Chapter xx
Various thoughts on the message of the Qur'an

a supplement text for Urdu translation.

The modern missionary movement, dating back to the Basle mission and other well known godly revivals, gave great hope that the missionary movements, beginning around 1787, would usher in the evangelisation of the world and therefore the coming of Christ.

Over these past 200 years much of what has passed for missionary work has been spoilt by the heavy attachment of the missionaries to their home culture and therefore has limited what could have been people movements, falling in love with Jesus Christ in a fresh and culturally appropriate way.

There have been bright spots, Hudson Taylor and his identification with the Chinese, C.T.Studd in Africa, Sadhu Sundar Singh in India and Tibet, Dr Saeed Khan Kurdistani, Bakhte Singh and others, all the way down to Phil Parshall and his fresh emphasis on contextualisation. Unfortunately these movements have often been squelched by boards and denominations because they could not think laterally, creatively and outside of their own culture bound interpretation of scripture.

I remember teaching at a youth seminar about the true meaning of the word Muslim which stands for surrender to the living God. In that pure sense I am a true Muslim but an Irish missionary copied the tape, edited it for his own purposes and circulated it to many other workers trying to discount an attempt to break the log jam of thinking in Muslims missions that I was experimenting with. His board could not understand the issues and therefore sent it to Charles Marsh, that great pioneer in Algeria, for guidance. His response was, “If this fire is hitting your mission, let the fire burn on.” That missionary still lives in the small world of his own culture, happily extracting converts into his own world.

I have no doubt, not even a reasonable one, that the Bible is the inspired word of God. I have seen too many miracles, too many answers to prayer too much healing in my inner self to even have a electron of doubt. It is in the interpreting and applying that Word that we sometimes differ. To communicate that difference to people who are theologically bound, have never worked cross culturally, even in their own land, and have not had an origin thought in their own heads is an impossible task. I believe that Jazz theology needs to be much more our approach.

I would also say that those who write and postulate about contextualisation, from an academic point of view really cannot understand the depth of feeling, the insights and the freedom there is in living in another culture brings. With the collapse of Communism many missions have turned from that field to the Islamic one and bring the same attitudes and responses as they had for Communism. This is tragic.

Some leaders have come into Muslim missions without having learned an Islamic language or having lived in an Islamic land and a new triumphalism is pervading their approach. “If it happened to Communism we can see it in Islam” they postulate.

They do not realise the forces that drive Islam, the sensitivities and the loyalties that it inspires amongst it adherents and its obvious rejection of western institutions, including the church as they see it. Yes there are some coverts but many come with ulterior motives. One young man in Iran I worked with became a Christian because he wanted to drink alcohol. Another I know wanted a white wife etc.

The church in Muslim lands has an unenviable position. They have stood for Christ, often in the face of
incredible odds. Even as I write my Armenian friend is telling of unspeakable things that happened to his grandfather and grandmother in Turkey in the 1920’s and yet he evidences a real love for Turks and Turkey now. He has moved on.

In order to survive, those churches have closed ranks and refused to change or reach out to their Muslim friends in this age. They are largely irrelevant and out of touch. There are a few saints who secretly do the work, often in the face of opposition from their own people and I salute them and praise their bravery.

Since then I have also moved on. I have sought new answers and in working with other fanatics, like my friend Nagy, we have sought to discover what it truly means to identify with Muslim people in their desire to please God, to stand against injustice and preserve their cultures. We still have not arrived but we have found other fanatics who are pushing the boundaries further out. Those who disagree with us I ask that you please be patient with us. We are trying to go boldly on where none, or very few, have been before. Maybe in another generation what we discover today maybe the norm for tomorrow. I am also aware that our work may also be written off in heaven as wood, hay and stubble. It is a step of faith and we are asking God to show where we should stop and not go.

This chapter is sent out to create discussion, to disturb and comfort others who are trying new ways in Muslim evangelism. God bless you with wisdom, boldness and faithfulness to Christ your labour of love, only God knows.

We therefore dedicate this volume to those many men and women who no one knows about but who have won the right to talk to Muslims, whatever their approach.

Ron George
Zurich 1998

A SPECTRUM OF APPROACHES TO MUSLIMS OVER TIME.

Early days: When the Arabs arrived in Damascus they were confronted with issues of miracles, or lack of them by Mohammad. John of Damascus embarrassed them and used miracles as a proof of prophethood, Jesus having many and Mohammad none. Thus there arose a set of Hadiths stating that people had seen Mohammed’s miraculous powers, singularly missing in the Qur’an.

Bishop Timothy, a Syrian priest was asked by the caliph what he thought of Mohammad, a very sensitive and testing question. His reply was “that he walked in the way of the prophets” When challenged why he did not then follow Muhammad he replied “then I would not be a Christian” This satisfied the caliph, as no offense had been given and loyalty to his own “ummah” had been shown.

Gradually Muslims and Christians settled down to a more or less peaceful coexistence that varied with the degrees of harshness of various rulers. All this was up set with the rise of a growing population of disheerited gentry in Europe who looked to the Middle East to fulfil their needs for an inheritance. Thus the Crusades were born.

The medieval period was a time when politics and religion were not separated and the enlightenment had not hit Europe. Islam was portrayed as the anti Christ, the devil incarnate. The figure of Prester John arose to give hope to failing Christian kings who could not overcome Islamic armies. John was to
be a King in the east who would overthrow the anti Christ. This attitude still exists today. Many in the USA today have not separated Islam and politics and see Muslims as the enemy.

The medieval period was a time when politics and religion were not separated and the enlightenment had not hit Europe. Bernard of Clairvaux called for a crusade, not through Byzantium but through North Africa against Islam. He was the author of the hymn, “Oh Jesus the very thought of you”.

With the enlightenment came new opportunities to look at Islam afresh. Modern missions were born and new translations of the Qur’an and Islamic texts gave more insight. Since that period the following themes have characterised missions to Islam.

1. The affirmation of the Uniqueness of Christ in God and the rejection of all and every other approach. Christ was unique and to serve and follow him to the exclusion of all others was paramount.
2. Others thought that the Christian faith was the very thing that Islam was really looking for and did not know it. There were bridges in Islam that allowed for Muslims to come to a greater understanding of faith and to leave Islam.
3. Christianity is a monotheistic religion and a partner with Islam and Judaism.
4. The social gospel came in with the more liberal wing of the church emphasising the need to meet human need and should be divorced from any witness. This caused a reaction by the evangelicals who eschewed all social work.
5. In times of oppression and persecution the church was to hold onto its own faith and by living amongst Muslims and talking with them they would have a witness amongst them.

Today we are witnessing several changes.

1. The radicalisation of Islam as the social Islamic experiments of Nasser and other post WWII leaders comes to nothing. This is because they did not have a world view that created those benefits to undergird their changes of approach. The West’s superior material wealth could not be generated in Islamic lands because of this Muslims turn to fundamentalism as a means of forcing or hoping that God would bless them. Neither had Islam undergone an enlightenment and Reformation that the west badly needed to go though lay the foundations for the industrial period of plenty (of waste, production, consumption and materialism)
2. This radicalisation will in turn fail and give way to a new and possibly more enlightened Islam as there are more and more Islamic students returning from western universities and bring new ideas to their homelands. Added to this is the impact of globalisation, often through the use of the internet, bringing knowledge of other cultures and ways.
3. A return to an Abrahamic religion and an Islamic form of Messianism in Christ. This we would call a true inculturation or incarnation of Christ in Islam.
4. The possible displeasure of God at the moral fibre of the western world and a preparation for its demise and the handing over of it to Islam.

Questions for discussion

1. Are there differences between the church and the Kingdom of God?
2. Is contextualisation theologically biblical and can it be done in an Islamic milieu?
3. What are the preeminent issues that could not be taken over from Islam?
4. Is it possible to create an Islamic Biblical creed?
Ron George

At this point maybe we should let the Qur'an speak for itself and see what its central clear message is.

In his introduction to a translation of the Qur'an Shaykh, Ahmad Darwish says:

1. There is not one single verse in the Koran that says “O Believers, do not befriend the Jews and the Christians ...” however in bad translations from Urdu to English you may find such mistranslation. The Arabic verse clearly states “Believers, take neither Jews nor Nazarenes (Christians) for your guides ...” in spirituality, which is understandable.

2. There are several verses in the Koran that refer to killing the unbelievers (worshipers of stones), such verses relate directly to the battle fields of 1500 years ago, when early Muslims were persecuted as the early Christians persecuted. True path of Islam is moderation, therefore Muslims should lead exemplary lives and preach the religion to non Muslims and not kill them. Over the centuries many non Muslims choose to live under Islamic protections (i.e. Spain) and were never subjected to persecution.

3. We need to replace the word “Christians” with the more accurate translation “Nazarenes”. To learn more about the Nazarenes and their roots, as well as the Christians and their roots, please refer to our informative research in the section “Prophet Jesus in the Koran” page 493.

Grand Shaykh, Professor Hasan Qaribullah, Dean of Umm Durman Islamic University, Shaykh, Ahmad Darwish (mosque@mosque.com) Reviewed by the former manager of Muhammad Ali.

There are at least three views about the origins of the Qur'an. Depending on your educational orientation you will find one of these more acceptable than the other and the process of enlightenment and modernization in the reform of Islam is more acceptable than the other.

Robin Hood effect.
Ask any child in UK who is Robin Hood and you will get the same answer. He was a high born man,
dispossessed by the wicked King John and his cronies, especially the Sherri of Nottingham. The accounts of his adventures are all set in middle England around Sherwood Forest. It is so widely believed that there stands in Nottingham a statue to the man himself. However the truth is that, if there was such a man, he came from Yorkshire in the far NE of England. Wandering troubadours sang his praises and invented stories about him but placed him in Nottingham, the centre of England where he would be more widely accepted than in the NE, a less acceptable place for an English hero to originate from. Poetry rises above history in this and many other cases including, possibly, the origins of Islam.

View 1. That the Qur'an originates in heaven and was given word by word from God over a period of time to His Prophet, Muhammad. The copy we have today is an exact replica of that transmission. It is to form the basis of all life and belief, reinforced by the recorded activities of the messenger and so the messenger is also partly the message as well.

View 2. Particularly during the under the European occupation of Islamic lands a great deal of interest was shown in translating these books and searching for historical events that surrounded their revelation. European orientalists put together such books as “The Historical Development of the Qur'an” Canon Sell, “Mohammad at Mecca”, “Mohammad at Medina” by Watt and so on, the bibliography is enormous.

With the rise of textual criticism and especially under John Wansbrough, Prof. Hawting, Cook and Crone newer thoughts emerged regarding the actual environment during the period of the rise of Islam and numerous researchers on comparative religious studies, numismatics, archaeology, textual examination, and so on that has given rise to some interesting scenarios much of which is captures in Ibn Warraq's world “What the Qur'an really Says”

Recent Qur'anic studies is helping us place the development of the Qur'an and Islam along with the context of Mohammad's mission into a historical framework, long missing in the equation. In the book Hagarism Cook and Crone present a world view that helps understand the story so far.

"Islamic civilization is the only one in the world which went through its formative period later than the first millennium B.C. Its emergence thus constitutes an unusual, and for a number of related reasons a peculiar, historical event. This book is an attempt to make sense of it.

In making the attempt we have adopted an approach which differs appreciably from that of more conventional writing in the field. First, our account of the formation of Islam as a religion is, radically new, or more precisely it is one which has been out of fashion since the seventh century: it is based on the intensive use of a small number of contemporary non-Muslim sources the testimony of which has hitherto been disregarded.*( It follows, of course, that new discoveries of early material could dramatically confirm, modify or refute the positions we have taken up.)

Secondly, we have expended a good deal of energy, both scholastic and intellectual, on taking seriously the obvious fact that the formation of Islamic civilization took place in the world of late antiquity, and what is more in a rather distinctive part of it. Finally, we have set out with a certain recklessness to create a coherent architectonic of ideas in a field over much of which scholarship has yet to dig the foundations.

It might not be superfluous for us to attempt a defence of this enterprise agaormoree raised eyebrows of the specialist, but it would certainly be pointless: it is in the last resort by specialists that our work will be judged, and the judgment of specialists is not open to corruption by prefaces. What has been said
should also suffice to warn the non-specialist what not to expect: this is a pioneering expedition through some very rough country, not a guided tour. There is however one particular group of readers who are in a special position. For although the characters who appear in our story are all of them dead, their descendants are very much.

In the first place, the account we have given of the origins of Islam is not one which many believing Muslim can accept: not because it in any way belittles the historical role of Muhammad, but because it presents him in a role quite different from that which he has taken on in the Islamic tradition.”

Islam has traditionally stood for logic, science knowledge (ilm). That is in classical Islam except in the approach of the texts that they hold dear. However there are varied interpretations of those same texts that give rise to sects and deviations within and outside of Islam. A rigorous analysis of truth attested by various proofs is essential if we are to follow God and do His will on earth. The skills of Arabists, historians, grammarians etc are badly needed to arrive at a correct exposition. Of course traditionalist will feel threatened that their private interpretations are questioned but in the name of knowledge and truth we must all strive for a full and accurate exposition as to what the revelations says and means.

There is a good deal in this book that may disliked by the Muslim who has lost his religious faith but retained his ancestral pride. What we wish to stress for such a reader is that the strong evaluative overtones of the language in which we have analyzed the formation of Islamic civilization do not add up to any simplistic judgment for or against. We have presented the formation of the new civilization as a unique cultural achievement, and one to which the marauding of our own barbarian ancestors offer no parallel whatever; but equally we have presented the achievement as one which carried with it extraordinary cultural costs, and it is above all the necessary linkage between the achievement and the costs that we have tried to elucidate.

Postscript: For a helpful survey covering most of the Syriac sources used In this book, see now S. P. Brock, ‘Syriac Sources for Seventh-Century History’, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies 1976. For an occurrence of the phrase abl al-islam in an inscription dated A.H. 71 which we overlook at p. 8, see H. M. el-Hawary, ‘The oldest Islamic monument known’, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society 1932, p. 290. For a dating of the earliest Koran fragments, which though for our purposes not sufficiently precise, should have been cited at p. 18, see A. Grohmann, ‘The problem of dating early Qur'ans’, Der Islam 1958.

PART I
WHENCE ISLAM?

IJUDEO-HAGARISM

Virtually all accounts of the early development of Islam take it as axiomatic that it is possible to elicit at least the outlines of the process from the Islamic sources. It is however well-known that these sources are not demonstrably early. **There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century**, and the tradition which places this rather opaque revelation in its historical context is not attested before the middle of the eighth. The only way out of the dilemma is thus to step outside the Islamic tradition altogether and start again.
1. If we choose to start again, we begin with the Doctrina Iacobt, a Greek anti-Jewish tract spawned by the Herodean persecution. It is cast in the form of a dialogued between Jews set in Carthage in the year 634; it was in all probability written in Palestine within a few years of that date. At one point in the argument reference is made to current events in Palestine in the form of a letter from a certain Abraham, a Palestinian Jew. A false prophet has appeared among the Saracens. They say that the prophet has appeared coming with the Saracens, and is proclaiming the advent of the anointed one who is to come \(\text{tou erkhomenou teilemmou kai Khristou}\). I, Abraham, went off to Sykamina and referred the matter to an old man very well versed in the Scriptures. I asked him: `What is your view, master and teacher, of the prophet who has appeared among the Saracens?' He replied, groaning mighty: `He is an impostor. Do the prophets come with sword and chariot? Truly these happenings today are works of disorder... But you go off, Master Abraham, and find out about the prophet who has appeared.' So I, Abraham, made enquiries, and was told by those who had met him: `There is no truth to be found in the so-called prophet, only bloodshed; for he says he has the keys of paradise, which is incredible.'

There are several points of interest in this account. One is the doctrine of the keys. It is not of course Islamic, but there are some slight indications that it was a doctrine which the Islamic tradition had been at pains to repress: there is a group of traditions in which the keys of paradise are sublimated into harmless metaphor, and a Byzantine oath of abjuration of Islam mentions the belief that the Prophet was to hold the keys of paradise as part of the `secret' doctrine of the Saracens. The point is not of great intrinsic interest, but it does suggest that we have in the Doctrina a stratum of belief older than the Islamic tradition itself. Of greater historical significance is the fact that the Prophet is represented as alive at the time of `the conquest of Palestine. This testimony is of course irreconcilable with the Islamic account of the Prophet's career, but it finds independent confirmation in the historical traditions of the Jacobites, Nestorians and Samaritans; the doctrinal meaning of the discrepancy will be taken up later.'

But the really startling thing about the Doctrina is its report that the Prophet was preaching the advent of `the anointed one who is to come'. That is to say the core of the Prophet's message, in the earliest testimony available to us outside the Islamic tradition, appears as Judaic messianism. The idea is hardly a familiar one, but again it is strikingly confirmed by independent evidence.

There is in the first place a Jewish apocalypse of the mid-eighth century, the `Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohay', which preserves a messianic interpretation of the Arab conquest. Since the messiah belongs at the end of an apocalypse and not in the middle, this interpretation is likely to derive from an earlier apocalypse written soon after the events to which it refers. The relevant passage is as follows:

When he saw the kingdom of Ishmael that was coming, he began to say: `Was it not enough, what the wicked kingdom of Edom did to us, but we must have the kingdom of Ishmael too?' At once Metatron the prince of the countenance answered and said: `Do not fear, son of man, for the Holy One, blessed be He, only brings the kingdom of Ishmael in order to save you from this wickedness. He raises up over them a Prophet according to His will and will conquer the land for them and they will come and restore it in greatness, and there will be great terror between them and the sons of Esau.' Rabbi Simon answered and said: `How do we know that they are our salvation?' He answered: `Did not the Prophet Isaiah say thus: "And he saw a troop with a pair of horsemen, etc."? Why did he put the troop of asses before the troop of camels, when he need only have said: "A troop of camels and a troop of asses"? But when he, the rider on the camel, goes forth the kingdom will arise through the rider on an ass. Again: "a troop of asses", since he rides on an ass, shows that they are the salvation of Israel, like the salvation of the rider on an ass.'
In addition, the 'Secrets' contains some references to the Kenite of Num. 24:21 which are intelligible only as the residue of an alternative messianic interpretation of the conquest. 15

Now it is in no way surprising that a Jewish apocalypse of the time should present the invasion which terminated Roman rule in Palestine as a positive event in the eschatological drama, and it is as such that it appears in another such composition, the apocalyptic poem 'On that day'.16 But the author of the passage quoted from the 'Secrets' does more than this: he presents the role of the Ishmaelites and their prophet as intrinsic to the messianic events themselves. This interpretation makes sense when set alongside the testimony of the Doctrina that the Prophet was in fact proclaiming the advent of the messiah, and at the same time provides independent confirmation of its authenticity. It may of course seem mingle that Jews should accept the credentials of a presumably Arabian prophet as harbinger of the messiah; but there was good Judaic precedent for the performance of an Arab in this role.17

The other direct confirmation of the messianism of the Doctrina is to be found fossilised in the Islamic tradition, and incidentally reveals to us the identity of the messiah himself: 'Umar, the second caliph of the Islamic schema retains even there the messianic designation al faruq, the Redeemer.19 At the same time his entry into Jerusalem is an appropriate performance in this role,20 while the 'Secrets' would seem to have him engage in the equally messianic task of restoring the Temple. 21 'Umar's embarrassing by-name was not of course left un glossed in the Islamic tradition.

