in the East, and missional expansion of Islam in the West.

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<sup>991</sup> L. Azuri, "The Sheikh of Al-Azhar in an Exceptionally Tolerant Article: Christianity, Judaism Share Basic Tenets of Islam; Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims Must Be Based on 'Mutual Recognition'", MEMRI <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5677.htm> (accessed October 1 2011). A very good document supporting religious pluralism in Islamic states was prepared recently by Al-Tayeb and issued publicly as the 'Al-Azhar Document'. For example, Article 3 states,

“الالتزام بمنظومة الحريات الأساسية في الفكر والرأي، مع الاحترام الكامل لحقوق الإنسان والمرأة والطفل، واعتبار المواطنة وعدم التمييز علي اساس من الدين او النوع او الجنس او غير ذلك، مناط التكليف والمسئولية وتأكيد مبدأ التعددية الثلاث.” واحترام جميع العقائد الدينية السماوية

“The commitment to freedom of thoughts and opinions with a full respect of humans, women and children's rights, to multi-pluralism, full respect of divine [Semitic] religions and to consider citizenship as the basis of responsibility in the society.” See Al-Azhar University, "Nuṣ Wathīqat Al-Azhar Ḥawal Mustaqbal Miṣr", Egypt State Information Service <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Ar/Story.aspx?sid=48572> (accessed October 1 2011).; and the English translation at Al-Azhar University, "Al-Azhar Document", Egypt State Information Service <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Story.aspx?sid=56424>.

<sup>992</sup> Al-Tayeb translated and quoted in Azuri.

If a true 'family of the Book' society were to exist, as Ayoub proposes and Al-Tayeb already claims, it would probably have to be predicated on globally accepted rules for the interpretation of scripture. As we will see below, some Christians have been working very hard to interpret the Qur'an for themselves, and the same may be said of Muslims interpreting the Bible, but to what degree does the one group really accept as valid the interpretive framework of the other? The move from tolerance to acceptance, from exclusive to inclusive, appears to be happening on both sides, but as polemics and apologetics give way to more inclusive tones, will the passivity of pluralism and the activity of ecumenism develop tension between themselves? Can pluralists truly tolerate ecumenists, and can ecumenists truly include pluralists?

Perhaps if the "family of the Book" project were to become a mutual pursuit of Muslims and Christians, an acceptable stop along the way is Boullata and Sachedina's community of orthopraxy. If Christianity can potentially be realized under any rule, and Islam potentially provide a rule that allows Christianity to propagate, then in theory, true Christians and Muslims under truly Islamic rule should work well together, and even behave much the same in the exercise of social development and moral government. For the apprehensive Christian, Khodr offers that, "The Christian who knows that, within God's plan, the great religions constitute training schools of Divine mercy will have an attitude of profound peace and gentle patience,"<sup>993</sup> and Troll offers that, "The essence of mission is that the church, confessing the love of God revealed in Christ, strives to live out its true human vocation by practicing self-giving love in the power of Christ's Spirit and by striving to enable others to live out this same vocation."<sup>994</sup>

## II.7 Comments on the Tone of Dialogue

The polemical / apologetical dialogue has not developed much in the thousand years between 287/900 and 1318/1900, nor in the century between 1318/1900 and 1421/2000.<sup>995</sup> This can be easily seen in a comparison of the works of Tisdall and Moucarray, who carry the Christian voice in this tone with near mirrored content in their two works dating from 1904 and 2001 respectively.<sup>996</sup> Some of these similarities have been indicated above. In the truest

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<sup>993</sup> Khodr: 126.

<sup>994</sup> Troll, 78.

<sup>995</sup> Just as in the end of Part I, the following comments on the tone of dialogue are observations, and not typological in nature. It is not intended here to blanket the entire century under restrictive categorical commentary, but only to present discernible narrative specifically on the development of the ecumenical tone in dialogue.

<sup>996</sup> Even more strongly worded polemical voices than these are rising up as well, especially it seems, among American authors. Terry Jones, for example, famously burned a Qur'an in public in 2011, sparking

apologetical voice, Moucarray defines tolerance in dialogue thus: “True tolerance is to accept the other, not by ignoring the differences between us, but by measuring that distance accurately and by recognizing that whoever wants to cross over has the right and freedom to do so.”<sup>997</sup> Our focus here is not on the lack of innovation in the exclusive tones, however, it is on the exceptional development in the inclusive tones, and especially those ecumenical that demand our attention.

Louis Massignon was a rare and strong voice for the reconciliation of Christianity and Islam. Such was his love for the study of Islam that he was often thought to have himself converted, yet having refused to recite the *shahāda*, his Islamic friends in Bagdad, “worked actively to keep him alive,” as they, “could not resign themselves to the thought of seeing him die an unbeliever.”<sup>998</sup> Bassetti-Sani writes that he was perhaps the first Christian who, “in the Pauline spirit, had become spiritually Muslim ... achieving a profound spiritual experience of a life totally consecrated to God in Jesus Christ, in practising those things which are essential foundations of the Islamic faith.”<sup>999</sup> As an Islamic scholar, Nasr dismisses summarily the three main critiques brought against Massignon: that he over-emphasized the role of suffering in Islam, that he lacked interest in contemporary Sufism, and that his concern for the mystical-spiritual elements in Islam was inauthentic. Nasr describes him as “noble of soul,” with, “a profound and universal appreciation of matters spiritual.”<sup>1000</sup>

Massignon’s acceptance of the Islamic faith as, “the realization of the divine blessing to Abraham for Ishmael and his descendants,” remains commonly un-recognized in academic circles, and may well only be admitted by the most dedicated of his students, in spite of his influence on the pro-Islamic stance of the Vatican II documents.<sup>1001</sup> Massignon was a student of Charles de Foucauld and teacher of Bassetti-Sani.<sup>1002</sup>

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international outrage leading to retaliatory attacks that saw international aid workers murdered in Kabul and elsewhere. Jones may be considered exemplary of the ultra-polemical voices. See Terry Jones, *Islam Is of the Devil* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2010). Echoing John of Damascus’ accusation that Islam is the predecessor to the anti-Christ, Joel Richardson too has claimed that the Islamic Mahdi and the Biblical anti-Christ are one and the same eschatological character. It seems that little has progressed among the hardcore polemicists. Joel Richardson, *The Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth About the Real Nature of the Beast*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: WND Books, 2009).

<sup>997</sup> Moucarray, 20.

<sup>998</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962) : Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation*, 111. The Muslim friends of Charles de Foucauld had also on his deathbed commanded him to say the *shahāda*, but even in death he refused. See Antier, 316-317.

<sup>999</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962) : Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation*, 105., cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-22.

<sup>1000</sup> Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition*, 341.

<sup>1001</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *Louis Massignon (1883-1962) : Christian Ecumenist Prophet of Inter-Religious Reconciliation*, 55.

<sup>1002</sup> Charles de Foucauld had invited Massignon to join him in the desert, and Massignon wanted to go but was stopped by his father who insisted on the scholarly life and marriage instead. The two wrote consistently, but only met once briefly, in Paris on June 22, 1913. See Antier, Ch. 15.



Charles de Foucauld was much more focused on conversion than his successor. Yet Charles too saw in Islam a positive morality and piety. He wrote that, "Islam has produced in me a profound upheaval ... Observing this faith and these souls living with God as a continual presence has allowed me to glimpse something greater and more true than worldly occupations."<sup>1003</sup> In spite of this, Islam for de Foucauld was ultimately void of truth. Charles remarks, "I could see clearly that Islam was without a divine basis and that the truth was not there,"<sup>1004</sup> and, "these souls are lost and will remain in that state if we do not take measures to influence them."<sup>1005</sup> This is decidedly apologetic in tone, and in contrast to the ecumenism of Massignon and Bassetti-Sani.

The ecumenism of Bassetti-Sani is apparent in his posture, to which he calls all of Christianity:

I am convinced that dialogue between Muslims and Christians will truly bear fruit only if it takes as its point of departure a new spirit and a new orientation in interpreting the Koran and the person and mission of the prophet. For centuries, every Christian author began with the conviction that the Koran could not be a revealed book and that Mohammed could not be a messenger from God. Likewise, all the apologists, Jews and Christians, with these same convictions, thought they could convince the Muslim.

Why is it not possible to start from a different position, a position which takes into consideration the deep faith of millions of Muslims, who for centuries have believed in the divine origin of the Koran and in a genuine mission of Mohammed? ... Let us suppose that the Koran is actually a revealed book and that Mohammed is a genuine messenger of God. Let us apply the methods of criticism and history ... What results can come of such a realistic and honest approach?<sup>1006</sup>

From the Islamic side, though he may wish to be thought of as an ecumenist, Al-Faruqi is generally apologetic in tone when it comes to the standard dialogue issues. He first approves of both Christianity and Judaism: "To disbelieve in them – nay, to discriminate between them – is apostasy," continuing, "The respect with which Islam regards Judaism and Christianity, their founders and scriptures, is not courtesy, but acknowledgement of religious truth."<sup>1007</sup> In the end however, he credits his generosity toward the other Semitic religions to the benevolence of Islam.

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<sup>1003</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>1004</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>1005</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>1006</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 38-39.

<sup>1007</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 74.

Evidently, Islam has given the maximum that can ever be given to another religion. It has acknowledged as true the other religion's prophets and founders, its scripture and teaching. Islam has declared its God and the God of that religion as One and the same. It has declared the Muslims the assistants, friends and supporters of the adherents of the other religion, under God. If, after all this, differences persist, Islam holds them to be of no consequence. Such differences must not be substantial ... Islam treats them as domestic disputes within one and the same religious family.<sup>1008</sup>

It seems here that he is indicating a more pluralistic stance than ecumenical in the Christian-Muslim relationship. The differences between the religions are inconsequential, and so have no real bearing on the relationship from an Islamic perspective, yet when pressed on his definition of an 'infidel', he says that, "No Jew or Christian may be called an 'infidel' *a priori*. However, if he denies God or God's unity or His transcendence, he may and should be so called."<sup>1009</sup> Considering his evaluation of trinitarian theology above, it seems that al-Faruqi is creating quite a limited space for his inclusivism. In al-Faruqi's evaluation:

1. Christians are of the same religion as Muslims.
2. Christian trinitarianism denies the unity of God.
3. Christians who deny the unity of God are 'infidels'.

