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William Thomas Long

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Christian responses to Islamic Christology; a critique of sūrahs three, four, and nineteen of the Qur'ān.

William Thomas Long, 1988

ABSTRACT

The aims of this study are to present and to evaluate the Quranic portrayal of Jesus as found in sūrahs three, four, and nineteen.

Chapter one incorporates a brief introduction leading to the presentation of what the Qur'ān says about Jesus within the prescribed limits, and in the light supplied by Christian and Muslim exegetes. The second chapter appraises, in relation to the Qur'ān, the relevant Biblical and apocryphal views of Jesus, noting the parallels, differences and additions afforded by the canonical and non-canonical accounts.

Chapter three examines, from a wide Christian perspective, a number of different Christological viewpoints. Subsequently, each Christology is examined in relation to Islamic Christology. The pertinent points are discussed in detail, noting similarities and differences. Chapter four examines the Quranic material relating to the question of the death of Jesus

and this involves an appraisal of various Muslim traditions which prove to be contrary to the Qur'ān.

Chapter five presents an evaluation of Islamic Christology. It is argued that there is substantial agreement between the Qur'ān and the Bible with regard to Jesus. From the Unitarian and Liberal Christian viewpoints, Islamic Christology is an acceptable Christology. On the other hand, it is argued that Islamic Christology, from the orthodox Christian perspective, is not worthy of consideration as a legitimate Christology because it does not incorporate the concept of Incarnation.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO ISLAMIC CHRISTOLOGY;
A CRITIQUE OF SŪRAHS THREE, FOUR, AND
NINETEEN OF THE QUR'AN

William Thomas Long, 1988

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UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY
1988



Christian Responses to Islamic Christology:

A Critique of Sūrahs Three, Four, and Nineteen of the Qur'ān.

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The material contained in this thesis has not previously been submitted by me for a degree in this, or any other, University.

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Notes on the Transliteration of Arabic Words

The system of transliteration is the same as that found in the Encyclopaedia of Islam with the following modifications:

th becomes th

dj becomes j

k becomes q.

Abbreviations

- AQ A Yūsuf 'Alī, The Holy Qur'ān, Text, Translation and Commentary, First published 1934; new edn., Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1975.
- JME Cragg, K., Jesus and the Muslim - An Exploration. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1985.
- JPI 'Ata ur-Rahim, M., Jesus a Prophet of Islam. First published, Diwan Press, Norfolk, 1977; 3rd edn., London, MWH Publishers, 1983.
- JQ Parrinder, G., Jesus in the Qur'ān. First published, 1965; Sheldon Press, London, 1982.
- MGI Hick, J., (ed), The Myth of God Incarnate. SCM Press, London, 1977.
- MW Ayoub, M., 'Towards an Islamic Christology': 2, 'The death of Jesus, reality or delusion', Muslim World, April 1980, pages 91 to 121.
- RSV The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version. Glasgow, Collins, O.T., 1952; N.T., 2nd edn., 1971.
- WGO O'Shaughnessy, T.J., Word of God in the Qur'ān. First published as The Koranic Concept of the Word of God, 1948; revised edn., Biblical Institute Press, Rome, 1984.

CHAPTER ONE

JESUS IN ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

Section 1.1: Scope and Limits of the Study

The aims of this study are to examine critically the tenets of Islamic Christology which are grounded in sūrahs three, four, and nineteen of the Qur'ān, and to weigh the Quranic material in the balance of relevant Christian and Muslim scholarship.

Throughout this thesis there are points of argument derived from Quranic sources outside the specified limits of study, but all additional Quranic references are cited in order to enhance and illuminate the prescribed area of research.

Sūrahs three, four, and nineteen contain the bulk of the Quranic material relating to Jesus. Sūrah three, which belongs to the second and third years of the Hijra, is entitled, 'The Family of 'Imrān' (the father of Moses). It portrays the continuity of religious tradition from the Mosaic Dispensation to the birth, ministry and destiny of Jesus. The sūrah in question presents a basic view of religious history which culminates in the one true religion, namely, Islam, and Christians are enjoined to find in Islam the completion of Christianity.



Much of sūrah four appears to have been revealed between the battle of Uhud and the siege of Medina, but some passages, especially those referring to the Jews, are probably before Uhud. Sūrah four is entitled 'Women' because it deals chiefly with women's rights, but it includes important statements about the person, status, and destiny of Jesus.

Sūrah nineteen is entitled 'Mary' and belongs to the late Meccan or perhaps early Medinan period. The first part of sūrah nineteen is devoted to stories of Biblical personages. Fairly full accounts are given of Zechariah, of the Virgin Mary, and of the birth of Jesus. Jewish attitudes to Mary are discussed and, as in sūrahs three and four, the rôle and destiny of Jesus are portrayed within the context of Islamic Christology.

Christian responses to Islamic Christology necessitate the use of the Bible. The Biblical presentation of Jesus will be compared and expounded with reference to the relevant Quranic material. In addition, various apocryphal works will be cited where necessary, but all material - both Biblical and apocryphal - will only be rehearsed with reference to the critique of sūrahs three, four, and nineteen of the Qur'ān. Similarly, Christian and Muslim exegetes will be cited only in relation to the Quranic limitations of

this thesis.

The ultimate question, which will be answered by this thesis, is as follows: 'Is the Islamic view of Jesus worthy of consideration as a legitimate Christology?'

The following information should be helpful in reading this thesis.

Firstly, the few dates which are used are given anno domini. However, the dates of books published in the Arab World are given as after the Hijra (A.H.).

Secondly, 'Īsā and 'Jesus' are considered to refer to the same person. Thus, 'Jesus' is used throughout without changing to 'Īsā when the Qur'ān is discussed. However, it must be stressed, at this early stage, that care is needed before assuming that the Quranic 'Īsā, and Jesus, are one and the same.

Thirdly, all quotations from the Qur'ān, unless otherwise stated, are taken from, A. Yūsuf 'Ali, The Holy Qur'ān, Text, Translation and Commentary, first edn., 1934; new edn., Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1975.

All quotations from the Bible are taken from, The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version. Glasgow, Collins, O.T., 1952; N.T., 2nd edn., 1971.

Section 1.2: The Quranic Portrayal of Jesus

The primary source for a Muslim's understanding of Jesus ([°] Īsā)¹ is, of course, the Qur'ān. Yet, the reader of the Qur'ān will soon discover that the Qur'ān offers neither a chronologically ordered, nor a systematic, presentation of the life of Jesus, and that all of its scattered references (93 verses in 15 sūrahs or chapters) collected together, would fill only a few pages of the Qur'ān. At the same time the reader will note that biography is not the purpose of the Qur'ān. For in the Qur'ān all the prophets and apostles are subservient to the message they proclaim. The message, not the messenger, is the supreme revelation of the Word of God, and thus the ultimate concern for men. Nor is Jesus in relation to his message, Quranically portrayed, an exception. Still, the Qur'ān always respects and honours Jesus. By what means and in what sense does the Qur'ān portray Jesus? In the following paragraphs the Quranic portrayal of Jesus, as found in sūrahs three, four, and nineteen, will be presented.

The annunciation and Virgin Birth of Jesus, or more exactly his virginal conception,² would appear to be confirmed by the Qur'ān. Indeed the Qur'ān holds Mary the mother of Jesus in high regard and she is the only woman who is specifically called by name³ in the Qur'ān. The Muslim interpretation of the name Mary

means, 'the pious'. According to the Qur'ān Mary is visited by an angel, usually identified with the angel Gabriel (Jibrīl),⁴ who appeared to Mary in the form of, 'a man in all respects'⁵ or 'a man without fault'.⁶ The word conveyed to Mary by the messenger was quite clear:

'He said: "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son." She said, "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" He said: "So (it will be); thy Lord saith, 'That is easy for me, and we wish to appoint him as a sign unto men and a mercy from us': it is a matter (so) decreed."'⁷

The above quotation is the longest account, within the Qur'ān, of the annunciation. There is, however, another Quranic account of the annunciation, as follows:

'Behold, the angels said, "O Mary, God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God. He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity and he shall be (of the company) of the righteous." She said, "O my Lord how shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?" He said, "Even so, God created what He willeth, when He hath decreed a plan, He but saith to it, Be, and it is."'⁸

Thus, there are two very similar accounts of the annunciation to be found in the Qur'ān. It seems that in the Qur'ān the distinction between the annunciation and the conception is not precisely made. Moreover, the Quranic presentation of the manner of conception

and birth of Jesus does not in any way imply divinity. The Qur'an specifically denies the divinity of Jesus. For the Muslim the virginal conception of Jesus is a miracle like many others, that is, an interference by God with the ordinary laws of nature, and somewhat similar to the conception of John the Baptist (Yahyā) by Elizabeth in old age.⁹ According to the Qur'ān God has only to say 'Be' and a thing is. By bringing about Jesus' birth of a virgin, God gives a sign of his immense power. But in fact this is not the most wonderful thing God has done. In the Qur'ān Jesus is compared to Adam, as follows:

'The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him "Be": and he was.'¹⁰

Therefore Jesus' birth is easier to understand than that of Adam, who had neither father or mother.

Following the annunciation, according to the Qur'ān, Mary conceived and retired to 'a remote place'.¹¹ A. Yūsuf 'Ali, commenting on the location of the above events, states:

'The annunciation and the conception, we may suppose, took place in Nazareth (of Galilee) say 65 miles north of Jerusalem. The delivery took place in Bethlehem about 6 miles south of Jerusalem. It was a remote place, not only with reference to the distance of 71 miles, but because in Bethlehem itself the birth was in an obscure corner under a palm-tree, from which perhaps the babe was afterwards removed to a manger in a stable.'¹²

Apparently Mary experienced the normal trauma of parturition as she was driven, by the pains of childbirth, to the trunk of a palm-tree. A voice came to Mary to encourage her and to inform her of the provision of water from a small river, and of dates from the palm-tree. It would seem that Mary was alone without the solace of any human company. In addition Mary had entered, that same day, into a solemn vow to God not to converse with any man or woman.

The child Jesus was born and after a time Mary brought him to show to her own people. As Mary had been away from her family for a long time, and now returned with a baby, the people were prepared to think that Mary had been unchaste. In defence of Mary the child Jesus was able to speak from the cradle:

‘He said, "I am indeed a servant of God, He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet."¹³

There is an additional Quranic reference to Jesus speaking in childhood, as already stated within the last above cited Quranic account of the annunciation, as follows:

‘He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity ...¹⁴

The Qur’ān makes it clear that the ministry of Jesus was directed to the Children of Israel¹⁵ whom he summoned to the worship of God and to unity among

themselves. In fact it would appear that Jesus legalised things which were previously forbidden to the Children of Israel. The Qur'ān states:

'I have come to you to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was before forbidden to you ...'¹⁶

Hence, Jesus came to declare the truth of what had been given before in the Law. The actual reason for the aforesaid relaxation of the Law is not apparent from the Qur'ān. Indeed Islam had previously been commended by God to Noah and then unto Abraham and Moses, and unto all other prophets.¹⁷ Consequently, Jesus received the teaching of the Torah and under inspiration was given the Gospel (injīl), a confirmation of the Torah. With regard to the actual content of the Gospel, the Qur'ān gives little information. In the Gospel, according to the Qur'ān, there are to be found guidance, light and admonition for the God-fearing.¹⁸ It is enjoined upon the people of the Gospel that they judge according to what God has sent down.¹⁹ In the Qur'ān Jesus' message is pared down to the essential, and thus agrees with the message repeated down the ages by all the prophets, namely: 'So fear God and obey me'.²⁰ In turn the revelation of the Gospel would lead to the Qur'ān.

In general the Qur'ān portrays most, or all, of the Children of Israel as an antagonistic people,²¹

against whom God protects Jesus and whom Jesus even curses.²² In the face of such antagonism the disciples (ansār) step forward to accept the call of Jesus to be his helpers in serving God. The Qur'ān states:

'When Jesus found unbelief on their part he said, "Who will be my helpers to (the work of) God?" Said the disciples, "We are God's helpers, we believe in God, and do thou bear witness that we are Muslims."²³

The response of the men in becoming the disciples of Jesus is described elsewhere in the Qur'ān.²⁴ It should be noted that the disciples are referred to as Muslims in the sense that all who bowed to God's Will, before or after Muḥammad, were adherents to Islam.

The Qur'ān appears to indicate that Jesus, even from the moment of his conception, was a 'Sign' (aya) to his people and to the world. By God's permission Jesus was able to fashion and bring to life a bird of clay as a sign from God to the Children of Israel. Likewise, the Qur'ān briefly refers to some of Jesus' miracles which include healings and raisings of the dead, but no specific details are given. The Qur'ān states:

'And (appoint him) an apostle to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it and it becomes a bird by God's leave. And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by God's leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for

you if ye did believe." ²⁵

The meaning of the above reference to Jesus' foreknowledge, with regard to the consumption and storage of food, is not quite clear.²⁶ Perhaps the basic intention, as with the healings and resurrections, is to be interpreted as being a 'Sign' (aya) from God.

Overall the Qur'an provides a brief and sketchy account of Jesus' ministry. Nevertheless, what is the general Muslim understanding of the destiny of Jesus in this and the next world? There is a passage in the Qur'an which refers, seemingly, to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. With reference to Jesus the Qur'an states:

'That they said (in boast) "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God." But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them. And those who differ, therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not; Nay, God raised him up unto Himself, and God is exalted in Power, Wise; And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them.' ²⁷

The passage quoted above has formed the basis of Islamic belief with regard to Jesus' destiny. Of course the passage in question is open to interpretation and the various theories and responses will be discussed at length in a later chapter.

There is another passage in the Qur'ān which also refers to the destiny of Jesus. The Qur'ān states:

'So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life again.'²⁸

The above Quranic reference would appear to be a clear testimonial to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Moreover, the Qur'ān has similar words with regard to the death of John the Baptist.²⁹ However, it is a question of interpretation. The different viewpoints on the relevant verses will later be examined in detail.

Generally speaking most Muslims believe that Jesus escaped death and was taken up bodily into heaven through the power of God. According to the famous Muslim traditionist, Bukhārī, Muḥammad during his night journey to the heavens saw Jesus in the second heaven.³⁰ The ascension³¹ of Jesus is not described in detail in the Qur'ān. Some Muslim traditions,³² to be discussed later, maintain that Jesus will return to earth at some future date and that Jesus' Second Coming will serve as a prelude to the Judgment Day,³³ as well as to his own death and resurrection. The Qur'ān does not shed much light on the supposed Second Advent of Jesus.³⁴ There is, however, in the Qur'ān, the strong suggestion that Jesus is an eschatological figure.³⁵ The whole question of the destiny of Jesus is of

paramount importance and, as already stated, will be discussed at length in the relevant chapter of this thesis.

Section 1.3: Names and Descriptions of Jesus

In order to complete the Quranic view of Jesus it is necessary to look at the different names and titles which are ascribed to Jesus in the Qur'ān. Firstly, Jesus is called °Īsā, a word which appears some twenty-five times in the Qur'ān. Scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, have differed in their explanations for the origin of the Arabic form of °Īsā. It has been suggested³⁶ that °Īsā was substituted for Jesus to effect the transposition of consonants for rhyming purposes. Or, it may be that the origin of the name °Īsā is due to misinformation and the corruption of original sources. Writers such as Landauer and Nöldeke³⁷ consider that the Jews introduced Muḥammad to the name °Īsā. Yet in reality the Jews, in hatred, referred to Jesus as Esau³⁸ claiming that the spirit of Esau had continued in the life of Jesus. However, Parrinder commenting on the name °Īsā, states:

'there appears to be general agreement that °Īsā came from the Syriac Yeshū' which derived it from the Hebrew Yeshua.'³⁹

In many ways the Quranic use of the name °Īsā remains a mystery.

The name °Īsā, as found in the Qur'ān, occurs frequently in the combination, °Īsā ibn Maryam (Jesus son of Mary).⁴⁰ In the majority of passages °Īsā is clearly regarded as being in a superior position to

Mary. Nonetheless, Mary's place is important from a dogmatic as well as from an historical point of view. The Qur'ān does not mention Joseph, the Biblical husband of Mary. In line with other Quranic references the designation 'son of Mary' tends to indicate that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. Mary conceived Jesus through God's creative Word.⁴¹ Therefore, to employ the title 'Jesus son of Mary' is perhaps one segment of the Quranic attempt to reinstate Jesus and Mary in the eyes of the Jews. In fact in both Mecca and Medina the Jews maintained a blasphemous opinion of Jesus and Mary. Hence, Muḥammad was sent to proclaim to the Jews the supreme sanctity of both Jesus and Mary, the immaculate virgin mother of Jesus.

According to the Qur'ān all creatures of God, including men and angels, are created to serve and worship God.⁴² The Quranic concept of service does not imply slavery, but complete submission to, or worship of, God. Thus, in the Qur'ān every man and angel, regardless of the status of anyone among them, is portrayed as a servant and only a servant of God. Likewise, the Quranic Jesus is only a servant of God. The Qur'ān presents Jesus' first words from the cradle as being an acknowledgement of his own servanthood to God.⁴³ Such dependence on the part of Jesus serves to make more decisive the Quranic argument against any who

might claim that Jesus was God. The Qur'ān insists on the status of Jesus as that of a created being and thereby a servant of God.

The Qur'ān frequently, eleven times in all,⁴⁴ calls Jesus 'the Messiah' (al-masīh). In the Qur'ān the term Messiah is given to Jesus from the time of his birth. The Arabic form al-masīh is obviously derived from a Hebrew origin and transmitted through Syriac. It seems to have been known in the north and south of Arabia in the pre-Islamic period. The Hebrew mashiah was used of the kings and the patriarchs and especially for the awaited Saviour. It is interesting that the Septuagint translates it by Christos. Apparently the Qur'ān calls Jesus 'the Messiah' as a title of honour. Nevertheless, though the Quranic portrayal of Jesus is one where he is blessed by God and supported by the Holy Spirit, the Qur'ān does not disclose the meaning of the term Messiah or the reason why Jesus alone is designated as 'the Messiah'. In any event Jesus the Messiah in the Qur'ān is only one in a series of prophets and apostles which ends with Muḥammad. The Qur'ān states:

'Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God.'⁴⁵

In the Qur'ān Jesus is referred to as being a prophet (nabī) and an apostle (rasūl).⁴⁶ In Islam the

office of prophet and apostle is the highest bestowed by God upon any of his creatures. The Qur'ān refers to angels also as apostles of God. Otherwise only men are prophets and apostles. Unfortunately the dividing line between a prophet and an apostle, as portrayed in the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition, is not very clear. The Arabic word for prophet (nabī) is the same as the Hebrew equivalent and certainly came through Syriac and Aramaic. A rasūl is 'someone sent' and so may be translated 'messenger' or 'apostle'.

In general it may be said that God has sent an apostle to every nation to proclaim essentially the same message, the message of Islam (submission to God). Men are called to believe in and obey God and His apostle. In the Qur'ān the response of obedience, or disobedience, is used frequently with apostle⁴⁷ and never with prophet. Furthermore, the Qur'ān portrays the office of apostle as being one of representing God to His people, and as such the apostle has a great responsibility⁴⁸ and authority.⁴⁹ The nature of authority is that of a faithful rendering of the message received from God. It would seem that on Judgment Day men will have to account for their response to the apostles.⁵⁰ Similarly the apostles will have to account for the fulfilment of the task assigned to them. Also, there is in the Qur'ān a

confident assurance that God will provide protection and refuge for His apostle. Likewise, the prophets and all the believers will also enjoy help from God.⁵¹ It is unthinkable that God's apostle should face defeat, as such failure would be a victory over God. Regardless of the strength of opposition the victory will be with God⁵² as was the case when the Jews tried to crucify Jesus. Prophets have been killed⁵³ but there is only one clear Quranic text which speaks about killing the apostles.⁵⁴

According to the Qur'ān it would appear that prophets figure only among the people of the Book.⁵⁵ It cannot be overlooked that prophethood is linked in a definite way with Abraham (Ibrāhīm) and his descendants. Moreover, several prophets are connected with a specific sacred text. Abraham is united with the Pages,⁵⁶ Moses with the Law,⁵⁷ David with the Psalms,⁵⁸ Jesus with the Gospel⁵⁹ and Muḥammad with the Qur'ān.⁶⁰ There is a clear union between prophet and scripture. Still, there are also Quranic texts which unite apostle and scripture.⁶¹ Hence, the prophet-scripture combination should not be overstressed. It should be remembered that every apostle is a prophet, but that not every prophet is, in Islamic orthodoxy, an apostle. In any case the Quranic Jesus is only a prophet and only an apostle and thereby is firmly

placed as being a creature of God in the succession of prophets and apostles.

It seems that Muslims know Jesus best as the prophet Jesus (°Īsā nabī) and Jesus, Spirit of God (°Īsā rūhu-llāh). In Muslim tradition Jesus is frequently addressed as 'Spirit of God'. It is not an easy task, as the Muslim commentaries testify, to sort out the various ways in which 'Spirit' is used in the Qur'ān. In general Muslims associate 'the Spirit' with the angel Gabriel, through whom God inspires the prophets. The Spirit of God is also instrumental in the creation of Adam as well as Jesus, since God breathed His Spirit into Adam.⁶² Therefore the Quranic conception of Spirit, or Holy Spirit, is not necessarily a person, but rather a force proceeding from God. Traditional Islam has tended to interpret 'Spirit' as a refined, created substance. In the Qur'ān Jesus is presented as having the support of the Spirit of God. The Qur'ān states:

'Christ Jesus, the son of Mary ... And His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him ...'⁶³

However, it must be pointed out that in the Qur'ān not only Jesus, but firm believers are strengthened with a spirit from God.⁶⁴ Therefore to conclude that the Quranic title of Spirit indicates that Jesus, while man and prophet, is more than a man or a prophet is to

infer something about Jesus which Muslims have traditionally rejected.