When eventually the original Aramaic sense of the term had been successfully forgotten, it acquired a harmless Arabic etymology and was held to have been conferred by the Prophet himself. An earlier view at tempted a historical rather than an etymological evasion: it was the people of the book who called 'Umar the faruq, and the appellation some how slipped onto the tongues of the Muslims.22 Detailed historical accounts of the way in which an innocently curious 'Umar was hailed in Syria as the faruq23 are accordingly balanced by the attribution to him of acts which emphatically deny his role as a Judaic redeemer. 24 It is ironic that the inevitable attribution of everything to the Prophet is in this instance probably right. For if there is contemporary evidence that the Prophet was preaching the coming of the messiah, it can hardly be for tuitous that the man who subsequently came bears even in the Islamic tradition a transparently messianic title.

We have so far confined our attention to the messianic aspect of the conquest of Palestine; but as might be expected, the sources provide indications of a wider intimacy in the relations of Arabs and Jews at the time.

The warmth of the Jewish reaction to the Arab invasion attested by the Doctrina25 and exemplified by the 'Secrets' is far less in evidence in later Jewish attitudes.26 More significantly, it is entirely absent from those of contemporary Christians, whether Orthodox27 or heretical. 28 At the same time the sources attest the translation of these philo-Arab sentiments into concrete political involvement: the Doarina refers to 'the Jews who mix with the Saracens',29 while according to an early Armenian source the governor of Jerusalem in the aftermath of the conquest was a jew.30 This evidence of Judeo-Arab intimacy is complemented by indications of a marked hostility towards Christianity on the part of the invaders. The converted Jew of the Doctrina protests that he will not deny Christ, the son of God, even if the Jews and Saracens catch him and cut him to pieces.31 The Christian garrison of Gaza put the same determination into practice, and was martyred for it.32 A contemporary sermon includes among the misdeeds of the Saracens the burning of churches, the destruction of monasteries, the profanation of crosses, and horrific blasphemies against Christ and the church.33 A violent Saracen hatred of the cross is also attested in an early account of the arrival of the invaders on Mt Sinai. 34 And the doctrinal corollary of all this finds neat expression when the
Armenian source mentioned above has an early Ishmaelite ruler call upon the Byzantine emperor to renounce ‘that Jesus whom you call Christ and who could not even save himself from the Jews.’ There is nothing here to bear out the Islamic picture of a movement which had already broken with the Jews before the conquest, and regarded Judaism and Christianity with the same combination of tolerance and reserve.

What the materials examined so far do not provide is a concrete picture of the way in which this judeo-Arab involvement might have come about. For this we have to turn to the earliest connected account of the career of the Prophet, that given in an Armenian chronicle written in the 660s and ascribed to Bishop Sebeos.

The story begins with the exodus of Jewish refugees from Edessa following its recovery by Heraclius from the Persians towards 628.

They set out into the desert and came to Arabia, among the children of Ishmael; they sought their help, and explained to them that they were kinsmen according to the Bible. Although they [the Ishmaelites] were ready to accept this close kinship, they [the Jews] nevertheless could not convince the mass of the people, because their cults were different. At this time there was an Ishmaelite called Mahmet, a merchant; he presented himself to them as though at God's command, as a preacher, as the way of truth, and taught them to know the God of Abraham, for he was very well-informed, and very well-acquainted with the story of Moses. As the command came from on high, they all united under the authority of a single man, under a single law, and, abandoning vain cults, returned to the living God who had revealed Himself to their father Abraham. Mahmet forbade them to eat the flesh of any dead animal, to drink wine, to lie or to fornicate. He added: 'God has promised this land to Abraham and his posterity after him forever; he acted according to His promise while he loved Israel. Now you, you are the sons of Abraham and God fulfills in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham, go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham, and none will be able to resist you in the struggle, for God is with you.' Then they all gathered together from Havilah unto Shur and before Egypt; they came out of the desert of Pharan divided into twelve tribes according to the lineages of their patriarchs. They divided among their tribes the twelve thousand Israelites, a thousand per tribe, to guide them into the land of Israel. They set out, camp by camp, in the order of their patriarchs: Nebajoth, Kedar, Abdeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These are the tribes of Ishmael... All that remained of the peoples of the children of Israel came to join them, and they constituted a mighty army. Then they sent an embassy to the emperor of the Greeks, saying: 'God has given this land as a heritage to our father Abraham and his posterity after him; we are the children of Abraham; you have held our country long enough; give it up peacefully, and we will not invade your territory; otherwise we will retake with interest what you have taken.'

This version of the origins of Islam is an unfamiliar one. It is also manifestly ahistorical in its admixture of Biblical ethnography and de monstrably wrong in the role it ascribes to the Jewish refugees from Edessa. This role, quite apart from its geographical implausibility, is in effect chronologically impossible: it means that Muhammad's polity could hardly have been founded much before 628, whereas as early as 643 we have documentary evidence that the Arabs were using an era beginning in 62 2.39 Persian-occupied Palestine would be a far more plausible starting-point for the Jewish refugees than Edessa. This need not however invalidate the picture which Sebeos gives of the structure of Jewish-Arab relations in the period leading up to the conquest, and the authenticity of this account is in fact strikingly confirmed from a rather unexpected quarter. In contrast to the standard Islamic account of the relations between Muhammad and the Jewish tribes of Medina, the Jews appear in the document known as the ‘Constitution of Medina’ as forming one community (umma) with the believers despite the retention of their own religion, and are distributed nameless among a number of
Arab tribes. Since this document is a patently anomalous and plausibly archaic element of the Islamic tradition, as agreement in these respects with the earliest narrative account of the origins of Islam is highly significant. Sebeos can therefore be accepted as providing the basic narrative framework within which the closeness of Judeo-Arab relations established earlier in this chapter belongs.

What Sebeos has to say is also of considerable doctrinal interest in its own right. In the first place he provides a clear statement of the Palestinian orientation of the movement, a feature implicit in the messianic scenario and independently attested in the Jacobite historical tradition; it is of course in some tension with the insistence of the Islamic tradition that the religious metropolis of the invaders was, already at the time of the conquest, identified with Mecca rather than Jerusalem. More specifically, the presentation of the movement as an irredentism directed to the recovery of a divinely conferred birthright to the Promised Land is suggestive of the messianic in-gathering of the exiles. Equally the exodus into the desert with which the story begins can plausibly be seen as the enactment of a well-established messianic fantasy. At the same time this role of the desert, taken with the toponymic evocation of the original Israelite conquest of the Land and the statement that the Prophet was well-acquainted with the story of Moses, is strongly suggestive of the rabbinic parallelism between the Mosaic and messianic redemptions: the emphasis is, in other words, Mosaic rather than Davidic. Thus Sebeos, without directly attesting the messianic theme, helps to provide a doctrinal context in which it is thoroughly at home.

But Sebeos also offers something entirely absent from the sources examined so far: an account of the way in which the Prophet provided a rationale for Arab involvement in the enactment of Judaic messianism. This rationale consists in a dual invocation of the Abrahamic descent of the Arabs as Ishmaelites: on the one hand to endow them with a birthright to the Holy Land and on the other to provide them with a monotheist genealogy. Neither invocation was without precedent. But if the message was hardly a very original one, it already contained, alongside the rationale for Ishmaelite participation in an Israelite exodus, the germ of an Arab religious identity distinct from that of their Jewish mentors and proteges.

There is no good reason to suppose that the bearers of this primitive identity called themselves `Muslims'. The earliest datable occurrence of this term is in the Dome of the Rock of 691 and it is not otherwise attested outside the Islamic literary tradition until far into the eighth century. Our sources do however reveal an earlier designation of the community, and one which fits well with the context of ideas presented by Sebeos. This designation appears in Greek as `Magaritai' in a papyrus of 642, and in Syriac as `Mahgre' or `Mahgraye' from as early as the 640s; the corresponding Arabic term is muhajirun. There are two notions involved here.

The first, rather lost in the Islamic tradition, is genealogical: the 'Mahgraye', as an early Syriac source informs us, are the descendants of Abraham by Hagar. But alongside this ascribed status there is also an attained one which is fully preserved in the Islamic tradition: the muhajirun are those who take part in a hijra, an exodus.

In the Islamic tradition the exodus in question is from Mecca to Medina, and its date is identified with the inception of the Arab era in 622AD. But no early source attests the historicity of this exodus, and the sources examined in this chapter provide a plausible alternative in the emigration of the Ishmaelites from Arabia to the Promised Land. Two points are worth adducing here in favour of this alternative. In the first place, the muhajirun of the Islamic tradition are by the time of the invasion of Palestine only the leading element of the conquering religious community; and yet the Greek and Syriac sources use the terms `Magaritai' and `Mahgraye' with every appearance of referring to the community as a whole. Secondly, the Islamic tradition preserves examples of the use of hijra and related terms in contexts where the emigration is not within Arabia but from Arabia to the conquered
territories. There is even a tradition which by implication narrows the destination to Palestine: there will be hijra after hijra, but the best of men are to follow the hijra of Abraham."

The 'Mahgraye' may thus be seen as Hagarene participants in a hijra to the Promised Land, and in this pun lies the earliest identity of the faith which was in the fullness of time to become Islam.

2 HAGARISM WITHOUT JUDAISM

The mutual understanding that `you can be in my dream if I can be in yours' may have provided a viable basis for an alliance of Jews and Arabs in the wilderness. But when the Jewish messianic fantasy was enacted in the form of an Arab conquest of the Holy Land, political success was in itself likely to prove doctrinally embarrassing. Sooner rather than later, the mixture of Israelite redemption and Ishmaelite genealogy was going to curdle. For inherent in the messianic programme was the question once put to 'Jesus of Nazareth: `Lord, wilt thou now restore the kingdom to Israel?' Jesus, of course, had been excellently placed to evade the question, and his followers had proceeded to shape a religion around this evasion. But the very success of the Arabs precluded a gradual dissociation from Jewish messianism, and required instead a sharp and immediate break.

The context in which this break actually occurred may well have been the central symbolic act of the messianic programme, the restoration of the Temple. On the one hand we have the readiness of the early sources to speak of Arab building activity on the site as restoring the Temple,' which at least suggests that this is what the Arabs originally took themselves to be doing; and in particular, we have the statement of the `Secrets' that the second king who arises from Ishmael will be a lover of Israel who `restores their breaches and the breaches of the temple'. But on the other hand we have the account given by Sebeos of an overt quarrel between Jews and Arabs over the possession of the site of the Holy of Holies, in which the Arabs frustrate a Jewish design to restore the Temple and build their own oratory there instead. It is not unlikely that the `Secrets' and Sebeos are referring to successive phases of Judeo-Arab relations. But Sebeos places his account of the break in the immediate aftermath of the first wave of conquests; the days of the messiah seem at all events to have been pretty short-lived.

The first thing the Hagarenes needed in this predicament was a rationale for the break with Jewish messianism. The Islamic tradition preserves some evidence of Hagarene inventiveness in this context: we have already seen the manner in which the designation of 'Umar as `Redeemer' was rendered innocuous, and we shall come later to the curious fate of the corresponding notion of `redemption'. But significant as such shifts may have been, they were also somewhat superfluous. The problem had long ago been faced and solved in a very different style by the Christians.

As the Hagarenes broke with their erstwhile Jewish proteges and acquired large numbers of Christian subjects, their initial hostility to Christianity was dearly liable to erosion. Thus Isho'yahb III, Nestorian Catholicus t. 64 7-8, comments on the highly benevolent attitude of the Arabs towards the church,' while another Nestorian writing in the Jazira in the last decade of the century recollects that the invaders had had an order from their leader in favour of the Christians. At the same time a Coptic life of Patriarch Isaac of Rakoti attests the idyllic relations that obtained between him and the governor 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Marwan in the 680s, and the latter's love of the Christians. Against this background, a certain doctrinal softening towards the person of Jesus himself was to be expected. Already in an account of a disputation between a Christian patriarch and a Hagarene emir which probably took place in 644," the emir appears neither to reject nor to affirm the messianic status of Jesus. 12 But the dearest evidence of this softening is to be found in the account preserved in a fragment of an early Maronite chronicle of Mu'awrya's actions on becoming `king' in Jerusalem in 6 s 9 : he proceeds to pray at Golgotha, Gethsemane and the grave of the Virgin, a behavioural endorsement of the redemptive death of Christ. "This of course is more than the Islamic tradition was to concede: Islam has no notion of Jesus as a saviour, and despite its acceptance of his messianic status, it contrives to perpetuate the
early Hagarene hatred of the cross through a clever invocation of Docetism. Mu'awiya himself, according to the same Maronite source, attempted to issue coins without the cross.' S But it is the recognition of Jesus as the messiah, already implicit in Wawiya's devotions and explicit in the Koran, that concerns us here. The most interesting attestation of this recognition occurs in a letter of Jacob of Edessa (d.c. 708) on the genealogy of the Virgin:

That the messiah is of Davidic descent, everyone professes, the Jews, the Mahgraye and the Christians. That the messiah is, in the flesh, of Davidic descent is thus professed by all of them, Jews, Mahgraye and Christians, and regarded by them as something fundamental. The Mahgraye too... all confess firmly that he Jesus is the true messiah who was to come and who was foretold by the prophets; on this subject they have no dispute with us, but rather with the Jews. They reproachfully maintain against them... that the messiah was to be born of David, and further that this messiah who has come was born of Mary. This is firmly professed by the Mahgraye, and not one of them will dispute it for they say always and to everyone that Jesus son of Mary is in truth the Messiah.

The significance of this passage relates less to the content than to the manner of the belief. It enables us to see in the rather inert and perfunctory Koranic recognition of Jesus as messiah the residue of a basic Hagarene tenet vigorously maintained in controversy with the Jews. The point of such a tenet is obvious enough. In the figure of Jesus Christianity offered a messiah fully disengaged from the political fortunes of the Jews. All the Hagarenes had to do to rid themselves of their own messianic incubus was to borrow the messiah of the Christians.

Where the exchange of a Judaic for a Christian messianism was less helpful to the Hagarenes was in the development of a positive religious identity of their own. The harder they leant on Christianity to dissociate them selves from the Jews, the greater the danger that they would simply end up by becoming Christians like the majority of their subjects. In conceptual terms the key to their survival lay in the primitive religious identity already delineated in Judeo-Hagarism, and in particular in the Prophet's invocation of the God of Abraham in order to present an alien monotheism to the Arabs as their ancestral faith. From this starting-point the Hagarenes went on to elaborate a full-scale religion of Abraham.

The idea of a religion of Abraham is of course prominent in the Koran. It is clearly presented as an autonomous religion (16:12 4, 22 :77); and its founder is not only categorised as a prophet (19:42, cf. Gen. 20:7), he is also for the first time endowed with a scripture, the Suhuf Ibraham (5 3 : 3 5 f, 8 7 : 18 f). The doctrinal resources of this faith extend to a scripturally ambiguous but essentially revivalist role for Muhammad himself (2 :1 2 3 ), and it also seems to have provided the primary context for the development of the notion of islam. But the only point at which the Koranic religion of Abraham retains any practical plausibility is the account of his foundation, in conjunction with Ishmael20, of what the Islamic tradition was to identify as the Meccan sanctuary (2 :Il 8ff ).

What is missing in the Koranic data is the sense of an integral and concrete project for a Hagarene faith. It is a Christian source which makes good this loss by introducing the notion of Abraham's 'commandments' also alluded to in the `Secrets' 22 - and by identifying them as circumcision and sacrifice. This late Umayyad text, a Syriac disputation between a monk of Bet Hale and a follower of the emir Maslama, includes the following exchange:

THE ARAB: Why don't you believe in Abraham and his commandments, when he is the father of prophets and kings, and scripture testifies to his righteousness?
THE MONK: What sort of belief in Abraham do you expect from us, and what are these commandments which you want us to observe?
THE ARAB: Circumcision and sacrifice, because he received them from God.25

Two other sources provide partial parallels to this Hagarene espousal of circumcision and sacrifice under an Abrahamic sanction. The first is an exchange of letters said to have taken place between 'Umar II and the emperor Leo III as it appears in the Armenian chronicle of Levond.26 Here one of 'Umar's reproaches against the Christians is that they have arbitrarily changed all the laws, turning circumcision into baptism and sacrifice into eucharist.27 The other source is a prophecy of the exodus of the Hagarenes from the desert attributed to St Ephraim, in which they are described as a people `which holds to the covenant of Abraham'.28

Now the identification of the cultic pillars of the religion of Abraham as circumcision and sacrifice has two interesting implications. The first concerns the relationship of this faith to Islam. It is of course true that the elements of the Abrahamic cult survive into the Islamic tradition.29 But they have lost their original centrality:30 there is a tendency for sacrifice to be absorbed into ritual slaughter,31 and there are even doubts as to the necessity of circumcision.32 Equally, except in the special case of sacrifice in the religious metropolis, the patriarchal rationale for these practices is far less in evidence. We are thus faced with a general dissipation of the structure of the religion of Abraham in Islam, a point the significance of which will be taken up later.33

Secondly, both circumcision and sacrifice are attested in pre-Islamic Arabia,34 and there is thus a certain presumption that it is there that the origin of the Hagarene practices is to be sought. In the case of sacrifice, moreover, this presumption is reinforced by a further consideration. The Christian sources indicate sacrifice to have been a standard cultic practice in Syria. Thus the Jacobite patriarch Athanasius of Balad, in a letter of 684 regarding the religious dangers of Christian intercourse with the conquerors, is particularly concerned to stop Christians eating the sacrifices of the `pagans';35 and Jacob of Edessa, in the course of some curious observations on the religious malpractices of the Armenians, mentions that the Arabs practice circumcision and make three genuflexions to the south when sacrificing.36 Now sacrifice outside the religious metropolis, whatever its Abrahamic scriptural sanction,37 could not in practice be a borrowing from one of the older monotheisms. There are thus grounds for seeing in Hagarene circumcision and sacrifice the perpetuation of pagan practice under a new Abrahamic aegis.38

What this suggests is that the role of Abraham in the early development of Hagarism was not simply to give an ancestral status to monotheist theory; it was also to confer a monotheist status on ancestral practice.

This is surely the context which gave Islam the curious term hanif, so closely associated with Abraham and his faith: by borrowing a word which meant `pagan' in the vocabulary of the Fertile Crescent, and using it to designate an adherent of an unsophisticated Abrahamic monotheism, the Hagarenes contrived to make a religious virtue of the stigma of their pagan past.39 At the same time we can discern in this trend the beginnings of the far-reaching reorientation whereby the origins of Islam came to be seen in an elaborate and organic relationship to a real or imagined pagan heritage.

The religion of Abraham provided some sort of answer to the question how the Hagarenes could enter the monotheist world without losing their identity in either of its major traditions. But in itself it was too simple and threadbare a notion to generate the basic religious structures which such a will to independence required. The faith which had most to offer the Hagarenes at this level was Samaritanism. The Samaritans had faced the
problem of dissociation from Judaism before the Christians, and without ever being absorbed by them. They had also solved the problem in a style very different from that of the Christians, and a good deal more relevant to the immediate needs of the Hagarenes: where the Christians sublimated the Judaic categories into metaphor, the Samaritans replaced them with concrete alternatives. Given this basic affinity, a Hagarene reception of Samaritan ideas was facilitated conceptually by the prominence of Moses in both judeo-Hagarism and Samaritanism, and politically by the very innocuousness of the Samaritan community.

The earliest Hagarene borrowing from the Samaritans of which we have evidence is their scriptural position. At one point in the disputation between the patriarch and the emir referred to above, the emir demands to be told how it is that, if the Gospel is one, the Christian sects differ among themselves in matters of belief. The patriarch replies:

Just as the Pentateuch is one and the same, and is accepted by us Christians and by you Mahgraye, and by the Jews and the Samaritans, and each community is divided in faith; so also with the faith of the Gospel, each heresy understands and interprets it differently.