Thus, according to al-Faruqi, it seems that Christians who believe in the Trinity are not the kinds of Christians that he includes in the "same religious family" as Muslims, but rather infidels. He is therefore an apologist, with ecumenical leanings. Nevertheless, he does offer a treatise on the commonalities between Christianity and Islam on which relationship can be formed:

1. We share the same God, who wants us to be happy here and hereafter.
2. God communicates with us through revelation.
3. It is possible for us to fulfill God's purpose for us.
4. We are ethically oriented and capable.<sup>1010</sup>

Ayoub is an exemplary ecumenical voice. Capitalizing on points of agreement, and recognizing and seeking to resolve points of departure, Ayoub suggests that, "The most urgent goal toward which both communities ought to strive is, therefore, the mutual acceptance of the legitimacy and authenticity of the religious tradition of the other as a divinely inspired faith."<sup>1011</sup> The recognition of the validity of the faith of the other should not, for Ayoub, be

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<sup>1008</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid., 211-217.

<sup>1011</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 66.

delayed in hopes of the immanent agreement between Christians and Muslims on objective truth in their points of departure.

It is something of an innovation of the most recent century that dialogicians are allowing and acknowledging personal relationships with their interlocutors to impact upon them. Charles de Foucauld made such an admission of the Toureg, as did his student Louis Massignon of his Islamic counterparts. Seyyed Hossein Nasr returns the compliment, acknowledging the impact of Massignon's work on the Islamic world in general, and that of his student, Henry Corbin, on the Shi'ite world in particular.<sup>1012</sup>

In the interest of improving the relationship between Christians and Muslims, Zahniser proposes a dialogical principle: the primacy of persons. "A Muslim is a person first and then a Muslim. Or, a Christian is a person first and then a Christian."<sup>1013</sup> The principle calls for the recognition that what one has learned of the other's faith, may or may not be true in the faith of the other. Cragg supplies the inverse of this principle, that of self-suspicion, "...one of the necessities is to suspect in ourselves the 'separatism' of which we accuse others."<sup>1014</sup> Thus between Zahniser and Cragg, the ecumenical dialogician should strive to root out their own separatist tendencies, and concentrate on the unifying humanity of their interlocutor, while seeking to understand the truth of the other over the truth they hold of the other.

It may be proposed based on the sources surveyed that just as the ecumenical tone saw steady decline during Phase 3 of the early dialogue, it now seems to be experiencing resurgence and revival during this most recent century. The ecumenical tone of Christian-Muslim dialogue appears to be experiencing tremendous growth. As ecumenical voices from both Muslim and Christian communities develop more common ground, however, the divide between inclusivists and exclusivists may be expanding. It is not difficult to predict that in the coming century, the division between inclusivism and exclusivism regardless of whether the voice is Islamic or Christian, could perhaps become as pronounced as the historical division between polemical Christians and polemical Muslims. What remains to be seen is whether inclusivists will remain inclusive of polemicists, as polemical Christians and polemical Muslims potentially find common ground in a new crusade against ecumenism and pluralism as syncretism and relativism.

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<sup>1012</sup> Nasr states: "There have appeared in the Western academic world a number of notable scholars who have been deeply sympathetic to traditional Islam and have made important contributions to its study." He goes on to name a number of Western scholars of Islam, chiefly among them, Massignon and Corbin. Nasr, *Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition*, 324, 351.

<sup>1013</sup> Zahniser, 11.

<sup>1014</sup> Kenneth Cragg in Haddad and Haddad, 404.

## II.8 Inter-Textual Trends

It may be appropriate here simply to refer the reader to the recent work of Kenneth Cragg on the inter-textual relations between the Bible and the Qur'an. His *A Christian-Muslim Inter-Text Now* is an exceptional exploration of the concerns and hopes of the ecumenist in the drawing together of the texts of the two faith communities.<sup>1015</sup> It is not necessary to repeat Cragg's discourse; rather here we will focus on only a few particular ideas in the management of scriptures by readers from the faith tradition of the other.

### II.7.i The Christianization of the Qur'an

The 'Christianization of the Qur'an' can admittedly transmit several meanings. Here it is exclusive of the use of Christian hermeneutics to disprove the Qur'an's validity. That is the realm of polemics, and may be exemplified by the work of Raouf and Carol Ghattas, *A Christian Guide to the Qur'an*.<sup>1016</sup> What we speak of here is the use of Christian and secular (Western) hermeneutical principles to re-interpret the Qur'an in the context of its congruence with a Christian worldview, and/or its congruence with its own historical context, irrespective of how congruent or incongruent that re-interpretation is with traditional Islamic commentary.<sup>1017</sup>

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<sup>1015</sup> Cragg, *A Christian-Muslim Inter-Text Now : From Anathemata to Theme*. Aydin evaluated Cragg's earlier attitude toward the Qur'an. Aydin's summary and evaluation may be considered a primer for Cragg's recent work. See Aydin, 149-156. See also Goddard's historical comparison of the two scriptures in Goddard, *Christians and Muslims : From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*, 33-47.; as well as Vernon K. Robbins and Gordon D. Newby, "A Proglomenon to the Relation between the Qur'an and the Bible," in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves, Symposium Series (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

<sup>1016</sup> R. G. Ghattas and Carol Ghattas, *A Christian Guide to the Qur'an : Building Bridges in Muslim Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009). Veiled as a bridge-building endeavour, this work is a commentary on the Qur'an, specifically designed to help the Christian reader of the Qur'an to identify proposed similarities and contradictions between the Qur'an and the Bible, and adds tips for the Christian on how to exploit both similarities and discrepancies for the efficient benefit of Christian evangelism.

<sup>1017</sup> Though as historians such as Sidney Griffith have argued, the Qur'an seems to some to present itself as inherently Christian. The Qur'an itself argues for its Christianization from the perspective of the Bible being its primary background for interpretation. Griffith highlights that, "even a cursory glance at the text of the Qur'an is sufficient to remind the most casual reader that it presumes in its audience a ready familiarity with the stories of the principal narrative figures of the Old and New Testaments." Thus the Qur'an states: "In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: 'Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it'." (Q42:13), and "So if you [Prophet] are in doubt about what We have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you. The Truth has come to you from your Lord, so be in no doubt and do not deny God's signs—then you would become one of the losers." (Q10:94-95). See Sidney H. Griffith, "The Bible and the 'People of the Book'," in *Sacred Scripture in the Life of the Church: 40th Anniversary of Dei Verbum* (Rome: Catholic Biblical Federation, Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 2005), 22. For a good dialogical inquiry on the compatibility of Muslim and Christian views of the role of prophethood in scripture see Heck, Ch. 1.

Goldziher, a Jewish ecumenist, for example, parallels the “steep path” of Sura 90:11-12 to the narrow gate of Matthew 7:13, and the cry for social justice in Q90:12-18 to Isaiah 58:6-9.<sup>1018</sup> Even these materials build relationship between the texts.

For ecumenical voices, the practice is very personal, and the re-interpretation sometimes more radical. Bassetti-Sani and Brian Arthur Brown provide several good examples. The lists of prophetic voices in the Qur’an take on Christian meaning, as they use Biblical hermeneutical principles in order to show Jesus as the focal point of key passages.<sup>1019</sup> For example:

Say [Muhammad], ‘We [Muslims] believe in God,  
and in what has been sent down to us,  
and to Abraham,  
Ishmael, Isaac,  
Jacob, and the Tribes.  
We believe in what has been given to Moses,  
Jesus,  
and the prophets from their Lord.  
We do not make a distinction between any of the [prophets].  
It is to Him that we devote ourselves.

If anyone seeks a religion  
other than [*islam*] complete devotion to God,  
it will not be accepted from him:  
he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter.  
(Q3:84-85, arrangement his)<sup>1020</sup>

Even though the text states very clearly that God does not distinguish between Abraham and Jesus, Bassetti-Sani sees more here through a Christian hermeneutical lens. He reads this as a structured symmetrical parallelism, common in Biblical passages. The passage places Jesus as the center of two outward reaching references to Islam, that of Abraham, and that about which the reader is learning here in the revelation given to Muhammad. In the center of the two ‘Islams’ stands Jesus, positioned between the law (Moses) and the prophets, as an allusion to the Transfiguration.<sup>1021</sup> On Mount Tabor, the Gospels relate that Moses and Elijah stood on either side of Jesus, representing the law and the prophets respectively.<sup>1022</sup>

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<sup>1018</sup> Goldziher and others, 19.

<sup>1019</sup> Brian A. Brown, *Noah's Other Son : Bridging the Gap between the Bible and the Qu'ran* (New York ; London: Continuum, 2008). Brown's contribution will be discussed below.

<sup>1020</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 149.

<sup>1021</sup> *Ibid.*, 149., cf. Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. That Noah and Adam as prophets preceded Abraham is not a concern for Bassetti-Sani, who notes that in a similar passage Noah is listed after Abraham (Q6:83-86), indicating Abraham as a kind of founder of Islam, though others were guided before him.

<sup>1022</sup> Cf. Luke 9:18-36

In another example from Bassetti-Sani, he reinterprets Sura 97 as a reference to the eve of the Incarnation itself.

We sent it down on the Night of Glory. What will explain to you what that Night of Glory is? The Night of Glory is better than a thousand months; on that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task; [there is] peace that night until the break of dawn. (Q97:1-5)

It is perhaps a blasphemous commentary from an Islamic interpretive perspective, but if the text is read in isolation from its traditional *tafsir*, there seems to be nothing in the text itself to prevent such an interpretation in light of Bassetti-Sani's understanding of the Qur'an as a revelation that upholds both the Incarnation and the Trinity.<sup>1023</sup> The traditional Islamic interpretation is that the Night of Glory is that night on which Muhammad received the first revelation. Bassetti-Sani argues that this interpretation is not rational, as the Qur'an was revealed over time, and the only 'Word of God' which was sent in a single night was that referred to in Q4:171, Jesus.

A third example presented by Bassetti-Sani is from Q2:87-91. He presents the passage as a correction of the Jews concerning Jesus' message. Noting that Jesus is expressly mentioned in v.87, Bassetti-Sani dismisses the traditional interpretation that this passage refers to the Jewish rejection of Muhammad. The last verse reads,

When it is said to them, 'Believe in God's revelations,' they reply, 'We believe in what was revealed to us,' but they do not believe in what came afterwards, though it is the truth confirming what they already have. Say [Muhammad], 'Why did you kill God's prophets in the past if you were true believers? (Q2:91).