According to orthodox Islam the eternal God possesses the eternal attribute of speech. God's speech is His agent in creation. As already noted, whenever God intends to do something, He merely says; 'Be and it is'.⁶⁵ In addition, through His eternal speech God addresses mankind in order to guide mankind on a straight path. God reveals His speech through His inspired prophets in the form of recitations which are recorded and assembled in the form of sacred Scriptures. Indeed the sacred Scriptures are the eternal Word of God or, at least, the emporiums of the eternal Word of God. For Muslims, therefore, the Qur'ān is supremely the Word of God for men.

It is interesting that in the Qur'ān Jesus is also spoken of as Word (kalima), a title which he alone possesses. The Qur'ān states:

'While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "God doth give thee glad tidings of Yahyā, witnessing the truth of a Word from God, and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a prophet, of the (goodly) company of the righteous."⁶⁶

The above Christological text portrays John the Baptist (Yahyā) as confirming a Word from God, that is, confirming Jesus, son of Mary, and approving his laws and his conduct. John was the first to confirm⁶⁷ Jesus

and to testify that he was a Word from God. What then is the relation, if any, of Jesus as 'a Word from God', to the Qur'ān as 'the Word of God'? It would seem that the Muslim prefers to speak about the Book as the comprehensive Word of God and about Jesus as a particular Word from God. All in all, Muslims generally do not allow Jesus, even as a Word from God, a status which excels that of any other apostle.

It is obvious, with regard to the notion of Jesus' Sonship, that the Qur'ān denies the ancient Arab belief that God has sons and daughters who were associated with God and acted as intercessors. The Qur'ān appears to consider the Christian belief in Jesus' Sonship as analogous to the ancient Arab belief.⁶⁸ Therefore the Qur'ān affirms that God has no son or associate, and therefore Jesus cannot be the Son of God, if being the Son of God would imply association with God. The Qur'ān states:

'For it is not consonant with the majesty of (God) Most Gracious that He should beget a son.'⁶⁹

There are, it would seem, the further Quranic implications that Christians confess that Mary and Jesus are gods alongside God,⁷⁰ and that there are three Gods.⁷¹ Moreover, the Qur'ān suggests that Christians confess that God is the third of three,⁷² and that God is the Messiah.⁷³ In short, the Quranic

portrayal of Christianity reflects a somewhat unorthodox view of Christian doctrine. The issues in question will be examined in a later chapter of this thesis.

Many of the Quranic descriptions of Jesus have already been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Still, there are some additional references to Jesus which are worthy of consideration. In some verses the Qur'ān speaks of Muḥammad's ministry for the Arabs and in other verses it speaks of his ministry for all people. Similarly, though at times the Qur'ān speaks of Jesus' ministry to the Children of Israel, the Qur'ān also speaks of Jesus as: 'a sign to mankind and a mercy from us'.⁷⁴ If Jesus is a pattern for the Children of Israel only, as some Muslims would contend, it is strange that the Qur'ān cites him as an example for the Arabs.⁷⁵ In fact the Arabs in question seem to have been no more impressed with Jesus than with their own gods.

Though most Muslims consider the prophets and apostles to be sinless, the Qur'ān openly speaks of the sins of Adam, Abraham, Moses and David and their need for forgiveness of sin. Does John the Baptist (Yahyā) escape from this charge?⁷⁶ It is the universal belief of Muslims that Muḥammad was a sinless man, but one of his wives, Umm Salmah, did not believe this to be the

case. During the closing days of Muhammad's life Umm Salmah said to him:

'As all thy sins are forgiven, why weepest thou?'''

In any event it appears that according to the Qur'ān and Muslim traditions Jesus, as a prophet of God, is considered to be free from sin. It is less clear, though there are grounds for supposing, that Mary the mother of Jesus is also considered to be sinless. There is a well known hadīth, based on a Quranic verse⁷⁸ which claims that every child that is born is touched or stung by Satan, except Mary and her son. Operating from the premise that only the sinless could intercede for sinners, some Christians have found the sinlessness of Jesus as support for his rôle as intercessor in some Muslim thought. It is plain that there is no suggestion in the Qur'ān that Jesus ever sinned or asked for God's forgiveness, as did other prophets. Certainly, Islam does not allow the idea of an original sin transmitted to the descendants of Adam. Yet Jesus, as were all the prophets and apostles before and after him, was a saviour through his message which enabled humanity to avoid error and to advance further on the path to God. No other prophet, not even Muhammad, is praised as highly in the Qur'ān as is Jesus. Nevertheless, there is in the Qur'ān a refusal

to confess the divinity of Jesus. But is the 'humanisation' of the Quranic Jesus so complete? Muhammad, echoing the words of other Messengers, acknowledges his own mortality.⁷⁹ It is significant that the term mortal (bashar) is never found on the lips of Jesus. This negative indication confirms the mysterious character of Jesus which is difficult to grasp. On the other hand, the Qur'ān makes it clear that Jesus ate food⁸⁰ and this would seem to underline the condition of mortality. However, the Qur'ān also portrays Jesus as one 'nearest to God'⁸¹ and the word used min al-mugarrabīn, is found elsewhere applied to the angels. The Qur'ān states:

'Christ disdaineth not to serve and worship
God, nor do the angels, those nearest to God
...'⁸²

But, all of this having been said, according to the Qur'ān, Jesus becomes a precursor of Muhammad and a witness to him.⁸³ The Qur'ān portrays Muhammad as being, 'the Seal of the Prophets'.⁸⁴

Therefore in conclusion it may be said that the Quranic Jesus, within the long history of human prophets, plays a unique rôle. In Jesus there is an originality of being that is analogous to that of Adam.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, Jesus, like other prophets, remains a human being created by God and very much God's servant and messenger. The Jesus of the Qur'ān

is fully human, regardless of his virginal conception and special status. Thus, Jesus remains human and in spite of his humanity, and perhaps because of it, Jesus through his miracles is made the agent of divine acts. In fact Jesus stands alone among the prophets in that only Jesus, by God's leave, received power to heal the sick, raise the dead and even bring life to crude substance. All in all, the Qur'ān presents a very human Jesus empowered by God and strengthened with the Holy Spirit. The Christology presented by the Qur'ān is a fully Islamic Christology which is founded on the Islamic view of man and God.

CHAPTER TWO
THE BIBLICAL JESUS

Section 2.1: The Biblical and Apocryphal Views of Jesus

In this chapter the Biblical, and relevant apocryphal, views of Jesus will be appraised in relation to the aforesaid presentation of the Quranic Jesus. Such an appraisal can only be possible by turning, in the first instance, to the Christian writings that are contained in the New Testament. They are not in actual fact, a single book, as the Quranic term, the injil, might suggest, but are a collection of different kinds of writings. Many of these writings, including the earliest of them, are letters from Christian leaders to local churches in various parts of the Roman Empire. The four Gospels complete the picture of Jesus. Although the writers of the Synoptic Gospels adopted a biographical literary form, their life of Jesus was intended mainly as a vehicle for the preaching of the early Church. All four Gospels, and especially the fourth, are far more concerned with the meaning of the events than the details of the historical happenings. Therefore they frequently differ in historical detail, though they are at one in their fundamental claims about the meaning of the events they describe. On the other hand, the

Evangelists' religious purpose did not lead them to neglect the historical character of the life of Jesus. The Biblical account of Jesus must be painted in the light of the relevant historical context and in relation to the above mentioned Quranic focus.

In the New Testament Mark,¹ Paul² and John are all silent about the birth of Jesus. Mark and John both begin their narratives with the entrance of Jesus upon his public ministry, when he was about thirty years old. Both connect this important event with the ministry of John the Baptist, who was the promised messenger, sent to prepare the way of the Lord. It is to Matthew and Luke that we must turn for information with regard to the birth, infancy and childhood of Jesus.

It seems clear that the two evangelists traditionally known as Matthew and Luke, believed that in conceiving Jesus, Mary remained bodily a virgin and did not have intercourse with Joseph. Matthew and Luke both provide an account of the virginal conception of Jesus. Yet, there is only one account, furnished by Luke, of the annunciation. Likewise Luke presents the coming and birth of John the Baptist as being inseparable to the annunciation and birth of Jesus. The significance of Zechariah's expectation depended on the coming Messiah. John's importance hinged on the

fact that he was to be the forerunner of Jesus. It is interesting that in the Qur'ān John the Baptist is presented as being the herald of Jesus. Similarly the Quranic accounts of John's coming and birth, as in the Lucan framework, precede the portrayal of the annunciation. In the Lucan narrative there is the following account of the annunciation to Mary:

‘In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end."

And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy the Son of God."³

This Biblical passage is quite similar to the related Quranic passages. The geographical location of the annunciation, as presented in Luke and in the Qur'ān, may be taken as being in Nazareth. Unlike the Qur'ān Luke clearly makes reference to Mary's betrothal to the

person of Joseph. It is noticeable that Jesus is referred to as, 'Son of the Most High' and as, 'the Son of God', in the Lucan account of the annunciation. There is no such indication in the Qur'ān. Furthermore, in the Lucan narrative, in contrast to the Qur'ān, the action of God in the conception of Jesus is formalised by reference to the Holy Spirit. Overall it would appear that Luke represents Mary's story of the events.

Following the annunciation the close link between Mary and her kinswoman Elizabeth in the prospective birth of their sons is brought out vividly in Luke's narrative. Only Luke records the Song of Mary* which was the response of Mary when her cousin Elizabeth had greeted her as the mother of Jesus. Mary's song is steeped in Old Testament allusions with reflections from Genesis, Samuel, Psalms and Micah. It was a spontaneous outburst of praise to God and it concludes that from henceforth all generations would call Mary blessed. Likewise the Qur'ān always conveys respect and honour to Mary.

According to Luke the actual birth of Jesus took place in Bethlehem. Luke records that Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem because of a census in the reign of the Emperor Augustus. That there were accommodation difficulties at that time is not surprising. Since

many travellers were returning to their birthplaces, available space would soon be occupied. Whether the stable that Joseph finally found was attached to an inn or was part of a cave dwelling, as some traditions suggest, is impossible to say. In fact Luke condensed his account of Jesus' birth into one sentence:

'And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn.'⁵

In addition Luke tells of the visit of the worshipping shepherds to the baby Jesus. Whilst the birth of the Quranic Jesus may be sited in Bethlehem, there is no mention of the shepherds in the Qur'ān.

The Lucan narrative⁶ provides some additional material which sheds some light on the early days of Jesus' life. Like all Jewish boys Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old. Soon after this ritual act Mary and Joseph went to the Temple to offer a thanksgiving to God for his birth. Luke's Gospel refers to two prophets, Simeon and Anna, who met Mary and Joseph in the Temple. Simeon openly announced Jesus as the expected Messiah. Reference is also made to a Jerusalem visit made by the family at Passover time when Jesus was about twelve. When they were ready to leave for home Jesus' parents found him in the Temple asking the rabbis questions. Apart from these

events Luke tells his readers that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature. The above occasions and incidents are not recorded in the Qur'ān.

The virginal conception of Jesus is also recorded by Matthew. Unlike Luke, who recounts the advance notice given to Mary concerning the miraculous birth about to occur, Matthew is much more direct in his birth narrative. Matthew states:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

But as he considered this, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet; 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us).

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife, but knew her not until she had borne a son; and he called his name Jesus.'

The Matthean infancy narrative has few points in common with the Lucan account. Both accounts agree in the main topic that they undertake to narrate, the virginal conception of Jesus, but they differ in detail. Matthew's account is written very much from

the side of Joseph and is Jewish in tone and in structure. In Matthew's birth story Joseph is the central figure with a decisive rôle. The Matthean account develops by guidance received in dreams and each detail happens in order to fulfil Old Testament prophecy. Matthew is prepared to use as a prophecy about Jesus any text at all which can be made verbally to fit, even although originally it had nothing to do with the question in hand, and was never meant to have anything to do with it. The methodology of Matthew with regard to prophecy would appeal to those Jews to whom Matthew was writing. In fact the above-mentioned scriptural form of interpretation, far fetched though it may seem, was in common use among the rabbis of Jesus' time, as well as within the community at Qumran.

It is plain that for Matthew the coming of Jesus was not an isolated incident, but rather an event in continuity with the plan of God and in line with Old Testament prophecy. Matthew sees great significance in the occurrence of the prophecy of the word Emmanuel (God with us), and that is more significant than the circumstances of Jesus' birth. However, the fact that Jesus is referred to as Emmanuel does not necessarily imply divinity. The name could merely stress that God would not forsake His people.⁸ Thus, the Biblical use of the word Emmanuel, in the sense of stressing God's

faithfulness, could be accommodated within the Quranic understanding of Jesus.

Matthew's Gospel is the only place in the New Testament where the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem is seen as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah. Matthew makes no attempt to present a detailed account of Jesus' birth. Matthew states:

'Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."'⁹

The story of the Magi has often been treated as legendary. Nevertheless, Matthew evidently considered the incident to have symbolic importance. It showed clearly that Jesus' mission was larger than the boundaries of Judaism and such a fact can find an echo in the Qur'ān where Jesus is presented as being a sign to mankind.

The two New Testament accounts of the virginal conception look dubious with regard to historical detail. In Matthew, Joseph receives instruction through the medium of dreams which suggests that the material is more legendary than historical. Likewise, the Lucan account favours poetical, rather than historical, language. In addition, the genealogies of Jesus furnished by Matthew and Luke, trace Jesus'

descent down to Joseph as his father. The fact that the two narratives in question are independent of each other may be a point in favour of their reliability. In any case, if the whole story of the birth of Jesus is regarded as legendary, then it may be assumed that he was simply the first child of a normal marriage between Joseph and Mary. It is interesting, however, that Mark, like the Qur'ān, never mentions the father of Jesus.

It is sometimes argued that if the story of the Virgin Birth is legendary, then Jesus must have been 'an ordinary man'. The accounts of the virginal conception, it is held, explain how Jesus is both man and God, in that he had Mary for a mother but God for a father. But this argument, if presented in this form, leads to serious consequences for the Incarnational Christian doctrine of the person of Christ. If the Virgin Birth story describes how Jesus was God and man, then it must be said that he was half God (on the father's side) and half man (on the mother's side). No orthodox Christian tradition has ever stated, or implied, that Jesus was half man and half God. Any such notion is pagan and blasphemous. Therefore, the accounts of the virginal conception, whether historical or legendary, must not be integrated into the doctrine of the person of Christ. Such an integration would be

dangerous on both historical and theological grounds.

What then is the significance of the virginal conception of Jesus as presented in the New Testament? It is not at all certain that Luke and Matthew, in their accounts of Jesus' birth, intended to explain how Jesus was both God and man. It is much more likely that they wanted, like Paul,¹⁰ to underline the fact that in Jesus there was a new creation. So far as the virginal conception of Jesus is concerned, the New Testament and the Qur'ān are in accord that it was a holy event designed as a mercy and a blessing. However, in Christianity the Virgin Birth does not stand in isolation. Cragg states:

'the virgin birth of Jesus, in Christian orthodoxy, has always been within the larger, deeper, surer faith of the Incarnation. The latter can subsist without the former. For, otherwise, the former would have no raison d'être, either in fact or faith. That "the Word was made flesh" is the controlling truth of faith.'¹¹

Indeed the New Testament accounts of the virginal conception of Jesus came to be meaningful for Christians after they had come to believe in the divinity of Jesus on other grounds, to be discussed later. In Islam, the Virgin Birth, in contrast to Christianity, stands in complete isolation, being presented as a sign of God's power and as the means of entry for the prophethood of Jesus. Any suggestion of

the Virgin Birth as being complementary to the concept of Incarnation is totally rejected by Muslims.

The Quranic reports of the annunciation and early childhood of Jesus appear to have more in common, at least in framework, with accounts found in earlier apocryphal works among Christians. For example, the Armenian Book of the Infancy records:

'The angel said: The Holy Spirit will come in thee and the power of the Most High will cover thee with his shadow. And God the word will take of thee a body ... The entry of the word of God will not violate thy womb ... Be it done to me according to thy saying ... As the holy Virgin was speaking these words and humbling herself, the word of God penetrated into her by her ear.'¹²

It seems, in fact, that the annunciation, as portrayed in the Qur'ān, is quite similar to the Armenian account. According to O'Shaughnessy¹³ the phrase 'Word of God', as presented above, is used in the same sense as found in the Qur'ān.

There is another apocryphal work, the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, which represents Jesus speaking from the cradle:

'Mary, I am Jesus the Son of God, that word, which thou didst bring forth according to the declaration of the angel Gabriel to thee, and my father hath seen me for the salvation of the world.'¹⁴

The above account is similar in structure to the corresponding Quranic report of Jesus' words from the cradle. Moreover, though the Arabic Gospel of the

Infancy was originally composed in Syriac, the Arabic translation was in existence in Muḥammad's time.

Furthermore, with regard to the childhood of Jesus, the apocryphal Infancy Story of Thomas states:

'When this boy Jesus was five years old he was playing at the ford of a brook ... He made soft clay and fashioned from it twelve sparrows ... But Jesus clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows: "Off with you!" And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping.'¹⁵

The above description of the miraculous powers of Jesus can find a definite parallel in the Qur'ān. In fact the apocryphal work in question goes back to at least the sixth century.

Is there any evidence to suggest that Muḥammad was familiar with the canonical or apocryphal accounts of the conception and childhood of Jesus? The presence of Jewish and Christian communities in the northern and southern Arabian Peninsula during the centuries which preceded the advent of Muḥammad is perhaps sufficient explanation that the Arabs already knew of the existence of the Bible in these Christian communities during the period of the Jāhiliyya (days of ignorance).¹⁶ Indeed the Jewish communities around Mecca would certainly have used the Old Testament in its Hebrew text or a later version. Likewise, the Christians possessed the canonical, and in some cases the apocryphal, books of the New Testament. The extent

to which Christianity had really penetrated into Arabia is difficult to determine. It was the official religion of the Byzantine Empire. The Melkite, or Orthodox State Church, was, however, not popular in the provinces bordering on Arabia. The Chalcedonian formula of the two natures, divine and human, in the one person of Jesus Christ, had been adopted in A.D. 451. Yet the dispute had continued, and had led to the formation of separate Churches. In Syria the Jacobite Church was strong, and held to its Monophysite doctrine, laying stress on the divine nature of Jesus. The Coptic Church in Egypt was also Monophysite, as was the Church in Abyssinia. In the Yemen the Church was influenced by the Abyssinian Church, and was, like it, Monophysite. In the north-east the state of Hīrah was largely Christian in population. This Church, somewhat isolated from the main body of Christendom, had maintained the older type of Christian doctrine associated with the name of Nestorius, and stressed the human nature of Jesus.

The extent of Muḥammad's knowledge about Christianity has been a topic of much debate. There is, however, evidence that the Arabs knew something about the externals of Christianity. For instance, the pre-Islamic poet al-A° shā, a contemporary of Muḥammad, states:

'Many an early cup (glistening) like the eye of a cock have I drunk with trusty youths in its curtained chamber while the church-bells rang; pure wine like saffron and amber, poured in its glass and mixed spreading a costly perfume in the house, as if the riders had (just) arrived with it from the sea of Darīn.'¹⁷

In addition, pre-Islamic poetry contains knowledge of Christian ceremonies as the poets had seen on their visits to the princes of Ghassān:

'We went out to watch the wild (game) around Thu'āla between Ruhayyāt and the pass of Akhrub. And from afar I perceived a troupe, as if they were monks at a festival with fringed robes.'¹⁸

Hence, it may be said that in pre-Islamic Arabia there was some understanding of Christianity beyond the boundaries of the Church. It may be further argued that such knowledge implies an awareness, amongst the Arabs, of the existence of the Bible. Muḥammad himself, in the course of his commercial dealings with Jews and Christians, would have had occasions of hearing about Christianity. The Christian and Jewish elements in the Qur'ān will impress the most superficial reader. In fact the Qur'ān repeats many details found in the Old Testament. Complete portions of the Pentateuch are paraphrased in several of its chapters, while explicit mention is made of the Psalms and, on one occasion, even a direct quotation is given.¹⁹ Still, it must be pointed out that the

Qur'ān, in contrast to the Old Testament , presents the Children of Israel returning to Egypt,²⁰ and changes are made in the chronology of the prophets.²¹ Thus, even though it is obvious that Muḥammad had heard some of the contents of the Old Testament, there seems to be no doubt that all of his knowledge was acquired from teachings and tales told to him by Jews and Christians. It appears that he was not the only one in his time who repeated these to his followers. His opponents, therefore, often mocked him because he told them stories of the ancients which had been heard more than once.²²

Also, in the Qur'ān there is reference to 'a table'.²³ Does it refer to the New Testament accounts of the Lord's Supper²⁴ or to the vision of Peter²⁵ or to the feeding of five thousand people?²⁶ Muslim commentators are not agreed on this matter. In any case the Quranic record of the table can find no clear parallel in the New Testament. Therefore may it be assumed that Muḥammad did not have first hand knowledge of the New Testament scriptures? It is possible that Muḥammad may have heard them read in public worship. In this connection Bell²⁷ points out that the verb gara' used by Muslims to mean the recitation of the Qur'ān, is borrowed from Syrian Christianity where it means the recitation of sacred texts, while Qur'ān he

derives from qeryāna, which in the Syrian liturgy means the scripture reading. There is no evidence of a Christian Church in the east using Arabic in its services. If Muḥammad had heard scriptures being read in church he would not have understood it as it would have been in Syriac. Indeed any knowledge of Greek, Syriac or Coptic on the part of Muḥammad and his companions may be excluded. On the other hand, it is possible that Arabic versions of the Gospels were in the hands of the Christians of seventh century Syria. O'Shaughnessy states:

‘Probably too, parts of Sacred Scripture were, in Muḥammad’s time, already translated into Arabic. It is more likely, however, that he and the Arabs in general heard them in improvised translations from other languages as is indicated by the many religious terms borrowed from Aramaic, Syriac and Abyssinian sources used in the Qur’ān.’²⁸

As already stated, the Quranic accounts of the conception, birth and early childhood of Jesus are more in keeping with the apocryphal writings. However, even the supposed Quranic rendering of the apocryphal stories shows some diversity from the traditional apocryphal texts. Thus, it would seem that the spread in Arabia of Christian ideas, before the arrival of Islam, took place largely through oral teaching. Even if Muḥammad could read,²⁹ it is doubtful if he had access to scriptural writings of any kind. It seems

more likely that Muḥammad was exposed, through the medium of oral tradition, to incomplete and corrupted accounts of scriptural events. This leads to the question as to the possibility of Muḥammad being influenced by a particular Christian tradition, or Christian sect.