Hagarism is thus classed as a Pentateuchal religion. Later the discussion shifts to the divinity of Christ and his status as son of God, and the emir demands proof from the Pentateuch. The patriarch replies with a barrage of unspecified scriptural citations, the weight of which was dearly prophetic. It is the emir's reaction at this point that is crucial:

The illustrious emir did not accept these from the prophets, but demanded [that] Moses [be cited] to prove to him that the messiah was God.

To accept the Pentateuch and reject the prophets is the Samaritan scriptural position.

Adherence to this scriptural position can also be detected in some passages of Levond's version of the correspondence between 'Umar and Leo. One of 'Umar's questions is this:

Why does one not find in the laws of Moses anything about heaven, hell, the Last judgment or the resurrection? It is the Evangelists . . . who have spoken of this things according to their own understanding.

To this Leo replies with an exposition of the gradual unfolding of the divine revelation, insisting that God did not speak to men once only through a single prophet, and denying his interrogator's position that 'everything vouchsafed by God to the human race was revealed through Moses'. Alongside this Mosaic fundamentalism may be set the disparagement of the prophets that appears in another of 'Umar's questions:

Why do you not accept all that Jesus says about himself, but search the writings of the prophets and the psalms with a view to finding testimonies to the incarnation of Jesus? You . . . are dissatisfied with what Jesus testified about himself, but believe in what the prophets said. But Jesus was truly worthy of belief, was close to God, and knew himself more closely than writings distorted and perverted by peoples unknown to you.

In each case, the tendency on the Hagarene side is dearly towards the Samaritan scriptural position. The way in which the great Judaic prophets scarcely figure in the Koran is perhaps the Islamic residue.
The Samaritan scriptural position had something to offer the Hagarenes on two levels. Specifically, it deleted the scriptural basis of the Davidic component of Judaic messianism - neither the legitimacy of the Davidic monarchy nor the sanctity of Jerusalem are attested in the Pentateuch;54 and at the same time, it did something to reinforce the patriarchal emphasis of the religion of Abraham. More generally, the espousal of the Pentateuch without the prophets defined an attitude to the question of religious authorityq at least in its scriptural form, which was polemically viable in the monotheist world.55

The Hagarenes had this found solutions to the most pressing problems they faced in the aftermath of the break with Judaism. Their religion of Abraham established who they were, their Christian messianism helped to emphasise who they were not, and their scriptural position, in addition to helping out with messianism, endowed them with a sort of elementary doctrinal literary, a line to shoot. The trouble was that these solutions were utterly inconsistent with one another.

3 THE PROPHET LIKE MOSES

The combination of the religion of Abraham with an instrumental Christian messianism was in itself a curious one, and the adjunction of the Samaritan scriptural position did nothing to render it more plausible. On the one hand the rejection of the prophets, by the very neatness with which it excised the scriptural basis of Davidic messianism, made nonsense of the recognition of the Christian messiah; and on the other, the recognition of the Pentateuch alone meant a Mosaic dominance which went badly with the notion of a religion of Abraham. But the root of the trouble was that the Hagarenes had not yet faced up to the basic dilemma of their religious predicament. They had begun with an uneasy combination of Israelite redemption and Ishmaelite genealogy; the specific content of each term might change, but the fundamental problem remained that of making an alien religious truth their own. There were really only two solutions. On the one hand they could proceed after the manner of the Ethiopian Christ ians, that is to say by themselves adopting Israelite descent. But in view of the play they had already made of tLeir Ishmaelite ancestry, it is hardly surprising that they should have clung to it throughout their entire doctrinal evolution. On the other hand, if they would not go to the truth, the truth
might perhaps be persuaded to come to them. On the foundation of their Ishmaelite genealogy, they had to erect a properly Ishmaelite propheto-logy. It was a daring move for so religiously parvenu a nation, but it was the only way out.

The initial doctrinal adaptions analysed in the previous chapter had left Muhammad himself distinctly underemployed. The repression of messianism had reduced his mission to that of a monotheist preacher of rather ill-defined status. It was possible to give this status more precise definition by invoking the notion of a revivalist messenger sent to restore the religion of Abraham. But from the materials preserved in the Koran, it would appear that the predominant trend was to align the Prophet with a series of non-scriptural warners sent to gentile peoples. That this archaic model reflects a significant doctrinal stratum is suggested on the one hand by the frequency and relative lucidity of its presentation, and on the other by the pull which it exercises even on the figure of Moses. The key to its attractiveness must have lain in its combination of simplicity and evasion: the reduction of the message to a mere warning delivered in a parochial ethnic context obviated the need to define its relationship to the wider domain of monotheist revelation.

It was just this relationship that stood in need of definition if an Ishimaelite prophetology was to be created. The Arabian warner had to advance beyond his comfortably parochial role into the dizzy heights of scriptural revelation: he had now to be aligned, not with Hud and Salih, but with the Moses of Mt Sinai. Two features of the Mosaic complex facilitated this alignment. The first was the ease with which it is possible to shift within the Mosaic paradigm from redemption to revelation, the Red Sea to Sinai. It was not difficult to see Muhammad in the Mosaic role of the leader of an exodus, and there was therefore no reason why he should not complete the performance by receiving revelation on an appropriate sacred mountain. This shift of emphasis is elegantly caught in the contrasting formulations of the relationship of Muhammad to Moses given by two Armenian chroniclers: for the early Sebeos, Muhammad is well acquainted with the story of Moses, while for the late Samuel of Ani he is imperfectly acquainted with the law of Moses. But the most striking attestation of the shift is the curious semantic evolution of the term furqan, from its original Aramaic sense of `redemption' to its secondary Arabic sense of `revelation': in the image of Is. 11:7, the salvation of the rider on the ass had been transmuted into the scripture of the rider on the camel.

The other helpful feature of the Mosaic complex was the Deuteronomic promise of a `prophet like Moses'. The Koran itself is too modest to cast the Prophet in this role: indeed it presents his revelation as a mere Arabic attestation of that of Moses (46:11 etc.). But the Sara provides clear instances of the identification of Muhammad as the Deuteronomic prophet. The Mosaic complex thus provided both the model and the sanction for the recasting of Muhammad as the bearer of a new revelation.

Where the Hagarenes had to fend for themselves was in composing an actual sacred book for their prophet, less alien than that of Moses and more real than that of Abraham. No early source sheds any direct light on the questions how and when this was accomplished. With regard to the manner of composition, there is some reason to suppose that the Koran was put together out of a plurality of earlier Hagarene religious works. In the first place, this early plurality is attested in a number of ways. On the Islamic side, the Koran itself gives obscure indications that the integrity of the scripture was problematic, and with this we may compare the allegation against `Uthman that the Koran had been many books of which he had left only one. On the Christian side, the monk of Bet Hale distinguishes pointedly between the Koran and the Surat al-tiaqara as sources of law, while Levond has the emperor Leo describe how Hajjaj destroyed the old Hagarene `writings'. Secondly, there is the internal evidence of the literary character of the Koran. The book is strikingly lacking in
overall structure, frequently obscure and inconsequential in both language and content, perfunctory in its linking of disparate materials, and given to the repetition of whole passages in variant versions. On this basis it can plausibly be argued that the book is the product of the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions. 16

At the same time the imperfection of the editing suggests that the emergence of the Koran must have been a sudden, not to say hurried, event. But again, there is no direct early testimony as to the date of this event.17 The Dome of the Rock does attest the existence, at the end of the seventh century, of materials immediately recognisable as Koranic in a text that not infrequently coincides with our own;18 but it does not of course give any indication of the literary form in which these materials normally appeared at the time. The earliest reference from outside the Islamic literary tradition to a book called the Koran occurs in the late Umayyad dialogue between the Arab and the monk of Bet Hale; 19 but as we have seen, it may have differed considerably in content from the Koran we now know. In any case, with the single exception of a passage in the dialogue between the patriarch and the emir which might be construed as an implicit reference to the Koranic law of inheritance,20 there is no indication of the existence of the Koran before the end of the seventh century. Now both Christian and Muslim sources attribute some kind of role to Hajjaj in the history of Muslim scripture. In the account attributed to Leo by Levond, I.,-lajjaj is said to have collected and destroyed the old Hagarene writings and replaced them with others composed according to his own tastes; 21 the Muslim traditions are more restrained, though far from uniform. 22 It is thus not unlikely that we have here the historical context in which the Koran was first put together as Muhammad's scripture.

Once Muhammad was established in the role of a Mosaic scriptural prophet, the identity of the new faith was finally secure. In the first place, a shift from a prophetology more reactionary than Judaism to one more progressive than Christianity brought the older monotheist religions into a more comfortable perspective. The Mosaic presence receded somewhat, 23 and the Torah according to one tradition was deferentially damped in Lake Tiberias.24 Equally the Hagarenes were now in a position to recognise the prophets of the Judaic canon 24 and to extend the role of Jesus by aligning him between Moses and Muhammad in a succession of great lawgivers on the Mosaic model. 211 Secondly, the problem of the national isation of prophecy had received as effective a solution as it was ever to get. 21 The appearance of a full-blooded Ishmaelite in the role of the final lawgiver of religious history resolved the worst of the tension between alien truth and native identity. At the same time the boldness of this solution rendered the religion of Abraham, with its timid espousal of the last prophet that Ishmael could legitimately share with Israel, conceptually otiosc.28 As its structure went into dissolution, its cultic prescriptions gave way to the less atavistic pillars of the religion of Muhammad.29 All in all, the new faith was now secure enough in its distance from its Judaic origins to confront Judaism on its home ground: when 'Abd al-Malik built the dome in which he proclaimed the prophetic mission of Muhammad, he placed it over the temple rock itself. 10

At the same time, the Samaritan and Abrahamic stepping-stones to the religion of Muhammad endowed it with a category central to its status as an independent faith, that of islam.3' The Samaritan contribution was the notion of islam in the sense of submission to God. The verb aslama has cognates in Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. But whereas neither Jewish nor Christian literature provides satisfactory precedent for the Islamic usage, 12 we find exact parallels in the most important Samaritan text of the pre Islamic period, 33 It could of course be argued that this represents the contamination of
the Samaritan textual tradition by Islamic influence; but in the case of Islam this is unlikely, not least because the Samaritan usage, sSuE the Islamic, is at home in a range of similar uses of the same and other roots. 34

But if Samaritanism provided the Hagarenes with the notion of Islam, it provides only a due to the significance it was to acquire for them. The context of the idea in Samaritanism is patriarchal; and its leading example Abrahamic. The religion of Abraham was thus the most appropriate locus for the assimilation and development of the borrowing, and the Koranic material bears out this inference. In general, this material gives a strong sense of the paradigmatic status of Abraham's submission and of the central role of submission in his religion. 31 Specifically, the Koranic treatment of the binding of Isaac, the key example of Abrahamic submission, is accompanied by an interpretation which is characteristically Samaritan.

This role of the religion of Abraham does something to explain the interest taken by the Hagarenes in a rather peripheral Samaritan notion; but it hardly accounts for the prominence achieved by this notion in Islam There are two directions in which one might look for the challenge which evoked this response. In the first place, we dearly have to do with a general religious category defining the proper relationship between man and God which occupies a position analogous to that of the covenant in Judaism. The possibility thus 'arises of seeing in Islam a development of the covenant of Abraham in the face of the challenge of the Mosaic covenant: This would at least make a certain sense of a very refractory feature of the semantics of the term, the fact that the Koranic usage of Islam and related forms frequently requires an intransitive sense, probably as primary. The most plausible sense of the root to invoke here is that of 'peace', and the sense of 'to make peace' is well-attested for the cognate of aslama in targurnic Aramaic;37 from this it can be argued that the primary sense of Islam was entry into a covenant of peace. 38 If so, the reinterpretation of this conception in terms of the ultimately donj~knant sense of 'submission' can readily be seen as intended to differentiate the Hagarene covenant from that of Judaism.

But if Islam is the conceptual rival of one Mosaic notion, it is also the historical successor of another. In early Hagarism the idea of 'exodus' had constituted the central duty of the faith, and at the same time provided its adherents with a name. 39 It was as if the central category of the religion of Moses had been a reference to the Red Sea. But when redemption became scripture, the Hagarenes needed a category more Sinaitic in scope. Hence Islam replaced hijra as the fundamental religious duty,40 and the 'Mahgraye' accordingly became Muslims.

4 THE SAMARITAN CALQUES

Judaism is among other things the religious sanction of a polity: the concentration of its capital, Jerusalem, and the legitimation of its state, the Davidic monarchy. The polity itself had long disappeared, but its memory remained, most vividly in the restorationist aspirations of messianism. Any religious movement dissociating itself from Judaism had perforce to exorcise the ghost of this polity.1 The followers of Jesus had done so by rendering the meaning of the messiah and his city innocuously spiritual: a heavenly Jerusalem was good enough for a sect whose kingdom was not of this world.2 But the Hagarenes, being in immediate possession of political power, required a solution of a more drastic and concrete character. It is here that the abiding structural legacy of Samaritanism to Islam is to be found, despite the complexities induced by a variety of
secondary interactions, in the form of a remarkable pair of Hagarene calques.3

The first of these is the Meccan sanctuary. The core of Samaritanism was the rejection of the sanctity of Jerusalem and its replacement by the older Israelite sanctuary of Shechem. This meant that when the Hagarenes in turn disengaged from Jerusalem,4 Shechem could provide a simple and appropriate model for the creation of a sanctuary of their own. The parallelism is striking. Each presents the same binary structure of a sacred city closely associated with a nearby holy mountain, and in each case the fundamental rite is a pilgrimage from the city to the mountain. In each case the sanctuary is an Abrahamic foundation, the pillar on which Abraham sacrificed in Shechem finding its equivalent in the rukn of the Meccan sanctuary.5 Finally, the urban sanctuary is in each case closely associated with the grave of the appropriate patriarch: Joseph (as opposed to Judah) in the Samaritan case, Ishmael (as opposed to Isaac in the Meccan.

These parallels are the more remarkable in that the Meccan sanctuary is clearly only the terminus of a complex development. In what follows we shall identify the major processes at work in this development, and attempt a speculative account of the way in which they may have interacted.

In the first place, the location of the Hagarene Shechem in Mecca is demonstrably secondary. The Islamic tradition, of course, leaves us in no doubt that Mecca was the aboriginal Abrahamic sanctuary of the Ishmaelites; but there is no lack of evidence to suggest that it was in fact quite some time before the Hagarenes knew whether they were coming or going.6 Negatively, no early source outside the Islamic literary tradition refers to Mecca by name. On the face of it the earliest references are those found in one Syriac version of the apocalypse of pseudo-Methodius; but although the apocalypse itself dates from the late seventh century, the references to Mecca which distinguish this version are likely to be secondary.7 The next Christian reference occurs in the `Continuatio Byzantiae Arabica',8 a source dating from early in the reign of Hisham.9 The Koran, on the other hand, does make one reference to Mecca (48:24), and in the context of military operations related to the sanctuary, but it never actually locates the sanctuary there; 10 and it refers to an abrogated qibla which in the context can hardly be identified as Jerusalem (2:138).

Positively, the Koran itself tells us the name of the place where the sanctuary actually was: Bakka (3:90). The Islamic tradition is naturally at pains to identify this place with Mecca," and none of our sources shed any light on its original location. There is, however, one source of uncertain date, the Samaritan Aramaic text known as the Asatir, which suggests that the name Bakka may be the residue of an archaic phase in the search for a Hagarene sanctuary. According to this text, the children of Nebajoth built Mecca, as it is written: `as thou goest (b'kb) towards Assyria, before all his brethren he fell' (Get. 2 f: i 8). 12 The b'kb of this verse, read baka in Samaritan Hebrew,13 is a dear reference to the place we know from the Koran as Bakka, and the context of the verse links it neatly with the death of Ishmael. This strained exercise in Biblical philology might of course be nothing more than an instance of inveterate Samaritan antiquarianism. But it may also be that we have here the residue of a Hagarene attempt to procure from their Samaritan mentors a Pentateudhal sanction for a Hagarene sanctuary. 14

It thus makes sense to scan the map of western Arabia for possible traces of discarded sanctuaries, and a number of places present interesting features in this context. In the Hijaz itself, the evidence is highly unsatisfactory in that it derives almost entirely from the Islamic tradition. There are never theless two places worth noting: Yathrib, to which we shall return's and Ta'if Ta'if presents one suspicious parallelism with Shechem in that both (in contrast to Mecca) are sanctuaries located in famously green environments;" and it is the subject of one suspicious Islamic tradition, to the effect
that it had once been a place in Palestine.17

Further north the quality of the evidence improves, although the problems still evade neat solution. We now reach an area for which Jewish settlement is well attested in pre-Islamic times, and for which a sacred geography had already been sketched out in the Jewish Targums. Here, in contrast to the deep south, the Hagarenes did not have to start from scratch - one reason why it was a good place to start.

Through their habit of up-dating Biblical place-names, the Targums Provided versions of Genesis in which the wanderings of the key figures - Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael - were transposed onto north-west Arabia.18 In the first place, some of these targumic renderings provided a shallow mapping onto provincial Arabia.9 The effect was to confer a patriarchal status on the Nabatean cultic centres of Petra and Elusa. We do not know how late these pagan traditions survived in the area. But we have already noted the characteristic Uanifist transvaluation of pagan practice which would have applied here, and it was long ago pointed out that there are some curious links between the pagan cults of provincial Arabia and the Meocan cult as we know it from the Islamic tradition. 20

In the second place, other renderings provided a deeper mapping in which the terminus was not Elusa but Hagra,2' the Arabic al-Hijr.22 The most interesting point here is the mention of Uagra in connection with the death of Ishmael in Gen. 2 s : 18. Al-Hijr was thus an obvious place for a grave of Ishmael. That the Hagarenes did in fact make this use of it is suggested by a curious feature of Meccan topography: even in Mecca, Ishmael is buried in the hi r. In other words, we seem to have here a striking parallel to the case of Bakka. In each case the Hagarenes appear to have set out to find themselves a sanctuary from Gen. z s : 18, in one case via the Samaritan Pentateuch, in the other via the Jewish Targum; and in each case they seem to have abandoned the site, taking the place names with them to their final Meccan repository.23

The targumic renderings thus presented the north-west as appropriate terrain for a Hagarene sanctuary; and the connections of Mecca with al Hijr and the paganism of provincial Arabia suggest that this potentiality may in fact have been exploited. Such a hypothesis would go well with the prominence of the north-west in the rather meagre Arabian geography of the Kor'an.24 and would make sense of some anomalous indications in the Islamic tradition that the sanctuary was at one stage located to the north of Medina.25

But the importance of the targumic north-west in the sacred geography of the Hagarenes is most dramatically confirmed by what we know of the early history of the qibla: it is towards somewhere in north-west Arabia that they appear to have turned in prayer. In the first place, we have the arheological evidence of two Umayyad mosques in Iraq, that of Hajjaj in Wasit and another attributed to roughly the same period near Baghdad. These mosques are oriented too far north by 3 3 degrees and 30 degrees respectively;26 and with this we may compare the literary testimony to the effect that the Iraqi qibla lay to the west.21 Secondly, we have the literary evidence relating to Egypt.28 From the Islamic side there is the tradition that the mosque of 'Amr b. al-`As in Fustat pointed too far north, and had to be corrected under the governorship of Qurra b. Sharik.29

From the Christian side we have the remarkable statement of Jacob of Edessa, a contemporary eye-witness, that the `Mahgraye' in Egypt prayed facing east towards the Ka`ba.30 The combination of the archaeological evidence from Iraq with the literary evidence from Egypt points un ambiguously to a sanctuary in north-west Arabia, and with this it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the location of the Hagarene sanctuary in
Mecca was secondary.