Jesus is given the Holy Spirit (v.87; cf. Matthew 3:16, 4:1, 12:8; Acts 4:27, 10:38 et al.), and his accusation in Luke 11:43 of the Jews pridefulness may be echoed here.<sup>1024</sup> In verse 91 of this passage, Bassetti-Sani identifies, "*the truth* confirming what they already have," as Jesus, "The Truth," of John 14:6. He proposes that in many cases, the term "the truth" (*al-haqq*) in the Qur'an may be replaced with the name of Jesus and find its meaning unchanged or even enhanced. For instance, the "Day of Truth" in Q78:39 may be understood as the day when even according to Muslims the mystery of Jesus will be finally revealed.

Finally, Muhammad is directed to ask the Jews why they murder their prophets, at the end of this passage. For Bassetti-Sani, this is a direct parallel to Matthew 23:34 when Jesus

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<sup>1023</sup> Bassetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ : A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, 153-154. He does the same for Q44:1-4.

<sup>1024</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-158.

makes the same accusation of the Jews, and an allusion to Stephen's speech before his martyrdom in Acts 7.

Whether by a Christian or Muslim, historical critical or literary hermeneutics often yield interesting new possibilities for Qur'anic interpretation. For example, the case of circumcision in v.88 of Bassetti-Sani's interpretation of Q2:87-91, contains a literary allusion to Romans 2:29 if it is interpreted critically. The Qur'an quotes the Jews as saying, "قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ" (*qulubunā ghulf*). The phrase is repeated precisely in Q4:155, where too it is quoted of the Jews. It should be kept in mind that this phrase in the original Kufic script would not have carried on it the diacritics to distinguish between غُلْفٌ and غُلُقٌ.<sup>1025</sup> The distinction in meaning between the two words here is interesting. The former is defined by Haleem and Badawi as, "to cover, to wrap, to seal, to be uncircumcised; to be covered with vegetation," where the second is defined, "to close, to shut, to lock, to bolt; to be impatient, to be dumbfounded."<sup>1026</sup> Yet in Haleem's English Qur'an, the former term is given the latter's meaning in translation in Q4:155, "Our minds are closed," though neither "mind" nor "closed" occur overtly in the Arabic text here. The phrase is variously translated, "Our hearts are the wrappings," by Yusuf Ali, "Our minds are made up," by Rashad Khalifa, and both, "Our hearts are sealed," (Q2:88) and "Our hearts are layered over," (Q4:155) by The Monotheist Group.<sup>1027</sup>

The noun form of the verb *ghulf* is *ghulfa* (غُلْفَةٌ) which is the male foreskin. The text of Q2:88 and 4:155 (*qulubunā ghulf*) presents itself literally as, "our hearts are wrapped in foreskin," or simply, uncircumcised. The phrase in Arabic bears striking resemblance to Jeremiah 4:4, which commands the Jews to, "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart" (הַמְלִי לַיהוָה, וְהִסְרוּ עֵרְלוֹת לְבַבְכֶם, אִישׁ יְהוּדָה).<sup>1028</sup> Paul uses the same imagery in Romans 2:29, "No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people."

The use of circumcision in the Bible in spiritual metaphorical terms is very likely behind the context of the Qur'an here. It is not strictly inaccurate to translate "uncircumcised hearts"

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<sup>1025</sup> The Topkapi manuscript shows at two layers of diacritics, black and red. This particular word is difficult to make out, but seems to be marked with the single mark of a *fā* in black rather than the dual mark of a *qāf* in Q2:88. In Q4:155 the word is more clearly marked as a *fā*. Altikulac, *Al-Mushaf Al-Sharif: Attributed to Uthman Bin Affan*, 16, 127.

<sup>1026</sup> Badawi and Abdel Haleem, 673.

<sup>1027</sup> Khalifa, 13.; Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, 41.; The Monotheist Group, 8, 57.

<sup>1028</sup> Cf. Leviticus 26:41. Moses is said to have uncircumcised lips (Exodus 6:12, 30), and the Jews have uncircumcised ears (Jeremiah 6:10). There is a spiritual meaning to circumcision in the Bible that is distinguished from the physical, "A time is coming," says the Lord, "when I will punish all those who are circumcised in body but not in spirit..." (Jeremiah 9:25).

as “closed minds” from a dynamic translation perspective, however, this translation can only be validated in light of the biblical context behind the use of the metaphor. The English translators therefore indicate by their choice of phraseology, an understanding of and allegiance to the meaning of the “uncircumcised hearts” metaphor in its biblical presentation. It is unclear whether the translation of “uncircumcised hearts” as “closed minds” is meant to lead the English reader of the Qur’an toward the biblical meaning of the metaphor, or away from the similarity in phraseology between the texts.<sup>1029</sup> One may posit that the literal English translation of the Arabic text, “our hearts are uncircumcised” (*qulubunā ghulf*) would be clear at least to Christian readers of the English Qur’an, and so the use of varied phraseology in English may be intended to communicate faithfully the meaning of the text, without revealing its biblical literary subtext to non-specialist Christian readers of the English translations of the Qur’an.

Brian Arthur Brown is, like Bassetti-Sani, a contemporary complementarian interpreter. He presents the texts of the Qur’an and Bible as congruent, and presents his findings focused on the stories of characters shared between the texts. For example, in the story of Noah, the Biblical record presents him as having three sons, and a grandson named Canaan through his son Ham. The Qur’an, however, presents Noah as having a fourth son named Canaan who refused to board the ark and thus died in the flood. Brown discusses the Genesis 19:18-27 passage as uninterpretable without the Qur’anic material. He notes that without the Qur’an, Biblical interpreters would never know that Ham had named his son Canaan after his lost brother Canaan, who died in the flood. Further, it would not be known that it was this fourth son Canaan, and not Canaan the son of Ham who was the object of Noah’s impassioned cry, “May Canaan be cursed! May he be the lowest of servants to his relatives” (Genesis 9:24). This curse has been used historically by Christians in the Biblical defence of slavery, but now may be shown in new light. Thus, “this episode provides an instance where knowledge of the Qur’an resolves a textual conundrum in the biblical text.”<sup>1030</sup>

The approach of the ecumenists toward the Qur’an departs from traditional missional approach, which Rashid Rida describes as: using the Qur’an to prove the accuracy of the Torah and the Gospel, then using the Torah and the Gospel as accurate, to disprove the Qur’an.<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1029</sup> Willful ignorance of the metaphorical significance of the “uncircumcised heart” in Judeo-Christian tradition is the accusation made by Gabriel Said Reynolds against modern interpreters and translators of the Qur’an. In his extended study of this Qur’anic reference, he comments that though the early *mufassirūn* may have not known of the metaphorical meaning, contemporary translators, “have no such excuse.” Reynolds, *The Qur’an and its Biblical Subtext*, 152.

<sup>1030</sup> Brown, 53. A brief review of the traditional presentations of the flood narrative by Christians, Muslims, and Jews may be found here: Jack P. Lewis, “Noah and the Flood: In Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Tradition,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 47, no. 4 (1984).

<sup>1031</sup> Rida summarized in Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 219.



Rather, we should perhaps be looking for harmony between the texts, though, as Ayoub notes, “Rida [himself] considers the books of the Old and New Testament to be a mixture of myth, legend, and history alone with the true biblical message as revealed by God. Thus, the Qur’an alone remains as the source concerning which there is no doubt...”<sup>1032</sup>

Though it may not strictly be considered an exercise in dialogue, the inter-textual disciplines are revealing previously unacknowledged Christian sub-text in the Qur’anic revelations. This may add to our understanding of the Qur’an’s own voice in the dialogue. This Biblical sub-text cannot be considered shocking from a Qur’anic standpoint, as the Qur’an states itself to be a continuation of the Christian tradition. However, these may be challenging to the Islamic view of the Qur’an as a pre-existent expression of God, and independent of textual and contextual influences. Two examples are pertinent here, and will be briefly introduced: *The Sleepers of Ephesus* and *The Alexander Legend*.<sup>1033</sup>

*The Sleepers of Ephesus* is of pre-Islamic Christian origin, and is preserved both in the surah of the cave (*al-Kahf*) Q18:9-26 as the *Companions of the Cave*, and in pre-Islamic Syriac Christian texts. Sidney Griffith notes the story to be prefaced by a warning against the heresy of those who say, “God has offspring” and a reminder of the authority of the Qur’anic revelation (Q18:4, 9), and concluded with a reminder to Muhammad to, “follow what has been revealed to you of your Lord’s Scripture: there is no changing His words, nor can you find any refuge except with Him” (Q18:27). In Q18:10-20 God relates the story, and in Q18:21-26 God clarifies the details. In the latter half, God takes credit for the fact that the story is well known (v.21) and clarifies that God knows best the real details (v.26).<sup>1034</sup>

The earliest extant texts date from the Syriac recensions of the works of Jacob of Serugh (c.451-521).<sup>1035</sup> Read in the light of its pre-Islamic origins, Griffith notes that, “the Qur’an evokes the memory of the story, which it presumes is common knowledge among its audience or at least that the legend was known to Muhammad, with whom Allah actually speaks about it.”<sup>1036</sup> Phraseological echoes quickly highlight the relationship between the Qur’an and the Syriac recensions. Griffith notes the relationship clearly: “the youths (*al-fitya* // *ṭlāyê*) took shelter (*awā* // *bātw*) in the cave (v.10); they prayed for their Lord’s mercy and right guidance (v.10); Allāh shut their ears for a number of years (v.11); and finally Allāh roused

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<sup>1032</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>1033</sup> A good introduction to these works in the Qur’an is in Beeston, 209-211.

<sup>1034</sup> This is not the place to go into depth on this story. Only some brief information will be given here. The reader is directed to Sidney Griffith in Reynolds, *The Qur’an in its Historical Context*, 116-131. See also Reynolds, *The Qur’an and its Biblical Subtext*, 167-185.

<sup>1035</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur’an in its Historical Context*, 120.

<sup>1036</sup> Ibid., 125.

them (v.12).” For each statement, Griffith provides the manuscript reference for the Syriac parallel.<sup>1037</sup>

The *Alexander Legend* is another example of the Qur’anic employ of Christian narratives.<sup>1038</sup> Preserved in the Qur’an as the story of Dhū al-Qaranayn (*The Two-horned One*; Q18:83-102), the *Alexander Legend* was a propaganda piece reportedly written about 8/630, from the camp of Heraclius (r.610-20/641) which told of particular events of around 6/628-7/629, and began with the Huns’ destruction of Alexander’s wall.<sup>1039</sup> Bladel shows that, “many of the correspondences between the Syriac and the Arabic stories are so obvious that they do not need special attention.”<sup>1040</sup> The story was likely aimed at the Monophysites, which could possibly account for its transmission among the Arab Christians of Muhammad’s time. “There are many indicators that the Alexander Legend could easily have reached the community at Medina or Mecca and that, when it did, it would have been meaningful to them.”<sup>1041</sup> This story as recorded in the Qur’an appears congruent with the Qur’anic focus on its contemporary political events and concerns. The story originates in the political camp of Heraclius, and finds its way into the Qur’anic narrative on political issues of Muhammad’s day.