The beginnings of Muḥammad's religious consciousness are associated with Christianity. He is said to have had esoteric conversations with the Christian monk Baḥīrā.³⁰ When Muḥammad was nine (or twelve, the age of Jesus when he was found in the Temple), he followed his uncle to Syria. As the caravan stopped near Baḥīrā's hermitage, the monk recognised the boy as the Prophet. The function of Baḥīrā in the Islamic tradition is to represent the Jewish-Christian scriptures simply as preparations for the coming of Muḥammad. In Christian polemical writings, the same figure will be used to denounce the Qur'ān as a fraud. In short, Baḥīrā becomes a heretic who teaches Muḥammad all that is true in the Qur'ān, mixing it with error. It is impossible to know if Muḥammad did have instruction from the said Baḥīrā.

Yet, the tradition in question does have some credibility.³¹ With regard to the identity of Baḥīrā, it seems that John of Damascus and others, thought of him as being an Arian or a Nestorian.³² The tradition

most worthy of credit classes him as an Armenian monk who was exiled for unorthodox opinions, probably Nestorian. The notion that a schismatic Armenian monk was associated with the origins of Quranic Christology may find support by reference to an apocryphal work, already cited as being similar to the Qur'ān, entitled Armenian Book of the Infancy. It seems clear that this apocryphal work is to be identified³³ with a Nestorian apocryphon of the same title written in Syriac, and translated into Armenian in the latter part of the sixth century.

In the light of the similarities between the aforementioned apocryphal works and the Qur'ān, it is clear that Muḥammad was aware of the oral tradition of apocrypha. It is plain that in some of the non-canonical writings the divinity of Jesus is stated, or at least implied. For example, in the Armenian Book of the Infancy, Jesus as the word is divine. Similarly in the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, Jesus is presented as 'the Son of God'. However, such declarations of divinity need not imply that Muḥammad would have rejected the works in question. Rather, oral tradition can be misunderstood and not least through the process of translation. Moreover, if Muḥammad had a mentor there is no guarantee that he did not ignore or suppress the doctrine of Christ's divinity in order to

accommodate his personal theology, possibly Nestorianism.

Muslims do not deny that Muḥammad had contacts with Jews or Christians but no link of dependence is accepted. In other words, revelation comes to Muḥammad directly, not through previous scriptures, or religions, but parallel to them. Even if the prophet had received information from them, this had no influence on the process of revelation.³⁴ It is because of the Islamic belief in the nature of the Qur'ān as the direct Word of God that any consideration of the Prophet as having learnt his view of sacred history and Christology from Jewish and Christian sources is the greatest blasphemy in the eyes of Muslims. According to Muslims the Christology of the Qur'ān is not an historical accident. Nonetheless, the fact that Muḥammad was exposed to certain Christian influences, at a particular point in history, must have had some bearing on his understanding of Christianity, an understanding more apocryphal than orthodox.

Section 2.2: The Mission and Ministry of Jesus

The canonical Gospels proclaim that Jesus began his ministry when he was about thirty years old. To assist him in his work he chose twelve disciples, though many others followed him on various occasions. The disciples were chosen for the specific purpose of preaching to the Jews of Galilee about the approaching kingdom of God. This close band of followers accompanied Jesus for most of his ministry. Without doubt the Qur'ān portrays Jesus as one who taught the people and gathered a select number of helpers around him. Yet, the Qur'ān does not speak about the mission of Jesus' disciples (whose exit from the Quranic stage is as rapid as their entry), that mission which was the fruit of their prolonged and profound fellowship with their master.

According to the New Testament Jesus adhered to the usual religious customs of his day. Still, the striking thing is that this same Jesus did not hesitate to set aside the written law as well as the rules of the scribes. There were many disputes about the law between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes. It is plain that Jesus allowed his disciples to pluck grain on the sabbath and he himself healed on the sabbath. This was no open offence against the scriptures themselves, but only against that sabbath casuistry

developed in Judaism. The basic principle of Jesus' argument is as follows:

'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'³⁵

For the above phrase to come from the lips of an ordinary rabbi is quite without parallel.

It is clear that the scriptures themselves, in addition to tradition, have to submit to Jesus' criticism. The first instance concerns Jesus' attitude to the regulations for cleanness. According to Mark, Jesus states:

'Nothing that goes into a man from without can make him unclean, but what goes forth from a man makes him unclean.'³⁶

The above principle sweeps away not only hundreds of traditions embodied in the Talmud, but many parts of the Old Testament law and challenges the authority of Moses himself. It is significant that in the Qur'ān there is reference to Jesus making lawful things previously forbidden to the Children of Israel. Thus, the Qur'ān may reveal knowledge as to some aspect of Jesus' attitude to the law as quoted above.

In a similar but more direct vein Jesus openly declared criticism of the law of Moses with regard to divorce. Jesus forbade divorce and called the permission by Moses a concession to the hardness of the human heart. Mark records Jesus' words as follows:

‘For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.’³⁷

The freedom of Jesus over against the human elaborations of the law which is revealed in the passage just quoted is without parallel as far as a rabbi is concerned. Even a prophet could not have gone against the authority of Moses without being called a false prophet.³⁸ It is obvious, according to the Gospel records, that Jesus spoke with clear authority. His authority was not that of the derivative kind drawn from the Torah. Nor did he, as did many rabbis of his time, parrot the teaching of someone greater like Rabbi Hillel. As found in the Sermon on the Mount the emphatic phrase of Jesus: ‘But I say to you’³⁹ must have been astonishing to Jews brought up under the Torah. In other words, Jesus claimed that, with his proclamation of the will of God, a new, final time of the revelation of God’s will had come. All in all, no Christology, no matter how true to scripture and tradition, is complete without the appraisal of Jesus’ attitude to the law. Hence, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the Jesus of the Gospels is different to the Quranic Jesus. The Qur’ān spells out

little or nothing about Jesus' direct authority over against scripture and the law.

It is plain from the Gospels that Jesus accepted a fairly sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile as part of God's plan, and regarded his commission, and that of his disciples, as being limited to Israel. Precisely because Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of Israel, he could not be at the beck and call of everyone. Nonetheless, Jesus also ministered to certain Gentiles.⁴⁰ Indeed Jesus seems to have shared the old Jewish hope that when the final salvation arrived, large numbers of Gentiles would be called to share in it.⁴¹ Countless words, parables and stories express this very thing; for example, the words of Jesus which Matthew has inserted in the tale of the heathen centurion of Capernaum:

'I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ...'⁴²

Thus, the coming of the kingdom of God would mean a radical deportation of limitations. The last become first and the first last.⁴³ It is interesting that the Biblical presentation of Jesus' ministry is seen as being mainly, but not exclusively, for the Jewish people. Likewise in the Qur'an the Gospel (injīl) is neither for the Children of Israel nor for Christians alone, but is a light and guidance for all people.

The Gospel tradition attributes to Jesus a number of 'mighty works', 'wonders' or 'signs', which are generally called miracles. As they stand the miracles fall into different groups or types. For example, there are the acts of healing such as curing a man suffering from paralysis, or deafness, or leprosy. Similarly there are the miracles of exorcisms when evil spirits are cast out of human personalities. One of the chief functions transmitted to Jesus' disciples was the power over unclean spirits to cast them out. Jesus' superiority to his followers was shown by casting out demons which they had failed to expel.⁴⁴ In addition there are the raisings of the dead such as Jairus' daughter and the widow's son at Nain. There were also nature miracles, such as the feeding of the five thousand and the stilling of the storm. The miracles were generally performed to give added point to the coming of the kingdom of God. There is in Jesus' miracles a note of inherent authority but in all cases the power behind them was accredited to God and not to Jesus.⁴⁵ Faith in God is considered as a prerequisite. For this reason the Gospels reveal how Jesus was unable to perform any miracle at his home town of Nazareth owing to lack of faith there.⁴⁶

In past centuries Christian apologists, as for example, Origen, saw the miracles in the New Testament

as being plain proofs of Jesus' divinity. Origen states:

'Undoubtedly we do think him to be the Christ, and the Son of God, because he healed the lame and the blind; and we are more confirmed in this persuasion, by what is written in the prophecies: "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall hear, and the lame man shall leap as a hart".⁴⁷

Thus, in the past the miracles of Jesus were taken as confirmation of his divinity. The truth, however, is that such a view is open to question. For one thing, many people wanted Jesus to prove who he was with a spectacular miracle. It is plain that Jesus consistently refused to perform miracles for the sake of the authorities.⁴⁸ Jesus knew that miracles, in isolation, did not actually prove a great deal. In New Testament times, when every village had its miracle-worker, miracles were not necessarily regarded as proof of divine confirmation of the teaching or character of the miracle-worker.⁴⁹

Certainly Jesus saw his miracles as fulfilments of the prophets' predictions about the Messianic age. In other words, the burden of Jesus' preaching was the kingdom of God and within his proclamation the miracles were tokens of the new era in which God's power was at work. In fact Jesus once used his miracles to show their Messianic significance. That is, John the

Baptist, who had been imprisoned by Herod, sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he really was the one he had been expecting. Luke records Jesus' response to John's question:

And he (Jesus) answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them".⁵⁰

Jesus was deeply sensitive to John's perplexity. All that Jesus could do to help him was to point to the facts of his own ministry in language which would remind John of the pictures of the Messianic age in the Book of Isaiah.⁵¹ Therefore the miracles of Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament do not necessarily declare the divinity of Jesus. In short, the miracles are signs that God's kingdom is at work.

The controversial Gospel episode of Jesus' healing the paralytic is of special interest. Mark states:

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak thus? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question thus in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Rise, take up your pallet and walk?" "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" - he said to the paralytic - "I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home." And he rose, and immediately took up the pallet and went out

before them all; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this".⁵²

According to Judaism the concept of forgiveness depends on true repentance together with restitution as may be possible. Where these conditions are present, God forgives unfailingly without the need of any human mediation or absolution. What is different, as presented in the above Biblical passage, is that Jesus pronounces the actual forgiveness of a person independent of any evidence of repentance. Indeed in the light of Old Testament⁵³ teaching the rabbis consider Jesus to be blaspheming because only God can forgive sin. Jesus goes on, however, to say that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth. The problem centres in the meaning of the Son of Man. For the present it is sufficient to note that in Jesus' claim to forgive sins we see a definite break with Judaism and with Islam, who both claim that forgiveness is the prerogative of God and for anyone to claim it is blasphemy. However, perhaps the Quranic and Judaic conception of Jesus as being a human creature only is a serious error. If so, Muslims fail to recognise that Jesus is not only the Messianic agent of God, but the Messianic agent of God in relation to the then coming kingdom of God. That being so, the power that works in Jesus is, of course, the power of God himself, and

there is no blasphemy in Jesus' claim that 'it' forgives sins. The fact that the paralytic was healed is taken as proof of both Jesus' ability to pronounce forgiveness of sins and to heal. If he can do one he can do the other.

There is, however, another side to the above controversy. Geza Vermes suggests that the notion of a man proclaiming forgiveness is not so very unusual. To support his thesis Vermes quotes from the Prayer of Nabonidus:

'I was afflicted (with an evil ulcer) for seven years ... and an exorcist pardoned my sins. He was a Jew from among the (children of the exile of Judah, and he said), 'Recount this in writing to (glorify and exalt) the Name of the (Most High God).'⁵⁴

Vermes goes on to suggest that there is a definite parallel between the above Nabonidus story and the Gospel account of the healing of the paralytic. Vermes states:

'Considered side by side with the Nabonidus story, there is nothing outstandingly novel or unique in the words of Jesus, "My son, your sins are forgiven".'⁵⁵

If the Nabonidus story, and Vermes' exposition of it, are taken as being legitimate, then the phrase 'to forgive sins' may be accommodated within the framework of a purely human response to God's prerogative of forgiveness. In short, Jesus was only a man, albeit a genuine charismatic within the age-old prophetic

religious line. Such a view would find a parallel with the Quranic Jesus.

With many miraculous acts attributed to Jesus it is not surprising to find that crowds were eager to listen to him. They were attracted by his teaching. The coming of the kingdom of God was a central tenet of Jesus' teaching. Reference to such a kingdom would not in itself be anything new to his listeners since the idea of it formed an essential part of Jewish thought. What was significant was the manner in which Jesus said the rule of God would be initiated. Everyone would come under the very personal rule of God and for this reason repentance on the part of them all was essential. There would be nothing automatic about entry into the kingdom. The way would not be easy. Indeed no one could be certain when the kingdom would come, since not even Jesus knew this.⁵⁶

While Christians acknowledge the few Quranic references to the miracles of Jesus, these references hardly place his works in the context of the kingdom of God and the call to repentance in the light of the kingdom. It would appear that the Quranic signs of Jesus' miracles are merely of historical interest to most Muslims and have little significance for them in their personal lives. Yet, as the miracles stand in the Qur'ān, they offer the Christian an opportunity to

introduce his Muslim friend to the contemporary significance of these signs within the Biblical context. It should nevertheless be remembered that the Quranic qualification 'by God's leave', as applied to Jesus' miracles, can also find a clear echo in the Gospel accounts.

Every book in the New Testament is permeated with the certain belief that Jesus was crucified and consequently died. Most Muslims deny the death of Jesus on the cross as a fact of history, in spite of solid Christian and non-Christian evidence contemporary with the event that he did die on the cross. Of all world communities they alone assert that Jesus did not die on the cross. While there are some Muslims who have realised the difficulty of this position and the possible weakness of some Muslim Quranic interpretation on this point, few have vocally opposed the orthodox Muslim belief that Jesus escaped and was taken into heaven. Yet even if it were granted that the Qur'ān allows the death of Jesus on the cross, the fact still remains that the Qur'ān is silent about the Christian significance of his death and resurrection. Nor can the Christian be satisfied with the acknowledgement of the mere fact of Jesus' death on the cross, since there is nothing characteristically 'Christian' about the fact in isolation. He must

proceed to relate the redemptive meaning of this historical fact for his Muslim friend also. Within this context he will recall the sinful intention of the Jews to put Jesus to death on the cross, an intention to which the Qur'ān also clearly witnesses. According to the Bible all mankind shares in the guilt of crucifying Jesus. The Gospels do not portray the crucifixion as a tragedy or the martyrdom of a human hero deserving of pity or admiration, but as an event which, though brought about by human sin, fulfilled the divine purpose, and is therefore to be regarded with awe and faith. Indeed the story as told in the Gospels does not end with Jesus dead and buried. The writers go on to say that Jesus had risen from the dead. The whole question of the death and destiny of Jesus will be dealt with later.

While Christians acknowledge that Muslims recognise the Ascension and Second Coming of the Messiah, they do well to recall the Biblical portrayal of the person and work of the ascended and returning Messiah. As the risen Lord who has accomplished his mission of redemption on earth, he ascends to his native place. After all it was from God that God's Word proceeded in order to become man. He goes there to prepare a place for his disciples and to intercede for them.⁵⁷ Through him the Father sends His Holy

Spirit, who will convince the world of sin, recalling to them what Jesus has done for them and taught them.⁵⁸ The same Jesus who ascended to heaven will again visit the earth in personal presence.⁵⁹ When he comes in glory he will judge all nations and firmly establish the kingdom of God. According to the New Testament Christ is now reigning as Lord at God's right hand sharing God's throne.⁶⁰ The second coming of Christ is inseparable from his ascension and heavenly session, for it discloses his present lordship to the world.

Section 2.3: Names and Descriptions of Jesus

Considerable help in understanding the person and work of Jesus may be obtained from a study of the titles used to designate him, especially as these were employed by Jesus himself and by his close associates. The name Jesus is used most in the narratives of the Gospels. Jesus means Saviour being related philologically to the Hebrew name Joshua. In Hebrews,⁶¹ Jesus actually stands in the text instead of Joshua. For the most part the name Jesus is joined with other terms when used in the Epistles, but occasionally it stands alone and doubtless for the purpose of emphasizing Jesus' humanity. According to the Bible, it is not by chance that Jesus bears the name Jesus. Matthew records:

'... and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'⁶²

This meaning unfortunately is lost in the Arabic name 'Īsā and is thus generally unknown to Muslims.

The popular Quranic usage of 'son of Mary', with regard to Jesus, is found once in the New Testament. Mark states:

'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary
... ?'⁶³

At the time when Mark wrote it was probably too early for slurs on Jesus' parentage to arise, as they did in controversy with Jews and pagans. The above phrase is

probably influenced by the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Alternatively the title 'the son of Mary' might indicate only that Joseph was now dead. Outside the canonical New Testament the phrase 'son of Mary' is found only in the Arabic and Syriac Infancy Gospels and also in the Paris Manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas.⁶⁴ For instance, the Arabic Infancy Gospel states:

'One day, when Jesus was running about and playing with some children, he passed by the workshop of a dyer called Salem. They had in the workshop many cloths which he had to dye. The Lord Jesus went into the dyer's workshop, took all these cloths and put them into a cauldron full of indigo. When Salem came and saw that the cloths were spoiled, he began to cry aloud and asked the Lord Jesus, saying: "What have you done to me, son of Mary?"'⁶⁵

The above story finds no parallel in the Qur'ān. However, the account shows that the title 'son of Mary' had been established in some Christian communities. Hence, there was a link between Syria and Arabia as the Arabic version is dependent upon the Syriac. It is possible, as already mentioned, that Muḥammad was aware of at least the oral tradition of apocrypha. The Qur'ān may use son of Mary in preference to Son of God. In any case the title in question is most certainly acceptable to both Muslims and Christians, as Jesus was definitely Mary's son.

The Qur'ān states that Jesus is no god but only a servant of God. The human cannot be divine, nor the

divine human. In fact the Bible clearly portrays Jesus as man and servant. Mark records:

'For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'⁶⁶

The designations of servant, and of the human and submissive aspects of Jesus servanthood, are common to both Islam and Christianity. Indeed the difference in emphasis between the Christian and the Muslim interpretations of servanthood depends upon different beliefs about the ministry and rôle of God's servants. Christians believe the greatest achievement of Jesus to have been his willing acceptance of the suffering of the cross, as depicted in the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah. Muslims utterly reject any notion of the Suffering Servant concept and especially its theme of vicarious atoning suffering.

The Qur'ān, in a completely nondescript way, calls Jesus 'the Messiah'. At the time of Jesus there was, within Judaism, a general expectation of the coming of a Messiah who would free the Jews from the hated rule of the Romans and usher in the kingdom of God. From the Gospel writings it would appear that Jesus considered himself, and was considered by many Jews, to be the Jewish Messiah. It seems that Jesus identified himself as Messiah with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and thus mystified his disciples and caused his

rejection by the Jewish people when he carried this identification to the lengths of being crucified.

The crucifixion ended any hopes of Jesus' messiahship in terms of him being King of Israel. The question is why did the title of Messiah not end with the death of Jesus? In this connection Moule comments:

'The tenacity of the usage is most plausibly explained, therefore, if Jesus himself had accepted the royal title, but, during his ministry, had so radically reinterpreted it that it became natural to his followers to use it in this new way. If he had interpreted messiahship, as we have seen him interpreting sonship, in terms of suffering and service and, only by that route and in that sense, of vindication and royal status, then it seems conceivable that the title might have been revived and perpetuated after he had been crucified.'⁶⁷

Although many Jews in the time of Jesus looked forward to a warrior Messiah, there was another element in the preaching of the Jewish prophets. For instance, the belief that God's appointed representative would save God's people by suffering instead of by fighting, is stated in four songs or poems, which are part of a collection of chapters in the Old Testament associated with the name of Isaiah, and which are known as The Songs of the Servant.⁶⁸ Whether the Servant concept was intended to portray a suffering prophet, or the people of Israel in their exile, or to refer to the Messiah, has been a matter of extended debate. In fact Jewish thought did not usually identify the Messiah

with the Suffering Servant. This revolutionary identification was carried out mainly in Christianity. However, even in the message of Second Isaiah the ground was prepared for a messianic interpretation. The distinguished Jewish interpreter, Martin Buber,⁶⁹ affirms that 'in the essential point' the messianic interpretation 'approximates closely' the intention of Second Isaiah. In any case Christian theology has traditionally interpreted the Servant in Isaiah as a prophecy applicable to Jesus.⁷⁰

Why the Qur'ān should refer to Jesus as the Messiah without explanation is not at all clear. Muḥammad would in all probability have encountered Jewish beliefs with regard to the coming Messiah. He would also have met Christians for whom Jesus was the Messiah. However, it would appear that Muḥammad had little knowledge of the concept of suffering messiahship. All in all, it may be said that the titles of servant and Messiah, as applied to Jesus, are initially acceptable to both Christians and Muslims. Yet when the Christian introduces the concepts of pathos and suffering to Jesus' servanthood and messiahship, then there is no parallel with the Quranic Jesus. The notion of a suffering Messiah, which is inherent in Christianity, finds no acceptance whatsoever in the Qur'ān. Moreover, with the Christian

interpretation of Jesus' suffering there is at least a hint of Jesus being more than a servant and more than a human Messiah. In short, the Christian idea of Jesus' divinity is perhaps beginning to emerge, and thereby, in deep contrast to the Jesus of the Qur'ān.