The other major source of perturbation in the sacred geography of Arabia was the search for a suitable scenario for the Mosaic activities of the Prophet. In the first instance this meant resiting the Hagarene exodus. Negatively, the Prophet was disengaged from the original Palestinian venture by a chronological revision whereby he died two years before the invasion began.31 Positively, a less embarrassing destination for the exodus was sought in the non-Palestinian conquests: the Islamic tradition preserves traces of a transfer of the notion of the promised land to the invasion of Iraq, 32 and of a generalisation of the exodus to the conquered territories as a whole." But the definitive solution was to detach the exodus from the conquests altogether and relocate it within Arabia. Thus in the Koran the `day of redemption' (8 :42) has become an episode in the biography of the Prophet, identified in the Islamic tradition with the battle of Badr. Conversely the in-gathering of the Jewish exiles to Palestine at the hands of the Redeemer became their expulsion from Arabia at the hands of a Muslim caliph, 34 and the Jewish collaborators of the Palestinian venture became the Arab (but not Ishmaelite) Ansar of Medina.35 The transposed exodus was then sealed into its new Arabian setting with the tradition `There is no hijra after the conquest of Mecca'. 36

Transposing an exodus is complicated because it necessarily involves more than one place. The Islamic tradition operates with two basic categories: the exodus takes the Prophet to the `province', the madina, 37 whence he prepares the recovery of the `metropolis', the umm al-quna. Now it makes good historical sense to suppose that the Prophet initiated the invasion of Palestine from some Arabian base.38 This base could conceivably have been Yathrib, 39 although the association of Medina with Midian in some sources" and general geographical plausibility might suggest a location farther north. The crucial category is however the metropolis, originally Palestinian, but already in the Koran manifestly Arabian.4’ The problem of setting up such a metropolis could be approached in either of two ways.

The most obvious solution was simply to up-grade the base to metropolita status: Muhammad's `province' was now reinterpreted as his `city'. That this solution was in part adopted is suggested by the curiously metropolitan character which Medina displays in certain respects: it is itself a sanctuary,42 it is in effect the final destination of the Hagarene exodus ,43 and unambiguously the political metropolis of early Islamic history.44 The alternative was to pivot the exodus on the provincial status of the base: Medina was, so to speak, held constant, while the sacred conquest shifted from Jerusalem to Mecca. Despite the metropolitan features of Medina, this is the solution to which the Islamic tradition substantially inclines.

At this point we need to recall an important feature of the doctrinal background: the advance from the religion of Abraham to that of Muhammad. The Abrahamic sanctuary was dearly intended as the Hagarene metropolis; but for an Islam conceived as the religion of Muhammad, a Muhammadan sanctuary might seem a more appropriate centre. What in fact emerged was a compromise in which Mecca retained the upper hand: `Mecca was Abraham's sanctuary and Medina is my sanctuary,' as the Prophet says ,45 but Mecca remained the cultic centre of Islam. This Meccan resilience is surprising: one might have expected the Abrahamic sanctuary to be absorbed or left to decay along with the rest of the Abrahamic cult. The explanation we would suggest is that the primacy of Mecca was saved by the superimposition on the Abrahamic sanctuaury of another extraneous Mosaic role. When redemption became scripture, the Hagarenes found themeselves in need of an Arabian Sinai. They had to find it moreover in a part of Arabia less contaminated by Judaism than Medina, the scene of the transposed
and retrojected Hagarene break with the Jews.

It does in fact make some sense to analyse the Meccan complex as an Abrahamic sanctuary skewed by Mosaic revelation. In the Islamic tradition, the Meccan Sinai on which the Prophet receives his first revelation of course Hira.46 But 'Arafat, the mountain belonging to the Abrahamic complex, also bears traces of Sinaic contamination. In the first place, while the form of the hajj suggests the Samaritan pilgrimage to Mt Gerizim, its ritual content presents striking parallels to the Biblical account of the waiting of the Israelites by Mt Sinai.41 It is as though the ritual were reenacting a waiting of the Ishmaelites while their own prophet went up their own mountain. Secondly, the Meccan complex differs in one major respect from that of Shechem: the 'house of God' has been moved from the mountain into the town4s - though the actual ritual of sacrifice has, rather inconsistently, been left behind.49 It would do something to explain this denudation of the mountain if the model had at some stage been Sinai rather than Gerizim.

In any case, Mecca was adopted as the scene of Muhammad's early revelations; and with this we have the essentials of the curious pattern of Hijazi sacred geography, in which the Mosaic roles of the Prophet are distributed between the distinct sanctuaries of Abraham and Muhammad.

The other major Samaritan calque was a rationale for political authority among the Hagarenes. Judaic messianism, quite apart from being Judaic, was inherently a religious legitimation of a climactic event, not of an on going authority. Equally the Christian empire which the Hagarenes displaced was a mere adjunction of two distinct conceptual orders which provided no intrinsically religious rationale for imperial rule.50 What neither the Christians nor the Jews could contrive was an intrinsically religious legitimation of an on-going authority. And this, oddly enough, was precisely what the Samaritans could offer: the central political value of Samaritanism is the continuing legitimacy of the Aaronid high-priesthood.51 The eternal priesthood thus made it possible for the Hagarenes to abandon the millennium without collapsing into kingship.52

That the Islamic imamate53 is a Samaritan calque is suggested by the structural resemblance of the two institutions. In each case we have an office in which supreme political and religious authority are fused, and in each case the primary qualification for office is the combination of religious knowledge with a sacred genealogy.54 The analogy is obvious enough, and was perceived long ago: the Samaritans themselves in their Arabic writings adopted the imamate to translate their own high-priesthood.55

It is however in the case of the `Alid imamate that the parallelism is most striking. In the first place, in Shi'ism as in Samaritanism, the religious knowledge takes on a marked esoteric flavour.56 Secondly, the genealogical qualification sharpens into descent from a particular collateral of the Prophet, Aaron in the Samaritan case and 'Ali in the Islamic;57 and the parallelism becomes explicit in the Shiite traditions which support the claims of 'AN to the imamate by asserting and developing the proposition that 'Ali is to Muhammad as Aaron to Moses.58 Thirdly, it is in some remarks on the Shi'ism of the second civil war in what appears to be a near-contemporary Arabic text that the clearest characterisation of priestly authority in Islam is to be found, accompanied by the striking designation of the priests as kahins.59 Finally, it is just possible that in the Koranic account of the golden calf we have an allegorical condemnation of the Samaritan role in the making of the `Alid high-priesthood.60

As in the case of the Meccan sanctuary, the case for a Samaritan model is basically a rather simple one. But here again, this case needs to be qualified by an attempt to sketch in the evolution which the concepts
underwent in Hagarism before achieving their definitive Islamic form. The source of the perturbations in this case seems to have been a secondary resurgence of Judaic influence.

The notion of a high-priestly authority was not of course alien to Rabbinic Judaism. But the actual character of religious authority as it existed in this milieu was dearly antithetical to the smooth functioning of such an Institution. In the long run this does much to account for the differentiation of orthodox Islam from Shiasm: with the dispersal of religious authority among a disorganised learned laity, it is hardly surprising that the genealogical qualification should have been relaxed and that imamic learning should have lost its esoteric edge. In the short run, the rabbinical background helps to explain the emergence in the strongly Judaic milieu of Iraq of a movement which stripped the imamate of its priestly character. Kharijism did of course in general accept the imamate - what concrete alternative did Judaism have to offer? But the knowledge of the imam was denuded of any esoteric quality, and the very notion of a sacred genealogy was rejected.62 It is appropriately to the Kharijites who seceded from Ali in the first civil war that the Islamic tradition attributes the slogan ‘there is no judgment but God’s’: despite the characteristically Samaritan form of the jingle, its content looks passably like a denial of one of the basic high-priestly prerogatives.63

The most important Judaic contribution was, however, the reassertion of the original messianic drive of Judeo-Hagarism in a new conceptual setting. It was again in Iraq that the messiah returned as the mahdi.64

Doctrinally, the transformation undergone by the repressed messiah was considerable, and indeed it seems most likely that the model for the mahdi was originally not the messiah but Moses redivivus.65 But whatever the doctrinal disparity, it is dear enough that the mahdi had inherited the role of political redeemer which lies at the heart of Judaic messianism.

It makes sense in genetic terms to identify two quite distinct Hagarene attempts to define the meaning of their politics: the continuing legitimacy of a Samaritan high-priesthood as against the imminent consummation of a neo-Judaic mahdism. It also makes a fair amount of sense in terms of the Islamic sources to insist on the distinct and even antithetical character of the two notions into at least the middle of the eighth century. On the one hand we have the imamate handed down in the priestly `Alid lineages of Hasan and Uusayn, the Eliezer and Ithamar of the Samaritan schema, and the freedom of these lineages from mahdian contamination until the period after the `Abbasid revolution. And on the other hand we have the outer lineages of the holy family, pretenders who have no status within the Samaritan schema and whose primary roles are mahdian.66

Yet at some stage, perhaps in the half century after the `Abbasid revolution, the two antithetical notions interacted. What concerns us about this rapprochement is not its politics but its central conceptual mechanism.

It is a prominent feature of the doctrine attributed by the Islamic sources to Ibn Saba' that 'Ali is identified as the heir of Muhammad in explicit analogy with Joshua in respect of Moses. 61 This use of the Mosaic schema has two interesting implications. In the first place, Joshua was not just the successor of Moses, but his only successor. To identify 'Ali, not as the first of a line of high priests, but as the sole successor of the Prophet, was to clear the future for the coming of the mahdi. Secondly, to cast 'Ali as Joshua is properly to make of him a layman unrelated to the Prophet, as opposed to a priestly brother. 68

The archaic purity of this doctrine is apparent in the way it turns on the fact that 'Ali cannot be Aaron and Joshua at once. But the coexistence of rival castings of 'Ali was likely to issue in conflation, and the key to the Islamic notion of the imamate is precisely the fusion of the two Mosaic figures. The Joshuan successor and the Aaronic brother have come together in the compromise which makes 'Ali the
cousin of the Prophet. More generally, the eternal priesthood and the sole successorship have merged into a line of more or less priestly successors, with the characteristic Shi‘ite identification of the last of the line as the mahdi. The qualifications for office - religious knowledge, more or less esoteric, and a sacred genealogy, more or less narrowly defined - combine with the dynastic pattern to perpetuate the Samaritan high-priesthood. But the identification of the institution as a successorship to the Prophet constitutes the residue of the mahdic manipulation of the figure of Joshua. The fusion was nicely expressed in a reinterpretation of the idea of the caliphate: the vicar of God (khalifat allah) became the Prophet's successor (khalifat rasul allah), and the first such successor was neatly accommodated in the two-year gap created by the retrojection of the Prophet's death to 632.

5 BABYLONIA

With the elevation of Muhammad to the role of a scriptural prophet and the assimilation of the Samaritan borrowings, Hagarism had given way to something recognisably Islamic. The transition can plausibly be placed in the late seventh century, and more particularly in the reign of 'Abd al-Malik. On the one hand, the numismatic, documentary and architectural remains of this period manifest a new and assured religious persona. And on the other, the period is marked in the Islamic tradition by the destruction and rebuilding of sanctuaries, political conflicts revolving around mahidic and imamic themes, and the attempt to impose a standard Koranic text memories which find some confirmation outside the tradition and are strongly suggestive of a period of drastic religious change. Further, it is to the reign of 'Abd al-Malik that recent research has traced the origins of Islamic theology. There is thus reason to assume that the outlines of Islam as we know it had already appeared by the beginning of the eighth century.

There is, however, no reason to include in these outlines the rabbinical culture which is so pronounced a feature of classical Islam. In the first place, such a development is a priori unlikely. 'Abd al-Malik's Islam had emerged under Syrian aegis, and there was little in the Syrian environment to force upon the Hagarenes the combination of a holy law with a learned laity. The initial Hagarene involvement with Judaism had been too brief in duration and too messianic in content to leave much scholastic residue. Equally the slow percolation of cultural influence from the overwhelmingly Christian environment was unlikely to push the Hagarenes in this direction. Above all Samaritanism, the major influence on the structure of Hagarism in its formative period, provided a model which was substantially the antithesis of the rabbinical pattern. In terms of the social embodiment of religious authority, Samaritanism is characterised by the esoteric learning of a hereditary priestly elite; and in terms of the intellectual content of this learning, Samaritanism, for all its Mosaic emphasis, does not appear to have been a halakhic faith to anything like the same extent as Judaism.

In the second place, such scant evidence as we have regarding the relevant aspects of Hagarism tends to confirm these inferences in two ways. First, there are indications from the Islamic side of the relative insignificance of the category of religious law in Hagarism. Islamic law preserves memories of Umayyad legal practice, but hardly of anything that could be styled Umayyad law; and equally, the scripture which Hagarism bequeathed to classical Islam was one distinctly low in halakhic content. Secondly, it is worth noting that in so far as there are indications of legal awareness, they point to a holy law based squarely if naively on scripture.

There can in fact be little doubt that Islam acquired its classical rabbinic form in the shadow of Babylonian Judaism, probably in the aftermath of the transfer of power from Syria to Iraq in the middle of the eighth century. The Judaic model is established by the fact that no other faith offered the same combination of holy law and learned laity, and this general structural resemblance is reinforced by the evidence of specific borrowings, most obviously the method and term qiyas. The Babylonian
environment is scarcely more open to doubt: Babylonia was in this period the unrivalled centre of
rabbinic Judaism, and it is equally to this region that research from the Islamic side has traced the
origins of Islamic law.12

The attitude of the early Iraqi schools towards the sources of law is correspondingly close to
that of the rabbis. In particular, there is the same rather unthinking acceptance of an oral tradition
perfunctorily placed under the general aegis of the relevant prophet. In the eyes of the rabbis their oral
tradition as a whole went back to Moses, as in the maxim that `All Torah is Mosaic halakha from
Sinai.'14 Likewise the early Iraqi lawyers use the notion of `sunna of the Prophet' to invoke a similarly
general sanction for the living tradition of their school. At the same time the role of scripture in early
Islamic law appears to have been minimal, which may reflect a combination of a simplistic
mishnaic model with the belated appearance of the Koran.” One is tempted to say that the halakha of
Iraq is as innocent of scripture as the scripture of Syria is innocent of halakha.

This innocence was rudely terminated by the interconfessional rumpus on the status of oral
tradition which broke out in the second half of the eighth century. This controversy was an event of
major significance in both the Jewish and Muslim communities, and it even seems to have infected the
most important Christian community of Babylonia, the Nestorians.18 In both Judaism and Islam, the
established way of thinking was challenged by an outright rejection of oral tradition in favour of a
uniquely scriptural foundation for the sacred law. On the Judaic side, this rejection took the form of
Karaism. On the Muslim side, it appears as an early doctrine of the Mu'tazila. 19

If the issue was the same in both communities, the resources available to the opposing groups
were significantly different. In the Judaic case, the rabbis were already in the habit of attributing their
tradition to Moses and could cite a chain of authorities to establish the authenticity of the
transmission;20 this chain was duly refurbished to meet the Karaite challenge.21 But the rabbis were in
no position to proceed in this fashion in respect of each individual item of the tradition. The history of
its transmission between Moses and the rabbis had been preempted by categories which were too
clumsily unitary to admit of such differentiation. Hence the talmudic dimension of rabbinic
scholarship, the attempt of the gemara to, establish that the individual items were not only mutually
compatible but also scripturally sanctioned.22 And because the rabbis were in possession of a large
and varied scriptural corpus with a good measure of halakhic content, the opportunities for such
demonstration were quite rich.

Now it can be argued that any fundamentalist rejection of tradition needs more in the way of
stuffing than is to be found among the fossilised meanings of scripture. To that extent the difference
between the Judaic and Islamic researchers is simply that where the former finds its stuffing in Qumranic
messianism,23 the latter finds it in Greek rationalism. 24 But not all scriptures are equally amenable to
the purposes of fundamentalists, and in this case the differing endowment of the two groups was
arguably crucial. Just because the rabbis had the scriptural resources for their gemara, their Karaite
opponents could hope to make a viable legal position of what one might call their reduction of mishna
to midrash. The Hebrew scriptures, heavily exploited by analogy, thus sufficed to keep Karaism in
business as a halakhic faith.25 The Mu'tazila were less fortunate: their scripture was shorter, less
varied, thinner in halakhic content, and the resulting strain is manifest in two ways. On the one hand,
Mu'tazilite law is all root and no branch:26 they attempt to eke out the scriptural foundations of law
with reason, and end up with reason instead of law. And on the other hand, the outright rejection of the
oral tradition itself disappears from the doctrines of the school. 27 Islamic law was always happy to
place itself under a general Koranic aegis; but the reduction of mishna to midrash item by items is just
not a feasible operation in Islam.

The Muslim rabbis, by contrast, were far better placed than their Jewish equivalents to respond
to the fundamentalist challenge. The history of the transmission of the oral tradition between the
Prophet and the eighth century scholars was still gratifyingly plastic. It was therefore possible to defend
the oral tradition item by item, tracing back each individual element to the Prophet with some suitable
chain of authorities (isnad). Where the fundamentalists have failed to reduce Muslim mishna to midrash, the traditionists were able to glorify it by the multiplication of isnads: the criticism of isnads is the Muslim gemara.28

Thw triumph of Shifi`i's solution to the problem of the oral tradition can thus be seen as an apt response to the logic of the situation. But it was more than that. Both the naive acceptance of the oral tradition among the early Iraqi lawyers, and its outright rejection among the Mu'tazila, display the old Hagarene dependence on non-Muslim, in this case Judaic, models.29 Now Shifi`i's solution, like so much else, makes its first appearance in Babylonia; 3° and it can be related in a peripheral fashion to earlier rabbinic notions.' Yet the fact remains that it is without substantial Judaic antecedents. The Hagarenes had achieved a new, independent and effective solution to a central dilemma of learned monotheism; and with this their undignified clientage to the peoples they had conquered was finally at an end.

But the evolution whereby Islam attained this academic distinction was also the final negation of its redemptive origins. When in the course of the original messianic venture the Hagarenes left Arabia, they did so in order to go home, to establish themselves in a promised land that was theirs to enjoy by a divinely conferred right of inheritance. Judaic redemption had subsequently given way to the Samaritan calques: the high priest took the place of the messiah, the Abrahamic sanctuary that of Jerusalem. It was a transposition into a lower key, a shift from momentary frenzy to institutional permanence, but it was not in itself an unhappy one. Samaritanism is not an exilic faith, and the link between its sanctuary and its priesthood, however forced in scriptural terms, is ancient and intimate. In Islam, however, this link was broken. The exigencies of politics required a Hagarene metropolis in the conquered territories, those of religion demanded its location in the depths of Arabia. Mu'awiya may have worn no crown, but he did not wish to return to the seat of Muhammad.33 There does at one stage seem to have been a certain concern to restore the link. Whatever credit one ascribes to the traditions regarding 'Abd al-Malik's attempt to divert the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the Dome of the Rock is an architecturally metropolitan building. 34 And against this suggestion of a pragmatic Umayyad attempt to bring the sanctuary to the high-priesthood can be set Ibn al-Zubayr's utopian determination to take the high-priesthood to the sanctuary. But thereafter the break was definitive.

The result was the introduction of an exilic quality into the relationship between political authority and sacred geography in Hagarism. And when the 'Abbasid revolution issued in the transfer of the high-priesthood from Syria to Babylonia, the stage was set for its eventual degeneration into a mere exilarchate,35 the shadow of a shadow, finally to disappear at the hands of the Mongols in the company of its Judaic equivalent. Even among the Imamis, the politically inert high priests were carted off from their 'Alid metropolis into Babylonish captivity, and the captivity in due course compounded by a concealment that was virtually transcendental.