The recent re-discovery of these two examples in the historical discipline is not strictly indicative of the Christianization of the Qur’an, but rather the Islamicization of Christian history as it is recorded in the formative Qur’an. The Qur’an, it appears, assumes its readership’s knowledge of Christian religious materials even outside of the Torah and *Injil*, in these cases, a sermon illustration and a political tract.

## II.7.ii The Islamicization of the Bible

Perhaps one of the most creative attempts at the Islamicization of the Bible comes from the Christian historian Kamal Salibi in his now famous work, *The Bible Came from Arabia*. Salibi posits that, “the Hebrew language passed out of common usage around the fifth or sixth century B.C.,” and thus it is possible to read the Hebrew Bible outside of the traditional Jewish interpretation.<sup>1042</sup>

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<sup>1037</sup> Ibid., 127, esp. nn. 77-80.

<sup>1038</sup> The *Alexander Legend* is independent from and not to be confused with the *Alexander Romance*, often discussed together. See Bladel in *ibid.*, 175.

<sup>1039</sup> Ibid., 188. Though the story was likely popularized very quickly, and contained in three seventh century apocalypses by different authors, there are no pre-Islamic sources as the story took place during the life of Muhammad. Bladel explores the possibility that the Qur’anic recension is the origin of the story, but concludes this as impossible.

<sup>1040</sup> For example, the Syriac twice relates Alexander to have horns on his head, given to him by God (cf. Q18:83). Alexander travels to “near where the sun sets, in the direction of the place where the sun rises” (cf. Q18:86, 90). In Syriac he is given Egyptian “workers in brass and iron” (cf. Q18:96), and upon completion of the gates, Alexander foretells of great eschatological battles (cf. Q18:99). See *ibid.*, 180-181.

<sup>1041</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>1042</sup> Kamal Salibi, *The Bible Came from Arabia* (Beirut: Naufal Group, 1985), 3.

In an echo of the methodology of Christoph Luxenberg (discussed above), Salibi proposes that Hebrew place-names in the Bible can be reinterpreted by rereading the Hebrew text through filters of consonantal transformation and metathesis. Consonantal transformation is the proposition that in the translation between unvowelled Hebrew and Arabic, not only are the short vowels unwritten and totally guess-worthy, but the consonants too change. Salibi lists potential transformations of consonants between Hebrew and Arabic, proposing for example four potential Arabic equivalents for each of the consonants in Hebrew rendered *z* and *t* in Latin transliterations. Metathesis, Salibi's next linguistic tool, allows for the repositioning of consonants in the trilateral roots of Hebrew words when they are translated into Arabic. Thus the Hebrew place-name rendered Gilead stems from the Hebrew *gl'd* which becomes *'l-g'd* and is in Arabic pronounced *al-Ja 'd*.<sup>1043</sup> The implication is that the mountain of Gilead is dramatically relocated from its traditional location in the ranges between Jericho and Damascus to, "the mountain spur of al-Ja'dah (*'l-ǧ'd*), in Rijal Alma', across Wadi 'Itwad from the Jizan region," some 1,500 kilometers away.<sup>1044</sup>

Consonantal transformation, metathesis, and the temporary historical phonological death of Hebrew allow in Salibi's estimation near total flexibility in drawing conclusions about the Biblical place-names corresponding with locations in Arabia. By this process, Salibi relocates the entire of the Jewish scriptures from Palestine to Asir, on the Western side of the Arabian Peninsula. Salibi is thus able to reconcile Biblical and Qur'anic place-names for events.<sup>1045</sup> Salibi has been ridiculed in the academy for challenging the traditional geography of Biblical history. As one reviewer notes, "*The weight of millennia of tradition and all of modern scholarship, as well as the manifest difficulty of some of Salibi's arguments, all work powerfully against his thesis.*"<sup>1046</sup> Salibi's weakness in archaeology and flexibility in philology leave his work open to broad criticism from academic giants in the field of Biblical history.<sup>1047</sup>

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<sup>1043</sup> Ibid., xii-xiii.

<sup>1044</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>1045</sup> For example, the event of Moses and the burning bush (Ex 3:1ff.; Q21:12, 79:16), which is said to have occurred Biblically on Mt. Horeb (*hrb*) in Sinai and in the Qur'anic valley of Ṭuwā (*ṭw*), is by Salibi relocated to Jabal Hādī in Asir, where two villages named Ṭiwā (*ṭw*) and Hārib (*hrb*) stand today. Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>1046</sup> Emphasis mine. W. Sibley Towner, "Book Review: The Bible Came from Arabia," *The Middle East Journal* 42, no. 3 (1988): 512.

<sup>1047</sup> See Philip Hammond, "Reviewed Works: The Bible Came from Arabia by Kamal Salibi," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22, no. 3 (1990)., and A. F. L. Beeston, "Reviewed Work: The Bible Came from Arabia by Kamal Salibi," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2, no. (1988).

Commenting on Philip Hammond's review of Salibi's findings, John Joseph noted that Hammond did not in fact critique Salibi's findings in his summary dismissal of them, and Salibi's work is of academic enough quality to deserve a hearing. This is a comment echoed by Salibi in his subsequent work, *The Secrets of the Bible People*, in which he furnishes more examples of his philological study, earning the praise of at least one reviewer (Ahmed). Frustration grew in the debate as Salibi accused his critics of summarily dismissing his scholarship, and his critics echoed the same remark of Salibi. Joseph challenged Hammond to expose at least some of Salibi's greatest errors, and Hammond replied:

Elsewhere, Salibi proposed that a historical person named Jeshu Bar Nagara eventually became associated with an Arabian fertility god named Issa, producing the fictional character of Jesus. Again he bases his postulations on topographical evidence, this time of seven villages in the Hijaz and Asir known by the name Al-Issa, literally meaning, The God, Issa.<sup>1048</sup> Salibi suggests that the place names pre-date Christianity, but gives no evidence. It does not appear to occur to Salibi that those names would have been naturally given to those locations by the vast number of Arabian Christians that were living there between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. Interestingly though, Salibi unwittingly contributes to the findings of our earlier study above. The recognition of Jesus as God was likely common to Christians at that time and enough to justify the place-names, however, such a clearly worded name as “The God, Jesus” suggests Monophysite doctrine over Nestorian in those locations, and reminds us of the Qur’anic correction against the statement, “God is the Messiah”(Q5:17). Salibi suggests rather that the Apostle Paul confused the man Bar Nagara and the deity Issa, and wrote them together as the same character.<sup>1049</sup> Once again, Salibi’s thesis is founded on toponymical gymnastics, ignorant of archaeology and the majority of historiographical scholarship.

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“That his ‘remarkable discovery’ was made on linguistic analysis of biblical place names, with little reference to geography, because of ‘disagreement,’ is hardly a basis for identification of such locations. That his argument rests on ‘the assumption that the Hebrew Bible has been consistently mistranslated,’ because Hebrew ‘was out of use’ by the 5th or 6th century B.C. is fallacious. Hebrew had to have been in use for reading biblical books from exilic times onward for cultic purposes, and a number of the apocryphal and pseudoepigraphic books were written in Hebrew. This would not have been possible, or even sensible, if the language was not still in use. That ‘Jewish’ migrations into Palestine ‘could well’ have been caused by civil war between Judah and Israel in western Arabia ignores the Davidic kingdom. The tradition that the break between the two sectors took place after the reign of Solomon and before ‘Judaism’ is actually a proper cultic designation; it also ignores the archaeological remains from that period. That archaeologists are ‘misled’ in their work and that ‘no clear evidence has been revealed which may properly be classified as being directly related to Biblical history’ ignores internally and externally dated epigraphic and material remains. That there is ‘no knowledge’ of biblical Hebrew’s orthography, grammar, syntax, nor idiom ignores a vast amount of linguistic effort and history that cannot be so casually dismissed. Here again, consultation of grammars, specific word studies, and other research on the language should have been done prior to making the statement. That the ‘Pharaoh of Egypt’ was a West Arabian deity cannot be supported on the basis of Egyptian usage or historical fact. That the reference to ‘priests’ in the ‘Return’ narratives refers to the people of ‘Qahwan’ requires rearrangement of several languages, in which the root of the word appears as a cognate term. That ‘David’s Hebron could hardly have been in Palestine, where no such place appears to exist’ is news to this reviewer, who happened to have excavated the site prior to 1967 and did find evidence of Iron Age occupation, not to mention the finding by colleagues of innumerable Iron Age vessels marked ‘Hebron.’ That ‘El-Khalil’ means ‘the cave’ is quite disrespectful to the Abrahamic tradition, as well as to the Arabic language. If Hebrew was not the language of the ‘Hebrews,’ but a language ‘widely spoken in western Arabia,’ why are there differences between it and Arabic, not to mention, in earlier times between it and both northern and southern Arabic?”

Based on these challenges of Salibi’s core assumptions by a leading Palestine archaeologist, his thesis cannot be considered as authoritative. See Kamal Salibi, *Secrets of the Bible People* (London: Saqi Books, 2004), cf. Hisham H. Ahmed, "Review Of: Secrets of the Bible People by Kamal Salibi," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 3 (1989). Joseph’s reply to Hammond’s review is in John Joseph, "Comments on Hammond's Review of Salibi's the Bible Came from Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991). Hammond’s reply to Joseph and the quote above in this note are in Philip Hammond, "A Reply to Joseph," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991).

Salibi’s third book on the subject was released in both English and Arabic in 2008, and has so far earned no scholarly review. It does not seriously consider archaeology, neither does it address Hammond’ and is presented more in the genre of propaganda than scholarship. See Kamal Salibi, *The Arabian Bible: Revisited* (Beirut: Cadmus Press, 2008).

<sup>1048</sup> Kamal S. Salibi, *Who Was Jesus? : Conspiracy in Jerusalem* (London: Tauris Parke, 2007), 142.

<sup>1049</sup> Bar Nagara is Aramaic meaning “the Carpenter.” Ibid., 90-92.