The most important characteristics and functions of the Quranic Jesus as prophet and apostle have already been noted. Likewise the Letter to the Hebrews states:

'Therefore, holy brethren, who share in a heavenly call, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.'⁷¹

The word apostle signifies 'one who is sent'. In fact the word is not applied to Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament, but in the Johannine literature God is frequently said to have sent his Son into the world.⁷² Angels, of course, were also sent by God,⁷³ but the mission of the Son is unique. It must be understood in close connection with his priestly work. Thus, according to the New Testament, Jesus is both apostle and high priest. The former refers primarily to the Incarnation and the latter applies mostly to his death, when as high priest he made expiation for sins. Therefore the title of apostle, as applied to Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews, must be seen within the complete context of New Testament theology. The term apostle appears to be common in meaning to both Islam

and Christianity, but the idea of Jesus' expiatory sacrifice, inherent in the Biblical usage of the term apostle with reference to Jesus, cannot be reconciled with the Quranic presentation of Jesus' apostleship.

Both Muslims and Christians believe that God speaks to people through individuals called prophets. The initiative is always God's, as can be seen from the accounts of the calling of various prophets in the Old Testament and from the Islamic account of Muhammad's call. An excellent definition of what it means to be a prophet is given by the Swedish Bishop, Tor Andrae:

'A genuine prophet is one who really has a message to deliver, one in whose soul some of the great questions of his age have stimulated a restlessness which compels him to speak, and for whom the ecstasy and prophetic inspiration are but the natural and inevitable expression of a strong lasting conviction and a genuine passion.'

If the function of the prophet is identified with prediction of the future, which is certainly one aspect of the prophetic office, then the result of the prediction will be the test. In the Qur'an prophethood, with Muhammad as subject, is seen in the sense of proclaiming and informing men of what they do not know of the Judgement Day. Also, as already shown, the Quranic Jesus informs the Jews of some of their actions of which he humanly speaking could not have any knowledge. It is not surprising that, when the Jesus

of the New Testament exercised his brief ministry in Galilee he stood in the ancient and familiar lineage of the prophets of God.⁷⁵ Moreover, the Acts of the Apostles presents one of the earliest Christologies which depicts Jesus as the prophet similar to Moses.⁷⁶ Such a depiction finds a clear parallel with the Quranic Jesus as being in the succession of the prophets.

According to the New Testament, Jesus shows definite characteristics of prophetic behaviour with his call for repentance, predictions of the future, and announcement of the imminent end. But it by no means follows from all this that Jesus thought of himself as a prophet. In fact Jesus plainly stated that he was not rightly understood with the designation of prophet. Matthew records the words of Jesus:

'The men of Nin'evah will arise at the judgement with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than Jonah is here.'⁷⁷

Hence, it cannot be surprising that Jesus was convinced that the age of the prophets had ended with John the Baptist. Jesus, according to Luke, states:

'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and every one enters it violently.'⁷⁸

Thus, Jesus clearly affirms that with his coming the

time of the law and the prophets is ended, and this is in harmony not only with Jesus' claim to be proclaiming God's will on his own authority,⁷⁹ but also with his bold thesis that his words will abide for ever.⁸⁰ In other words, there is a note of finality in Jesus' teaching which does not permit Muḥammad to be the Seal of the prophets, that is, as the end, confirmation and climax of the centuries old chain of divine messengers.

The Qur'ān describes Jesus as a prophet and such an appellation can find some echo in the New Testament portrayal of Jesus. For example, the title of prophet portrays the fact of Jesus' connection with the Old Testament prophets. Furthermore, the political connotations associated with the title of Messiah are avoided by the use of prophet. However, Cullmann states:

'the concept of the eschatological Prophet is too narrow to do justice to the early Christian faith in Jesus Christ. It fully comprehends only one aspect of the early life of Jesus, and even in this aspect it can be supplemented by other more central concepts such as that of the Suffering Servant of God.'⁸¹

It would seem that the title of prophet, as applied to Jesus, was not maintained in the early Church. Indeed the maintenance of the term prophet existed mainly within Jewish Christianity. For instance, with regard to Jesus' baptism, the Gospel of the Hebrews states:

And it came to pass when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended upon him and rested on him and said to him: My Son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldest come and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest; thou art my first-begotten Son that reignest for ever.⁸²

The surviving fragments of the above Gospel suggest that the work was written from a Jewish-Christian standpoint. In fact, Cullmann argues that the Jewish Christian Christology is the only system which built upon the foundation of faith in the prophet. In this connection Cullmann states:

although the future did not belong to this part of Christianity, its Christology had a real historical role to play again at a later time - not in Christianity, but in Islam. Specialists in the study of this religion now acknowledge that it was founded under the influence of Jewish Christianity. Not orthodox but heretical Jewish Christianity as it was spread in the Syrian area (precisely the branch which had no influence on the further development of Christianity) had a part in the founding of Islam. There the figure of the Prophet lives on in a new form.⁸³

Therefore, from the Christian viewpoint, Jesus may be designated as a prophet, but only in connection with the Suffering Servant concept. If such a connection is denied, then the lone concept of prophet would not present a true portrayal of the New Testament Jesus. The work of the prophet must be joined with his person. Thus, for yet another time the Biblical Jesus is in contrast to the Quranic Jesus in that the Christian

understanding of Christ's sufferings is present, even with the title of prophet.

In the Qur'ān, as already stated, Jesus is addressed as a spirit from God. It is difficult to know what to make of the Spirit in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān, however, does not teach that a spirit from God or the Holy Spirit is God Himself, rather, he is the breath or wind of God. Similarly the New Testament word Pneuma in itself may mean wind or spirit or spiritual influence. It is used alike of the Holy Spirit and of the gifts that he bestows. On the other hand the New Testament does not present the Holy Spirit in a wholly impersonal way, as though he was merely a force. In the Gospels there is a clear implication that the Holy Spirit is both Divine and a Person. According to Mark, Jesus states:

'whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin.'⁸⁴

Indeed the Gospel writers present Jesus as the person whose whole life was lived in the power of God's Spirit. Luke, in similar fashion to the Qur'ān, recalls that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit. At his baptism the Spirit appeared in the form of a dove giving Jesus God's energy for all that lay ahead. Jesus also said that he was able to start the work of God's kingdom because he had been given God's

power. Luke records Jesus' words, as follows:

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.'⁸⁵

However, it is in the New Testament account of the Last Supper that Jesus' most explicit teaching about the Spirit is found. Jesus, according to John, states:

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.'⁸⁶

The Greek word, Paraclete, which is left untranslated in the above text, meant literally 'one called upon for help', and it was given as a title to the specially appointed lawyer whom any stranger could summon to his aid if he was involved in the complicated legal matters of Greek cities. Jesus had been a constant help to his disciples during his earthly ministry, and now he promised that the Spirit of God would help them after he had ascended to heaven. He further promised that the Paraclete, the divine Spirit, would continue to teach them in the way that he himself had done, and would lead them into all truth. Then ten days after the ascension of Jesus, the apostles experienced a remarkable infilling of the Spirit of God.

Thus, in the Bible God's Holy Spirit is not distinguished from God himself, nor is the Spirit a

third being between God and man. From the Biblical standpoint, the Holy Spirit is God himself insofar as he is active among human beings. The encounter with God, with Jesus, and with the Spirit ultimately come down to one and the same encounter. Hence, in retrospect this self-disclosure of God, led, inexorably, to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

The Qur'ān, in contrast to the Bible, does not contain any articulated conception of God as Holy Spirit. Moreover, Jesus, according to the Qur'ān, predicted the coming of Muḥammad.⁸⁷ In consequence the Muslim would not accept the Biblical understanding of Paraclete, as presented above. The understanding of the Paraclete, within Islam, is beyond the scope of this thesis. In short, it may be said that the Paraclete, whom Christians believe descended upon the apostles at Pentecost, is thought by Muslims to have appeared in the figure of Muḥammad. Nonetheless, Christian orthodoxy cannot utterly reject the Quranic Jesus when he is referred to as a spirit from God, even though the Bible never presents Jesus in such terminology.

The Bible, like the Qur'ān, states that God is eternal and that he has an eternal Word through which he addresses mankind through the prophets. What is the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Word of God?

The answer is found, at least in part, by examining relevant Hebrew thought as found in the Old Testament.

The Jewish faith could not rest content in a bare Unitarianism. In the Old Testament and in later Jewish theology there are sentiments which point towards an awareness of distinctions within the being of God. The Jews, in opposition to surrounding polytheism, laid stress on the Unity and transcendence of God. This led to the link between God and creation. Indeed the Rabbis elaborated the notion of God's Word, as the creative utterance of God. The concept of God's creative word is remarkably close to the Quranic phrase, qāla kun fa-yakun, 'He (God) said, "Let there be" and there is', and it is found in several chapters of the Old Testament. For example, a quotation from the Psalms:

'Let all the earth fear the Lord, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.'⁸⁸

A more philosophical use of the term Word is found in Alexandrian Judaism. Here the Word means not so much Utterance as Reason.⁸⁹ The Word of God is closely related to the Wisdom of God. All in all, the Jewish thinkers had made use of several different ideas in order to express their belief that the God, who is pure spirit, had impressed his mind and his will upon the

material creation. One way in which they did this was to say that God had created the world by the agency of divine Wisdom, which they conceived of as a quasi-personal being, intermediate between God and the material universe. For instance, a hymn to Wisdom, found in Proverbs, depicts Wisdom as a distinct personality who was present with God at the time of Creation.⁹⁰ Therefore, Wisdom is, or is moving toward becoming, a hypostasis, that is, a distinct entity.

Beyond the boundaries of the Hebrew Bible the cosmic significance of Wisdom received even greater attention. In the book known as the Wisdom of Ben Sira (or Ecclesiasticus), written in the early second century B.C., Wisdom is compared to the breath issuing from the mouth of God, an emanation that penetrates all things. Ecclesiasticus states:

'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist. I dwelt in high places, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.'⁹¹

Here, too, it is said that Wisdom was created before all things and poured out upon all that God made. However, Wisdom is said to have found rest only in Israel, where she was associated with the Temple of Jerusalem and the Law of Moses.⁹²

In another writing, the Wisdom of Solomon (circa 50 B.C.), Wisdom is clearly a hypostasis, almost

identified with God himself. The relevant passage is as follows:

For Wisdom is more mobile than any motion, and she penetrates and permeates everything because she is so pure; for she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of his almighty glory; therefore nothing defiled can enter into her, for she is a reflection of the everlasting light, and a spotless mirror of the activity of God, and a likeness of his goodness. Though she is one, she can do all things and while remaining in herself, she makes everything new.⁹³

Therefore Wisdom came to be regarded as a semi-independent power, being the agent of God's creation and the intermediary between God and the world.

For the Christian church, the Wisdom movement came to its fulfilment in Jesus. Paul identified Wisdom with Christ, through whom redemption came to all mankind.⁹⁴ In addition, the prologue to the Fourth Gospel states:

In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.⁹⁵

It is probable that the above verse should be understood in the light of the Wisdom of the East, as already discussed. Thus, the Christian church received from Israel a conception of cosmic, pre-existent Wisdom in terms of which the significance of God's revelation in Jesus could be understood.

Nevertheless, what exactly is the Logos? What is meant to be conveyed by presenting Jesus via the Logos

concept? Commenting on this point, Conzelmann states:

'In John, there is no material cosmology and anthropology as a content of the doctrine of salvation. The sense is simply: he himself - as the Incarnate One. The point is that the word is not detached from the person of the revealer so that it can be communicated as free content. It is based exclusively on his existence, and therefore cannot be taught and learnt as knowledge. Anyone who has the person, i.e., who believes in him, has salvation.⁹⁶

It is true that the main corpus of the Fourth Gospel does not actually say that Jesus is the divine Logos. Nevertheless, Conzelmann's point, as stated above, is highly significant as can be seen from Jesus' own teaching. Jesus not only imparts the word which is truth, but Jesus is the truth. Further, Jesus not only gives life, but is life. Finally, Jesus not only gives the bread of life, but he is the Bread. Thus, even in the body of the Fourth Gospel Jesus is only one step away from being the divine Logos. In the Prologue the gap has been bridged and Jesus is the divine Logos.

Without doubt, the message of Christianity, is the person of Christ. If one is drawing parallels in terms of the structure of Christianity and Islam, what corresponds in the Christian scheme to the Qur'ān is not the Bible but the person of Jesus. In short, it is Jesus who is for Christians the revelation of (from) God. Thus, there is a parallel between the Muslim doctrine of the Qur'ān and the Christian Logos-doctrine

of Jesus. However, the concept of Jesus' divinity, which the Logos-doctrine must imply, would be totally abhorrent to Muslims. Hence, the Quranic emphasis on prophethood which dispels any notion of divinity on the part of Jesus. Still, Islam and Christianity may be said to agree that God is involved in the human situation. The Islamic conception of God's transcendence might seem to exclude any possibility of his immanence, but this is not so. There is a sense in which, according to the Qur'ān, God is very close to men. The Qur'ān states:

'It was we who created man, and we know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him; for we are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein.'⁹⁷

It is plain that the conception of God's immanence in the world and in human activities is more at home in Christianity, notably in the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Logos-doctrine, as applied to Jesus in the New Testament, finds no parallel or acceptance in the Qur'ān. Commenting on this point, with reference to the Qur'ān, Cragg states:

'It is the view that divine condescension somehow compromises divine transcendence. God's sovereignty must reserve itself, will send rather than come, confine itself to prophets rather than give itself in Logos-love.'⁹⁸

The above comments on the Quranic perspective eventually lead to the Quranic conviction that there

can be no place for suffering in deity.

In Arabia of the seventh century there were, in addition to orthodox Christianity, several heresies prevalent. Is there any link of dependence between the Quranic concept of Jesus as a word of God and heterodox teaching? Arianism and Nestorianism appear to be the most likely donors. With regard to Arianism, Theodore Abū-Qurrah (d. about 820), one of the great Byzantine theologians, states:

'The Agarenes ... bend their efforts to one point, the denying of the divinity of the Word of God. For their false prophet, since he followed the error of Arius, passed on to them this teaching, so opposed to piety and religion.'⁹⁹

The next point to be noted is that the Patriarch of Alexandria, opponent of Arius, writing in a letter around the start of the fourth century, states:

'The Arians affirm that the Word of God has not always been; but that it has been made from nothing; that this so-called Son is a creature and a work; that he is not at all like to the Father in substance nor his true Word, nor his true Wisdom, but one of those things that has been made and created.'¹⁰⁰

It is significant that the above cited Arian beliefs are very similar to the corresponding Quranic views of Jesus.

With regard to the title Word of God most Muslim commentators, as already noted, see in this a reference to God's creative word. Jesus is not the Word itself,

but rather the outward manifestation of this word. God has only to say 'Be' and a thing is. Without doubt, Nestorian teaching is also very similar to the Quranic conception of word (kalima) as a creative command. In this connection Abū-l-Barakāt, a fourteenth century writer, states:

'It is related to them too their irritation at (hearing the Jacobites) say that the word of God was found in the womb of a woman or that the womb enclosed it. And so they comment on this explaining that the word (kalima) descended into her only as a command (amr) and she conceived (him), just as other men are conceived and in this way he (Christ) was born, a man up to the day of his baptism ... Nestorius as patriarch of Constantinople forbade the Christians to say that the Virgin Mary brought forth God. He commanded them not to confess that he who was born of her was anything but a man like us.'¹⁰¹

It is clear, from the above text, that Nestorian doctrine can find a definite parallel with the Quranic use of word, as applied to Jesus.

Furthermore, the Protoevangelium of James, an apocryphal gospel which was in wide use among the Oriental Christians of Muhammad's time, presents an account of the Annunciation as follows:

'And behold, an angel of the Lord (suddenly) stood before her and said: "Do not fear, Mary; for you have found grace before the Lord of all things and shall conceive of his Word."¹⁰²

The above apocryphal verse refers to the Logos in a manner similar to that found in the Qur'ān. O'Shaughnessy, commenting on this point, suggests:

'The concept corresponds to the common interpretation of 'creative command' for 'word' as used of Christ in the Qur'ān. 'God creates what he wishes', says the Qur'ān (3:47/42) two verses after the announcing of 'a word' from God named Jesus. 'When he decrees a thing, he only says to it, Be, and it is.' Thus the thing whose creation is decreed would come into being, as the Protoevangelium states it, ek logou autou, by God's 'creative command'.¹⁰³

Therefore, once again, the Quranic Christological texts show a clear parallel with the relevant apocryphal writings. This, however, is not to doubt Muhammad's sense of divine inspiration. Indeed, Muslims would strongly resist any notion of borrowing from other scriptures. Yet, the similarities between the aforesaid apocryphal work and the Qur'ān cannot be overlooked. Nor can the parallel between Nestorianism and Quranic Christology be denied. Perhaps Muhammad was bound to be influenced by the environment of seventh century Arabia.

All in all, the Muslim designation of Jesus as a word from God helps in some measure to bridge the gap which exists between the Muslim and Christian understanding of Jesus' Person and his relation to God. There is no doubt that Christians, in the past and present, have found this designation more helpful than some other exclusively Christian titles of Jesus (such as Son of God, Lamb of God) to introduce the New Testament picture of Jesus to the Muslim. Through this

designation Christians can at least show Muslims that they are not setting up another god beside God. For the Christian, Jesus as the Word of God can no more be separated from God than can the sacred Book as God's eternal Word be separated from God in the eyes of Muslims. At the same time, Muslims have generally recognised that the word of God is greater than the prophet whom God uses as a channel to convey His Word to men. Is it possible to show the Muslim that the prophet Jesus as the Word of God is more than a prophet, to show him Jesus as God's eternal Word of redemption as the New Testament portrays Jesus?

The most controversial title given by Christians to Jesus, the son of Mary, is Son of God, a title which the Qur'ān detests. The Christian must take into account the Muslim's instinctive recoil at anything which seems to impugn the divine transcendence. In a mysterious passage in the Qur'ān Muhammad is commanded to say:

'If God Most Gracious had a son, I would be the first to worship.'¹⁰⁴

That the condition, grammatically open, is considered to be impossible is confirmed by another text:

'Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for God Most Gracious.'¹⁰⁵

Yet perhaps the Biblical designation Son of God need not be so abhorrent to Muslims. Modern Christian exegetes are agreed that Jesus did not apply the title Son of God to himself. Conzelmann remarks that the title is always found in confessions but never in narration, and after extensive examination of the Biblical evidence, he concludes:

'according to the texts we have, Jesus did not use the title 'Son of God'.¹⁰⁶

It would seem, therefore, that it was only after the post-Easter experiences, when Jesus had been lifted up to God, that the believing community began to designate Jesus as Son or Son of God. Moreover, it was only logical to give the name Son to one who called God his Father.

How is one to understand this ancient language of divine sonship? What the New Testament unquestionably has in mind is not a relation of parentage, but an appointment, in the Old Testament sense, conferring legal status and power. Not a physical divine sonship, as Islam always assumed and rightly rejected because it awakened associations of intercourse between a god and a mortal woman. The term son of God in the Old Testament is applied to an angel or demigod, one of the mythological beings whose ill conduct was among the causes of the Flood.¹⁰⁷ Further, the Old Testament

applies the title Son of God to the real or ideal earthly king over Israel. The Messiah was to be an earthly king of the line of David. Although, in fact, the term son of God is rarely used in Jewish literature in the sense of Messiah. The application of the phrase son of God to the Messiah rests chiefly on one of the Psalms, as follows:

'I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, "You are my son, today I have begotten you".¹⁰⁸

The above formula was in all probability used at the coronation ceremony.

Hence, the Christian usage of the term son of God was in no way unique, but was already a part of the Jewish tradition. The term in no way carries the idea of physical descent from, and essential unity with, God the Father. The Hebrew idiom conveys nothing more than a simple expression of godlikeness. However, within Jewish culture, was the king the son of God in a literal or metaphorical sense? Mowinckel states:

'In spite of all the mythological metaphors about the birth of a king, we never find in Israel any expression of a metaphysical conception of the king's divinity and his relation to Yahweh. It is clear that the king is regarded as Yahweh's son by adoption.¹⁰⁹

Though the son sayings in the Gospels may not be genuine, it is possible that Jesus thought of himself as being a son of God. In support of such a theory

Vermes quotes from the prayer of Honi as found in the Mishnah as follows:

'Lord of the universe, thy sons have turned to me because I am as a son of the house before thee.'¹¹⁰

Vermes goes on to stress that the phrase son of the house conveys the meaning of Honi's relationship with God as being that of a son with his father. In short, a close relationship. Likewise Jesus could have thought of himself as son of God. Certainly such a notion is reflected in the New Testament as Jesus refers to God as his Father.