For those Shi 'ites who persisted in regarding the reality of a high-priesthood as a central religious value, there remained of course the alternative of compounding Babylonish captivity with an exodus to the doubly exilic mount-tops of the Caspian or the Yemen. But in Babylonia itself the key value of religious politics was a dispirited perpetuation of the quietism of the rabbis in the face of an alien or desanctified state. 16 The long and intricate religious evolution of the Hagarenes was thus not without a certain ironic circularity. Their religious odyssey began and ended with Judaism, and in the process the Samaritan sanctuary in Arabia and the Samaritan high-priesthood in Syria had cancelled out. But there was also tragic development in the apparent circularity. The redemptive Judaism of Palestine had given way to the academic Judaism of Babylonia, good tidings to Zion to prayers for the peace of Babylon. The Hagarenes had abandoned the messiah only to end up with an exilarch, they had rejected the Jewish miqdash only to end up in the same medinah.37

There was of course a crucial difference: the Hagarenes were their own jailors, and their exile was to that extent a better appointed one.38 They still had honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.
Their sanctuary, though on occasion burnt, was not destroyed in the manner of the Jewish Temple: they never actually became mourners of Mecca. And for all their quietism, they retained a residual zealotism which even among the Imamis could in due course be activated by the menace of infidel rule.” But if the comforts of self-imposed exile were substantial, its costs went very deep. The Jews went into exile having lost everything to the overwhelming malevolence of an infidel power; if it was a punishment for their sins, God had at least sent the Babylonians to punish them. 40 The very totality of the deprivation in the present, and its essentially exogenous character, meant that the Jews had catharsis and hope. But the Mongols came too late to perform such a service for the emotional economy of Islam.

Without catharsis, the past was blighted. Few peoples can claim a more startlingly successful history than the Arabs in the period from the conquests to the fall of the Umayyads; and yet the classical sources breathe an air of utter disillusion. The Umayyads were branded as kings, their policy as tyranny, their taxation as extortion, 41 their conquests as tajmir,42 and their beliefs as impiety; only the losing parties in the civil wars of the period stood any chance of retrospective sanctification. 43 But the blight reaches back even into the inner-Arabian history of the patriarchal caliphate, and eats away the moral standing of such heroes of the conquests as 'Amr b. al-`As and ghallid b. al-Wafid. And without catharsis, there was equally no hope: the withering of the past meant the withering of the future. When the Jews went into exile, they took with them the memory of a sacred past the future restoration of which became a central religious value. But the Hagarenes, because it was their own conquests that had taken them into exile, and because they had no oppressors but themselves, had no relevant past to restore: all the glory of Kedar had failed. Where the messiah comes to reinstate the political reality of the Davidic monarchy, the mahdi merely fills the world with a historically colourless justice.44 Where the in-gathering of the Israelite exiles is a central theme of the messianic programme, the eschatological in-gathering of the Ishmaelites is a purely Christian fantasy.15 The mourners of Zion may one day have beauty for ashes; but Ishmael has no redeemer, they enjoyed him in the days of 'Umar the Firuq. The whirlwinds in the south abated to leave Islam, like Judaism, as a religion dominated by the legalism of Babylonian rabbis: but whereas in Judaism the other side of the coin is messianic hope, in Islam it is Sufi resignation.

All of the above maybe distasteful to the reader and I am sorry for this. There is another way. Look at teh Qur’an itself and see how hat numerous verses point to Jesus as Messiah, and the following list will help you look for yourself.

**The community of God in a path toward him**

The entire message of the Qur’an is a "recall for a return to God". This call is constantly repeated: "And you will all return to Him." Human life, according to the Qur’an as well as to the Bible, is nothing else but a "path toward God" (cf. Sura 1:2, 8; 2:142, 213; 3:51; 96, 101; 5:16; 6:39, 87 etc.). The Muslim must belong "entirely to God".

("I did not create angels and men other than that I should be worshipped!")

The "Declaration" says that the Muslims

"have an esteem for the moral life and render worship to God, above all, by prayer, fasting, and almsgiving."

Islam, centred about the faith of the God of Abraham, has brought to the masses of humanity which did not yet receive the message of the Bible, the directives of the God of Revelation. The first and principal duty of every man, according to the Qur’an, is that of proclaiming the unity of God by means of the Shahada:
"There is no other divinity except God."

Except for the profession of faith, presupposed always as sincere, the religion of the Qur’an leaves the conscience to the rule of natural law and to the entirely personal interior movement of grace. Islam has not assumed the task to fathom the intimacies of the heart but instead it recalls the divine sanctions that are necessary for the social traces of sin.

In fact, the

"commandments of Sinai"

are found in the Qur’an although their formulation is not exactly the same as in the Bible. God's commandments which the Qur’an presents to us may be reduced to twelve:

1. to proclaim the unity of God (Shahada);
2. to respect one's mother and father;
3. to be good toward one's neighbour and the weak;
4. to give alms to the needy;
5. not to kill new-born babes for fear of poverty;
6. not to fornicate;
7. not to kill;
8. to respect the goods of orphans and widows;
9. to keep one's promises;
10. to give just due, that is, not to steal;
11. not to curse; not to be proud.

The "right path", the "way of God", the means by which one must "return to Him" consists in the fulfilment of these divine precepts. The end of this path is the last judgment, which follows the resurrection, when the just will be presented as those who have fulfilled the precepts of the Lord.

In connection with this concept of God as the end of human life and in relation to the various duties or precepts formulated by God in His law, we can also find in the Qur’an a doctrine of sin, seen as a transgression of divine ordinances, disobedience to the command of God, revolt against God, and ingratitude. The worst sin is that of refusing to recognize God as one and to associate with Him other beings in adoration.

All the verses about Jesus in the Qur’an and parallel Bible passages.

By Jeff Hayes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth</th>
<th>Quran</th>
<th>Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God had foreordained Jesus birth</td>
<td>3:47</td>
<td>Isa 7:14, Matthew 1:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God had commanded Jesus’ birth</td>
<td>3:47</td>
<td>Luke 1:31, 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Jesus’ birth was a miracle to all men 21:91  Luke 2:8-20, Matthew 2:12
- The day Jesus was born was blessed 19:33  Luke 2:10..14
- Jesus is the son of Mary 3:45, 4:157  Luke 1:31, 2:7, Matthew 12:46
- Jesus is descended from Mary 3:36  Luke 2:7, Matthew 13:55, Genesis 3:15
- The Jews said a scandalous thing about Mary (concerning Jesus) 4:156  John  8:41
- Jesus spoke in the cradle to those who accused him of being illegitimate 19:29  Matthew 1:18-25

**Character**

- God made him an example to the people of Israel 43:59  ?
- God commanded Jesus to honour his mother 19:32  John  19:26
- God did not make Jesus proud or rebellious 19:32  Mark 7:36, Matthew 11:28-30; 12:15-21; 20:28; 21:5
• Jesus is righteous
3:46, 6:85
John 8:46, 2 Co 5:21

• Jesus said only what God told him to:
worship God, my lord and yours
5:117
John 14:1,10; 20:17

**Conception**

- No man had touched Mary when she became pregnant with Jesus
Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:34

- God sent his spirit to Mary and it took the form of a man
19:17
Luke 1:26-35

- God sent his spirit to give Mary a sinless son

- God breathed into Mary of his spirit and the result was Jesus
21:91, 66:12
Luke 1:35

- Jesus was sent down (from heaven)
3:53
John 3:13

- God spoke/cast His Word to Mary
4:171
John 1:14, Luke 1:35

- God created Jesus 3:47
21:91
Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35

- Mary went away when she became pregnant with Jesus from her home to a far place
19:22
Luke 1:39

**Death**

- People plotted (against Jesus)
3:54
John 12:10, Acts 3:15, 4:10
• God would have been able to destroy/kill Christ

5:17  Luke 1:37, 22:41

• God said to Jesus that He would make him die


• When God made Christ die, God Himself became the overseer over them

5:117  John 17:14, 15

• *(Jesus was) one of the messengers that the people of Israel killed


• *The Jews killed (Jesus) among other prophets

2:91  Acts 3:15, 2:36, 4:10, 5:30

• *The Jews themselves did not kill or crucify Christ


• *Their (and Christ’s) killers weren’t the real killers because God killed them

8:17 (see 4:157, 158)  Acts 2:23

• *The Jews thought they killed and crucified Christ

4:157  Matthew 27:25

• The Jews claimed they had killed Christ

4:157  Matthew 28:11-15

• *The Jews killed him and other prophets unjustly


• *(Christ) was dead and God raised him

6:122  Romans 6:4-11, Colossians 2:12-15

• *God ransomed Abraham’s son with a mighty sacrifice

37:107  Ti 3:4-7, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Peter 1:18-20

• The day Jesus died was blessed

19:33  Luke 2:10-14

**Exalted**

• Jesus is the knowledge of the last day


• The knowledge of the last day is God’s

41:47 (see 43:61, 85, 31:34, 33:63)  Matthew 24:36
• God aided Jesus with the Holy Spirit 2:87, 253, 5:110
Ps1:2, Matthew 4:1, 12:18, Luke 4:18

• John the Baptist testified to Jesus 3:39
John 1:29..34, Matthew 3:14

• God preferred فضل Jesus above other messengers 2:253
Hebrews 1:1, 2, 3:1..6, Matthew 21:33-41

• God preferred فضل Jesus and others above other people 6:86
I Timothy 2:5

• Jesus pronounced peace upon himself 19:33
John 13:13..17, 14:27

• *Jesus intercedes with God according to God’s will 2:255
I Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:27,34

• God exalted Jesus 2:253
Philippians 2:9, Ephesians 1:21-22

• Jesus commanded them to obey him 3:50, 43:63
Matthew 7:24-27, John 13:13

• God said to Jesus that He would cleanse him of unbelievers 3:55
Hebrews 7:26, Ephesians 1:20-22

• Jesus is distinguished in the world 3:45

• Jesus is distinguished in the hereafter 3:45

• Jesus is one of the near ones to God 3:45
المقربين 45
John 14:7-9,26, Luke 1:35

• Jesus is blessed 43:61 with 43:85
Matthew 21:9

• God made Jesus blessed wherever he went 19:31
Mark 7:37, Matthew 23:39

• God made a covenant with Jesus (among others) 33:7
Luke 4:18,43
### Followers

- **God’s helpers** أنصار are those who help Jesus  
  3:52, 61:14  
  I John 2:23, John 6:66-69

- **Jesus had followers**  
  3:53  
  John 3:26

- **God said to Jesus that He would make his followers higher than the unbelievers until judgment day**  
  3:55  
  Ephesians 2:6

- **Jesus told God the disciples were God’s servants, and He could choose to torture or forgive them**  
  5:118  
  John 17:6-11

- **The Christians say that Jesus is the Son of God**  
  9:30  
  Gal 4:4-7

- **Christians took Jesus the son of Mary as Lord instead of God**  
  9:31  
  1 Corinthians 8:6

### Fulfillment

- **Jesus confirmed the Old Testament that was in his hands**  
  3:50, 5:46  

- **Jesus told the people of Israel that he confirmed the Old Testament that was in his hands**  
  61:6  
  Matthew 5:17-20

### Humanity

- **Jesus ate food**  
  5:75  
  Luke 24:43

- **Jesus spoke to the people when an adult**  
  3:46, 5:110  
  Matthew 5-7, John 14:10, 7:16, 17

- **God gave Jesus shelter/refuge** مأوى  
  23:50  
  Luke 4:30

- **God is Jesus’ Lord**  
  5:117  
  Ph 1:3, John 20:17

- **God gave commandments to Jesus**  
  42:13  
  He 1:5, 8, 12, 13

- **God commanded Jesus to pray and give alms while he remained alive**  
  19:31  

- **God commanded Jesus to honour his mother**  
  19:32  
  John 19:26
### Judgment Day

- Jesus is the knowledge of the last day  
  43:61  

- The knowledge of the last day is God’s  
  41:47 (see 43:61, 85, 31; 34)  
  Matthew 24:36

- On judgment day, Jesus will witness against those who did not believe in him before their death  
  4:159  
  John 5:22, 23

### Messenger

- Christ was merely a messenger  
  5:75 (but see 4:171)  
  John 7:16, 17:8, 18

- Jesus was a messenger  
  2:87, 253, 3:49  

- Jesus was a messenger to the people of Israel  
  3:49  
  Matthew 15:24

- Jesus told the people of Israel that he was a messenger to them  
  61:6  
  John 5:43

- God caused Jesus to follow a long line of messengers  
  57:27  
  Matthew 21:33-41, John 10:7, 8

- The people of Israel didn’t care for Jesus  
  2:87  
  Matthew 12:24, 13:57

- *Jesus was one of the messengers that the people of Israel killed  
  2:87  
• God preferred عُلِّم فضلً Jesus above other messengers 2:253 Hebrews 1:1, 2, 3:1-6, Matthew 21:33-.41

• Jesus is called the messenger الرسول 3:53 John 4:34

• Jesus is God’s messenger الرسول الله 157, 171 John 10:36, 17:3, Acts 4:25

• God revealed to the disciples of Jesus to believe in God and in His messenger Jesus 5:111 John 6:66-69, 14:1

**Miracles**

• Jesus created خُلق the Jews a clay bird, breathed life into it, according to God’s will 3:49, 5:110 John 5:21, 20:22

• Jesus gave sight to the man born blind 3:49, 5:110 John 9:1-12

• Jesus healed the leper 3:49, 5:110 Luke 17:12-19

• Jesus raised(تَحْيَى، تَخْرِج) the dead according to God’s permission 3:49, 5:110 John 11:43-44

• Jesus prophesied to the Jews what they ate 3:49 John 6:47-49, 9:17

• Jesus prophesied to the Jews what they stored in their houses 3:49 Mark 12:40

• Jesus spoke to the people while still in the cradle 3:46, 5:110 Matthew 2:11, Luke 2:16-20

• The disciples asked Jesus if God was able to send them a feast ماندة 5:112 Matthew 15:32-38

• Christ asked God for a feast from heaven as provision as a miracle, God answered آية 5:114 John 6:5-14, Matthew 14:15-21

• God gave Jesus miracles بينات 2:87, 253 John 6:11-14, 7:31

• Jesus came with miracles بينات 43:63 Matthew 12:22-32

• Jesus came to the people of Israel with miracles بينات 61:6 Matthew 12:22-32
• The people of Israel called Jesus’ miracles magic 61:6 Mathew 12:22-32, Mark 3:22, 30
• Jesus came to the people of Israel with a miracle 3:49, 50 Mathew 15:34-38, 8:16-17, 11:4-6

**Names (see also word, prophet, messenger, relationship to God)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ is Jesus’ title</td>
<td>4:157, 171</td>
<td>John 4:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His name is the Messiah Jesus son of Mary</td>
<td>3:45</td>
<td>Matthew 1:21, Luke 1:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is a spirit from God</td>
<td>4:171</td>
<td>Luke 1:35, 1 Corinthians 15:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*God ransomed Abraham’s son with a mighty sacrifice</td>
<td>37:107</td>
<td>Timothy 3:4-7, Ephesians 2:8, 9, 1 Peter 1:18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God foreordained mercy</td>
<td>6:12, 54, 19:21</td>
<td>Ephesians 2:4, Matthew 20:29-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God made Jesus a mercy from him, and that was something predestined</td>
<td>19:21</td>
<td>Acts 2:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus was a miracle to all men</td>
<td>21:91</td>
<td>Luke 2:8-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God made Jesus a miraculous sign</td>
<td>19:21, 23:50</td>
<td>Luke 2:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ was a witness over the people while he was with them</td>
<td>5:117</td>
<td>John 17:12, 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Prophet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God caused Jesus to follow a long line of Jewish prophets</td>
<td>5:46</td>
<td>Matthew 21:33-41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Jesus told the people of Israel that a messenger was coming to them whose name was praised: John 14:16, 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rejection/Doubt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Jews disbelieved in Jesus: John 12:37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus cursed the Jews who disbelieved in him: Matthew 23:13-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people of Israel didn’t care for Jesus: John 6:70-71, Matthew 28:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some doubted about Jesus: John 4:157, 19:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ said he came to the people to clarify to them some of what they differed about: Matthew 19:3-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The varying parties differed about Jesus: Luke 5:17-26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship to God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God is not Christ son of Mary: I Corinthians 8:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God told Jesus to remember his grace to him: Philippians 4:23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God warded off the people of: John 10:39, 7:39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel from Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus is a spirit from God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God is Jesus’ Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus commanded them to fear God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus said only what God told him to: worship God, my lord and yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus spoke to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God asked Jesus had he told people to take him and Mary as 2 gods instead of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus answered that he never said anything he had no right to say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus said that God knows what Jesus said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Jesus is the knowledge of the last day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The knowledge of the last day is God’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God gave commandments to Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God commanded Jesus to honour his mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God raised Jesus to himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• God plotted against the people’s plot and won</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resurrection**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God raised Jesus to himself</td>
<td>4:158</td>
<td>Mark 16:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God plotted against the</td>
<td>3:54</td>
<td>Revelation 13:8, Matthew 20:17-19, Acts 3:15, 4:10,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people’s plot and won</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• The day Jesus was raised was blessed 19:33 Luke 2:10-14
• God said to Jesus that He would raise him up alive 3:55 Acts 1:9, Luke 18:33

Revelation

• God revealed أوهى to Jesus 4:163 Matthew 5:21-48
• God gave Jesus the Bible الكتاب 19:30 Matthew 5:21-48
• God revealed to the disciples of Jesus to believe in God and in His messenger Jesus 5:111 John 6:68-69
• God gave Jesus the New Testament, in which is guidance and light 5:46 Luke 2:32

God taught Jesus the Bible الكتاب, wisdom, the OT, the NT, and the NT
• Jesus allowed some of what was forbidden to them 3:50 Mark 7:14-20
• Christ said he brought the people wisdom 43:63 Matthew 13:1-52, 7:24-27

Servanthood

• Jesus said he was God’s servant 19:30 John 20:17, Philippians 2:5-7
• Jesus was not too arrogant to be God’s servant 4:172 Philippians 2:6, 7
• Jesus is only a servant to whom God gave grace 43:59 (but see also 4:171) Philippians 2:5-11
**Sinless**

- Christ was sinless
  
  19:19
  
  Hebrews 7:26, 2 Corinthians 5:21, John 8:46

**Word**

- Jesus is a saying of the truth
  
  19:34
  
  I John 5:7-12, 20, 2:21, 1:1, 2 John 1-2

- Jesus is a word from God
  
  3:39, 45
  
  John 1:14

- Jesus is God’s Word
  
  4:171
  
  John 1:1-3

- God spoke/cast His Word to Mary
  
  4:171
  
  Luke 1:35, John 1:14

The New Testament has many examples of the expression of “the Gospel” e.g. Rom.1 v3. Is it not possible that Muslims can find enough truth about Jesus Christ in the Qur’an to start them on a road of discovery since it originates with the Old Testament anyway. Our experience actually shows us that this is the case, many come to Christ and find what they are looking for after reading the Qur’an and see the high place He occupies in the Qur’an.

**CHAPTER 15**

**Developing a Creed for Messianic Muslims.**

Because of the close relationship of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael in Genesis 12 –16 we will find that many of the ideas concerning God, the prophets, worship, law and salvation are similar in the texts of the books. This may not be true in the practise and teaching of religion because this usually comes about much later in the development of the religion and is affected by cultural issues, political activities and historic events. So it is with the interpretation of the Qur’an in some forms of Islam. What the Qur’an teaches and says is not always what Muslims believe as the following partial dialogue shows. For a broader view see Bassetti-Sani’s work “The Qur’an in the Light of Christ”.

**Will they not ponder the Qur’an, or are there locks upon their hearts? (Surah 47:24)**

I started learning more about Allah through studying the Qur’an. The Qur’an taught me that I should learn about how to live my life from the lives of the prophets that Allah sent. Of course this is true of all prophets of Allah.