Al-Faruqi too dismisses the Christian understanding of the Hebrew scripture in the whole. He sees the Hebrew scripture specifically as a historical text which tells of the God of the Hebrews, who operated a kind of despotic and racist monolatry. Yahweh was not wholly transcendent and not wholly immanent either. For al-Faruqi, it was the latter Christianization of the Hebrew texts that assigned meaning to it based on the deification of Jesus. Thus since Jesus was both word and deed of God, so too the Hebrew scriptures contain not so much rules by which one should live as a record of the words and deeds of God in His Jewish-centered environment. The challenge in this view is that the Christian must divorce the word of God from God's actual intention. The Old Testament prophets speak, "Thus saith the Lord," and the Christian does not obey, knowing better that it was just God working through the prophet toward a better revelation of Himself in Jesus. 'Jesus as Word of God' thus abrogates 'The Law and The Prophets as Word of God'. There is perhaps some truth to al-Faruqi's presentation of the Christian view of the Old Testament scriptures.<sup>1050</sup>

The Muslim, on the other hand, sees in scripture ideas, not events, and the particular acts of God recorded are simply the natural consequences of reward or punishment for humanity's adherence to the revealed ideas. According to al-Faruqi then, faith simply plays too great a part in the Christianization of the Hebrew scriptures. In the Islamicization of the Hebrew scriptures, all that matters is obedience to the absolute moral law. The end result is that the Christian's dogmatic and deterministic view forces him to make sense of the predestination of horrible acts, whereas the Muslim approach is an ethical one, if the act recorded was unethical, it is simply a historical record of disobedience and not the Word of God.<sup>1051</sup>

Al-Faruqi's approach is compelling, and does highlight deterministic limitations in the Christian interpretation of the Hebrew scriptures, but his ethical approach is perhaps more a lens of convenience than an interpretive filter for scripture that the Qur'an seems to uphold. The ethics on which Al-Faruqi's interpretation sorts the good from the bad are set out by the Qur'an, which allows in the Islamicization of the Hebrew scriptures the convenience for the Muslim of being able to simply disregard whatever does not line up with the Qur'an, as a record of disobedience. The Hebrew scriptures thus take on both the form and content of the Qur'an. It seems that in his Islamicization of the Hebrew scriptures, al-Faruqi simply reproduces the error he accuses the Christians of making in the Christianization of the same scriptures.

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<sup>1050</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 111-118.

<sup>1051</sup> Ibid., 111-118.

Worthy of mention here is the Christian scholar Kenneth Bailey, who, while not Islamicising the Gospels *per se*, returns them to their Semitic context, exposing interesting Islamic congruencies. Through extensive presentation of historical context, literary style, and cultural understanding, Bailey presents many of the Gospel stories and parables of Jesus in the cultural context of their day, exposing potential differences between common Christian interpretations and the meaning of the Gospels in historical context.<sup>1052</sup> Thus, though not bringing the Gospels in direct comparison with the Qur'an, his conclusions do sometimes present possible congruencies, once the Gospels are (to Bailey) properly, historically, understood in their Semitic cultural context.

During the interim period between our first survey and this most recent one, a very interesting text developed as an attempt at the Islamicization of the Bible: the *Gospel of Barnabas*.<sup>1053</sup> The *Gospel of Barnabas* is used by both Muhammad Abū Zahrah and Ahmed Shalabi,<sup>1054</sup> though Ayoub admits that it is a late work.<sup>1055</sup> Ata ur-Rahim's use of the text exemplifies its meaning to Muslim scholars.

Ata ur-Rahim's polemical work defends the *Gospel of Barnabas*.<sup>1056</sup> He claims that, "The Gospel of Barnabas covers Jesus' life more accurately than the other Gospels; and the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* further clarify the picture of who Jesus really was."<sup>1057</sup> As Oddbjørn Leirvik summarizes, "In the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus vehemently denies that he is the Son of God, and repeatedly foretells the coming of Muhammad. In consonance with dominant interpretations of the Qur'an, he is substituted on the cross by Judas."<sup>1058</sup> Ata ur-Rahim adds that the *Gospel of Barnabas* was a source text for Iranaeus, who was a unitarian Christian,<sup>1059</sup>

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<sup>1052</sup> In commenting on the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-13), and particularly the title 'Father' for God (v.9), Bailey highlights the title as a metaphor, and the Islamic warning that such metaphors can lead to idolatry. "The warning Islam offers the Christian faith is important for Christians to hear. The danger Islam speaks of is always present when metaphors are used as titles for God. Christians have often used the word *father* and given that word meaning based on experiences with human fathers. This is a form of idolatry." Thus Jesus' own definition of *father* is the only informative one, which Bailey says is exemplified in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), presenting a dramatically counter- or even extra-cultural definition. "Jesus called God 'Father' and defined this term in the parable of the prodigal son. This is the only legitimate understanding of 'our Father', and any other definition is a rejection of the teaching of Jesus and a betrayal of his person. The warning of Islam stands, and when Jesus is allowed to define his own term, the believing community avoids the idolatry that can follow the use of metaphors as titles for God." Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 99. Emphasis his.

<sup>1053</sup> Lonsdale and Laura Ragg Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Lexington, KY: Forgotten Books, 2008).

<sup>1054</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 223. It is also rebutted by Moucarray: Moucarray, 247-250.

<sup>1055</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*, 173.

<sup>1056</sup> Ata ur-Rahim, CH. 5.

<sup>1057</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>1058</sup> Oddbjørn Leirvik, "History as a Literary Weapon: The Gospel of Barnabas in Muslim-Christian Polemics," *Studia Theologica* 54, no. (2001): 4.

<sup>1059</sup> Ata ur-Rahim, 78.

and that the *Gospel of Barnabas* was included in the *Codex Sinaiticus*.<sup>1060</sup> These last two claims draw attention to the text.

The *Epistle of Barnabas* in the *Codex Sinaiticus* is an entirely different work from the *Gospel of Barnabas*. The two do not resemble each other in style, content, meaning or details. It cannot be said that they are works of the same author. The *Gospel of Barnabas*, is, according to specialist Jan Joosten, "...originally an Italian text and that it may reasonably be assigned a fourteenth-century date."<sup>1061</sup> Far from the Biblical languages of Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, the early Christian Syriac, or post-Islamic Arabic, this *Gospel of Barnabas* is of 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian origin.<sup>1062</sup> Zahniser agrees, the *Gospel of Barnabas* is a "medieval forgery," which contradicts even the Qur'an itself.<sup>1063</sup> Its appearance as a work of polemical fiction is reminiscent of the *Legend of Sergius Bahīrā*, of arguably equal creativity, likely equally intended for polemical function, and ultimately equally void of historical value.

## Conclusion

Nasr suggests that,

The rationalist and agnostic methods of higher criticism applied by certain scholars to the text of the Qur'an ... is as painful and as much a blasphemy to Muslims as it would be to believing Christians if some Muslim archaeologists claimed to have discovered some physical remains of Christ and were using DNA analysis to determine whether he was born miraculously or the son of Joseph.<sup>1064</sup>

Nasr's parallel is appropriate, and provides an interesting point of reference for distinguishing, "rationalist and agnostic methods of higher criticism," from those methods which produce blasphemy and pain. It is not, however, appropriate for Nasr to oppose rationalism and Islamic studies, as this would necessarily show Islam to be irrational.

To answer Nasr's hypothetical case, from a historical-critical perspective, the search for the bones and DNA of Christ should in theory be of no threat to the Christian whatsoever, as it is the position of the Christian that proper archaeological science will necessarily vindicate the truth of the Christian narrative, or perhaps cause Christians to re-evaluate the narrative against rational proofs. Thus, the Islamic archaeologist searching for the body of Christ should

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<sup>1060</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>1061</sup> Jan Joosten, "The Date and Provenance of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 (2010): 201.

<sup>1062</sup> Joosten proposed the origin of the text from Italian in a previous article. Joosten's conclusions were challenged by Ulrich Schmid and August den Hollander. He defends his conclusions convincingly in the article cited here. The dating of the text is the most interesting piece of information for us here. On the dating Joosten states: "The strongest evidence is the mention of the centennial jubilee in chapters 82 and 83. Since the Christian Jubilee was shortened in 1349 to 50 years (and later to 25), the notion of a centennial jubilee points to the first half of the fourteenth century." Ibid., 210.

<sup>1063</sup> Zahniser, 86-94.

<sup>1064</sup> Nasr and Chittick, *The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, 58.

in theory, with each turn of the shovel void of evidence, become a greater ally of the Christian traditional narrative. It is in the manufacture of a body and potential falsification of DNA results, that there is threat of abuse by the polemical archaeologist.<sup>1065</sup> In this case, however, the approach of the falsifying archaeologist cannot be said to be either rationalist or agnostic, as Nasr claims. Rationalism may not be said to be un-Islamic.

If the Qur'an is truly from God, for example, then the Muslim has no more to fear from true agnostic rational criticism of the Qur'an than a Christian has to fear of a truly scientific archaeologist pursuing the body of Christ.<sup>1066</sup> It is in the abuses of these sciences, and therefore the voiding of the scientist as rationalist, that the conclusions reached by irrational scientists may cause pain through blasphemy, as may be exemplified by some radical revisionists indicated above. Nevertheless, Nasr's hypothesis cautions the Christian, the Muslim, and the atheist alike, to handle with care the religious 'sacraments' of others, protecting to their own pain the right of the religious other to have their 'sacraments' explored rationally.<sup>1067</sup> In theory then, if the ultimate claim of the Qur'an is true, then true rational agnostic criticism should be incapable of producing either pain or blasphemy. It is thus the methodology which needs to be measured when the results seem incongruous.

Returning to the thoughts of Cragg, hyper-focus on the particular incongruences between the two main texts may become a distraction from the greater parlance, that of the exploration of unity in theme. As he describes, "Anathemata are endless in their ingenuity, inventive in their subtlety and – all too often – vehement in their prejudice. They are more exhaustive than a selective care can hope to satisfy and we linger then in 'wandering mazes lost'."<sup>1068</sup> The responsible dialogician then is to focus on the greater themes of the texts, the most important of which to Cragg is the vice-regency of the earth. On the responsible

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<sup>1065</sup> As in the literary cases of the legendary texts of the *Gospel of Barnabas* and the *Legend of Sergius Bahirā*.