One important aspect of Jesus' teaching was his insistence upon the fatherhood of God. The unanimous testimony of the Gospels is that Jesus used the Aramaic form Abba (Father) in all his prayers. The term Abba is similar to the English word daddy without the sloppy overtones that title has acquired. Jesus' use of Abba shows the heart of his relationship to God. Yet, for Jesus to address God so directly does not necessarily mean he claimed to be his divine son. Rather, it was a form of address often used by the Jewish holy man, the nabī, the hasid or indeed anyone who felt he could enter into a direct dialogue with God. Abba as a way of addressing God was certainly used by the grandson of Honi, the Circle Drawer, the charismatic rain-maker. Vermes, with reference to the grandson of Honi, relates

the following anecdote

'When the world was in need of rain, the rabbis used to send school-children to him, who seized the train of his cloak and said to him, Abba, Abba, give us rain! He said to God: Lord of the universe, render a service to those who cannot distinguish between the Abba who gives rain and the Abba who does not.'¹¹¹

The term Abba as applied to God is rejected by Muslims because it is understood in the sense of physical generation. Hence, to think of God as Father implies to the Muslim that God must have a wife. Such a notion, quite rightly, is rejected as being blasphemous. Nor do Muslims admit the term in a metaphorical sense that God is the father of all men. Consequently, Jesus' use of the name Abba for God, as presented in the New Testament, would find no acceptance in the Muslim camp. However, the theory that Jesus thought of himself as Son of God, in the sense of a holy man's intimacy with God, could find an echo in the Quranic conception of Jesus.

The conclusion arrived at so far is that in itself the Christian claim that Jesus was the Son of God is not necessarily a claim to divine status, nor does it imply any notion of paternity in the physical sense. Historical Christianity has resisted attempts to identify incarnation with divine filiation in any sense that would have the deity as the male element unite with Mary as the female element to produce the human

Son of God. It is therefore tempting to compare the Biblical Jesus with the Quranic Jesus and to see no contradiction in terms of his person. However, it would appear that the Bible portrays Jesus as being more than a man of God. There is more than divine action in him; there is divine being. This is the essential difference between Christ and all who preceded him. The point is made in terms of the difference between prophets and the Son. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews states:

'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.'¹¹²

Similarly, in the same letter, there is a contrast between a servant and a son, as follows:

'Yet Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honour than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ was faithful over God's house as a son ...'¹¹³

Moses was uniquely great in the eyes of the Jews. In the above passage the status of Moses as servant is contrasted with the status of Christ as Son. Consequently, the superiority of Jesus is declared.

The Son stands in a much more intimate relation to the Father than a servant does and something of the Father's very self is in the Son.¹¹⁴

It must be stressed that the New Testament nowhere states categorically that Christ is God. The New Testament speaks of Christ being equal with God,¹¹⁵ being in the form of God,¹¹⁶ being one with God,¹¹⁷ but it stops short of saying that he is God. If the title Son of God indicates a unity between Christ and God, this is not quite the same as an identity. Therefore what does the Christian concept of divine sonship imply? Watt states:

'The conception of son of God is to be regarded as expressing, in the best way possible for us, something real about God. The symbol of divine sonship implies that a human being may have insight into his purposes and into his relationship with humanity, and may be able to do something towards realizing the purposes. Jesus was a pioneer in this field, and his followers become more fully sons and daughters of God as, following him, they understand God's purposes more fully and seek to realize them.'¹¹⁸

The Muslim, at least in an academic setting, should find the term Son to be acceptable in a strictly metaphorical sense. Any understanding of Jesus' Sonship in a biological sense must be rejected by both Muslims and Christians. Perhaps the Qur'ān opposes the use of the term Son out of the well-founded fear that it will be taken too literally. Certainly in dialogue

with non-Christians the designation Son of God requires careful handling. As far as the Biblical presentation of Jesus is concerned the use of the term Son of God should not be totally rejected by Muslims. In the light of the Bible Christians can at least suggest that the Qur'ān actually denies neither the Christian concept of Jesus' Sonship, regardless of whether or not it intends to deny it. When Christians confess that Jesus is the Son of God, they are affirming that God is one, as Jesus himself plainly stated. They are not establishing another god alongside God. Nor are they suggesting that God has a physical relationship with a consort. Nor are they elevating a man into a god, or a man and a woman into gods alongside God.

Finally, within the limits of this study, the notion of original sin is one which Islam emphatically denies, affirming that every human being comes into the world innocent and sinless. Accordingly, each person will be held accountable for any sins self inflicted upon his or her unblemished nature. The Qur'ān would seem to imply that Jesus never blemished his human nature. Similarly, though with much more emphasis, the Bible presents Jesus as being without sin.¹¹⁹ The conviction of Jesus' sinlessness is deeply embedded in the New Testament. No doubt the account of the Suffering Servant, as discussed above, and the analogy

of an unspotted and flawless sacrificial offering helped to give expression to the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness. However, the doctrine itself was based on the impression which Jesus made on his disciples and which he has always made on his followers.

Ambrose and Augustine,¹²⁰ the Fathers of the Western Church who figured prominently in developing the theology of original sin, explained that Jesus was free from sin because he was conceived of a virgin. Behind this explanation lies the thesis that the transmission of original sin is bound up with the sexual nature of human propagation and the sensual appetites aroused by procreation. Many modern theologians¹²¹ feel an urgency to reformulate the truth contained in the doctrine of original sin, but even the defenders of the traditional understanding of the concept have for the most part abandoned the 'concupiscence theory' of the propagation of sin. Thus, while the virginal conception may enter into the mystery of Jesus' sinlessness, it is difficult to argue that in order to be free from original sin Jesus had to be conceived of a virgin.

Therefore the Bible, and to a lesser degree the Qur'ān, both present Jesus as one without sin. Undoubtedly, such a belief portrays Jesus as being at least superior to other men, including Muhammad. In

addition, the Biblical conception of the sinlessness of Jesus implies, in some sense, that God in Christ took on himself the sin of the world. This conception lies at the root of all substitutionary theories of atonement. In short, Christ though not himself a sinner, identified himself with man in his sin, becoming so involved in it that he shared man's fate and dealt effectively with his predicament. Muslims reject the notion that each individual is responsible for his own actions which cannot be paid for by another.

In general, what can be said about the Quranic Jesus in relation to the Biblical Jesus? While the Qur'ān frequently refers to the injīl, it reflects little familiarity with the message of the injīl, that Book also which it has come to confirm. If at times it confirms the injīl, at other times it distorts the injīl's message. If at times it seems, directly or indirectly, to quote the injīl, it gives little or no credit to its source.

As already noted, the total sum of the Quranic verses related to Jesus, taken together, would fill only a few pages of the Qur'ān, a book equal in size to the New Testament. Apart from his birth accounts, which are composed of a series of consecutive verses, references to the teachings, works and person of Jesus

even as prophet are generally brief, scattered, often more suggestive than illuminating and at times heavily dependent upon traditions for our understanding of them. In their Arabic dress some of his names, such as 'Jesus' and 'Messiah', conceal their original Hebrew meaning and purpose for which they were attributed to Jesus, meanings which are actually alien to the Quranic Jesus. The concept of the pathos of God, as reflected in the person of the New Testament Jesus, is completely absent from the portrayal of Jesus in the Qur'ān. Other names and descriptions attributed exclusively to Jesus such as 'a Word from God' and 'a spirit from God', taken in isolation might even appear to separate the Person of Jesus from the rest of the Quranic prophets and apostles. It comes as no complete surprise that a few Muslims have claimed that the Qur'ān itself has paved their way to the Saviour Jesus. In any event it is hard for the Christian to understand the Muslim assertion, serious because so frequent, that the Quranic account provides all that we need to know about Jesus.

Perhaps we can best understand the Quranic portrayal of Jesus and his significance in relation to the total Quranic context of prophet and prophecy. According to the Qur'ān the prophecy, not the prophet, is vital; the message is the eternal Word of God, while

the messenger is merely its channel. To the Christian, apart from the difference between Islamic and Christian concepts of the mode of revelation, some Quranic incidents in the life of Jesus and the settings which surround them are more apocryphal than Biblical, more Muḥammad-like than Christ-like. The defence of the Quranic Jesus against his enemies, however well intentioned, does not accord with the Biblical portrayal of Jesus who loved his enemies, blessed and prayed for his persecutors, and enjoined the same attitude upon his disciples. Nor does the Biblical account portray Jesus merely as one in a series of prophets, as a messenger proclaiming a message essentially the same as other messengers, as the penultimate to, and type of, Muḥammad and as a forerunner to Muḥammad, the seal of the prophets. According to the Bible Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy, himself the Message of God. The Redeemer more than the Law-giver. In him the kingdom of God is at hand.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO ISLAMIC CHRISTOLOGY

3.1: The Christian and Islamic Understanding of the Oneness and Character of God

The debate between Christianity and Islam remains focused on the person of Jesus and his relationship with God. It is important to recall, with reference to Jesus, the overall historical context of the relevant Quranic material.

During the early days at Medina Muḥammad meets with the Jewish community. They are probably of Arab descent but their conversion to Judaism, centuries before, has turned them into members of Israel. Muḥammad is rejected, on racial and religious grounds, by the Jews of Medina. They claim that there are no prophets outside of Israel and that Muḥammad's teachings are not in conformity with the Bible. To such criticism the Qur'ān answers:

'Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in faith, and bowed his will to God's, (which is Islam), and he joined not gods with God.'¹

'We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of Apostles; We gave Jesus the Son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you an Apostle with what ye yourselves desire not, ye are puffed up with pride? - Some ye called impostors, and others ye slay.'²

Consequently, Muhammad felt betrayed. He had counted on the Jews to back him up in his struggle against paganism, but they had turned against him. Politically, the Jews were eliminated from Medina. The first two tribes were expelled in 624 and 625, the last saw its men massacred and its women and children reduced to slavery in 627.³ Theologically, Muhammad now rejects Judaism which, he claims, is not in conformity with the teaching of the prophets.⁴ However, the break with the Jews and Judaism, does not impair Muhammad's sense of being the last in the line of Biblical prophets. On the contrary, it re-inforces in him the sense of his unity with past prophets and their true followers. Since he has discovered the hostility of the Jews to himself and compared it with their opposition to Jesus, Muhammad expects to find in Christians when he meets them a great deal of friendship and communion with his ideals.

There is no evidence, as already shown, that Muhammad had direct contact with a Christian community. Therefore, Muhammad is not building on personal experience when he speaks of Jesus or of his teachings. Indeed the Qur'an seems to imply that Jesus and Muhammad must be one in doctrine and their followers friends, having the Jews as common enemies. The Qur'an states:

'Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians"; because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.'⁵

Of course, this friendship is linked with the fact that Muslims and Christians are supposed to have the same teachings and that the Christians play their part in confirming the divine origin of Muḥammad's revelations.⁶ In an effort to defend the name of Jesus against the Jews as he discusses with them, Muḥammad is led to speak more precisely of Jesus' person and life. This naturally leads Muḥammad to re-interpret the figure of Christ in the terms of his own experience and according to his own categories. In defending Jesus he defends his own teachings. When finally Muḥammad is told some facts about Jesus' life and teachings, this information comes from opponents, mainly Jews, who try to destroy his trust in Jesus. It is characteristic that many of the Christological passages in the Qur'ān are addressed to Jews not to Christians, and that their prime objective is to answer some claims or arguments of Jewish polemics.

It was only in 632, a few months before his death, that Muḥammad finally meets a Christian community with which he can discuss in depth. An official delegation of Christians from Najrān (Yemen) comes with its



leaders. In the discussions that follow their arrival, Muhammad invites them to join Islam. He challenges them to an ordeal by fire (Mubāhala), they refuse. The following Quranic verse may be an abbreviated account of the actual proposal of 'ordeal' made to the Najranites by Muhammad:

'If any one disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: "Come! Let us gather together, - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves. Then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of God on those who lie!"'

The Christians refuse the challenge and it becomes clear that Christian teachings are not compatible with Muhammad's doctrines. Thus, his defence of Jesus against the Jews must now be repeated against the Christians. In consequence a new vision emerges proclaiming that Islam is the only religion accepted by God.⁸ All other religions and communities have gone astray and distorted their scriptures.⁹ The Christians themselves are sinners¹⁰ and the Muslims should not become their friends although they can marry their daughters and eat at their table.¹¹ Therefore it could be said that Islam owes its existence as a separate religion to the fact that its message and its founder were rejected first by the pagans of Mecca, then by the Jews and finally by the Christians. In short, Islam exists because dialogue failed.

The different emphases in Christology have far-reaching consequences for the rest of theology, in particular for the doctrine of God. Is there any common ground, outside of the Christological debate, between Islam and Christianity in regard to the concept of God? Judaism, Islam and Christianity are bound together as monotheistic religions, for they have their origin in the command to worship the one God. Deuteronomy states:

'Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might.'¹²

The basic common point between Muslims and Christians is faith in the one and only God, who gives meaning and life to all. The unity of the human race and equality of all people before God is grounded in the concept of one God. Indeed one of the most important messages given to Muḥammad was of the oneness of God. The Qur'ān states:

'There is no god but He; that is the witness of God, His angels, and those endued with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He, the exalted in power, the wise.'¹³

The intensity with which Islam approaches the unity of God seems to exclude any independent value or existence for either the world or humanity. The consequence of radical Islamic monotheism is that it

reacts against anything that even looks from a distance as though it might be in danger of attacking the unity of God. The Qur'ān states:

'Say: "O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you. That we worship none but God; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than God." If then they turn back, Say ye: "Bear witness that we at least are Muslims bowing to God's will."¹⁴

'Soon shall We cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, for that they joined companions with God, for which he had sent no authority; their abode will be the fire; and evil is the home of the wrong-doers!¹⁵

'God forgiveth not the sin of joining other gods with him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this. One who joins other gods with God, hath strayed far, far away from the right.¹⁶

Thus, according to the Qur'ān, God cannot Himself come into association or connection with anything else whatsoever. To suggest anything of the kind would be to detract from God's honour and, thereby, to compromise his Divine unity. To this horrible sin Islam gives the name shirk. Shirk is to associate what is creaturely with the Creator. Clearly, from the Muslim point of view, the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Incarnation already looks as though it is an example of shirk. Such a view of the Christian belief in Incarnation is mistaken, as will be shown later.

God, from the Muslim viewpoint, is known first of

all through his gift of creation. The Qur'ān records the first direct revelation to Muḥammad, as follows:

'Proclaim! or Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created. Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood.'¹⁷

The Quranic emphasis upon God's power in creation can find a clear parallel with the Biblical account of creation.¹⁸ Hence, God formed the heaven and earth and created the human race. Even more strongly than Christianity, Islam sees God's handiwork in nature and in her mysterious powers and laws. The world itself is evidence of God's supreme wisdom, creative power, and sustaining might. The Qur'ān never tires of repeating that in all this wonderful creation man is the single creature who above all others has been endowed with the riches of it all.

In addition to God's self-revelation in creation there is, from the Muslim perspective, the book of revelation, namely, the Qur'ān, through which humanity comes to know God. That is, God has raised his prophets and apostles from amidst mankind and has revealed to them true knowledge of his will and his purpose. Moreover, Muslims have been enjoined not only to believe in the prophethood of all the prophets but also in the Books which were revealed to them. The Qur'ān states:

'Say: We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to

Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to God do we bow our will (in Islam).¹⁹

Therefore Moses and Jesus, the founders of Judaism and Christianity, are regarded as having proclaimed the same truths as Abraham. There is, however, no notion of a prophetic tradition since each is held to have received the message directly from God. The basic concept which Islam seeks to inculcate is the concept of the unity of God. It is from this belief that all other tenets, principles, and injunctions flow as from a life-force.

Islam, in line with its Old Testament heritage, has a particular sensitivity towards justice and righteousness. God, according to the Qur'ān, has established the standards of justice and demands righteousness from every man and woman. On the Day of Judgment God will judge each individual, then separate the good from the evil-doers. Nonetheless, God is presented in the Qur'ān as being merciful and compassionate. Christian interpretations of the Islamic doctrine of God often fall short at this point. It cannot be overstressed that the Qur'ān is permeated with the understanding that God is merciful. For example, the Qur'ān states:

'To God belongeth all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgiveth whom He pleaseth and punisheth whom He pleaseth; but God is Oft-Forgiving, most merciful.'²⁰

Further, every sūrah of the Qur'ān, with one exception, is prefaced with the words, 'In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful'. Moreover, the Qur'ān is not ignorant of God's love. The Qur'ān states:

'Say, If ye do love God, follow me. God will love you and forgive you your sins. For God is oft-forgiving, most merciful.'²¹

Thus, for the Muslim, God is perfectly righteous and yet sin may be forgiven through his unending mercy and compassion, with just one exception the sin of shirk. Sincere repentance and trust in God will not be in vain.

The conclusion arrived at so far is that, with regard to the oneness and character of God, the Qur'ān and the Bible have much in common. However, in Islam there is a major difference in respect of Christianity. In Islam history is not perceived as affecting the nature of God. In short, God has not become incarnated in history. God does not change. Thus, the meaning of history is not at all the same as in Christianity. Even the sacred history which is common to Islam and Christianity and Judaism is treated in a totally different manner in the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is more indifferent to the historical significance of sacred

history than the Bible, and much more interested in the moral significance of events rehearsed in that history. This is an important point in Muslim/Christian dialogue.

3.2: Orthodox Christian Christology

Needless to say, any inquiry into Islamic thought in connection with Christianity should take as its point of departure the Islamic understanding of the Quranic passages concerning Christianity. It would appear, at first sight, that the Qur'ān formally rejects any doctrine of the Trinity. The Qur'ān states:

'O People of the Book commit no excesses in your religion, nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than an apostle of God, and His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him; so believe in God and His apostles. Say not "Trinity", desist. It will be better for you for God is one God, glory be to Him. Far exalted is He above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is God as a Disposer of affairs.'²²

Watt, with regard to the above passage, states:

'it is clear that they are not attacking the orthodox Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but the misinterpretation of that doctrine sometimes called 'tritheism'.²³

The notion of tritheism, from the orthodox Christian viewpoint, is heretical teaching about the Trinity which denies the unity of substance in the Three Divine Persons. In fact tritheism was mainly associated with the teachings of the Monophysites, a group of the fifth century. Such teaching stressed the divine nature of Christ at the expense of his humanity. It was strongly supported in Egypt, especially among

the Coptic-speaking inhabitants, and also in parts of Syria. When the Muslims invaded Egypt in C.639 the Monophysite Copts preferred to live under Islam rather than to submit to Constantinople, and the majority of the Christians of Egypt gladly accepted Muslim toleration of their peculiar belief. Moreover, the success of Islam sprang essentially from the failure of Christian theologians to solve the problems of the Trinity and of Christ's nature. In Arab territories, Christianity had penetrated heathenism but usually in Monophysite form. The Muslims and the Monophysite Christians never fused theologically. But, unlike the Jews, they did not remain racially and culturally distinct. Hence, the Quranic denial of the 'Trinity' may be directed against tritheism as found within Monophysitism.

There is, however, another side to the above controversy in that the Quranic attack on the 'Trinity' may be directed against the Jews only. Basetti-Sani, with regard to verse 4:171, states:

'People of the book' is an expression that describes the leaders of the Jewish community (though at times it refers to the community as a whole). It is never used to describe the Christian community. Christians are called An-Nassära and are rhetorically addressed as 'people of the gospel'. Once again, we must read the text which seems to deny the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ as addressed to the Jews of Medina and not to Christians.²⁴

Thus, the Qur'ān proclaims to the Jews and the pagans of Medina the excellence of Jesus. Basetti-Sani further states:

'When the messiahship of Jesus was introduced with the formula "He is a Word and a Spirit proceeding from God", the Jews of Medina jeered at Mohammad (and the Christians) throwing in his face the remark that there are now three Gods instead of one. The text is a reproach of this sneering twist that they gave to the formula.'²⁵

If the above theory holds water, then verse (4:171) is not an absolute attack on heretical Christian teaching, but an assault on Jewish misunderstanding with regard to the Quranic Jesus.

Furthermore, the Quranic Trinity seems to be a triad composed of Allah, of Mary his consort, and of Jesus their child. The Qur'ān states:

'And behold! God will say; "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?" He will say; "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right to say. Had I said such a thing, Thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden.'²⁶

It is interesting that the cult of Mary which was verging on idolatry was practised by certain Christian sects of Arabia, namely, the Collyridians who invested Mary with the name and honours of a goddess.²⁷ The above Quranic verse may well be directed against this heresy.

In any event, orthodox Christianity vehemently denies belief in three Gods. The Christian Creeds openly profess belief in one God and thereby strict monotheism is declared. Therefore the Trinity as understood and rejected in the Qur'ān is not the same as that which is taught by Christian dogma, and defined by the councils which were held before the revelation of the Qur'ān. The Quranic assertions of the divine unity are readily intelligible to Christians and a portion from the New Testament makes a similar protest:

'Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence", and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth - as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom we exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.'²⁸

Without doubt, there is an emphasis on the unity of God in the Christian Scriptures like that in the Qur'ān, but with the difference that, in the former, Jesus is associated with the one God in a way which sounds strange, even offensive to Muslim ears.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to draw out the implications of the Biblical revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is not contained formally in Scripture but is both an inference and a construct from the Bible. The first disciples of Jesus were Jews and worshipped the one

God. Indeed Jesus himself reaffirmed the unity of God.

Mark records:

Jesus answered; The first is, "Hear O Israel;
The Lord our God, the Lord is one."²⁹

However, the impression made by Jesus on those who knew him was of one who was more than man. The resurrection of Jesus made the disciples certain that in him they had encountered, in some sense, the living God. In other words, Jesus revealed the suffering love of God which is in the innermost heart of God. Such love led Jesus to suffer on the cross and to undergo death for all mankind. The early Christians felt the logical weakness of all this just as much as Christians today. Nevertheless, they felt compelled to proclaim the message of Christianity. Paul, writing to the Christians at Corinth, states:

but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.³⁰

The first century Church tried various ways of expressing this central point in their faith. These different forms of expression embraced both thanksgiving for God's love and confessional formulae with regard to Jesus. The Easter experience caused the early Christians to see a unity between Jesus and God.