Yes... and we have to believe in Allah, angels, the Holy Books, the messengers, the Day of Judgment...

In the Qur’an, it says:

"Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the East or the West. The righteous man is he who believes in God [Allah] and the Last Day, in the angels and the Book and the prophets;..." (Qur’an 2:177)

I needed to know what will happen to me when I die. The problem is that even though we obey all of
the rules there's still something missing. When I die, I'm not sure if I'll go to heaven or hell. So I'm afraid of dying.

**If we know the Straight Way... then we don't have to worry about our future.**

Surah Al-Fatih says every time we pray we say,

"Show us the Straight Way." (Qur’an 1:6)

Now how many times a day do we ask Allah to show us the Straight Way? What is the Straight Way is?

In the Qur’an. It says,

"He [Isa] is certainly the sign of the Hour (of change). So have no doubt about it, and listen to me. This is the straight path.... When Jesus [Isa] came with the signs, he said: 'I come to you with authority, and to explain something about which you are at variance. So fear God [Allah], and follow me. Verily God [Allah] is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him. This is the straight path.'" (Qur’an 43:61, 63-64) 

The words "follow me" also mean that we have to follow Isa al-Masih. This is the Straight Way. But Isa al-Masih is only for Christians, isn't he?

**Isa is a Muslim! Here is why: What is the definition of Islam?**

Islam and Muslim both mean to submit or surrender to Allah. Based on the Qur’an, I believe that Isa al-Masih is someone who has submitted and surrendered to Allah. For example, Isa is a servant of Allah.

"He said, 'Indeed, I am the servant of Allah, ... '" (Qur’an 19:30) 

The Qur’an says,

"The Messiah [Al-Masih] would never disdain from being a servant of GOD [Allah], nor would the closest angels. Those who disdain from worshipping Him, and are too arrogant to submit, He will summon them all before Him." (Qur’an 4:172)

Also the Qur’an says,

"Then when Isa (Jesus) came to know of their disbelief, he said: 'Who will be my helpers in Allah's Cause?' Al-Hawariyyun (the disciples) said, 'We are the helpers of Allah; we believe in Allah, and bear witness that we are Muslims (i.e. we submit to Allah).'" (Qur’an 3:52)

**Muslims can believe in Isa al-Masih too?**

The first Muslim to believe in Isa al-Masih after the Qur’an was revealed was the prophet Muhammad (PBUH)! He told us about Isa al-Masih in more than 90 verses in the Qur’an.

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) tells us so much about Isa al-Masih, because the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came as a Warner. He warned us about the terrible punishments in Hell that await sinners and he brought us the message about Allah's love for us.

We can never make ourselves perfect. No one is perfect either. Only Allah can make us perfect. I learned that from the Qur’an. It says,
"O you who believers, do not follow the steps of Satan. Anyone who follows the steps of Satan, should know that he advocates evil and vice. If it were not for GOD's [Allah's] grace towards you, and His mercy, none of you would ever have been purified. But GOD [Allah] purifies whomever He wills. GOD [Allah] is Hearer, Knower." (Qur'an 24:21) ⁹

"He is God [Allah], besides whom there is no other deity. He is the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Giver of Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Mighty One, the All-powerful, the Most High! Glory be to God [Allah] above their idols." (Qur'an 59:23) ⁷

Allah will accept us only if we are completely pure! Like it said in the verse quoted before."If it were not for GOD's [Allah's] grace towards you, and His mercy, none of you would ever have been purified." (Qur'an 24:21) ⁹

Allah is Holy, so we can only be accepted if we go according to the Qur’an,

"He that comes before his Lord laden with sin shall be consigned to Hell, where he shall neither die nor live." (Qur’an 20:74) ⁷ - it's only by the Grace and Mercy of Allah that we can be clean.

The Mercy of Allah is before Isa was born we are told that Allah sent an angel to see Maryam. Allah said through the angel,

“And (We wish) to appoint him [Isa] as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah), and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah).” (Qur’an 19:21)

Is Isa al-Masih only for the Jews, notice the words "a sign to mankind". It doesn't say a sign to the Jews; it means for everybody... all people.

"So We [Allah] gave power to those who believed [in Isa] against their enemies, and they became the victorious (uppermost)." (Qur’an 61:14) ¹

The enemy is Satan and his followers. They always attack us with all sorts of problems in our daily life. But, alhamdulillah, I can overcome all the problems in this life because Isa helps us.

**It seems strange too for Islam to talk so much about Isa al-Masih.**

It's not that strange, because there are many stories about the life of Isa al-Masih in the Qur’an. Besides that, as Muslims you have to read the entire Qur’an. So of course have to read all of the verses about Isa al-Masih. It would be wrong for a Muslim to skip the verses about Isa al-Masih.

We know about Isa al-Masih because the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) spoke a lot about Isa al-Masih in the Qur’an. So the person who taught me about Isa al-Masih was the prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

There are many Muslims who skip reading about Isa al-Masih because they think that since Muhammad (PBUH) was the last prophet they shouldn't be interested in learning about the life of Isa al-Masih anymore, or any of the other prophets either. But the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was very interested in the life of Isa al-Masih. That's why he told us so many things about Isa al-Masih, because Isa al-Masih is very different from all the other prophets.

Isa al-Masih is special; the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us that Allah sent angels to announce to Maryam that Isa al-Masih would be eminent in this world and the Hereafter. The Qur’an says,
"When the angels said, `Mary [Maryam], God [Allah] gives thee good tidings of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah [al-Masih], Jesus [Isa], son of Mary [Maryam]; high honoured shall he be in this world and the next, near stationed to God [Allah].'" (Qur’an 3:45) 4

Are we making a distinction between Isa al-Masih and the other prophets by exalting Isa.?

"Of these messengers we have exalted some above others. To some God [Allah] spoke directly; others He raised to a lofty status. We gave Jesus [Isa] son of Mary [Maryam] veritable signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit." (Qur’an 2:253) 7

Allah spoke to Isa directly. Allah showed His favour to Isa by giving him signs and strengthened with the Holy Spirit. Allah's angels said that Isa would be eminent in this world and the next and that he would be near stationed to Allah. So it was Allah who exalted Isa.

The meaning of al-Masih? It means "the anointed one". Did you know that a long time ago when there were kings, they used to pour oil on his head to make him the king? One of the reasons Isa al-Masih is so special is because Allah gave Isa the title, al-Masih. This verse means that Allah has anointed Isa al-Masih... not with oil but with His Spirit!

Wouldn't I be called a Christian? Just because I know and believe in Isa al-Masih, nobody calls me a Christian, right? I'm a Muslim; you know that... Besides that, Isa al-Masih never asked people to become Christians. Isa al-Masih only asks us to follow him. As it says in the Qur’an,

"When Jesus [Isa] came with the signs, he said: `I come to you with authority, and to explain something about which you are at variance. So fear God [Allah], and follow me.'" (Qur’an 43:63) 3

Good Muslims should respect Christians because they are followers of the Holy Books. The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) liked Christians. He even complimented Christians...

Does the Qur’an say that? A verse that says,

"And you will find that the closest people in friendship to the believers are those who say, `We are Christian.' This is because they have priests and monks among them, and they are not arrogant." (Qur’an 5:82)

You know Abdullah, if we see this verse; it means that these people are humble. How can you say that Christians are humble? If they are true Christians then they have surrendered their life to Allah's power by having faith in Isa al-Masih as the Mercy of Allah. Nowadays there are many conceited people. They think they can go to heaven by their own effort and power. They think that by doing good deeds, showing kindness to others, feeding the poor, fasting and performing sacrifices and many other religious duties they will be accepted into heaven.

We can't use those things to bribe Allah in order to get into heaven.

Well, if we do good deeds in order to get into heaven, it means we are using the good deeds as a kind of bribe so Allah will let us into heaven. But even though we do many good deeds we also commit many sins. So why should Allah accept our good deeds? Think about it... We commit a lot of sins, don't we? And we sin every day, right?

We sin every day, over and over again! We're deceiving ourselves if we believe that we don't sin!

"The works of the unbelievers are like ashes which the wind scatters on a stormy day; they shall gain nothing from what they do. To act thus is to stray far into error." (Qur’an 14:18) 7
The Qur’an warns us,

"Say, `Shall we inform you about the greatest losers of their works? Those whose endeavour in the present life has gone astray and they still believe that they are doing well." (Qur’an 18:103-104) 8

Allah will accept our prayers as something good. Even our prayers might not qualify as something good. It says in the Qur’an that, "The human being often prays for something that may hurt him, thinking that he is praying for something good. The human being is impatient." (Qur’an 17:11) 9

Qur’an says,

"If Allah were to punish men for their wrongdoing, He would not leave, on the (earth), a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated Term: when their Term expires, they would not be able to delay (the punishment) for a single hour, just as they would not be able to anticipate it (for a single hour). (Qur’an 16:61) 2

"It is not their sacrificed flesh which avails with God [Allah], nor their shed blood. Only reverent awe on your part avails with Him." (Qur’an 22:37) 6

They also believe that if people pray for them after they die they can get out faster.

But the Qur’an says,

"Why, they who have earned the wages of sin and are enclosed in error, are people of Hell, where they will abide forever." (Qur’an 2:81) 3

"And those who followed would say: `If only we had one more chance, we would clear ourselves of them, as they have cleared themselves of us.' Thus will Allah show them (the fruits of) their deeds as (nothing but) regrets. Nor will there be a way for them out of the Fire." (Qur’an 2:167) 2

Abdullah: I never knew that before. I thought that our good deeds could help us to get out of Hell. Last week, I talked with my neighbours and they said that they believe that the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) will save them from Hell.

The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) often called himself a warner. According to the Qur’an, Muhammad (PBUH) was commanded by Allah to refer to himself that way. It says,

"Say, `I have no power to benefit myself, or harm myself. Only what GOD [Allah] wills happens to me. If I knew the future, I would have increased my wealth, and no harm would have afflicted me. I am no more than a warner, and a bearer of good news for those who believe.'" (Qur’an 7:188) 9

There’s also another verse that says,

"We have sent you with the truth as a bearer of good news, as well as a Warner. You are not answerable for those who incur Hell." (Qur’an 2:119) 9

According to the Qur’an, the disciples of Isa al-Masih called themselves Muslims. The disciples said,

"We are the helpers of Allah; we believe in Allah, and bear witness that we are Muslims (i.e. we submit to Allah)." (Qur’an 3:52)
The followers of Isa worship three gods.

In the Qur’an it says,

"Thus, GOD [Allah] said: 'O Jesus [Isa], I am terminating your life, raising you to Me, and ridding you of the disbelievers. I will exalt those who follow you above those who disbelieve, till the Day of Resurrection....'” (Qur’an 3:55)

There’s a verse that says,

"Anyone who kills a believer intentionally will be cast into Hell to abide there forever, and suffer Allah's anger and damnation. For him a greater punishment awaits.” (Qur’an 4:93)

Here was the list of verses:

- Isa al-Masih is the son of Maryam: Surah 2:87, 253; 3:45
- Isa al-Masih is the Messiah (al Masih): Surah 3:45; 4:157, 171
- Isa al-Masih is the Servant of Allah: Surah 4:172; 19:30
- Isa al-Masih is a prophet: Surah 19:30
- Isa al-Masih is an Apostle of Allah: Surah 4:157, 171; 5:75
- Isa al-Masih is the Word of Allah: Surah 3:45; 4:171
- Isa al-Masih is the Word of Truth: Surah 19:34
- Isa al-Masih is the Spirit of Allah: Surah 66:12
- Isa al-Masih is a sign (for all peoples): Surah 19:21, 21:91
- Isa al-Masih is a witness: Surah 4:159; 5:11
- Isa al-Masih is a mercy from Allah: Surah 19:21
- Isa al-Masih is great (eminent): Surah 3:45
- Masih is righteous: Surah 3:46; 6:85
- Isa al-Masih is blessed/a blessing: Surah 19:31; 43:59
- Isa al-Masih did miracles: Surah 2:87
- Isa al-Masih was led by the Holy Spirit: Surah 2:253
- Isa al-Masih was born of a virgin: Surah 3:47; 19:20,21
- Isa al-Isa al-Masih guides people to the truth: Surah 3:49
- Isa al-Masih healed people: Surah 3:49
- Isa al-Masih raised the dead: Surah 3:49
- Isa al-Masih would die for unbelievers: Surah 3:55
Isa al-Masih was resurrected from the dead Surah 3:55
Isa al-Masih ascended to heaven after his death & resurrection Surah 3:55
Isa al-Masih is a life giver Surah 5:113, 114
Isa al-Masih is holy Surah 19:19
Isa al-Masih is coming again Surah 43:61
Isa al-Masih knows the future Surah 43:61, 63
Isa al-Masih is to be obeyed/followed Surah 43:63

Our Master Christ Jesus: Whose son is he?
Isa Abdul-Majeed, In the name of God Most Gracious and Merciful.

The disagreements concerning him:
There have been many arguments about Christ Jesus. Scientists and men of religion have disagreed about him for a long time, and so have the various religious sects, as the Generous Koran says:

"That is Jesus son of Mary, the statement of truth, about whom they are doubting." (Maryam 34)

"And the various sects differed among themselves." (Maryam 37)

"And the various sects differed among themselves." (Zuhruf 65)

"Those who differed about him are in doubt of him." (Nisa 157)

"Mankind was all one people, and God sent prophets carrying good news and warnings, and He sent the Book with them in truth, to judge between men in the matters in which they differ, and none differed about him except those who were given it after they received the clear miracles." (Baqara 213)

In summary, there is a serious controversy. So let us ask:

Who is Christ Jesus?
We will examine first what the Generous Koran has to say about Mary and Christ Jesus.

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

and "Mary daughter of Amran who protected her chastity, and we breathed into her womb of our Spirit, and she believed the words of her Lord." (Tahrim 12)

"Christ Jesus, son of Mary, God's messenger, and his word which he sent to Mary and a spirit from him." (Nisa 171)

"Since the angels said, Mary, God is giving you good news of a word from him, whose name is
Christ Jesus son of Mary, and he will be highly honoured and famous in this world and the hereafter, and brought near to God." (Al Imran 45)

"He said, I am truly a messenger sent from your Lord to give you a sinless boy. She said, How can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me, nor have I been a prostitute? He said, This is what your Lord says: It is easy for me, and we will make him a miracle to all men, and mercy from us, and it was a predestined matter. So she became pregnant with him and went far away."
(Mary 19-22)

If we read these verses without prejudice, we will see clearly that Mary daughter of Imran is the mother of Christ Jesus. Therefore, Our Master Christ Jesus is the son of Mary. This is totally clear.

Do we have other sources of knowledge about the matter as well? The Generous Koran says the following about the Honoured Injeel:

"We made Jesus son of Mary follow them... and we gave him the Injeel, in which is guidance and light, confirming the Tawrat in his possession. It was guidance and a sermon to godly people." (Maida 46)

"So let the people of the Injeel judge by what God has revealed in it, and whoever does not judge by what God has revealed are truly sinners." (Maida 47)

"And we revealed to you the Book with truth, confirming the Book in your possession and guarding it." (Maida 48)

"Mankind was all one people, and God sent prophets carrying good news and warnings, and He sent the Book with them in truth, to judge between men in the matters in which they differ." (Baqara 213)

"We revealed the Book of Remembrance, and we are its protectors." (Hijr 9)

"Those we sent before you were men to whom we revealed, so ask the people of the Book of Remembrance if you don't know." (Nahl 43)

"Those we sent before you were men to whom we revealed, so ask the people of the Book of Remembrance if you don't know." (Anbiya 7)

"We revealed the Tawrat and the Injeel." (Al Imran 3)

"Confirming the Tawrat in your possession." (Al Imran 50)

"O people of the Book, do not argue over Abraham, since the Tawrat and Injeel were not revealed until after him." (Al Imran 65)

"O people of the Book, you have no foundation unless you uphold the Tawrat and Injeel and what was revealed to you by your Lord." (Maida 68)

"We made our messengers follow them and we made Jesus son of Mary follow them, and we revealed the Injeel to him." (Hadid 27)

"When you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who are reading the Book before you." (Yunis 94)

We have seen clearly from these many verses that the Generous Koran encourages us to use the Honoured Injeel as a reference. If God told Mohamed (pboh) to use the Book (the Honoured Injeel and
the Wise Tawrat), then of course we may also. What, then, does the Honoured Injeel have to say about this matter? We see in the following verses:

"This is the story of the birth of Christ Jesus: His mother Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph, and before their wedding, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was godfearing man, and he did not want to scandalize her, so he decided to divorce her and keep the matter secret. Then an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him: 'Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, whom you will call Jesus (Ransomed), because he will ransom his people from their sins.' This all happened in fulfilment of God's promise in the Tawrat: 'A virgin will get pregnant and have a son, who will be called Emmanuel, meaning God is with us.' And Joseph woke up and did what the angel had commanded. He brought her to his home in marriage, but he had no sexual relations with her until she had borne Jesus." (Matthew 1:18-25)

We see that the Honoured Injeel confirms what the Generous Koran says. Can we also use the Wise Tawrat in our study? The Generous Koran says the following about the Wise Tawrat:

"And how can they make you their judge, when they have the Tawrat, which contains God's judgment?" (Maida 43)

"We revealed the Tawrat, in which is guidance and light, by which the prophets judge... whoever does not judge by what God has revealed are truly unbelievers." (Maida 44)

"And we revealed to them in it, 'life for life, and eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth.'" (Maida 45)

"And we made Jesus son of Mary follow them, confirming the Tawrat in his possession." (Maida 46)

"And we revealed to you the Book with truth, confirming the Book in your possession and guarding it." (Maida 48)

"Mankind was all one people, and God sent prophets carrying good news and warnings, and He sent the Book with them in truth, to judge between men in the matters in which they differ." (Baqara 213)

"We revealed the Book of Remembrance, and we are its protectors." (Hijr 9)

"Those we sent before you were men to whom we revealed, so ask the people of the Book of Remembrance if you don't know the clear signs and psalms." (Nahl 43-44)

"Those we sent before you were men to whom we revealed, so ask the people of the Book of Remembrance if you don't know." (Anbiya 7)

"We revealed the Tawrat and the Injeel." (Al Imran 3)

"Truly it is in the books (lit. Psalms) of the men of old." (Shuara 196)

"Confirming the Tawrat in your possession." (Al Imran 50)

"O people of the Book, do not argue over Abraham, since the Tawrat and Injeel were not revealed until after him." (Al Imran 65)

"O people of the Book, you have no foundation unless you uphold the Tawrat and Injeel and
what was revealed to you by your Lord." (Maida 68)

"We made our messengers follow them and we made Jesus son of Mary follow them, and we
revealed the Injeel to him." (Hadid 27)

"They brought clear signs and books (psalms) and the Book of Insight." (Al Imran 184)

"Their prophets brought them clear signs and books (psalms) and the Book of Insight." (Fatir
25)

"When you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who are reading the
Book before you." (Yunis 94)

We have seen clearly from these many verses that the Generous Koran encourages us to use the Wise
Tawrat also as a reference. What, then does it have to say?

"A virgin will get pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, meaning, God is
with us." (Isaiah 7:14)

We see that the Wise Tawrat also confirms what the Generous Koran says. All the holy books agree on
this point: Christ Jesus is Jesus son of Mary.
Was Mary a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus?