<sup>1066</sup> This may be said to be the impetus behind the now famous project by Maurice Bucaille, *The Quran and Modern Science*. In 1978 Dr. Bucaille, a French surgeon, produced a survey of the Qur'an's alignment to known scientific principles. For example, Q21:30 "...We made every living thing from water" is said to prove evolution. The findings are generally forced and somewhat unoriginal, as especially in this case, the claim that life began with water was also made in the Hindu *Veda*, and by the Greek philosophers Thales and Aristotle. What is perhaps most interesting about the project is its clear polemical tone toward the Bible. It is interesting that in this case Muslims chose atheist scientists as allies against other theists, and the other theists responded in kind. Christian medical doctor William Campbell authored a monumental reply to Bucaille in *The Quran and the Bible in the Light of History Science* (1986). Also an extended polemic against the Qur'an, Campbell too aligns with science against his theist counterpart. A full comparison of the texts is outside the scope of this study. However, it should be noted that secular science has been fought over by both Muslims and Christians as an ally in the Christian-Muslim debates, and its use as a weapon in dialogue has been more or less equally the project of both Christian and Muslim polemicists. See Maurice Bucaille, *The Qur'an and Modern Science*, 1st ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science, 1978); cf. Campbell.; Asadi, Ch. 6.; Zebiri, 55-57.

<sup>1067</sup> What is meant by 'sacraments' here is not limited to specific formal ordinances such as the Eucharist or the *hajj* but rather anything that the religious other would themselves hold sacred including rites, shrines, scriptures, and other artefacts of strong religious meaning.

<sup>1068</sup> Cragg, *A Christian-Muslim Inter-Text Now : From Anathemata to Theme*, 217.



stewardship of the planet, Christians and Muslims cannot find any distance between their texts.

## Conclusion to Section II

Our focus being on the use of the Qur'an, the Qur'an's own voice, and on ecumenical trends, we have found in this survey and analysis some striking new possibilities for investigation on issues of Christian-Qur'anic congruence and Christian-Muslim community. The events of formal dialogue outlined in the introduction, though encouraging from a historical perspective, have not formed the majority of our content in this section. Formal dialogue has not been representative of many contributing voices in the dialogue, though many of those voices attended such formal dialogue events. In view of the century as a whole, formal dialogue events have formed little of interest. Rather, it is individual voices such as Ayoub and Massignon, and those unilateral declarations of Vatican II and the *Common Word* that have been most historically interesting.<sup>1069</sup> Though formal dialogue events continue to present public commitment to relationship between organizations of Christians and Muslims, it is the independent works of those Christians and Muslims that have attended and will in the future address those events that produce the most traction in the conversation.

Topically, the Trinity may not be said to be either specifically outlined in the Bible or denied in the Qur'an. Both the position on its ultimate reality or its ultimate incredulity based on the Biblical and Qur'anic texts alike, seem to be matters of interpretation. Tritheism is presumably specifically rejected by both the Qur'an and the Bible, and the unity of God is likewise presumably protected by both. In terms of inclusivity in dialogue, it is perhaps compelling that even though from a historical-critical standpoint the Qur'an quite possibly directs its harshest critique of Christian theology to Philoponian Tritheism, it is with these same Philoponian Tritheists that the Qur'an appears to urge the formulation of a 'common word'.

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<sup>1069</sup> The seeming inability of conferences to produce common statements has been a contributing factor. This conclusion has been drawn regarding the WCC by Mahmut Aydin, for example. See Aydin, 129. It may be added here as a note, that some of these individual voices are getting together to produce a kind of *kalām* which no longer is recorded by one side or the other, but in fact produces a dialogue in written form. For example Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997). The work contains little innovation in the dialogue, and is tonally apologetic. However, its form is helpful. In the first section, the Muslim writes on dialogue topics such as Creation and Muhammad, and after each entry, the Christian writes a short response, sometimes followed by clarifications from the Muslim. In the second half, the roles are reversed. The Christian presents his view, followed by a short Muslim response, and sometimes a clarification. Though the material is exclusive, the form illustrates the value of dialogue for understanding's sake, between a Muslim and a Christian.

The debate over the incarnation seems now to be wrestling through interpretations of the uniqueness of Christ in the Qur'an. This uniqueness is being slowly accepted by brave Muslim dialogicians. In explication of Christ's Qur'anic character, we have seen a move by Ayoub toward the Christian understanding of *Logos*, and its Islamic metaphysical underpinnings identified with the Sufi expressions of Ibn 'Arabi. Askari again draws attention to the shared-ness of Jesus:

It is in this capacity of the Word of God as Person that Christ is in each faith, and yet outside. He stands between. He is the redeemer of the monological man with his monological faith. By believing in Christ, a Muslim has to be aware of the monological traps within his own faith. The truth is that Christianity and Islam constitute one complex of faith, one starting with the Person, and another with the Word. Their separateness does not denote two areas of conflicting truths, but a dialogical necessity.

Is there any common 'sign' between Christians and Muslims?

Answer: Only 'friends' would know.<sup>1070</sup>

Christians too are moving toward the archetype of Islam. Some Christian ecumenists such as Watt, Massignon, and Cragg for example are recognizing Muhammad's prophethood as shown above. However, the interpretation of that prophetic office seems from as much a Christian perspective as Ayoub's excavation of the uniqueness of Christ is from an Islamic perspective. Respected Christian authors, seemingly without Biblical imperative to do so, are nonetheless moving measurably toward Christian-Qur'anic congruency.

These two projects, the documented interpretation of the Qur'an as revelatory by Christian scholars, and the documented acceptance of Christ as the unique Word of God by Muslim scholars, both represent monumental steps toward the scripture of the other, though quite often not according to the traditional interpretation of it by the other. Retrieving the quote which opened Section II, dialogicians who dared to breach their own tradition have also sometimes found themselves in Arkoun's realm of the previously unthinkable. The defence of the prophethood of Muhammad by Christians, or the defence of the accuracy and validity of the Christian scriptures by Muslims represents not so much an innovation in dialogue, but a return to early ecumenical trends in a rejection of the unthought as justifiably unthinkable.

In this growing *dia-Logos* project we find Christians discovering the Qur'an as *Logos*, and Muslims finding that *Logos* in the gospels, but though there is growing acceptance of the

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<sup>1070</sup> Askari in Swidler, 45. One recalls Charles de Foucauld's description of the Toureg here, which, in the early years of our modern study echoes the plea of Askari. Foucauld writes, "The Toureg community are a great consolation to me; I can't say how good they are to me, how many upright people there are among them; a few are real friends, something so rare and precious everywhere. I have at least four 'friends' on whom I can count entirely ... We relate together ..., and they have come [sic] to know that they have a friend in me, that I am devoted to them, that they can have confidence in me – and that they have reciprocated what I am for them." Latham, 61-62.

text of the other there has been little evidence in this survey in the way of the questioning of core assumptions by the interpreters. Christians in our sources who accept the Qur'an are unlikely to use it as new cause to ask: is Jesus truly divine? Likewise, Muslims in our sources who accept the Bible as validated rather than abrogated by the Qur'an are unlikely to find that additional information cause to question: is the proposed divinity of Jesus truly contradictory to the concept of *tawhīd*? These questions are probably still unaskable.

Yet the acceptance of the Qur'an as revelatory by Christians whose Bible does not expressly direct them to do so is possibly as monumental in dialogical terms as the emerging Islamic acceptance of the uniqueness of Christ, though the Qur'an too arguably does not expressly require it. The *dia-Logos* project has only just begun. As Ayoub notes, "This final stage in the long history of Muslim-Christian relations is still in its beginnings. When it is fully realized, it will, I hope, lead to true ecumenism, and ecumenism that will accommodate Islam not as a heresy of Christianity, but as an authentic expression of the divine and immutable truth."<sup>1071</sup>

Al-Faruqi, an exclusivist Islamic counterpart to Ayoub, also offers concession: "We must say boldly that the end of dialogue is conversion; not conversion to my, your or his religion, culture, mores or political regime, but to *the* truth."<sup>1072</sup> The objective truth that requires conversion on both sides, Arkoun might argue, is not so much unthinkable as simply yet unthought, and as Askari might add, can only possibly be thought in dialogue, together, by 'friends'.

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<sup>1071</sup> Ayoub and Omar, *A Muslim View of Christianity : Essays on Dialogue*, 135.

<sup>1072</sup> Al-Faruqi and Siddiqui, 249.

## Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge

This study originally set out to review and analyse the use of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim dialogue during the first three centuries of Islam and the most recent century. To this end, we have concentrated on Qur'anic interpretation in dialogue and the Qur'an's own voice in dialogue according to the occasions of its revelation and other historical sources. Varying voices in what is now clearly a polylogue have been organized thematically, and categorized by tone. The exclusive tones, polemical and apologetical, have been the dominant tones in the dialogue, but they have not earned the highlight in this study. The inclusive tones, ecumenical and pluralistic, have been more in focus here, and draw attention to innovations in Qur'anic interpretation or dialogical reasoning that may otherwise fade away as minority voices. In drawing attention to ecumenical tones and innovative Qur'anic interpretations, those voices which attempt to employ the Qur'an as a tool for constructing bridges of thought between Christianity and Islam, have been amplified. This amplified ecumenical tone in concert with occasional historical contextual analysis of the Qur'anic voice is both *original* in the academic field of the history of religions, and arguably desperately needed in the present socio-political context of the increasing interaction between Muslim and Christian civilizations.

Dialogicians may now be better equipped to explore potential harmonies between Christian and Islamic concepts which are informed by or founded upon the Qur'anic revelations. Qur'anic scholars have hopefully found herein innovative and historical voices whose tendencies have been to encourage the thinking of Arkoun's unthought thoughts. The role of the Qur'an in interfaith dialogue may be said to be utilitarian. Whether interpreted by a Christian, Muslim, secularist, dialogician or historian, the Qur'an may be made to defend pluralism and polemicism, war and peace, if its own voice in context is ignored. Those with the patience and humility to listen to the Qur'an's own historical voice, which is not presented comprehensively herein, may find that it is of flexible and strong enough material to bridge the Christian-Muslim divide. Dialogicians are encouraged allow more light to shine on its flexibility, in order to truly admire its strength.

## Ecumenism as Humble Orthodoxy

Humans may continue to debate the meanings of the *mutashābihāt* (unclear) words of scripture, but they may not, as worshippers of a God who has revealed himself in mysterious ways, assign his regret to his mode of communication, nor may they hold their systematic theologies based on his ambiguous revelations to be wholly holy. Therefore, if intentional ambiguity is inherent in the revelation, which in the Introduction we have proposed that it is, humble orthodoxy may be the most appropriate response. In any case, both Muslims and

Christians are perhaps beginning to acknowledge that their respective scriptures may be the incomplete revelations they possibly present themselves to be:

Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written. John 21:25

If all the trees on earth were pens and all the seas, with seven more seas besides, [were ink,] still God's words would not run out: God is almighty and all wise. Q31:27

The Word, therefore, according to The Word, is perhaps only partly spoken. It is the re-orientation of dialogicians from both religious traditions from a post-spoken hermeneutic to a dialogical inquiry of what appears to be only partly revealed, that they find the humble orthodoxy that allows mutuality in spite of apparent contradiction.