Consequently, Jesus is named as Lord^{3 1} and as the Son of God.^{3 2} Indeed the use of the above titles portrays the beginnings of the faith to which the Confessions and Creeds of the Church give expression.

It would, nevertheless, be a mistake to confine the Christian faith simply to its teaching about the figure and significance of Jesus, central as these are. There is also a universal dimension to the Christian faith. In brief, Christianity recognises that the story of God moving towards his people begins with the creation of the world, and will find its fulfilment in the Kingdom at the end of time. In all this the Church simply took over the faith of Israel. God, as presented in Genesis, is the creator of heaven and earth. In the New Testament, God is the heavenly Father who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the lilies of the fields and without whose will not even a sparrow falls to the earth. In their understanding of God's creative and sustaining power Islam and Christianity are very close to one another.

In Christianity, however, there is a much greater awareness of the ambiguity, the fallenness, and the transitoriness of the creation and especially of the human reality within creation. There is a much sharper sense that creation itself needs redemption, so that sin and death and sorrow may be overcome. Such a quest

is, of course, in line with the profound longings of the Old Testament prophets, who likewise hoped for the new world renewed and transfigured by the Spirit of God. Christians, in contrast to Muslims, interpret the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus as being the beginning of this process of transformation, even if this is but a glimpse of the future consummation. Christians experience the action of the Holy Spirit in the process of sanctification.

As the Church spread through the ancient Mediterranean world, the Hellenistic culture and thought-forms which dominated that world quickly came to determine the way in which Christian theology was expressed. The mystery of the unity of God, and at the same time the unbroken unity of Jesus with the Father was expressed in terms borrowed from the world of Hellenistic thought. On the one hand, there were the theologians who emphasised the human form of Jesus. They thought of him as a man sent by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It may be said that their Christology was worked out 'from below'. Because of their strong convictions about the unity of God, they tended to emphasise the distinction between God the Father and Jesus. The theologians on the other side wanted so much to proclaim the divinity of Jesus that they developed a Christology 'from above'. They

claimed that the Son was co-equal with the Father in eternity. All in all, during the first seven hundred years of Church history there were theological conflicts with regard to finding an acceptable Christology. Such disputes are actually part of the background to the rise of Islam.

The great Arian controversy of the fourth century, which split the Church in two, stemmed from the preaching of the Alexandrian presbyter, Arius. According to Arius the Son was a created being who did not eternally exist and, thus, was a sort of demi-god, subordinate to the Father. The Emperor Constantine summoned the first General Council of the Church at Nicaea, in A.D. 325, to settle the dispute and so reunify the Church. At the Council of Nicaea Eusebius of Caesarea proposed that the creed of his own church should be adopted. This creed is as follows:

'We believe in One God the Father Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in One Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, Only-begotten Son, First born of all creation, begotten of God the Father before all worlds, by whom also all things were made, who for our salvation became incarnate and lived among men and suffered and rose again on the third day and ascended to the Father and shall come again in glory to judge quick and dead. We believe also in one Holy Spirit.'³³

This was an orthodox creed. But it had not been constructed in view of the particular problem

confronting the Council of Nicaea, which was the Arian heresy. The Creed of Caesarea was, however, accepted as a basis for discussion and certain additions were made. These were designed to exclude ambiguity and offer no opportunity for evasion. The Creed of Nicaea, which resulted, is as follows:

'We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead; And in the Holy Spirit.'³⁴

To make assurance doubly sure, the following anathemas were added:

'But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change - these the Catholic Church anathematizes.'³⁵

The three phrases calculated to make Arian evasion impossible were, 'from the substance of the Father', 'begotten not made', 'of one substance with the Father'. The import of these phrases was that the divine Sonship of Christ is an eternal reality. He is

inseparably one with the Father, yet distinct. He is in no sense a creature. He is the eternally-begotten Son. Beyond this the Council did not define the constitution of the Divine-human person.

At Nicaea the Arian reduction of the Son to the status of a creature was combated by the affirmation of the oneness of substance, or essence, of the Father and the Son. Then the position being made clear that Jesus was truly, substantially, of the stuff of Deity, the question arose as to the manner of the union of Deity and Humanity within the person of Jesus himself. That is to say, that the question of the relation of the Son as a whole (if we may so speak) to the Father being settled, it is now asked, what is the relation of the Divine and human elements within this 'whole' which is the Person of Christ? A synthesis was sought which would conserve the Deity and the humanity, maintain the distinction between them, and yet preserve their unity. To achieve such a synthesis was the task confronting the Fathers of the Church at the Council of Chalcedon. If Chalcedon did not succeed, it did state the issue with a clarity never excelled. Perhaps it said all that it is possible to say by way of giving expression to that which is unutterable.

At Chalcedon the Creed of Nicaea, quoted above, was received as the belief of the Church. The Council

had also before it the letters of Cyril and the Tome of Leo, and a creed which later became known as the Nicene Creed. If space permitted, these might be exhibited by way of commentary on the Symbol upon which the Council finally agreed. Of that Symbol, the following is the essential paragraph:

'In agreement, therefore, with the holy fathers, we all unanimously teach that we should confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father in Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin; begotten from the Father before the ages as regards His Godhead, and in the last days, the same, because of us and because of our salvation begotten from the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos, as regards His manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union, but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one prosopon and one hypostasis - not parted or divided into two prosopa, but one and the same Son, only-begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ Himself have taught us about Him and the creed of our fathers has handed down.'³⁶

Certainly the Definition of Chalcedon, hammered out fifteen hundred years ago, is a remarkable achievement. It remains the classic statement of Catholic Christological dogma. Given the Biblical material, it was the inevitable expression in its historical situation of the Church's deepest conviction concerning

the Christ of the New Testament. And so long as we are working at the same level, that is to say, accepting the same Biblical data and operating with the same modes of thought, we must agree that the sum of the matter is: No Two Natures, no Incarnation. No Incarnation, no Christianity.

Therefore the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, is not to question a belief in the one and only God, but to explicate it. For the Christian, the encounter with God, with Jesus, and with the Spirit ultimately come down to one and the same encounter. Likewise, Muslims do not usually believe that the Christian God consists of God, Mary and Jesus. Such an understanding is not the general Muslim interpretation of the Christian Trinity and has not been so historically. Furthermore, the Trinity as it is usually understood consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has been understood by many Sufi metaphysicians as three hypostases which do not destroy the unity of God. Moreover, there are anthropomorphisms to be found in the Qur'ān as follows:

'To God belong the East and the West, whithersoever ye turn, there is the Presence (face) of God. For God is all-pervading, all knowing.'³⁷

'But construct an Ark under Our eyes and our inspiration, and address Me no further on behalf of those who are in sin. For they are about to be overwhelmed in the Flood.'³⁸

Quranic anthropomorphisms, of course, are not intended to be taken literally. In just the same way Christians affirm that God is three hypostases, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christians understand these terms as meaning, God, His Word, and His Spirit.

Accordingly, in the Chalcedonian solution to the Christological problem the language of divine sonship is employed. The Qur'ān emphatically denies that God has a son:

‘Far exalted is He above having a son ... ’³⁹

‘It is not befitting to the majesty of God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it "Be", and it is.’⁴⁰

‘They say: "God Most Gracious has begotten a son!" Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin. That they should invoke a son for God Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of God Most Gracious that He should beget a son.’⁴¹

It should be remembered that the Qur'ān was inveighing against the pantheon in the Ka'ba at Mecca, where the ‘sons and daughters of God’ were idolatrously worshipped. Hence, the very expression ‘son of God’ was taboo. It is quite certain that later Muslim apologists read into these texts a refutation of Christian dogmas. But it is equally certain that not one of the Quranic texts in question gives an accurate

account of Christian teaching. Zaehner, commenting on the first above-cited passage, states:

‘What, in fact, is Muḥammad denying in this passage? Nothing more, it would appear, than that God was physically the Father of Jesus. Muḥammad, though he certainly knew of the Christological controversies that had been raging during the last centuries, was not a trained Christian theologian, and for anyone who was not just that, the whole concept of the generation of the Word must either have been incomprehensible or implied that God had taken on a human form and cohabited with Mary rather as the ancient gods did in pagan legend. Such an idea was rightly abhorrent to the Prophet.’⁴²

Therefore the Quranic denial of God having a son must be seen within the above limitations, and, thereby, such a denial is fully endorsed by Christian orthodoxy.

Further, the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God does not affect the unity of God. He is God’s only Son in the sense that in him God once and for all has revealed Himself to mankind in His eternal Word become the man, Jesus, because it is for mankind and for their salvation that He has revealed Himself in His eternal Word. Moreover, Zaehner, commenting on verse (19:35), the second above-cited passage, states:

‘God, according to this passage, then does not acquire a son in the course of time; and this again is consonant with orthodox Christian teaching and actually opposed to the Arian heresy which held that God the Son was created in or before time. God does not acquire a ‘son’ because the ‘Son’ or, as the Qur’ān prefers to call Him, the ‘Word’, is co-eternal with God.’⁴³

Apparently, Muḥammad had some knowledge of the disputes with regard to the two natures of Christ. The Qur'ān, for example, states:

'In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary. Say: "Who then hath the least power against God, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, his mother, and all - every one that is on the earth? For to God belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. For God hath power over all things.'⁴⁴

'The Jews call 'Uzair a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; In this they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the truth.'⁴⁵

The above verses specifically deny that Mary is the Mother of God, and that the Messiah is the son, rather than the Word, of God. Zaehner, commenting in this respect, states:

'the denial that Mary is the mother of Allah (God) would seem to be in direct support of the Nestorian position which denied to Mary the title of Mother of God. She could not even be said to be the mother of the Word that was 'cast upon' her since this pre-existed her, and if motherhood implies origination, then Mary is not the mother of God, though she is the mother of the Messiah, who, in some way not defined by the Qur'ān, is united to the eternal Word. The Quranic position, then, with regard to the two natures of Christ would appear to be Nestorian.'⁴⁶

The conclusion arrived at so far is that the Muslim distrust of Christianity is not the direct

result of the study and refutation of orthodox Christian teaching; it merely springs from an obsessing urge to defend the transcendence of divine unity. It is because they are looked on as an affront to the divine nature that Christian dogmas are brushed aside. This is so true that, although the unity of substance, neither begetting nor begot, is formulated in both Christian and Islamic belief, Muslims are all too ready to think that Christians do not accept it or at least distort it. Indeed, at various times, passages from the Qur'ān have been looked on by Muslim apologists as the refutation of the Christian dogma of the Trinity and Incarnation. But when we come to examine these passages more closely, we discover that their statement of the Christian dogmas they propose to refute is far from accurate. What they are refuting is not orthodox Christian belief at all but heretical views which the Church herself repudiates. Thus, it would be more correct to say that the Qur'ān does not deal with Christian teaching at all, rather than to say that it repudiates it. Zaehner states:

'The Qur'ān, then, as opposed to traditional Muslim orthodoxy, does not explicitly deny any specific Christian doctrine except that Christ is the son of God, and this for obvious reasons that have already been pointed out. For, except to those well coached in Christian theology, sonship implies physical procreation and this is unthinkable in God who is a pure Spirit.'⁴⁷

However, the distinctions between one and three made by the Christian doctrine of the Trinity do not satisfy the average Muslim. How can the one and only God, asks the Muslim, be a union of hypostases and relations? Without doubt, the Christian belief in the Incarnation is difficult to comprehend. It is much easier, and more logical, to adopt the Muslim position and to think in terms of the absolute unity of God with the subsequent ministry of prophethood. The Chalcedonian solution to the Christological debate does emphasise both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. As already shown, the humanity of all the prophets, including Jesus, is clearly affirmed in the Qur'ān. Therefore, with regard to the human nature of Jesus, the Qur'ān and orthodox Christology may be said to be in agreement. The Qur'ān, however, does not go beyond the concept of prophethood with regard to Jesus. Such an understanding is dictated, in the first instance, by the radical monotheism presented in the Qur'ān. Secondly, with Muḥammad as the Seal of the Prophets it would not be consistent for Incarnation to displace prophethood. Hence, there must be continuity. The Qur'ān states:

'To those who believe in God and His apostles and make no distinction between any of the apostles, We shall soon give their due rewards. For God is Oft-forgiving, most Merciful. '48

The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, from the Muslim viewpoint, appears to compromise God. In other words, Incarnation means that God is vulnerable to created matter. Yet, is the contrast between Islam and Christianity so absolute with regard to the notion of Jesus' divinity? Cragg, commenting on this point, states:

'The 'associations' of God with mankind, in mercy, compassion, revelation, law, justice, refuge and authority are many and sure. These tokens of God's relation to us are precious and should evoke our worship of Him alone. In strenuously avoiding to be deceived by them into idolatry, we must not fail to register the bond they constitute between God and ourselves, as the Qur'an repeatedly insists in its summons to a true sense of the sacrament of all our experience.

Seen in this light, there is no trace of Shirk in the Christian acknowledgement of Jesus as the Christ, no basis for the suspicion that Christians are 'deifiers' of Jesus. Rather, their conviction that their worship of God must duly incorporate the significance they found in him must be seen as firmly within the Islamic principle of the due and undivided recognition of the divine.⁴⁹

An untrue doctrine of the Person of Christ means no true doctrine at any point. Unless there is in Christ a true Incarnation, unless the Word of God comes to men in Jesus Christ, there can be no doctrine of the Trinity. Further, it is only in the light of the doctrine of the Incarnation taken with all seriousness that Christians, and Muslims, can understand the work of Christ. For even the doctrine of the Incarnation

does not sum up the Christian revelation. Incarnation is with a purpose. The purpose is redemption made possible through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. The Qur'ān is not specific with regard to Jesus' death and resurrection, and the Christian dogma of redemption is not mentioned. The Church's affirmation is that Jesus Christ is true God and true Man. He is the Word become flesh. If Jesus is God incarnate, then His work and its continuation in the Church must take precedence over any merely prophetic revelation, including the Qur'ān.

3.3: Unitarian Christology

Though Unitarian ideas were not unknown in the early Church, as in some forms of Monarchianism,⁵⁰ the main developments of the doctrine occurred after the Reformation. Unitarianism took its rise in the sixteenth century as an attempt to restore Christianity to its lost purity. At most periods of their history Unitarians would have preferred to be called just 'Christians' without any other label. During the greater part of their history they have aimed at making the basis of Christian fellowship as broad as possible, because to them Christianity has always been a way of life rather than a creed. Indeed most reform movements in the Christian Church set out with the idea of restoring Christianity to something more like early Christianity, or rather, to what men imagined early Christianity to have been.

The special characteristic of the Unitarian attempt to restore Christianity was, that they regarded Christianity primarily as a way of life rather than as a system of doctrine. Hence, since they believed that Christianity was first and foremost a way of life, Unitarians attached less importance to argument about the letter of doctrine and more to the spirit which lay behind, and so they were tolerant. They longed for a wider Christian fellowship based on the essentials of a

common Christianity and a common experience, rather than the interpretations of that experience expressed in terms of a particular century. Moreover, they held that only those doctrines should be accepted which were in the New Testament, and that of these only such as are intelligible to human reason should be regarded as matters of faith. By giving up the use of metaphysical terms and agreeing on the words of Scripture, they hoped to get away from endless theological squabbles and to unite all those who professed and called themselves Christians. And they hoped, too, that the less attention was concentrated on abstract points of theology the more attention might be paid to the moral life.

It is interesting that Islam is presented as being a non-doctrinal religion. For example, the Qur'ān states:

'Ye are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in God. If only the People of the Book had faith, it were best for them. Among them are some who have faith, but most of them are perverted transgressors.'⁵¹

A. Yūsuf 'Alī, commenting on the above verse, states:

'The logical conclusion to the evolution of religious history is a non sectarian, non racial, non doctrinal, universal religion, which Islam claims to be. For Islam is just submission to the Will of God. This implies (1) Faith, (2) doing right, being an example to others to do right, and having the power to see that the right prevails, (3) eschewing

wrong, being an example to others to eschew wrong, and having the power to see that wrong and injustice are defeated.^{'52}

Thus, from the outset there is a certain amount of similarity between Unitarianism and Islam with regard to the non-doctrinal and moral concerns of both religions.

Unitarianism rejects the idea of the Trinity and questions belief in the divinity of Christ in favour of the oneness of God. Consequently, the love of God becomes an impossible conception, and Unitarianism knows nothing of a God who so loved the world that he himself became incarnate. Unitarians, like Muslims, consider Jesus as a mere man, inspired as other great men are, though in a greater degree. Michael Servetus, for example, one of the most famous of early Unitarians, states what he believes to be the true nature of Jesus, as follows:

'Some are scandalised at my calling Christ the prophet, because they happen not themselves to apply to him the epithet, they fancy that all who do so are chargeable with Judaism and Mohametism, regardless of the fact that the Scriptures and ancient writers call him a prophet.'⁵³

Clearly, the Unitarian Jesus has much in common with the Quranic Jesus. This is made plain by the following verses from the Qur'ān:

'It is God who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is a way that is straight.'⁵⁴

'It is not possible that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom, and the Prophetic Office, should say to people: "Be ye my worshippers rather than God's." On the contrary (He would say): "Be ye worshippers of Him who is truly the cherisher of all. For ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly. Nor would he instruct you to take angels and prophets for Lords and Patrons. What! Would he bid you to unbelief after ye have bowed your will to God in Islam?'"⁵⁵

'Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than an apostle of God ...'⁵⁶

Another early exponent of Unitarianism was Francis David, who, in 1564, became bishop of the Reformed church in Transylvania. David was also court preacher to the king, John Sigismund. The king was impressed and at the Diet of Torda (1568) he ordered Unitarianism to be tolerated. In 1571 this faith, along with Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, was recognised as a 'received religion'. However, when John Sigismund died, severe persecution began. By the later eighteenth century Unitarianism in Hungary had been almost completely suppressed. It is not clear how much contact Francis David had with the religion of Islam. But his beliefs are very close to Islam, and in one place in his writings he openly refers to the Qur'ān in support of these beliefs:

'It is not without reason said in Qur'ān that Jesus can give no assistance to those who worship him because they would have him pass for God contrary to the doctrine taught by him ... so they are worthy of blame who teach that we ought to worship and invoke Jesus; he himself having taught that the Father is to be

invoked ... God is not threefold but One.⁵⁷

Therefore, once again, there are substantial points of agreement between Unitarianism and Islam.

For a time the Unitarian Church in Poland flourished with the greatest success. There was at that time a connection of Poland with Italy, and, when persecution made life in Italy unsafe for heretics, Faustus Socinus went to Poland and became the unofficial leader of the Church there. The word Socinian was applied for over two centuries to Unitarians, though they themselves did not use that name. When their great theological collection was published by exiles in Holland after 1665, they were described as the Library of the Polish Brethren, who are called Unitarians.

The new city of Racow became the centre of the Polish Unitarians. A great University was established and printing presses published over five hundred works. The chief of these works was called the Racovian Catechism, after the name of the town Racow. Socinus was engaged on this at the time of his death, and it was published a year later, in 1605. This book appeared in Latin, German, Dutch, and English, and did more than any other book except the New Testament to spread anti-Trinitarian ideas. An excerpt from the Racovian Catechism is, as follows:

'The opinion of those who attribute divinity to Jesus Christ is not only repugnant to right reason but likewise to the Holy Scriptures, and they are in gross error who believe that not only the Father but also the Son and the Holy Ghost are three persons in one deity ... The essence of God is most simple and absolutely one, and therefore it is a downright contradiction for one to generate another if they are three independent persons.

And the poor little reason of our adversaries to the contrary to prove that the Father had begot a son of his own substance are ridiculous and impertinent ... Always till the times of the Nicene Council and some time later as appears by the writings of those who lived then, the Father ... alone was acknowledged for the true God, and those who were of the contrary mind, such as the Sabellians and the like were accounted heretics ...

The spirit of the Anti Christ hath not introduced more dangerous error into the Church of Christ than this doctrine which teaches that there are three distinct persons in the most simple essence of God, each of which itself is God, and that the Father ... is not the only true God but that the Son and the Holy Ghost must be joined with him. There is nothing more absurd or more impossible and more repugnant to right reason ...

Also Christians believe that Jesus Christ died to merit salvation for us and to satisfy the debts which we contracted by our sins, yet this opinion is false, erroneous and most pernicious.⁵⁸

The above sentiments, with the exception of the use of the term Father for God and the reference to Jesus' death, would find full acceptance with the Quranic viewpoint, as already shown. Because Unitarians believed profoundly in the moral worth of man and in the infinite possibilities of human nature,

they rejected also the doctrine of original sin, human depravity, and absolute predestination, which seemed to them both degrading to God and weakening to man's moral striving. Above all, they rejected the prevailing doctrines of the atonement then current, which seemed to them both excessively legalistic in form and non-moral in character. Their views of the atonement even more than differences of Christology separated them from most other Christians.