Does the Generous Koran have anything to say about this question? Yes! In the same verses that we read before, it says:

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

"Mary daughter of Amran who protected her chastity, and we breathed into her womb of our Spirit, and she believed the words of her Lord." (Tahrim 12)

"She said, How can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me, nor have I been a prostitute?" (Mary 20)

"Since the angels said, Mary, God has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above all women in the world." (Al Imran 42)

"She said, Lord, how can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me?" (Al Imran 47)

God breathed into Mary (Anbiya 91) or into her womb (Tahrim 12) of his Spirit (God's Spirit), and Mary then became pregnant and gave birth to Jesus. Is there any mention of sexual relations in this passage? No! And how did Mary become pregnant with Jesus? God breathed into her! Mary did not get pregnant by herself, but became pregnant from the breath of God in her.

Does the honoured Injeel support this truth? We read in it:

"God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin in the city of Nazareth in Galilee named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, who was descended from King David. When the angel came to her, he said, 'God's peace be upon you whom God has blessed. God is with you.' Mary was afraid and wondered at the greeting. The angel said, 'Don't be afraid, Mary. God is pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, whom you shall name Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him Son of God Most High. Almighty God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will rule over the people of Israel forever. His kingdom will never end.' Mary asked the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin, and no man has lain with me?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come to you and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you, so that your child will be sinless, and will be called the Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age, and is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible for God.' Mary said, 'I am God's servant. Let what you said happen to me.' Then the angel left her." (Luke 1:26-38)

So the Honoured Injeel affirms this truth also. And does the Wise Tawrat have anything having to do with this subject? It says the following about our lady Mary, mother of Jesus:

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" (Isaiah 7:14)

Yes again. The Wise Tawrat also supports this truth. Thus, all three heavenly books are united in what they say about this topic, too. Mary the mother of Jesus was a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus. Why then has there been such a long argument about whose son Jesus is? Most probably it has developed from some literal translations of foreign words. In some Arabic translations of the Honoured Injeel, the expression "son of God" is used. This expression is a literal translation of an expression in
the original ancient Greek text of the Honoured Injeel meaning "The Christ" or "God's vice-regent" or "The promised King of the Jews (who was expected to come and revive his people and save them from their enemies.)" Do any of these meanings have even a hint of a sexual relationship between God and a woman? God forbid!

The arguments of those who do not want to understand

Here we have a strange phenomenon: two parties who agree completely about what they mean, but who fight one another about titles, becoming fanatical, each party insisting that they and only they are correct. Is this not what has happened between the Christians and the Muslims about the expression "son of God?" The two parties agree totally about the method of the birth of Christ Jesus son of Mary, and about his pure, chaste mother.

The Christians who "are reading the Book" (Yunis 94) know that the expression "son of God" which appears in some Arabic translations of the Honoured Injeel does not mean that God has gotten married or that he has had sexual relations. Nor does it not deny the oneness of God. Far be it from him. Those who "are reading the Book" (Yunis 94) know that the birth of Christ Jesus son of Mary was by a breath of God's Spirit, as the Generous Koran and the Honoured Injeel say:

"Say, He is the One God, The everlasting Refuge, Who does not beget, nor was born." (Ikhlas 1-3)

"They said, 'God has taken a son for himself. How could it be! Everything in heaven and earth is his, and all are subservient to him" (Baqara 116)

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

"Mary daughter of Amran who protected her chastity, and we breathed into her womb of our Spirit, and she believed the words of her Lord." (Tahrim 12)

"He said, I am truly a messenger sent from your Lord to give you a sinless boy. She said, How can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me, nor have I been a prostitute? He said, This is what your Lord says: It is easy for me, and we will make him a miracle to all men, and mercy from us, and it was a predestined matter. So she became pregnant with him and went far away." (Mariam 19-22)

"The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary, God is pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, whom you shall name Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him Son of God Most High. Almighty God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will rule over the people of Israel forever. His kingdom will never end." Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin, and no man has lain with me?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come to you and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you, so that your child will be sinless, and will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:30-35)

"There is only One God, and there is only one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus son of Mary." (1 Timothy 2:5)

This is what the Honoured Injeel means by the expression "son of God" - that our master Christ Jesus son of Mary had no father, but he existed by a breath of God's Spirit. But unfortunately, the people who do not know their book do not understand; they only assume. In fact, there is a group of Christians who
claim (falsely) that God has fathered a son, even though the Honoured Injeel contains nothing of the sort.

We must all meet together, as the Generous Koran says:

"Come let us agree with you about something: we will not worship any except God, and we will not call anything else God." (Al Imran 64)

Let's not be that kind of fanatic who does not want the truth, but only their own desires and traditions, who fight each other over words. If they would get together and talk quietly, they would find that what they mean is not two different meanings but the same thing. They would find that they agree totally on the intended meaning, and would stop fighting about the words they use.

Is our Master Jesus truly the Christ?

Many people do not understand that the word "Christ" is not one of Jesus' names. Neither do they understand that the word "Christ" is a title that has a special meaning that applies to Jesus. The meanings of "Christ" are: "God's vice-regent," "the promised, awaited king of the Jews," and "he who comes and gives life to his people, saving them from their enemies."

"Christ Jesus, son of Mary, is truly God's messenger, and his word which he sent to Mary and a spirit from him." (Nisa 171)

"She said to him, 'I know that the Christ is coming, and he will tell us everything.' Jesus said, 'I who speak to you am the Christ.'" (John 4:25-26)

"Pilate the governor returned to his palace and called Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' Jesus said, 'Are you asking this for yourself or did others say this about me?' Pilate said, 'Am I a Jew? Your own people and priests turned you over to me. What have you done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would have defended me from being turned over to the Jews. No, my kingdom is not from here.'" (John 18:33-36)

Is Jesus God's vice-regent?

With regard to the expression, "God's vice-regent,..." some people say that it should not be used at all. But this expression occurs in the Generous Koran as below:

About Adam: "When your Lord told the angels, 'I will make a vice-regent on earth.' They said, 'Will you put someone there who will corrupt and shed blood, whereas we sing your praises and are holy to you?' 'God said, 'I know things you don't know.'" (Baqarah 30)

About David: "We have truly made you a vice-regent on earth, so judge truthfully among men." (Sad 26)

Since this exact expression occurs in the Generous Koran about Adam and David, why is there an objection to using it for Jesus son of Mary? Let us return to our question. Is our Master Jesus God's vice-regent? One of the essential pre-requisites of God's vice-regent is that he be obedient to God. If he is not, he will not execute God's orders, so how could he be a vice-regent? Were Adam and David obedient to God? We read in the Generous Koran:

About Adam: "And Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray." (Taha121)
About David: "And he asked his Lord for forgiveness." (Sad 24)

One who disobeys is definitely not obedient, nor is one who needs to ask his Lord for forgiveness. Because of their disobedience, they lost the privilege of being vice-regent over all mankind.

But what does the Generous Koran say about Christ Jesus son of Mary? First, the Generous Koran never mentions a single sin or reason for Jesus to ask forgiveness. Not only does the Generous Koran never attribute to Christ Jesus son of Mary any sins, but it ascribes to him the exact opposite.

"That I may give you a sinless son." (faultless, pure, free from sin - Mary 19)

Thus, only Jesus has the right to be vice-regent. This is a quality that only Christ Jesus son of Mary has.

God's vice-regent must also be someone God trusts completely. Therefore, he must enjoy an intimate relationship with God. Who can enjoy that kind of relationship with God?? Only one who has something of God's nature. Who is that? The Generous Koran mentions only of Adam and Christ Jesus son of Mary that God breathed into them of His Spirit. Thus, only they of all mankind could possibly be vice-regents. Of Adam the Generous Koran says:

"Then He formed him and breathed into him of His Spirit." (Sajda 9), and

"And Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray." (Taha 121)

Because of Adam's disobedience, he lost the privilege of being vice-regent from this aspect as well.

Now concerning Jesus, let us see what the Generous Koran has to say about him. In addition to affirming the purity and sinlessness of our Master Christ Jesus son of Mary, it says:

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

"He said, I am truly a messenger sent from your Lord to give you a sinless son." (Mary 19)

These verses clearly tell us that Christ Jesus son of Mary came through a breath of God's Spirit in his mother Mary, and thus, that he has a nature from God's Spirit as well as his human nature from his mother. Thus he alone possesses the prerequisites to be God's vice-regent.

Now let us return to the verse we read at the beginning of our discussion about God's vice-regent:

"When your Lord told the angels, 'I will make a vice-regent on earth.' They said, 'Will you put someone there who will corrupt and shed blood, whereas we sing your praises and are holy to you?' 'God said, 'I know things you don't know.'" (Baqarah 30)

What did God know that the angels did not know about? The angels expected that the man (Adam) would be a corrupter and murderer and were correct. But they did not know God's plan - that He would send another vice-regent (David), and when he also failed, would then send the only vice-regent in whom God breathed His Spirit and who also did not disobey God: Jesus son of Mary. In case anyone would suggest another one of the prophets, claiming that he also is fit to hold this position, let us look at some of the verses that deal with the disobedience of the prophets:

About Adam and Eve: "We sinned against ourselves, and if You don't forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be lost." (Aaraf 23), and

"And Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray." (Taha 121)
About Noah: "And if you do not forgive me and have mercy on me, I will certainly be lost." (Hud 47), and "Lord, forgive me and my parents and believers who enter my house, and the rest of the believers." (Nuh 28)

About Abraham: "Whom I crave that He will forgive me my sin on the Day of Judgment." (Shuaraa 82), and "My Lord, forgive me and my parents and the believers on the day of reckoning" (Ibrahim 41)

About Moses: "And Moses struck him and killed him. He said, 'This is a work of Satan'... He said, 'Lord, I have sinned against myself. Forgive me!'" (Qasas 15-16)

About Aaron: "Don't you follow me? Have you thus disobeyed my command?" (Taha 93)

About both Moses and Aaron: "He said, 'Lord, forgive me and my brother.'" (Aaraf 151), and "We crave that our Lord will forgive our sins." (Shuaraa 51)

About David: "And he asked his Lord for forgiveness." (Sad 24)

About Solomon: "I have loved the good things of the world more than mentioning the name of God...He said, 'Lord, forgive me.'" (Sad 32, 35)

About Jonah: "I was truly a sinner." (Anbia 87), and "So the whale swallowed him while he was blameworthy." (Safat 142)

About Mohamed: "So that God may forgive your past and future sins." (Fatah 2), and "And ask forgiveness for your sins and those of all the believers." (Mohammed 19), and "And ask forgiveness for your sins, and praise your Lord." (Mumin or Ghafir 55), and "And ask forgiveness from God." (Nisa 106), and "He frowned and turned away when the blind man came to him." (Abasa 1-2), and "And praise your Lord and ask his forgiveness." (Nasr 3), and "We took away from you your burden of guilt." (Inshirah 2), and "And say, 'Lord, forgive and have mercy!'" (Muminin 118)

Thus, only about Jesus does the Generous Koran not mention any sins or asking of forgiveness. Jesus is the only vice-regent who did not fail in the task of complete obedience, as is necessary for a vice-regent.

This is clearly illustrated in the following verse:

"Jesus has a likeness in God's eyes to Adam, who was created by God from the dirt, saying, 'Be!' and he was." (Al Imran 59)

We note here that the Generous Koran is very precise in what it says about the way in which Adam and Jesus came. It says,
"who was created from the dirt" in the singular, referring to Adam only, not 'who were created from the dirt' in the plural, referring to both Adam and Jesus. They are similar not in the way they came to the earth, as we will see below, but in God's giving each one of them the opportunity to be his vice-regent. In that, Jesus has a likeness in God's eyes to Adam." (Al Imran 59)

This is also clear to the person who reads the Generous Koran or the Honoured Injeel or Wise Tawrat, for the heavenly books are all united in what they have to say about Adam:

Generous Koran

"Jesus has a likeness in God's eyes to Adam, who was created by God from the dirt, saying, 'Be!' and he was." (Al Imran 59)

"Then he made him and breathed into him of his spirit." (Sajda 9)

Honoured Injeel:

"And God made the first man from dirt, so he is earthly." (1 Corinthians 15:47)

Wise Tawrat: "And God made Adam from dirt, and breathed into his nose the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7)

Thus, God made Adam from dirt, and then breathed into him from his Spirit. Did Jesus son of Mary come in the same way? No! As we read in the heavenly books:

Generous Koran:

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

"Christ Jesus, son of Mary, God's messenger, and his word which he sent to Mary and a spirit from him." (Nisa 171)

"Since the angels said, Mary, God is giving you good news of a word from him, whose name is Christ Jesus son of Mary, and he will be highly honoured and famous in this world and the hereafter, and brought near to God." (Al Imran 45)

"He said, I am truly a messenger sent from your Lord to give you a sinless boy. She said, How can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me, nor have I been a prostitute? He said, This is what your Lord says: It is easy for me, and we will make him a miracle to all men, and mercy from us, and it was a predestined matter. So she became pregnant with him and went far away." (Mary 19-22)

and "Mary daughter of Amran who protected her chastity, and we breathed into her womb of our Spirit, and she believed the words of her Lord." (Tahrim 12)

Honoured Injeel:

"This is the story of the birth of Christ Jesus: His mother Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph, and before their wedding, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph her fiancé was god-fearing man, and he did not want to scandalize her, so he decided to divorce her and keep the matter secret. Then an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him: "Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for she is pregnant by the Holy
Spirit. She will give birth to a son, whom you will call Jesus (Ransomer), because he will ransom his people from their sins.” This all happened in fulfilment of God's promise in the Tawrat: "A virgin will get pregnant and have a son, who will be called Emmanuel, meaning God is with us.” And Joseph woke up and did what the angel had commanded. He brought her to his home in marriage, but he had no sexual relations with her until she had borne Jesus.” (Matthew 1:18-25)

"God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin in the city of Nazareth in Galilee named Mary, who was engaged to a man named Joseph, who was descended from King David. When the angel came to her, he said, "God's peace be upon you whom God has blessed. God is with you." Mary was afraid and wondered at the greeting. The angel said, "Don't be afraid, Mary. God is pleased with you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, whom you shall name Jesus. He will be great, and people will call him Son of God Most High. Almighty God will give him the throne of his ancestor David, and he will rule over the people of Israel forever. His kingdom will never end." Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin, and no man has lain with me?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come to you and the power of the Most High God will overshadow you, so that your child will be sinless, and will be called the Son of God. Your relative Elizabeth is pregnant in her old age, and is now in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible for God." Mary said, "I am God's servant. Let what you said happen to me.” Then the angel left her." (Luke 1:26-38)

"It is written in the Tawrat, 'and Adam became a living person' and the last Adam (Jesus) became a spirit giving life to man. But Adam the man came first, and then the spirit (Jesus). And God made the first man from dirt, so he is earthly. But the second man (Christ) is from heaven, and Adam the earthly is like the rest of the sons of earth. The man of heaven is like the rest of the sons of heaven (his followers), and as we have worn the image of the earthly one, so we will also wear the image of the heavenly one.” (1 Corinthians 15:45-49)

and

"Sin entered into the world through one man (Adam) and which led in turn to death. Thus death affected all people, because all are sinners. Sin was in the world before the law of Moses, but where there is no law, there is no accounting for sin. But from the days of Adam to Moses, death affected all people, even those who had not sinned in the way Adam did, and Adam was a type (or symbol) of Jesus who came after him. And God's gift is not like the sin of Adam in its effect, since the grace of God and the grace of the one man Jesus Christ have overflowed to many, while through one man's sin (Adam) many died. And the gift of God is not like the sins of Adam in its result. The one sin (in the days of Adam) led to destruction but many sins led to the gift of the mercy of Christ. Thus, death affected all people through the one man (Adam) as a result of his disobedience, but those who receive the overflowing of the grace and gift of righteousness are affected by life through the one man Christ Jesus. Thus, the sin of one man (Adam) led to the destruction of all, and the righteousness of one man Christ Jesus led to mercy and life for all. The disobedience of one man made many disobey, and the obedience of one man made many righteous. Sin was known more after the Law of Moses came, but grace increased even more and overflowed when Jesus came. As sin affected all people and killed them in the days of Moses, now the mercy of our master Christ Jesus will affect all people and give them eternal life.” (Romans 5:12-21)

and

"Those born of the spirit are spirit and those born of the flesh are flesh." (John 3:7)
Wise Tawrat:

"The virgin will become pregnant and have a son and they will call him 'Emmanuel' or 'God is with us'" (Isaiah 7:14)

These verses all tell us very clearly that Christ Jesus son of Mary came from a breath of God's spirit into his mother Mary. There is no similarity between him and Adam in this, but they are similar in God's giving each one of them the opportunity to be his vice-regent. In summary, Jesus has a nature from the spirit of God in addition to his human nature from his mother, and since he has no guilt, sin or reason to ask forgiveness, our answer is "Yes, our master Jesus is the only vice-regent of God."

Is Christ Jesus also the son of David?

This expression has two meanings: "The promised coming King who will ransom his people" (we have dealt with this meaning above) or "descended from David." Was Jesus descended from David?

"This is the life story of Christ Jesus son of David son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1)

"When Jesus began his ministry, he was about 30 years old, and people thought he was the son of Joseph, son of Hali, son of Metthath, son of Lavi, son of Melki, son of Yanna, son of Joseph, son of Metathia, son of Amos, son of Nahum, son of Hesli, son of Nejjai, son of Maat, son of Metathia, son of Shami, son of Joseph, son of Judah, son of John, son of Risa, son of Zerubabel, son of Shealtiel, son of Niri, son of Melki, son of Addi, son of Kosim, son of Almodam, son of Ir, son of Yusi, son of Eleazar, son of Yorim, son of Metthath, son of Levi, son of Shamoun, son of Judah, son of Joseph, son of Yunan, son of Aliakim, son of Milia, son of Minan, son of Matatha, son of Nathan, son of David." (Luke 3:23-31)

"And King David fathered Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon fathered Rehoboam, who fathered Abia, who fathered Asa, who fathered Jehoshaphat, who fathered Joram, who fathered Uzziah, who fathered Jotham, who fathered Ahaz, who fathered Hezekiah, who fathered Manassah, who fathered Amon, who fathered Josiah, who fathered Jeconiah and his brothers in the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, who fathered Zerubabel, who fathered Abihud, who fathered Eliakim, who fathered Azor, who fathered Sadouq, who fathered Akim, who fathered Aliud, who fathered Eleazar, who fathered Mattan, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Joseph, husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Christ." (Matthew 1:6-16)

So yes, Jesus was descended from David.

Is Christ Jesus son of Mary also the son of man?

In the Honoured Injeel, there is another expression which Christ Jesus son of Mary commonly used of himself, "the son of man." This expression, which talks of his being king, refers to a verse in the Wise Tawrat, which contains the very same words:

"And I saw in my dream someone like a son of man coming on the clouds, and he came to the throne of Everlasting God, and was presented to him, and God gave him everlasting authority and eternal kingship and majesty over all nations and peoples." (Daniel 7:13-14)

These verses, which refer to the reign of Christ Jesus son of Mary over mankind are also consistent
with what the Generous Koran has to say about the subject:

"Since the angels said, 'Mary, God has good news for you about a word from him whose name is Christ Jesus son of Mary, and he is highly-honoured in this world and the hereafter, one of those brought near to God.' (Al Imran 45)

"She protected her chastity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit, and made her and her son a miracle for all mankind." (Anbia 91)

Thus, Yes, he is also the son of man, the king over mankind, as we saw before.