In David Bertaina's recent study of the early Christian-Muslim dialogue he makes the bold claim that there are only two ends to dialogue. The pre-modern end was the prevailing of one's beliefs over the other. The modern parses between this and a second end: "the teleological end of modern liberal dialogue is not persuasion, but the dialogue itself. ... [Dialogue] functions as a therapy meant to redeem religious groups from their commitments to objective truth and persuasion."<sup>1073</sup> Bertaina has accurately described modern pluralistic tones, however, dialogue itself is not the goal of true ecumenists who have been shown in this study to actively mould their own truth claims to accommodate those of the religious other. There is a true and dialogical commitment to the mutual pursuit of an objective truth that neither in the dialogue fully represents.

As shown in I.1 above, the Qur'an itself is quite likely an ecumenical voice in this dialogue. It appears soteriologically inclusive and yet revisionistic, correcting excesses in theology where it identifies them in its Christian interlocutors. In I.2, over the first century of Christian commentary on Islam, this congeniality declines incrementally in the voices of our surveyed Qur'anic interpreters and Christian observers alike. Islam begins in the eyes of our surveyed Christian sources as the fulfillment of the promises of God to Hagar and Abraham concerning Ishmael, then slowly becomes the hand of God's wrath against sinful Christians. Finally, Islam is described as a tolerated evil that God has allowed, to punish his Church.

When the polemics of John of Damascus are introduced, the commentary on Islam from Christians seems to divide into two. Firstly, there are those like Sebeos, Theodore Abū Qurrah, Abū Rā'īṭa, and Ammār al-Baṣrī who take a critical and sometimes very harsh approach

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<sup>1073</sup> Bertaina, *Christian Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East*, 2-3.

to a Christian theology of Islam, often employing arguments presumably introduced by John, such as Muhammad as a 'false prophet'. Secondly are the ecumenical voices, amplified by *On the Unified Trinity*, which is quickly published very likely in reply to John of Damascus, and whose inclusivism is echoed by *The Chronicle of 741* and Timothy I in his debate with Caliph Maḥdī, in the bridges of the 'veil of God', and the *ṣifāt* Allah. The surveyed extant voices of Islam too, whether the accommodating and affirming voice of Ibn al-Layth, or the harsh and condemning voice of Abū Isā al-Warrāq, do not find agreement among themselves on what to do with Christianity from an Islamic perspective.

And the Qur'an, our focal point, seems only rarely allowed to speak for itself, as the *mufassirūn* on both sides often ignore the very *asbāb al-nuzūl* in favour of commentary extrapolations that sometimes align to the contemporary context of the commentators over the internal coherence of the Qur'an, or its voice in its own historical and often Biblical context. It is to Timothy I and *On the Unified Trinity* a trinitarian document, proof of the prophethood of Muhammad, and to John of Damascus and his followers, a book of 'ludicrous doctrines'. Even the syncretising texts of the Christian *Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā* and the Muslim 'Alī al-Ṭabarī become counterpart attempts to explain the existence of the religion of the other in the existence of the Qur'an. What is discernable from the first three centuries of dialogue that remains recorded is that ecumenism never fully dies, yet polemics and eventually apologetics become increasingly dominant tones, and the Qur'an seems still at times waiting its turn to speak for itself.

In America, Terry Jones and Rick Warren may be considered living counterparts to John of Damascus and Timothy I, respectively. In Academia, these may be Gairdner and Cragg. Though as it was in the first three centuries, it is now as well, that the ecumenists appear to show more respect for the Qur'an's own voice than do the polemicists. Ayoub and Bassetti-Sani are working hard to reconcile the Qur'an and the Bible, sometimes at the cost of their own held truths, and others are joining them on this quest. It is hoped that the historians of religion, Thomas, Goddard, Daniel, Shahīd and others, will offer more clarity than confusion to the task of the dialogician, who is the intended primary beneficiary of this study.

The Qur'an does appear to allow for some interpretive flexibility, however, in its historical context it does not seem to favour interpretations which reject the event of the crucifixion, allow for the deification of Mary, or deny the servanthood of Jesus to God, any more than those which justify the events of September 11, 2001 on the basis of the lesser *jihād*. The Qur'an is very likely corrective of all of these positions, Muslim and Christian, and historical inquiry is slowly providing the Qur'an a place for its own voice.

Now, far from a syncretistic project, the true ecumenism of Islam and Christianity is being explored by representatives willing to question their subjective commentaries in light of the possibility of God's objective revelation to the religious other. Historians of the religions of Christianity and Islam in dialogue, are able to report new and exciting possibilities. Thus it is possible, as shown, that what Christians wrestle with in the plurality in unity of God as Trinity, seems to be sufficiently similar to that with which Muslims wrestle in the Divine Names, that they are perhaps one and the same theological problem. It is possible that as the Qur'an diligently promotes unitarian monotheism, it also allows for trinitarianism as it allows for Divine Attributes, while sternly warning its readers to avoid any semblance of tritheism. It has been shown that Muslims have entertained the possibility that the Qur'an concedes that Jesus was indeed crucified, and Christians have likewise entertained the possibility that as the Qur'an makes clear, the Jews cannot be blamed for his death. Nevertheless, the scriptures agree that he is alive. And it is possible to consider now that that same Jesus experiences ontologically something of the Unity of Being with God that Muslims and Christians have both struggled to explain in their religious experience.

Muslims have entertained that the Gospel is uncorrupted, and Christians have entertained that the Qur'an is inspired by God. It is possible, dialogically speaking, that even though he was not likely the Paraclete of John, Muhammad was very possibly the seal of the prophets of Yahweh, just as Jesus is indeed a servant of Allah. It is very possible that war, rather than being a religious imperative, has been a distraction, from mutually supportive relationship as a religious imperative. It is possible, as their representatives have shown, that Muslims and Christians may live together democratically, under a mutually worshipful and fruitful social ethic. And it is possible, that all of these possibilities as explored, are simultaneously true. As these possibilities are recognized and entertained, perhaps a humble orthodoxy will growingly govern those who call themselves 'Muslim' and 'Christian', to accept the ambiguity in their respective scriptures as a divinely intended quality of revelation, out of the deepest respect for their mutually agreed upon transcendent and omnipotent One True God. It is possible that the most fruitful dialogue is a competitive self-giving love for one's neighbour.

## **Orthopraxy**

The Qur'an provides the foundation for orthopraxy as ecumenical dialogue, as Boulatta and others have shown. The World Council of Churches (WCC) agrees, affirming the, "common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action on behalf of the common good of

all people.”<sup>1074</sup> Prince al-Hasan bin Talal of Jordan notes that historically, social responsibility has played a part in bringing Christians and Muslims together, even though some of each have consistently tried to widen the division. Yet, “In both communities, such negative feelings or attitudes towards the ‘other’ have been basically atavistic rather than rational in nature.”<sup>1075</sup> This is balanced again by the WCC, which encourages Muslims and Christians to, “correct misconceptions,” and encourage the, “recognition of, and respect for, differences,” between the faiths.<sup>1076</sup>

Dardess and Mich present that even from a conservative ecumenical or liberal apologetical approach, Muslims and Christians possibly need little more than their shared teachings on social justice to begin to behave with the religious other for the benefit of society. Dardess and Mich present the centrality of social justice in both Christianity and Islam, remarking that poverty and justice are core elements in this shared mission. It is a mission that Christians and Muslims can struggle together in, for even, “As Jesus and Muhammad discovered, the justice of God is not established without a struggle or controversy.”<sup>1077</sup> This conclusion is made by these authors without the ecumenical foundation of the mutual identity of Allah with Yahweh, and so rings slightly hollow. Though Muhammad and Jesus may have worked together to serve the poor, without the mutual recognition of the One God by these two religious archetypes, they would likely have disagreed that one was his prophet and the other his ‘Son’. This core theological rift is most likely that which has kept Muslims and Christians from behaving well together as global citizens, and a conscious act of will alone will see exclusivists from both sides serving together in refugee camps and at soup kitchens.

In the wilful mutual pursuit of social justice, Christians and Muslims may become the kinds of friends that Askari says can address divisive issues, and perhaps entertain Arkoun’s unthinkable thoughts. Thus the orthopraxy project may have merit as a precursor to the *dia-Logos* project.<sup>1078</sup> As Muslim and Christian exclusivists lay down their theological differences in favour of communal social justice acts, they may see the religious other in the light of friendship, and witness of the other that obedience to God, be he Allah or Yahweh, trinitarian or unitarian, produces very similar social fruit. It may be then that they start to accomodate

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<sup>1074</sup> World Council of Churches Office on Interreligious Relations, “Documentation: Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 12, no. 4 (2001): 486.

<sup>1075</sup> El-Hasan bin Talal, “The Future of Muslim-Christian Relations: A Personal View,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 11, no. 2 (2000): 165.

<sup>1076</sup> World Council of Churches Office on Interreligious Relations: 486, 488.

<sup>1077</sup> Dardess and Mich, *In the Spirit of St. Francis & the Sultan : Catholics and Muslims Working Together for the Common Good*, 167.

<sup>1078</sup> This is especially true, as Heck notes, if Christians and Muslims are together in the project of selflessness. In the reduction or rejection of ego for the sake of common good, the religions find harmony in the realm of social ethics as predominantly community oriented rather than individualistic or relativistic. Heck, Ch. 3.



like fruit coming from a like source, or as James says, “Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? Does a fig tree produce olives, or a grapevine produce figs? No, and you can’t draw fresh water from a salty spring” (James 3:11-12).

## Perichoresis

Perichoresis is a term extending from the early developmental period of Christianity. In trinitarian terms, Perichoresis is the one nature in more than one hypostasis. Its meaning is that of a community of being, where the life of each of the Persons of the Trinity is interpenetrated by the others. There is such interpenetration between them that it is impossible to distinguish between one and the other. The term’s intended use was to describe the undescribable mystery in the relationship between God and Christ, and Christ and the Church, exemplified in Jesus’ words in John 17:20-21, “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” The conception of ‘unity of Being’ by Ibn ‘Arabī carries a similar tone and is indicative of the term’s appropriate use here. This term may be used of Christianity and Islam as two expressions of faith in a religion of a single ineffable nature, as our present historical context is revealing possible.