The notion of original sin is one which Islam and Unitarianism both emphatically deny. Islam affirms that every human being comes into the world innocent and sinless. Accordingly, each person will be held accountable only for what he himself inscribes upon his unblemished nature, not for what his ancestor Adam did or did not do. It is to be remembered that Islam teaches that the first man, Adam, was also the first prophet to whom God gave guidance for himself and his descendants after he disobeyed God and turning to Him in repentance for his sin, was forgiven. Each human individual, according to the Qur'ān, is responsible only for his own actions. The Qur'ān emphasises this again and again:

'Say: "Shall I seek for my Cherisher other than God, when He is the Cherisher of all things that exist? Every soul draws the need of its acts on none but itself. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another. Your goal in the end is towards God. He will tell

you the truth of the things wherein ye
disputed." '59

'Not your desires, nor those of the People of
the Book can prevail. Whoever works evil,
will be requited accordingly. Nor will he
find, besides God, any protector or helper.' '60

Hence, to attribute to God His laying upon each
new-born infant the intolerable burden of a sin
committed by his remotest ancestor would appear to be a
denial, from the Muslim viewpoint, of His attributes of
justice, mercy, kindness, and compassion towards His
creatures. Similarly, to further claim, like Christian
orthodoxy, that the taint of this sin cannot be
forgiven unless the Deity sacrifices Himself for His
creatures, is, to the Muslim, a denial not only of His
unfailing justice and good-will toward His creation
but also, it would seem, of His wisdom, logic and
reasonableness. Islam and Unitarianism both proclaim
that God is able to and does forgive sins if repentance
is sincere, without any intermediary or intercessor.

John Bidle (or Biddle) (1615-1662) is regarded as
the founder of English Unitarianism, which emerged in
the turbulence of the Civil War period. The following
is an excerpt from Bidle's 'Confession of Faith':

'I believe that there is one most High God,
Creator of Heaven, and Earth and the first
Cause of all things and consequently the
ultimate object of our Faith, and Worship. I
believe in Jesus, to the extent that he might
be our brother, and have a fellow feeling of
our infirmities and so become more ready to
help us. He has only human nature. He is

subordinate to God. And he is not another God. There are not two Gods. The Holy Spirit is an Angel who due to his eminence and intimacy with God is singled out to carry His message. ⁶¹

All in all, Bidle's beliefs have many points of affinity with Islamic Christology. In this regard the Qur'ān states:

'This is the true account. There is no god except God. And God - He is indeed the Exalted in Power the Wise. ⁶²

'Christ disdaineth not to serve and worship God, nor do the angels, those nearest to God. Those who disdain His worship and are arrogant, He will gather them all together unto Himself to answer. ⁶³

Furthermore, Bidle's claim that the Holy Spirit is an Angel is similar to the Quranic conception of the Holy Spirit. The Qur'ān states:

'Say: Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel - for he brings down the revelation to thy heart by God's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe. ⁶⁴

The above verse is a reference to Gabriel communicating the Qur'ān to Muḥammad. Yet, in another verse it is the Holy Spirit who brings the revelation to Muḥammad:

'Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord. In truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a guide and glad tidings to Muslims. ⁶⁵

Thus, once again Unitarianism has a close affinity with the teachings of Islam.

The liberal Anglican, Theophilus Lindsey (1723-

1808), left the Church of England in 1773 and opened the first self-styled Unitarian Church, Essex Chapel, in London. This was the first church built in England for the purposes of Unitarian worship. Earlier Unitarians had held views which made the worship of Christ possible in their sense, but to Lindsey this was not possible. The year 1774, therefore, marked the beginning of the modern Unitarian movement. In 1790 Lindsey asserted the following facts with regard to Unitarian Christology:

'That there is One God, one single person, who is God, the sole creator and sovereign Lord of all things;
That the holy Jesus was a man of the Jewish nation, the servant of this God, highly honoured and distinguished by Him;
That the Spirit, or Holy Spirit, was not a person, or intelligent being; but only the extraordinary power or gift of God, imparted to Jesus Christ himself, in his life-time; and afterwards, to the apostles and many of the first Christians, to empower them to preach and propagate the gospel with success (ACTS 1:2); and that this was the doctrine concerning God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, which was taught by the apostles, and preached to Jews and heathens.'⁶⁵

The above cited Unitarian assertions, as already shown, are in accord with the Quranic portrayal of Jesus.

Joseph Priestly (1733-1804) was an English Unitarian minister who rejected the orthodox Christian doctrines of the Atonement and the Trinity. Priestly and his successor, Thomas Belsham, found their source of authority in Scripture. They interpreted the Bible

in a rationalistic and optimistic way, to get round those verses which Christians had previously used to support the doctrine of the Trinity and the belief that man has a fallen nature. Priestly, in his most important work, states:

'The causes of the corruptions were almost wholly contained in the established opinions of the heathen world, and especially the philosophical part of it, so that when those heathens embraced Christianity, they mixed their former tenets and prejudices with it. Also, both Jews and heathens were so much scandalized at the idea of being disciples of a man who had been crucified as a common malefactor, that Christians in general were sufficiently disposed to adopt any opinion that would most effectually wipe away this reproach.

The opinion that the mental faculties of man belonging to a substance distinct from his body or brain, and of this invisible spiritual part, or soul, being capable of subsisting before and after its union with the body, which had taken the deepest root in all schools of philosophy, was wonderfully calculated to answer this purpose. For by this means Christians were enabled to give to the soul of Christ what rank they pleased in the heavenly region before he was born. On this principle went the Gnostics, deriving their doctrine from the received oriental philosophy. Afterwards, the philosophising Christians went upon another principle, personifying the wisdom, or logos of God the Father, equal to God the Father Himself ...

The abuses of the positive institutions of Christianity, monstrous as they were, naturally arose from the opinion of the purifying and sanctifying virtues of rites and ceremonies, which was the very basis of all the worships of the heathens.⁶⁷

The foregoing Unitarian statement is an attack on

orthodox Christianity, including a specific denial of the divinity of Christ. Such denials are in harmony with Islam and would certainly find accommodation within the perspective of Islamic Christology. Needless to say, the above notion of the Fatherhood of God and the acceptance of Jesus' death as an historical fact are both in contrast to the Islamic position. However, the Unitarian contention that Christianity has been corrupted is faintly echoed in the Qur'ān. That is, within a decade of Muḥammad's death the Arabs were continuing to expand eastwards and westwards. The conquests brought them into contact with many well-educated Christians, and some further 'defence' became necessary. This took the form of elaborating a doctrine of the 'corruption' (tahrīf) of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. This doctrine was never precisely formulated, and was understood by Muslim writers in various ways. Some thought that the actual text of the Bible had been altered, while others said that it was only the interpretation which had been changed. The doctrine is allegedly based on some verses of the Qur'ān. For example, the Qur'ān states:

'Can ye, O ye men of Faith, entertain the hope that they will believe in you? Seeing that a party of them heard the Word of God, and perverted it knowingly after they understood it.'⁶⁸

The imprecision of the doctrine did not lessen its

usefulness as a 'defence', since if one form was unsuccessful, another could be tried.

William Channing (1780-1842), an American Unitarian pastor, had great influence on Unitarian thought. In the schism between conservative and liberal Congregationalists in America, Channing espoused the liberal or Unitarian cause, and preached against the orthodox Christian doctrines of the Trinity, the Atonement and total depravity. From about 1820 he was considered to be a Unitarian, and is often reckoned the greatest American Unitarian theologian. Commenting on the doctrine of the Trinity, Channing states:

'We do, then with all earnestness, though without reproaching our brethren, protest against the irrational and unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. "To us", as to the Apostle and the primitive Christians, "there is one God, even the Father". With Jesus, we worship the Father, as the only living and true God. We are astonished, that any man can read the New Testament, and avoid the conviction, that the Father alone is God.'⁶⁹

Likewise, Channing condemns the doctrine of the Atonement, as follows:

'Trinitarians profess to derive some important advantages from their mode of viewing Christ. It furnishes them, they tell us, with an infinite atonement, for it shows them an infinite being suffering for their sins. The confidence with which this fallacy is repeated astonishes us. When pressed with the question, whether they really believe, that the infinite and unchangeable God suffered and died on the cross, they acknowledge that this is not true, but that Christ's human mind

alone sustained the pains of death. How have we, then, an infinite sufferer? This language seems to us an imposition on common minds, and very derogatory to God's justice, as if this attribute could be satisfied by a sophism and a fiction.⁷⁰

In the light of the preceding sketch of Unitarian belief there can be little doubt that Unitarian Christology is very similar to Islamic Christology. This is not to say that, with regard to the person of Christ, Unitarianism and Islam are identical. They are not. There are points of difference. Firstly, Unitarians accept the use of the title Father as applied to God. Secondly, the historical fact of Jesus' death, and subsequent faith in his resurrection, can both find acceptance within Unitarian Christology. Yet, the significance of Jesus' death, according to the Unitarian position, is not to be found in any theories of atonement. Thus, Unitarianism and Islam, albeit from different perspectives, both deny the orthodox Christian belief in the Atonement. All in all, Unitarians and Muslims have many common points in their respective Christologies.

3.4: Recent Trends in Christology

All mainstream Christian traditions since the patristic period have followed the lead of the New Testament writers, whose presentations harmoniously converge upon the 'two-nature' Christology, and the account of mediation built on it, which is set out in the Fourth Gospel and in the letters to the Colossians and the Hebrews. However, Christologies are in dispute today, and the differences under discussion are crucial. The question is whether the man Jesus was, and remains, God in person or not. There is within Christianity a modern trend of thought which finds in orthodox Christology too high a doctrine of the Person of Christ. Consequently, there is a growing tendency, in more radical circles, for theologians to regard Jesus as a man, in himself exclusively human, in and through whom God acted in a special, or even unique way. In the following paragraphs some examples of modern Christology will be examined and compared with the relevant tenets of Islamic Christology.

The first example is the book *The Myth of God Incarnate*,⁷¹ written by seven British theologians and published in 1977. Right at the outset the seven authors state that they wrote their essays, not only for the sake of truth but in particular to:

'make Christian discipleship possible for our children's children. For Christianity can

only remain honestly believable by being continuously open to the truth.^{'72}

Moreover, all of the authors in question consider that the doctrine of the Incarnation, when taken as a description of factual truth, is no longer intelligible. In the opening essay Maurice Wiles asks the following question:

'Are we sure that the concept of an incarnate being, one who is both fully God and fully man, is after all an intelligible concept?''⁷³

Thus, how do the authors see Jesus? Their main perspective on Christological thought is summed up in the Preface with the conviction that Jesus was:

'a man approved by God for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us.'⁷⁴

This sentence really sums up the main objective and content of the book in question. Indeed we may excuse ourselves from trying to state in positive terms just what a myth is, for those who use this category of explanation do not seem to be fully agreed among themselves on that;⁷⁵ suffice it for our purposes to say that myth is in one way or another an imaginative declaration of personal significance or communal vision which does not correspond to, or rest on, public, objective, cosmic, space-time fact. Therefore, according to the above Christological statements, Jesus

was simply a man approved and chosen by God. Such opinions are strikingly similar to the Quranic portrayal of Jesus, as already presented.

Furthermore, does a Christianity without Incarnation imply that the worship of Christ, traditional throughout the whole of Christian history, was idolatrous in character? Wiles, commenting in this connection, states:

'It is important to remember that in the strictest sense it is never simply Jesus who saves nor is Christ by himself the object of man's worship. Jesus as Second Person of the Trinity incarnate is the one through whom we come to the trinitarian God, the one through whom the whole Trinity acts towards us.'⁷⁶

This appears to have, at least, the seeds of Christian orthodoxy. Wiles, however, had already declared, in his essay in *Christian Believing*,⁷⁷ that:

'I cannot with integrity say that I believe God to be one in three persons. My questioning - historical and philosophical - does not leave me with sufficient grounds to form a belief on such a question one way or the other.'⁷⁸

In *The Myth of God Incarnate*, moreover, Wiles argues that, even in the absence of Incarnational belief, it:

'would still be possible to see Jesus not only as one who embodies a full response of man to God but also as one who expresses and embodies the way of God towards men. For it is always through the lives of men that God comes to us and we are enabled to meet him and respond to him. It was through the personality and leadership of Moses in their escape from Egypt that the Israelites experienced the redemptive

power of Yahweh. It was through the experience and prophetic ministry of Hosea that they grasped the inexhaustible depth of his demanding but forgiving love.

So, it may be claimed, it is supremely through Jesus that the self-giving love of God is most fully expressed and men can be caught up into the fullest response to him. For Jesus was not merely a teacher about God; the power of God was set at work in the world in a new way through his life, ministry, death and resurrection.

On such a basis it is reasonable to suggest that the stories about Jesus and the figure of Jesus himself could remain a personal focus of the transforming power of God in the world. They could still properly fulfil that role, even without the concept of 'incarnation', though they would not impinge upon us in precisely the same way.⁷⁹

All in all, Wiles presents a form of Christianity in which the deity of Jesus is looked upon as being optional. The notion of a non-incarnational Christology, as stated above, would find tentative affinity with Islamic Christology.

In addition, John Hick considers orthodox Christian dogma as being only one way of expressing Christian truth. Hick states:

'the Nicene definition of God-the-Son-incarnate is only one way of conceptualizing the lordship of Jesus, the way taken by the Graeco-Roman world of which we are the heirs, and that in the new age of world ecumenism which we are entering it is proper for Christians to become conscious of both the optional and the mythological character of this traditional language.'⁸⁰

Moreover, Hick goes on to compare the respective human

processes which led to the development of both Buddhism and Christianity. He concludes:

'Buddhology and Christology developed in comparable ways. The human Gautama came to be thought of as the incarnation of a transcendent, pre-existent Buddha as the human Jesus came to be thought of as the incarnation of the pre-existent Logos or divine Son.'⁸¹

Further, mindful of the Christian claim that the resurrection of Jesus necessarily proves the reality of his divinity, Hick states:

'the claim that Jesus had been raised from the dead did not automatically put him in a quite unique category. It indicated that he had a special place within God's providence; but this was not equivalent to seeing him as literally divine. For Jesus is not said to have risen in virtue of a divine nature which he himself possessed but to have been raised by God. Accordingly the first Christian preachers did not draw the conclusion that he was himself God but that he was a man chosen by God for a special role and declared by his resurrection to be Messiah and Lord. (Acts 2:22 and 36).'⁸²

Thus, according to Hick, orthodox Christology is the end result of the process of development and, thereby, is a departure from the Christology afforded by the Acts of the Apostles. Likewise, Islam maintains that a great many things about Jesus had been lost and that Christianity was moulded and developed into a form which would appeal to the Graeco-Roman world. Of course, the death and resurrection of Jesus, in stark contrast to Islamic tradition, are accepted by the

exponents of modern theology. Yet, with regard to status, the Quranic Jesus is somewhat akin to the Jesus of modern non-incarnational Christology. Islam's abhorrence at the concept of Incarnation is beginning to find a definite, albeit modest, echo within recent Christian thinking.

A more positive approach to the idea of non-incarnational Christology is found in the 'Spirit Christology' as expounded by Geoffrey Lampe. In brief, 'Spirit Christology' maintains that Jesus was, in himself, totally a man in whom the Spirit of God worked in a decisive way. Lampe states:

'those who talk of meeting and speaking to Jesus would find it hard to explain the difference between that experience and encountering, or being encountered by, God; and in fact I think the latter is what they actually mean: they are experiencing God who was in Jesus, God who is, therefore, recognised by reference to the revelatory experience recorded in the New Testament and reflected upon in the whole subsequent Christian tradition.'⁸³

If, for the sake of argument, the experience of 'meeting Jesus' is indistinguishable from encountering the God who was only 'inspirationally' present in Jesus, then there can be no exclusive revelation as all the prophets were inspired by the same God. Thus, there is continuity of inspiration amongst all the prophets, as the Qur'ān states:

'We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him. We sent

inspiration to Abraham, Ismā'īl, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the Psalms.^{'84}

Furthermore, Lampe expresses his understanding of Jesus' divinity, as follows:

'I believe in the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the sense that the one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, revealed himself and acted decisively for us in Jesus. I believe in the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, in the sense that the same one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, is here and now not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move, in him we have our being, in us, if we consent to know and trust him, he will create the Christlike harvest: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.^{'85}

Therefore it is clear that Lampe presents a positive and logical Christology where the one God is working within the man Jesus. Such views are basically Unitarian in nature and, as previously shown, have much in common with the Islamic view of Jesus.

There is no escaping the fact that what non-incarnational Christologies say is that, contrary to what orthodox Christianity always thought, God did not come in person to save the world; for whoever Jesus was, and whatever he did, he was not God. Denial that the Incarnation is fact takes away at a stroke all grounds for supposing the Trinity to be fact. Hence, the logical unity of God, as maintained within Islam, is unquestionably asserted by the new Christologies.

Without doubt, there are many points of contact between the non-incarnational Christologies and the perspective of Islamic Christology. The emphasis on the absolute humanness of Jesus, within the limitations of prophethood, is one major common feature. Of course, this is not to claim that Islamic Christology is somehow identical with that of the Christologies in question. Obviously it is not. There is no such thing as a unified Christology between Islam and Christianity, regardless of trend. Still, the Quranic portrayal of Jesus is not so remote from the above cited Christologies.

Further, what of the link between Incarnation and salvation as conceived within orthodox Christianity? With the adoption of 'humanitarian' Christologies both objective reconciliation through Christ, and personal renewal in Christ as its consequence, will have to go. Again, if substitutionary sacrifice goes, the gift of justification that is based upon it goes also. From the orthodox perspective, the model of the Spirit of God acting in and through one who was himself exclusively man is terribly inadequate. Such a model does not provide a basis for any objective view of the atonement, but only an 'exemplarist' doctrine of some sort. In other words, deny the Incarnation, and Jesus' death, just because it is not now the death of God's

Son (and not, therefore, the most costly gift God could bestow), loses its significance as the guarantee of every other gift that God can devise. So, the significance of Jesus' death, within non-incarnational Christology, can have no substitutionary or mediatorial effect. Indeed if Islam accepted the historical fact of Jesus' death it is probable that an 'exemplarist' notion of atonement would be the most acceptable.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE DEATH OF JESUS

4.1: Interpretation of Qur'ān 3:55

The reality of the crucifixion and death of Jesus is essential to the Christian faith since it is inextricably bound up with the resurrection. Muslims deny, out of their very veneration for Jesus, the one fact that is admitted by all historians to be authentic, the crucifixion. To say that the whole New Testament is wrong in asserting that Jesus was crucified is, to say the least, absurd. Moreover, to make such a denial of Jesus' crucifixion from a source which comes from the seventh century is, for an historically thinking man, without reason. Nevertheless, what is the Quranic understanding with regard to the destiny of Jesus?

Muslim tradition accepts the notion of the Ascension of Jesus, but rejects any suggestion that Jesus was crucified. Is Muslim tradition faithful to the Quranic presentation of Jesus? It is difficult to gauge the meaning of the Quranic references to the death of Jesus. The first reference is as follows:

'So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life again!'¹

Therefore it would appear, at this point, that the death of Jesus is asserted in the Qur'ān. However, in the light of a later Quranic verse (4:157) a new Muslim interpretation had to be found for the above verse (19:33), namely, that the death of Jesus would occur in the future after his Second Coming. Jesus, according to the great exegete al-Baidāwī, would remain for forty years, after his future descent, and then die and be buried by Muslims.² The Qur'ān, however, is silent with regard to the aforesaid Muslim tradition relating to Jesus' death. Commenting on the verse in question, Parrinder states:

'There is no futurity in the grammar of the Qur'ān (19, 34/33) to suggest a post-millennial death. The plain meaning seems to be his physical death at the end of his present human life on earth.'³

Next, with reference to Jesus' destiny, the Qur'ān provides the following insights:

'Behold God said: "O Jesus I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the day of resurrection; then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.'⁴

When Jesus is conscious of the unbelief of his people the above verse (3:55) presents God's assurance, that is, 'O Jesus I will take thee (or, causing you to die, mutawaffika) and raise thee to Myself.' Muslim

exegetes went to great lengths in their endeavours to harmonise the above sentiments with verse (4:157) which, they assumed, rejected and denied the crucifixion. Hence, they claimed that Jesus did not actually die on the cross, but was taken up to heaven. Parrinder states:

'Baiḍāwī gave five alternative meanings for 3, 48/55. It could mean 'achieve the whole of thy term and tarry till thy appointed end', or 'take thee from the earth' or 'take thee to myself sleeping' or 'destroy in thee the lusts which hinder ascent to the world of spirits', or 'some say that God let him die for seven hours and then raised him to heaven'. This last was said to be held by Christians, but perhaps Baiḍāwī felt that the passage compelled some kind of belief in an actual death.'⁵

The death of Jesus is therefore denied as an historical reality.

Moreover, there are Islamic traditions which place Jesus' death at a future date. For instance, al-Ṭabarī cites Ka'b al-Aḥbār, the Jewish chief Rabbi, as saying:

'God, exalted be His Majesty, would not have caused Jesus, son of Mary to die ... Thus, when Jesus saw the small number of those who accepted him and the multitude of those who rejected him, he complained to God. Then God revealed to him, 'Surely I am receiving you (mutawaffīka) and lifting you up to me. For the one whom I take up to Me is not dead, and I shall send you against the one-eyed liar (al-A'war al-Dajjāl) and you shall kill him. After this, you shall live for twenty-four years, then will I cause you to die the death of the living.'⁶

Similarly, the Muslim opinions which place Jesus' death

at some future date can readily find support in the following two important traditions:

'It is related from Abu Hurairah that, "The Apostle of God said, 'By Him in whose hand is my life! It is certainly on the point of coming to pass that the Son of Mary will descend amongst you as a just judge. And he will break the cross in pieces, and will kill the swine and will set aside the poll-tax. And wealth will abound to such an extent that no one will accept it; and one prostration in prayer will be better than the world and all that is therein." Then Abu Hurairah said: "If you doubt this, then (read the revelation), 'there shall be none of the People of the Book, but will certainly believe on him before his death.'"