Summary

We have seen that our master Christ Jesus son of Mary has many titles, and among those titles, most of them refer to his kingship and mastery over mankind. But how can we make use of his kingship and mastery personally? Since he is God's vice-regent, how can we obey him? In the Generous Koran it says:

"And when Jesus brought clear miracles, he said, 'I have come to bring you wisdom and to make clear to you what you disagree about, so fear God and obey me." (Zakhraf 63)

"I came to confirm the Tawrat that is in my hands, and to allow for you some of what was forbidden to you, and I have brought you a miracle from your Lord, so fear God and obey me." (Al Imran 50)

How then can we benefit personally from his kingship and mastery? And since he is God's vice-regent, how can we obey him? An expert in God's law asked Jesus the same question 2000 years ago, as the Honoured Injeel says:

"A religious expert named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews, came to Jesus at night and said, 'Our teacher, we know that you have come from God, because no one can do your miracles unless God is with him.' Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, you won't see God's Kingdom unless you are born again.' The expert asked him, 'How can an old man be born? Can he be born from his mother's womb again?' Jesus answered him, 'You won't enter God's kingdom unless you are born of water and the Spirit. Those born of the flesh are flesh and those born of the spirit are spirit. Don't be amazed that I said you must be born again." (John 3:2-7)

Thus, God sends spiritual life to us through his Spirit, and we submit to the authority of God's vice-regent and become under the control of God's Kingdom when we ask God to send his spirit into our hearts, as the Generous Koran says:

"He it is who sent the Sakinah into the hearts of the believers, so they would grow in faith." (Fatah 4)

What is this Sakinah? This word has two meanings. First, comfort and assurance, and second, the presence of God himself. Both meanings are correct, because when God sends his spirit (his spirit or sakinah) to the hearts of the believers, his presence stays with them and they experience inner comfort and assurance (sakinah).

Do you want to experience God's presence with you? Do you need inner comfort and assurance?

If so, pray to God and ask him to send the sakinah into your heart with a prayer like this:
O God, O Most Gracious and Merciful
Lord, you are bountiful with your spirit and generous
Lord, I am a guilty sinner
Lord, I want to obey Christ, your only vice-regent
Lord, send me your spirit, the sakinah, now
Lord, I submit to your great kingdom
Lord, give me a share in the gardens of grace
Amen.

A Possible Creed for Ishmaelite
I believe that Jesus the son of Mary is the Messiah, the prophet and messenger of God, the Word of God. Special is he among the prophets.
To him God gave clear signs and God strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.
He was born of a Virgin pure and preferred above all the women of creation.
He was taught of God and healed the sick, gave sight in the blind and raised the dead by the permission of God.
He is illustrious in this world and in the Hereafter, one of those brought near to God, one of the righteous.
I believe that our Father Abraham was a friend of God and that He gave promises to him to make him a great nation. That convenant act passed upon his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, to bless both sons.
Isaiah al Masih was sent as a messenger of God to the Children of Israel and came confirming that which was before him of the Torah and yet making lawful some of that which had been forbidden before.
In the midst of widespread unbelief he called out men to be his helpers in the cause of God, men who could help because they had surrendered to the purpose of the Lord of the worlds.
God caused him to follow in the footsteps of the prophets who had gone before him, gave him the Gospel and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. He was a pattern of conduct for the Children of Israel, God made him (and Mary) a sign for all peoples; he is God's revelation for mankind and a mercy from him.41
Mohammed was sent to the people of Ishmael to bring them also back to God in obedience and submission.
In the Gospel is guidance and a light. There is no distinction made among the prophets of God, but God exalted some above others. Of those who are thus exalted is particularly Jesus, son of Mary. 42
There are certain reservations that Muhammad made with regard to classical Christian confessions of
faith. He rejected the notion that the Messiah is the "son" of God; he avoided even the term "Father" as
designative of God because of its suggestion of physical paternity and pagan deities who mate. 43 For
Muhammad, Jesus, son of Mary, however exalted was only a messenger, a slave of Allah, a part of the
creation, and yet a special part of creation, one before whom, like Adam, the angels should fall down in
obeisance. Muhammad apparently rejected the historical fact of the crucifixion and therefore its
atoning significance. Rather than the resurrection he stressed the ascension of Jesus. But those who
follow Jesus he believed to be set by God above those who disbelieve, and the spread of the Christian
faith to be veritably the result of the work of God. 44

As a biblically oriented Christian I am not able to share this (Qur’anic confession in toto. But I am
profoundly grateful for it. Above all, I cannot bring myself to be hostile to a religious teacher who has
such an exalted conception of Jesus the Christ. I feel myself impelled even further to expect that
"genuine word of love for Muhammad from the followers of Christ* which the Christian scholar Daud
Rahbar has recently asked for. 45 I believe I owe him that element of sympathy which a Muslim writer
has called 'I fourth dimension." 46 I see him as an authentic Prophet of God, even thought like other
prophets both before and after the time of our Lord, neither morally perfect nor doctrinally infallible.
And the movement which is called Islam I regard as an instrument of God in the history of salvation
with.

There are some with weak consciences and others with strong consciences. Rom 14 says those who are
strong (e.g. feel they can say it) should not look down on those who are weak. Also that the weak (e.g.
those who don’t feel they can say it) should not judge the strong. For you to say to the strong “You can’t say it” or to the weak, “You must say it” would be perverting the gospel.

2. The most important issue is whether or not the person would be involved in idolatry by saying the
creed. I Corinthians 10:20 deals with a similar issue and allows freedom while warning of the
danger of partnership with demons.
In an idolatry passage, 1 Colossians 8:6 says “there is one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” Notice the difference between God and Lord here. If there were no difference, then there would be two gods. With “God” here, Paul associates Fatherhood, creation, and the purpose of our lives. With “Lord” here, Paul associates mastership/ownership at least (Lord), humanity (Jesus), kingship (Christ), mediation of creation and mediation of God’s life.

Since there is thus one Lord (Eph 4:5 also), and if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Ro 10:9), you get salvation, a key question to the believers would be, “Does acknowledging محمد رسول الله mean acknowledging him as Lord - i.e. master or mediator*? If it means that, then they cannot say it.

3. A related issue is whether saying the creed causes spiritual bondage Ephesians 4:27. 1 Corinthians 6:12 says “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved to anything.” I sensed this was also your concern in Cyprus when you asked Akram, “You didn’t mean that saying the creed causes spiritual bondage, did you!” But whether it does for him or not, it may for some and possibly may not for others. Your situation with those in the South is probably much different from ours, and you may well have more problems with Ali. Again, this will need to be referred to the believers for individual evaluation.

Related is Ephesians 6:12. Does the creed hinder us from struggling against the principalities, ...the powers, ... the world rulers of this present darkness, .. the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places?

A related passage is Galatians 4:8-11.

“8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to beings which are by nature no gods. 9 But now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how can you turn back once again to the elemental spirits of the universe? Do you wish to be enslaved by them again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Here Paul links ritual observances with spiritual bondage and slavery.

4. In addition, it seems he is especially concerned with them going back to bondage to the same spiritual beings as before. Paul says a similar thing in Gal 5:1 “don’t submit again to a yoke of slavery.” See Hebrews 6:4-6

5. Another principle is faith/doubt. Ro 14:23 says, “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” This again is an issue that the believers will have to decide individually. If they have doubts, then they must not do it. Do they sense they quench the Spirit? I Thessalonians 5:19 Do they sense they are disowning Christ? II Titus 2:12

6. Another issue that may apply is circumcision in the N.T., which was very much a community boundary marker as the creed is now (not only for new converts but for those whose faith is in doubt as well). Circumcision was not to be required of those that did not have it, but for those who already had it, they were advised to keep it. I Corinthians 7:18. This could be seen to imply that for someone who grew up Focus, to remain so (including the creed?) is preferable. Will they be able to express trust in Christ for forgiveness and intercession if they say the creed or will the creed imply trust in the whole system of Islam and the Koran, etc? +

7. Some other verses about speech (which should apply to anything we say, including a creed):

8. If it implies solidarity or unity with محمد instead of Christ, then it should be avoided. Eph 5:32
9. Is saying the creed to avoid suffering? Philippians 1:29, 1 Thessalonians 1:6 et al Don’t.
10. Is there an element of confidence in the flesh in the creed? Philippians 3:4, 6 Don’t.
11. Is it in conflict with the gospel of the grace of God? Don’t.
13: Does it imply that محمد is their hope of glory and not Christ? Don’t.
14. Does it make them partners... in the defence and confirmation of the gospel? Philippians 1:7
15. Would they see a conflict between the creed and 1 Timothy 2:5 لا إله إلا الله ولا شفيع بين الله والناس إلا محمد النبي عيسى بن مريم? Or how would they see the difference in just substituting Jesus for محمد?
16. The book of Hebrews was written to Jews to show them that Christ was superior to absolutely everything in Judaism. Does the creed imply to them that محمد is in some way superior? Is the highest category or is there something higher that could be assigned to Jesus?
17. Would they say the creed to remain on the fence - marginal? Or could they say it and at the same time be ready to die for Christ? I Thessalonians 3:5 Will it lead to them trying to have the best of both worlds - salvation but taking 4 wives, e.g. I.e. will it hinder them from accepting wholly the authority of Scripture?
18. Would you call it a good confession? 1 Timothy 6:12
19. Does the creed deny Christ or disown Him? II Timothy 2:12 Is it friendship with the world? James 4:4
20. Is it consistent with one who would hold firm to the sure word as taught? Titus 1:9 see 1 Timothy 3
21. God gifts the person who wins another to faith with a special relationship with him (you have many guides in Christ, but you have not many fathers). In addition, the gift of apostle seems to involve helping new believers think through these issues, and occasionally making a decision for them on an issue (e.g. singleness in 1 Corinthians 7, veils in 1 Corinthians 11). See II Corinthians 10:8 “the authority the Lord gave us for building up.” Other verses about building on a foundation you yourself have laid are: Ro 15:20, 1 Co 3:10, II Corinthians 10:1, 6, 13:10.
22. Does it hinder them from fixing their eyes on Jesus? Hebrews 12:2
23. Is the motivation for saying the creed (in you or them) to avoid the stumbling stone of Christ? 1 Peter 2:8
24. Is the motivation fear? 1 Peter 3:14
25. Is the word of their testimony compromised or diluted? Revelation 21:11

*By the way, I have concluded that “the gospel to the” Focus focuses on Christ role as the only mediator - that this is the most important (and hardest?) thing for them to acknowledge.
Gal 5:3

The Question of the Shahada.

The Shahada Kabir is fundamental to a Muslim’s life, it is spoken into his ears at birth, he declares his allegiance to the community, to God and obedience to Mohammed on its declaration. A convert is required to recite it to convert and the angels of death will ask him what his Shahada is at death. When talking to a Muslim in Britain some time ago I declared that I also was a Muslim, as is Moses, Abraham, David and Jesus. All of them declared their faith in God but none of them used Mohammed’s name in that declaration. Since Muslims put a lot of weight on tradition and the teachings of the elders and fathers this is a problem. Bida or innovation is a great sin and adding Mohammed’s name to the declarations that these previous prophets made could be seen to be Bida.

His response was “say the Shahada” at that point in my journey I could not. The animosity towards Islam, the cultural and religious divide so strong and the insertion within our community and culture so deep that I could not understand the implications. It was a lost opportunity to build bridges and take the advantage to flesh out what these terms mean.

So, what is the Shahada? “There is only one God and Mohammed is the prophet of God” unless of course you are a Shia and then the added words “and Ali is the friend of God” are added (* thus the antagonism between Sunni and Shia as this is also Bida.)

Let us break this down into its constituent parts. “First of all “There is only one God.”

It does not take a long discussion between Jew, Christian and Muslim to agree upon this statement. There might be different views as to what this God is like, how He works etc. But that is even true among those three faiths within themselves. Thus we have Calvinists and Armininians, Sunni and Shia and Sufi. Fundamentally we are talking about the creator of the universe, the God who made all things and causes everything to exist.

Secondly we have the statement “and Mohammed is the Prophet of God” Here we must look at the term ‘Prophet’ in Arabic. There are three words that denote a prophet and his role; “Monvir”, “Nabi” and “Rasul”. Monvir is like Noah, a warner of the coming judgment of God in the flood. Nabi is a foreteller of the future a classic Old Testament prophet who told God’s people what he would do with the nations. Rasul is from the term a messenger, one who brings a message. What was Mohammed’s message? Was it not that God would judge idol worship, that there is only one God and that Jesus is the word (Kalimatullah) of God and the Spirit (Ruh) of God. Can we disagree?

The fact that soon after Mohammed’s death Islam changed under the guidance of Ayesha and the Quraish whose goal was to retake Mecca. This was to continue to use it for their own profit, derived from it as a centre of religious activities. The Quraish tribe used it to wage war upon other nations and does not diminish the value of Mohammed’s original work. A fuller outline of this is found in Ibn Warraq’s books, and the works of Wansbrough, Hawting, Pun, etc.

Simply there emerging evidence that Islam arose around the 9th Century as the Roman powers withdrew from Arabia Felix leaving a power vacuum. Into this vacuum the sons of Ishmael stepped and established rule in Jerusalem and Damascus. Meeting with Christians and Jews who had a prophet, a city and a book these Ishmaelites had nothing. Thus was invented the stories (contained in the Haddith). Out of the Haddith came the Qur’an incorporating Syriac Christian hymnology, pagan stories
and even Ethiopic, Sabean and Buddhist legends. Like Christianity, it took some 200 years to formulate Islam into a cohesive religious system in contradiction to existing system prevalent at the time.

So the Shahada is not something to be fought but it is to be understood as a creedal focal point for an emerging community who has lost its roots as an Abrahamic line. Mohammed is calling all Arabs to return to the worship of the God of their fathers, Ishmael and Abraham. It is an Arab manifestation of an Abrahamic faith. Very similar to the Mormonism being an American manifestation of European Christianity.

Within Christianity we also have had “Rasuls” appearing from time to time. Surely Spurgeon, Moody, Edwards, Whitfield, Wesley et al were not bringing a new message but a call for a return to the old message of faith in God and a life transformed by obedience to Him. So also we have a whole movement within Africa of local and national prophets who speak into the lives of the people. Can we now accept the Muslim call to be another form of this phenomena?
CHAPTER 16

Risala or the message. What the Qur’an says about “The Straight Way”

The Straight Way

“In the name of the merciful and compassionate God.
Praise belongs to God, the Lord of the worlds, the merciful,
the compassionate, the ruler of the day of judgment!
Thee we serve and Thee we ask for aid. Guide us in the right path,
the path of those Thou art gracious to;
not of those Thou art wroth with; nor of those who err, Surah 1

The Qur’an opens with words of praise to God and a summary of man’s relation to him. In the Muslim’s spiritual contemplation, his first words are those of praise (v1); this leads him to see God’s attributes - as the gracious and merciful Sustainer and Judge - more clearly (v2-4). From this develops an attitude of worship; and an acknowledgement of the need to seek God’s help (v5). Finally comes prayer for guidance, and contemplation of what guidance means (v6).

Thus the true Muslim asks God, “Show us the straightway” (v6). This desire to know and be guided in the straightway is uppermost in his heart.

Who are the followers of the straight way?

1) God’s chosen ones:- V7 describes further the followers of this straight way; they are God’s chosen ones. The straightway is:

‘The way of those on whom
Thou hast bestowed Thy grace,
Those whose (portion)
Is not wrath.
And who go not astray.’

This verse is often divided into two halves to argue against Christians. ‘The way of those on whom
Thou hast bestowed Thy grace’ is seen to be referring to Muslims, who are on the straightway. The latter half is then often misquoted as ‘Those whose (portion) is wrath go astray’. Removal of the negatives causes this then to be applied to Jews and Christians (who by inference are on the crooked path). In reality, the entire verse is simply describing those who are on the straightway - those whom God has chosen. He has bestowed his grace on them; and so they are protected from God’s wrath and from going astray.

This point is reinforced in 6: 87. The followers of the straightway are God’s chosen ones. ‘We [God] chose them, And We guided them To a straight way.’

2) True men of faith/ God’s sincere servants:- The straightway is the way of all true men of faith, typified by Abraham. As the original true man of faith in God, Abraham worshipped Him alone and was considered righteous:

6: 161

A way that is straight, -
A religion of right, -
The Path (trod) by Abraham
The true in faith,
And he (certainly)
joined not gods with God.

• The straightway is that taken by all of God’s sincere servants:

15:39

And I [Iblis] will put them
All in the wrong, -
15:40
Except Thy chosen servants among them,
15:41
(God) said: ‘This is for me a
Straight path.
Q? What is the straightway?

1) The way of God's chosen servants leads directly to Him. A more direct translation of the Arabic in Sura 15: 40-41 reads: (God) said, “this (way of my sincere servants) is indeed a way that leads straight to me’.

2) Now we come to the crux. The straightway leads to God; and to follow Jesus is the straightway:

43: 61

And (Jesus) shall be
A Sign for the coming
Of the Hour (Of judgment):
Therefore have no doubt
About the (Hour), but
Follow ye Me: this
Is a Straight Way.

Jesus is the straightway. Jesus does, not command God's chosen ones to follow his teaching or his example, but to follow him. The straightway (Jesus) leads to God. In other words, following Jesus leads us straight to God. We come to God through Jesus!!! Following Jesus = coming to God.

3) To worship God is also the straightway, as he himself commands.

36: 61

Worship me, (for that) this
Was the Straight Way (God speaking.)

This is reiterated by Jesus:

43: 64

For Allah, He is my Lord
And your Lord. so worship
Ye him: this is
A Straight Way [Jesus speaking]

- Further, the straight way is to serve God:

19: 36

Verily God is my Lord
And your Lord: Him
Therefore serve ye: this is
A Way that is straight. (Jesus speaking).

Now, we have seen following Jesus is the straightway. Here, to worship and serve God is the straightway. Hence, worshipping/serving God following Jesus!!!

4) The continuation of Sura 43 shows that those who are on the straight path, God’s chosen and protected devotees (worshippers), submit to Him. A true Muslim is one who submits to God, this is the real meaning of Islam:

43: 68

My devotees!
No fear shall be
On you today
Nor shall ye grieve, -
Those who have believed
In Our Signs and submitted (to Us)

Now earlier in the Sura, Jesus commands those seeking the straightway, those fearing God, to obey him:

43: 63

When Jesus came
With Clear Signs, he said,

‘Now have I come
To you with Wisdom,
And in order to make
Clear to you some,
Of the points on which
ye dispute: therefore fear Allah

And obey me,

A true Muslim submits to God; yet Jesus commands obedience to himself. The straightway of devotion to God involves submission to Him; and also obedience to Jesus. Obeying Jesus is equivalent to submitting to God in fear and worship!!! Devotion to God = fearing God = submitting to God (true Islam) = obeying Jesus. How can this be?

To summarise, Jesus is the straightway leading us to God. Jesus is the means by which we come to God; following Jesus coming to God. Moreover, following Jesus is the same as worshipping God. Lastly, devotion to God = submission to Him (true Islam) = obedience to Jesus. We are left with two conclusions. Firstly, we approach God through Jesus. Secondly, to approach Jesus is indeed to approach God. Jesus is both the straightway and He to whom the straightway leads!!!

Biblical parallels to move on to:

1) John 14: 4-6 Jesus tells his followers “You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas answers, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” He has misunderstood; he thinks that Jesus’ followers will be treading the same path to the Father that Jesus did in the same way that Peter (John 13: 37) imagines he can follow Jesus now to the place where he is going, by laying down his own life.

Jesus’ response to Thomas is, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In reality, Jesus’ own path to the Father is via the cross; that is a step we cannot imitate. The reason his followers know the way is because they know Jesus himself; not because they will follow Jesus’ route. Jesus goes to God via the cross - so that WE can come to God via Jesus. Jesus is the way to God; we approach God through him & his own death on the cross.

2) John 10: 7-11 “Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Jesus, who lays down his life for his followers, is the gateway to God; whoever enters through him will be saved. cf also 14-18; v27-30.

NB (the) way / (a) way - signified in Arabic by the presence or absence of ‘al’ (the). The English translation is not always correct - sometimes (the) way is translated as (a) way and vice versa. Both occur in reference to the same ‘straight way’.