With the resurgence of ecumenism leading to a deepening divide between Includivists and Exclusivists whether Muslim or Christian, a perichoretic expression of Christian-Muslim faith is beginning to emerge. This is exemplified by case studies presented by Volf: Ann Redding, a former Episcopal priest who claims to be 100% Christian and 100% Muslim; and Ibrahim, an Islamic scholar and *hafiz* who follows Jesus as a Muslim.<sup>1079</sup> To these we may add what is known in Christian circles as the “Insider Movement.” The term refers to Muslims who have embraced the Christian view of Jesus, but retain most if not all of the Islamic traditional expressions of faith, including identifying themselves as Muslims. Best known among these may be Mazhar Mallouhi, who describes himself as a “Muslim follower of Jesus.”<sup>1080</sup>

With the arbitrary rejection or acceptance of the designations “Christian” and “Muslim” by people of faith, accompanying the amalgamation of expressions of faith and works of obedience traditionally associated with Islam and Christianity, it is becoming

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<sup>1079</sup> Volf, 195-196.

<sup>1080</sup> He notes that of all of the Islamic practices, only the *shahada* and the *hajj* are altered by the Insider Movement, and even these are not universally rejected. The present author has met Muslim followers of Jesus whose shahada is “*lā ilāha illallāh wa ‘Īsa kalimat allāh*” (there is no God but God and Jesus is his word), for example. A biography of Mallouhi is already published in Paul Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road : Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2007). The quote above is from an article written by Mallouhi specifically to address misconceptions of the movement. See Mazhar Mallouhi, “Comments on the Insider Movement,” *St. Francis Magazine* 5, no. 5 (2009): 3.

increasingly challenging for objective observers to distinguish where Christianity ends and Islam begins, or vice-versa. Thus we see in the mainstream media critiques of ecumenists like Rick Warren as syncretists, alleged creators of a 'heresy' dubbed 'Chrislam'.<sup>1081</sup> Volf quotes a section of Warren's prayer from the inauguration ceremony for US President Barack Obama, January 20, 2009. It deserves repetition here:

Almighty God, our Father, everything we see and everything we can't see exists because of you alone. It all comes from you. It all belongs to you. It all exists for your glory! History is your story. The Scripture tells us, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!" And you are the compassionate and merciful one toward everyone you have made.<sup>1082</sup>

In response to this prayer, his involvement in the *Yale Response*, and his partnership with the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), critics often accuse Warren of syncretism. This may be due to a general lack of knowledge of the potential closeness of the theologies of Islam and Christianity. Theologically, there may be decreasing distinction between the concepts of unity in plurality in God described as Trinity, or God described in his Most Beautiful Names. The manner in which these concepts are described by representatives of the two religious traditions has tremendous overlap. The mutual challenge of Nasr and Rahner, for example, is the explanation of plurality within God while maintaining monotheism. They agree that one God is all that is outside of creation, and that all of creation comes from one God, and yet as soon as theologians open their mouths to add any description to God whether in terms of Person or Attribute, the description appears to be immediately deficient. Muslim and Christian theologians thus face a similar limitation that only silence from both can truly honour, what Rahner calls, "the ultimately forbidden goal," of rendering logically and

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<sup>1081</sup> Rick Warren is Lead Pastor of the Southern Baptist Saddleback Church in Orange County, California, with a weekly attendance of approximately 20,000 people, the author of *The Purpose Driven Life* which has sold more than 30 million copies, and one of the signatories of the *Yale Response* to the *Common Word* document discussed above. In a report on its July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009 Independence Day celebrations, the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) website relates that, "Warren's presence wasn't the only thing contributing to the evangelical-like atmosphere of the assembly hall. The sound system, giant video screens, and slick mass production values recalled America's Protestant mega-Churches. Warren's presence created a lot of interest but the real buzz among the convention crowd was reserved for superstar converts to Islam like Sheikh Hamza Yusuf--perhaps Warren's equivalent in the American Muslim community--and Yusuf Islam." See Frankie Martin, "Celebrating July 4th with Rick Warren and 45,000 Muslims", Islamic Society of North America <http://www.isna.net/Interfaith/articles/News/CELEBRATING-JULY-4TH-WITH-RICK-WARREN-AND-45000-MUSLIMS.aspx> (accessed June 16 2011).

'Chrislam' can be found on several polemical Christian blogs now, often connected with Rick Warren. See the following blogs for example: Anonymous, "Chrislam Starts to Spread in America," in *Now the End Begins*, ed. Geoffrey Grider (Now the End Begins, 2011).; Anonymous, "American Churches to Embrace Chrislam on June 26, 2011," in *Now the End Begins*, ed. Geoffrey Grider (Now the End Begins, 2011).; Jim West, "Chrislam: The Inevitable Result of Political Correctness," in *Zwinglius Redivivus*, ed. Jim West (Wordpress.com, 2010).; D. L. Adams, "'Chrislam' - Core Values without a Core," in *Big Peace*, ed. Peter Schweizer (Breitbart.com, 2011).

<sup>1082</sup> Volf, 5. The first Biblical quote is from Deuteronomy 6:4, "Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." The sentence following contains an allusion to Psalm 145:8-9, "The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation." The phraseology of the last sentence quoted of Warren is an unmistakable employment of '*al-rahmān al-rahīm*', a most common phrase of Muslims.

intelligently the mystery of God.<sup>1083</sup> Thus in silence under the recognition of the ultimate truth of monotheism, Muslims and Christians stand with a single perichoretic theology, for whatever else might be spoken about God out loud by either, betrays the transcendence of God in the theology of both.

## Qur'anic Christianity

Historically, it seems that the Qur'an may have been able to sort through the Christological debates with a surgical precision unknown until now. Could it be that the Qur'an corrects the adoptionism of the Nestorians in Q19:35, the Arian Docetism and Jewish arrogance in Q4:155-158, the eating restrictions and Mariolatry of the Nazoraeans in Q5:5 and 5:116, the *muharraf* apocryphal 4 *Ezra* text in Q2:116-117, and the tritheism of the Philoponians in 4:171 and 5:73, simultaneously, all while guarding and defending the Christianity of Muhammad's family-in-law in Mecca (Monophysite),<sup>1084</sup> that of the learned Christian scholar Waraqa ibn Nawfal, for whom there seems no critique given at all, but praise and inclusion? Indeed, this would be a remarkable revelation. And yet, this is a perfectly reasonable conclusion from a non-reductionist historical perspective which considers the best of probability in the history of meanings. Furthermore, it must be conceded that of all things known of Christianity on the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Muhammad, that it may be said to have been neither catholic nor orthodox, is perhaps the truest, in the strictest senses of both terms.

When historians ask to whom the Qur'an responds when it speaks of Christians, Occam's razor most likely calls for a 'both-and' rather than an 'either-or' approach. Chasing the idea that there is one Christian sect out there that will justify each of the Qur'anic critiques of Christianity arguably requires much more effort in assumption than to accept that the Qur'an in fact responds to several of the Christian sects historically highly likely to exist at the time. If a Christian sect can be shown independent of the Qur'an to have existed on the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Muhammad, it is reasonable to suggest that its proponents were involved in Christological debates in which the voices of Muhammad, and the Qur'an, became increasingly authoritative. Thus there are very likely no "Qur'anic Christians," *per se*, that can be categorized by simple identification with a single doctrinal creed. There is, however, quite likely a Qur'anic Christianity to which it calls all Christians. The question is now, of all of the kinds of Christians most probably criticised by the Qur'an, to which branch(es) does it not

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<sup>1083</sup> Rahner, 81.

<sup>1084</sup> Shahid has presented strong evidence for the influence of Ethiopia on the Christianity of Mecca, which would indicate Monophysitism as the dominant doctrine. This may also explain why *Isā*, *ḥawāriyyūn*, and *injīl* appear for Jesus, disciples, and Gospels in the Qur'an. The terms are likely of Ethiopic Christian origin. See Shahid, "Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 Ad," 12-17.

respond in some way, and to what degree do the varied critiques of varied Christian doctrines disqualify whole branches of Christianity from its catholic 'common word' project? As the Qur'an appears to trim off the excess in the theologies of its Christian readers without rejecting Christianity categorically, to what Christian orthodoxy does it in fact steer them?

## Concluding Thoughts

Nasr outlines seven major issues that continue to plague the relationship between Christians and Muslims:

1. The Nature of God
2. The Finality of Revelation
3. The Status of Scripture
4. Sacred Language
5. Sacred Law
6. The Life of Christ
7. Modernism<sup>1085</sup>

These categories coincide with and contain the major themes which have been addressed above, indicating that little has changed in the major arenas for dialogue. Though some narratives which were developed for war, such as whether or not Allah of the Qur'an is Yahweh of the Bible, have been more or less closed, the great themes which dominated the growing early dialogue are great themes in dialogue still. Yet even Nasr notes that,

The obstacles mentioned above must not be considered insurmountable. They are discussed here, not to cause discouragement, but to present the reality of the present situation beyond political niceties and diplomatic decorum. Problems must first be stated in honesty before they can be solved. We believe, in fact, that with good will, love for truth and charity, rather than passion, fanaticism and love for power, most of these obstacles can be overcome.<sup>1086</sup>

All of these issues have been herein discussed, often presenting the Qur'an as an inert, brick-like tool used for either building bridges, or throwing at one's enemies. Yet the Qur'an, as it has also been shown, though often allowing its voice to be overcome by its defenders and enemies alike, is never voiceless. Neither is the Qur'an hopelessly shackled to the tone of its interpreter. The Qur'an, in its context, speaks into the relationship between Christians and Muslims, and has showed itself often as corrective of its friends as those who would presume themselves its enemies. The Qur'anic voice in Christian-Muslim dialogue is only recently finding among dialogicians the respect it commands, and in the quieting of the polemical tones

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<sup>1085</sup> Haddad and Haddad, 457-467.

<sup>1086</sup> Nasr, "Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles to Be Pondered and Overcome," 225.

of dialogue to hear the ecumenical tones of the Qur'an, Muslims and Christians may find themselves, shockingly at times, in harmony.

As historians of religion track the music of dialogue whether in cacophony or harmony, they do their best to compel dialogicians to remain respectful of historical context, and none has better abbreviated the core hope of those dialogicians than the historian Hugh Goddard, whose plea for honest dialogue is worthy of repetition:

No criterion of judgement can be applied to the faith of the other that has not already been applied to one's own faith. There must, in other words, be no double standards.<sup>1087</sup>

If each plays the notes they have been given according to agreed upon musical rules, they may unwittingly find in their radically different sets of sheets, complementary tunes in a single symphony. The rules for creating dissonance are well-known and defended, but rules for harmony are still being decoded. May the Composer find pleasure in the song of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

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<sup>1087</sup> Goddard, *Christians and Muslims : From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding*, 9.

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