'It is related from 'Abdu 'llah 'Amru that, "The Apostle of God said, 'Jesus, Son of Mary, will descend to the earth, and will marry, and children will be born to him. And he will remain on the earth forty-five years. After that he will die and be buried with me in my grave. And Jesus, Son of Mary, and I will rise in one grave between Abu Bakr and 'Umar'."

The notion of Jesus' Second Advent,⁸ together with the idea of the Dajjāl, can find no echo whatsoever in the Qur'ān.

The next point to be noted is that there are some Islamic traditions which understand wafāt literally as wafāt mawt (death). For example, Wahb.b. Munabbih⁹ relates that:

'God caused Jesus, son of Mary, to die for three hours during the day, then took him up to Him.'¹⁰

It is possible that the reference to the period of three hours may be an allusion to the three hours of

darkness associated with the crucifixion of Jesus as mentioned in the Gospels.¹¹ Further, Ibn Ishāq reports on the authority of a Christian convert that God:

'caused Jesus to die for seven hours of the day and then He revived him.'¹²

There is no such record within the Christian tradition, but it would be useful to discover the origin of the claim in question.

Thus, the phrase in verse (3:55) which unambiguously means, 'O Jesus I will take thee (or, causing you to die) and raise thee to Myself' can be robbed of its meaning by Islamic traditions which are contrary to the Quranic witness to Jesus. Furthermore, the Qur'ān uses wafāt and its derivatives in contexts which mean death.¹³ To maintain that verse (3:55) is the only occasion on which 'death' is not the intended meaning is not only absurd, but also contradicts the consistency of the Qur'ān. Cragg, commenting in this connection, states:

'There is an immediacy about the passage in 3:55 which seems, in all normal assessment, to require real dying and prompt resurrection - in other words, what the Christian faith affirms as the climax of the very real travail the phrase implies.'¹⁴

Al-Rāzī is one of the most interesting and controversial of the Sunnī commentators. Mahmoud M. Ayoub, with regard to al-Rāzī's understanding of verse (3:55), states:

'we find in Rāzī a genuine attempt to go beyond the literal reading of the text. He first interprets the word mutawaffīka as possibly meaning "completing the term (ajal) of your life", and "protecting you from the evil schemes of your enemies". This also means that Jesus was taken up to heaven both in body and spirit, that is, as a complete person. Rāzī then argues that the word is to be understood metaphorically: "I (God) shall render you (Jesus) as though you are dead", because when Jesus was taken up to heaven and no news or trace was left of him on earth, he became as one dead.'¹⁵

The above comments afforded by al-Rāzī cannot be reconciled with the Qur'ān. Firstly, it must be remembered that the Qur'ān itself in verse (3:55) clearly has the death of Jesus as a past event. Secondly, to interpret death metaphorically is unreasonable for were the same principle applied to the entire Qur'ān it would be impossible to determine its meaning since every word could be a mere metaphor. There must be continuity in the interpretation of the Qur'ān even when such interpretation is contrary to established Muslim tradition.

Finally, al-Rāzī may have been influenced by the Sufi view of Christ. He quotes, concerning the question of Jesus' death, the statement of the famous Sufi Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī that God said:

'I am causing you to die to your desires and the limitations of your cardinal soul (nafs).'¹⁶

Perhaps in the light of the above reference and with

regard to the meaning of verse (3:55), al-Rāzī concludes:

What is meant by this verse is that the Exalted One gave Jesus the glad tidings that his acts of obedience and good deeds were accepted. He informed him also that what troubles and hardships he had suffered at the hands of his enemies in the cause of manifesting his faith (dīn) and sacred law (sharī'a) would not be lost, nor would his reward be destroyed.¹⁷

Such an interpretation at least leaves room for discussion about the nature of death itself, which other interpretations do not permit.

4.2: Interpretation of the Substitutionist Position

The general Muslim understanding of the destiny of Jesus in this and the next world rests squarely on the following passage from the Qur'ān:

'That they said (in boast) "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God." But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them. (wa lakīn shubbiha lahum) And those who differ, therein are full of doubts, with no certain knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not; Nay, God raised him up unto Himself, and God is exalted in Power, Wise; And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them.'¹⁸

The passage quoted above has formed the basis of Islamic orthodoxy concerning the events of the last few days of Jesus' life on earth. The whole passage is directed against the People of the Book (here, the Jews) and their evil actions. To avoid the possibility of the Qur'ān contradicting itself all other Quranic passages alluding to Jesus' death are interpreted in the light of the above passage, which Muslim exegetes assumed denied the crucifixion. Thus, they have offered a variety of interpretations, and the prevalent, but by no means exclusive, opinion has been that the words shubbiha lahum mean that someone or other was made to bear Jesus' likeness (shabah) and die in his stead.

One explanation of the substitutionist position is

that all the disciples were changed into the image of Jesus so that the Jews killed someone who had been made to look like Jesus. Al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of Wahb.b.Munabbih, relates the following story:

When God revealed to Jesus that He would take him up to Him, Jesus and seventeen of his disciples went into a house (perhaps to celebrate the Passover). There, they were surprised by the Jews who were seeking Jesus. God, however, cast the likeness of Jesus on every one in the group so that he could not be distinguished from the rest. The Jews exclaimed, "You have bewitched us! Either bring forth Jesus or we shall kill you all." They then took one of the group and killed him, believing him to be Jesus. Hence, "It was made only to appear so to them".¹⁹

The above story is certainly favoured by al-Ṭabarī in that Jesus as God's prophet was saved and the Jews frustrated. Secondly, the Christians, in asserting the fact of the crucifixion, were proclaiming the truth as then perceived. However, the story in question has serious shortcomings. For one thing, there was little point in all the disciples being changed into the likeness of Jesus if only one was necessary. Moreover, the account fails to give an explanation of shubbiha lahum. In brief, the story serves only as a vehicle for expressing the Quranic phraseology. Indeed the majority of Muslim exegetes reject the tradition in question because it was conveyed on the authority of only one traditionist, namely, Wahb.b.Munabbih.²⁰

Al-Ṭabarī relates another story, also on the

authority of Wahb.b.Munabbih, which presents a different account of events. The basic ending is one where Jesus is not crucified, but saved by God thereby defeating the Jews in their attempt to kill Jesus. The lengthy account is as follows:

When God informed Jesus, son of Mary, that he would be soon departing this world, he was disheartened by death, and sorely grieved. He therefore called the disciples (hawāriyyūn) together for a meal which he had prepared for them. He said, "Come to me all of you tonight for I have a favour to ask of you. When they had all come together in the night, he served them himself, and when they had finished eating, he washed their hands and helped them to perform their ablutions with his own hands, and wiped their hands on his garments.

The disciples regarded this as an act below the master's dignity and expressed their disapproval. But Jesus said: "Any one who opposes me in what I do tonight is not of me (that is, of my faith), nor I of him." Thus they concurred. When he had finished, he said, "As for what I have done for you tonight, serving you at table and washing your hands with my own hands, let that be an example for you. You regard me as the best of you, so let no one among you regard himself as better than the others, and let each one of you offer his life for the others as I have laid down my life for you.²¹ As for the favour for which I have called you, it is that you pray God fervently that He may extend my term (ajal)."

But when they stood up in prayer, wishing to prolong their earnest supplications, they were overcome by sleep, so that they were unable to pray. He began to rouse them, saying, "To God be praise, could you not bear with me one night and render me help!" They answered, "We know not what had befallen us. We used to stay up the night in long fellowship (samar), but tonight we cannot keep ourselves from sleep, and whatever supplication we wish to make, we are being prevented from making."

Then Jesus said, "The shepherd will be taken away and the sheep will be scattered." With similar words he went on foretelling and lamenting his end. He continued, "In truth, I say to you, one of you will deny me three times before the cock crows. And another will sell me for a few pieces of silver and consume my price.

After this, they went out, each his own way, and left him. The Jews then came seeking him, and they seized Sham`ūn (Simon Peter), exclaiming, "He is one of his companions", but he denied, saying, "I am not his companion." Others also seized him and he likewise denied. Then he heard the crowing of a cock, and he wept bitterly.

The next morning, one of the disciples went to the Jews and said, "What will you give me if I lead you to Christ?" They gave him thirty pieces, which he took and led them to him. Prior to that, however, he (or, it) so appeared to them. (The phrase *wa kāna shubbiha alayhim qabla dhālik* is inserted here without further explanation. It could mean that the disciple Judas bore his likeness or that they imagined something; no doubt the phrase is inserted to harmonize a Gospel account with Islamic exegesis. From here on, it is not clear who the actual object of the story is.)²²

Thus they took him, after ascertaining that it was he, and tied him with a rope. They dragged him, saying, "You raised the dead and cast out Satan, and healed those who were possessed, can you not save yourself from this rope? They also spat on him and placed thorns upon his head. Thus they brought him to the wood on which they wished to crucify him. God, however, took him up to Himself and they crucified what seemed to them (*salabū mā shubbiha lahum*).

Then Jesus remained seven (days?). Then his mother and the woman whom Jesus cured from madness came to weep in the place where the crucified one was. Jesus came to them and said, "For whom do you weep?" They answered, "For you". He said, "God had taken me up to

Himself and no harm befell me. For this is a thing which only appeared to them. Go now and tell the disciples to meet me at such and such a place."

So they met him, eleven, but the one who sold him and led the Jews to him was missing. Jesus asked his companions about him and they said, "He regretted what he did, so he hanged and killed himself." Jesus said, "Had he repented, God surely would have turned towards him." (It is clear from this that Judas was not the one substituted for Jesus. At this early stage, the identity of the substitute was left unspecified.)^{2 3}

Jesus then enquired from them concerning a youth who followed them called John (Yuhannah). He answered, "He is with you. Go now for everyone of you will speak the language of a different people. Let him therefore warn them and leave them."^{2 4}

The above account has traces of New Testament notions, but there is absolutely nothing to cast light on the meaning of the phrase, shubbiha lahum. The only positive assertion is the fact that Jesus himself was not crucified. As to who or what was substituted, we are told nothing. Elder, commenting on this and similar traditions, states:

'The tradition that seems most trustworthy only repeats the Koranic language of the verse. We have been searching for truth in a circle and we end where we began.'^{2 5}

The Muslim idea of substitution, with regard to Jesus, must have come under the moral spot-light. In other words, the belief that God caused an innocent man to die in the place of Jesus, is nothing short of divine wrongdoing. Therefore, it was imperative that

the one who took Jesus' place must have done so voluntarily. Hence, the accounts which embraced the concept of one suffering voluntarily were the most readily acceptable. For instance, al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of Qatāda), relates the following account:

‘It has been related to us that Jesus son of Mary, the prophet of God, said to his companions, "Who among you would consent to have my likeness (shabahī) cast upon him, and be killed?" One of them answered, "I would, O prophet of God." Thus that man was killed and God protected His prophet and took him up to Himself.’²⁶

Traditions adopting the aforesaid approach are numerous, tedious and uninformative. There are, however, traditions on the authority of Ibn Ishāq which try to identify the substitute as either Sergus or, as some of the Christians are said to have claimed, Yudas Zechariah.²⁷ Nevertheless, it is surprising, if not absurd, that the substitutionist interpretation of verse (4:157) is so prevalent. Needless to say, the basic foundation for the substitutionist position is not historical but a theological dogma dictated by the Islamic conception of prophethood. In this respect, Cragg states:

‘there was, for the Qur’ān, a compelling reason - Christology apart - why Jesus should be preserved from ignominy and real death, namely, the credibility and authenticity of his prophetic role. If he were truly to have suffered and died, God must be understood to have deserted him and his whole status would thereby have been disowned.’²⁸

Al-Rāzī, attempts to justify the substitutionist interpretation by raising the theological and philosophical objections to it and by resolving those objections. Al-Rāzī's response highlights the basic incompatibility between orthodox Christian theological thinking about the death of Jesus and the traditional Muslim objections to the Christian point of view. The orthodox Christian view holds that Jesus' death was part of the Divine plan for the redemption of the world, yet traditionally orthodox Muslims have seen God's saving Jesus from an ignominious death as part of the Divine protection of His prophet. Al-Rāzī's arguments rest firmly within the orthodox Muslim frame of reference and pay little attention to a Christian viewpoint and then only at the level of historical fact and not at the level of theological interpretation.

Al-Rāzī does have difficulties with the substitutionist position. For example, although Jesus' likeness was cast on another and he himself was raised to heaven, people believed that the person killed was Jesus. Al-Rāzī, commenting on this moral dilemma, states:

'In sum, the opening of such a gate necessitates doubt in tawātur, and this in turn necessitates doubt in fundamentals (uṣūl), and this in turn necessitates doubt in the prophethood of all prophets. This is a branch (far^c) necessitating doubt in fundamentals and must therefore be rejected.'²⁹

Therefore al-Rāzī seems to infer that some credence must be given to the material transmitted from one generation to another. Hence, he attempts to discredit the Christian tradition by suggesting that when Jesus was taken up to God the Jews, by mistake, crucified someone else. Thus, at verse (4:157) al-Rāzī suggests that the Christian chain of transmission could have been corrupted by Jesus' few disciples. That is, they could have claimed that the mistaken victim of crucifixion was Jesus. Al-Rāzī states:

'The Christian agreement in the transmission (of the crucifixion event) goes back to a few people whose agreement on a false report is not improbable.'³⁰

However, the notion that a small group of people is not a legitimate source for knowledge could similarly be applied to the tradition from the Prophet that Jesus did not die but will die in the future, the tawātur of which goes back ultimately to one person. All in all, al-Rāzī's exegesis is basically a justification of the substitutionist position. Al-Rāzī, like al-Ṭabārī, treats the destiny and the question of the death of Jesus as a purely historical phenomenon without reference to its theological interpretation among Christians whose opinions are not considered in detail.

In order to complete the picture of the substitutionist position it is necessary to cite a

further example of the said position. It is very probable that Mu'tazilī theology was the main impetus in rendering the idea of substitution, initiated by God, to be unacceptable.³¹ Indeed, for the Mu'tazilī, it was unthinkable that God could commit an act of injustice. Such a case of deliberate mistaken identity, as is related in many of the substitutionist theories, would not be in keeping with the Mu'tazilī conception of God. Shī'ī authors, who had much in common with Mu'tazilī thought, report an interesting tradition, as follows:

'Al-Shaykh al-Tūsī reports that the Jews sought to kill Jesus, but God took him up to Himself. They therefore took another whom they crucified on a high and isolated hill, allowing no one to come near him until his features had changed beyond recognition. They were thus able to conceal the fact of Jesus' ascension, which they witnessed, and to spread false reports of his death and crucifixion. This they did to prevent his ascension from becoming a reason for other Jews to believe in him.³²

In the above account there is at best a hint of reason and God is divorced from any direct involvement with regard to the choice of substitute. However, the account fails to mention the fact that only the Romans had power to crucify.³³ Any interaction between the Jews and the Romans, for dubious religious reasons, would have been virtually impossible. The above story may satisfy the demands of Muslim morality, but it does

not meet the facts of history. The New Testament picture is one where Jesus is flogged by the Romans prior to his crucifixion between two thieves, not to mention the presence of other witnesses.³⁴

The defence of the substitution of Jesus is found in the *Manār* commentary by M. °Abduh and R. Riḍā. Their treatment of verse (3:55) is free from layers of tradition and true to the Qurānic text. *Al-Manār* renders the verse as follows:

‘I am causing you to die (mumītūka) and placing you in an exalted place (makān rafī°) near Me.’³⁵

With such an interpretation it comes as no surprise that the previous commentators are charged with corrupting the Qurʾān in order to accommodate ‘fairy tales’ (*Khurāfat*) about Jesus’ return and future death after killing the *Dajjāl*.³⁶ *Al-Manār*, being opposed to redemptive Christian theology, does not support Jesus’ death on the cross, but suggests a demise in an unknown place as was the case with Moses.³⁷ In other words, *al-Manār* interprets the Qurʾān as affirming the death of Jesus as a past event.

In general, *al-Manār* adheres to the traditional view that the likeness of Jesus was cast on another who was killed in his place. Certainly *al-Manār* presents verse (3:55) as meaning, ‘I am causing you to die’, but otherwise the conclusions of the said commentary are

basically those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī. With reference to verse (4:157) al-Manār does not provide any reasoned or acceptable insights. In short, M. °Abduh and R. Riḍa were apologists out to contend for the faith of Islam and to give credence to the Muslim belief that Jesus was not crucified in the manner related in the New Testament.

4.3: Some Modern Attitudes

Modernist Muslim interpretations have not accepted the idea of substitution. A book by a well known Egyptian doctor and writer Muhammad Kamel Hussein, published in English as City of Wrong, a Friday in Jerusalem, created a great deal of discussion because it purported to be the first ever written in the world of Islam, which makes a thorough study of the central theme of the Christian faith, the crucifixion. However, the book itself is not about the crucifixion at all. Jesus does not die on the cross; and to Hussein it does not really matter whether Jesus was killed or not because his book is really an exploration of the motives of those who condemned Jesus and the endless struggle between the individual conscience and the immoral collective will.

Hussein gives an interpretation of the Quranic denial of Jesus' crucifixion, as follows:

'the idea of a substitute for Christ is a very crude way of explaining the Quranic text. They had to explain a lot to the masses. No cultured Muslim believes in this nowadays. The text is taken to mean that the Jews thought they killed Christ but God raised him unto Him in a way we can leave unexplained among the several mysteries we have taken for granted on faith alone.'³⁸

As Hussein suggests, it is important to note the context in which the denial is given in the Qur'ān. That is, verse (4:157) must be interpreted more as a

defence against the Jews who maintained that they alone had killed and crucified Jesus. Thus, Hussein rejects the notion of a substitute for Jesus.

A number of Christian scholars have attempted interpretations of verse (4:157) in the vein presented by Hussein. Zaehner, for example, states:

'Muslim tradition, which has been followed by many European translators of the Qur'ān, takes the words shubbiha la-hum which I have provisionally translated as "doubt was sown among them", to mean that Jesus was crucified only in appearance - the old docetic heresy, but it is extremely doubtful whether the words can mean this. Bell translates, "he was counterfeited for them" which seems to stretch the meaning of shubbiha unbearably. Shabbaha means (a) "to cause to resemble", and (b) "to cause doubt". In the context it is more natural to take shubbiha in the sense of "doubt was caused for them".³⁹

Furthermore, in this connection, Elder states:

'a free translation of shubbiha lahum (he was made to resemble another for them) could be "it was made a misunderstanding - a perplexity to them". In that case, the verse could then be properly translated as "Yet they slew him not, and they crucified him not - but it (His Crucifixion) was made a misunderstanding to them". Jesus' Crucifixion perplexed them; they saw the event, but failed to appreciate its inner meaning.⁴⁰

All in all, a number of readings like those of Zaehner and Elder have been presented in order to bring verse (4:157) more into line with the Christian Gospel, but these have not been accepted by all Muslim exegetes, even though such readings are faithful to the Quranic text.

A recent and extensive interpretation in the above vein comes from the Italian Franciscan Guilio Basetti-Sani. Commenting on verse (4:157) Basetti-Sani states:

‘hence, in the light of this gospel text (Jn.10:17-18) and the Christian dogma on the free and spontaneous self-immolation of Jesus, we must read and interpret the koranic text thus: No! It was not the Jews who killed and crucified Christ; he gave himself freely. Even after his death, during the hours that preceded his rising, Christ remained alive in some manner, in the sense expressed by the Roman liturgy for Holy Saturday: ‘I have become like a man who needs no help, free among the dead’.⁴¹

There is, from the Christian viewpoint, much truth in Basetti-Sani’s sentiments as presented above. Most Muslim scholars, however, would find Basetti-Sani’s approach hard to swallow, and Muslim fundamentalists would find it offensive. Such a reading of the Qur’ān, in the light of Christ, is more of an insult to Muslims than is the old-fashioned polemical interpretation. In short, Basetti-Sani is saying that only Christians can correctly interpret the Qur’ān. Despite the ecumenical guise, his approach comes across, in the final analysis, in the same manner as Muslim polemicist suggestions that the Christian scriptures are corrupt and can only be read in the light of Muḥammad.

Therefore in conclusion, it is clear that the Muslim commentators have twisted the meaning of verse (3:55) or taken verse (4:157) from its anti-Jewish

context. The fact that verse (4:157) is addressed to the Jews and not to the Christians cannot be overstressed. There is no Islamic justification for having Jesus substituted on the cross except for the non-Quranic idea that Jesus, like Muḥammad, was ultimately successful in escaping the evil intentions of his enemies. It must be stressed that the notion of Jesus being substituted on the cross can find no textual support in the Qur'ān. Indeed, Cragg considers the concept of substitution to be unacceptable, he states:

'what are we to say of the nature of a God who behaves in this way or of the character of a Christ who permits another - even if a Judas - to suffer the consequences of an antagonism his own teaching has raised against himself.'⁴²

Further, if verse (4:157) is seen in its anti-Jewish context and its content as a simple statement of fact, the verse, as Elder observed,⁴³ is in reality a confirmation of the New Testament understanding of the event itself if not the meaning attributed to that event by Christian orthodoxy. Indeed the emphasis throughout verse (4:157) is on the third person plural pronoun referring to the Jews and not on the third person singular pronoun which on one occasion refers to Jesus but is left vague as to what it refers to on the remaining two occasions. Thus, the verse can be

understood as denying the rôle of the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus as the actual perpetrators of the deed. This is the most simple and literal understanding of the verse and it finds an echo in the New Testament. For example, the Synoptic Gospels⁴⁴ present Jesus as being handed over to the Gentiles, whereas John⁴⁵ has the Jews unable to put any man to death. Therefore verse (4:157) has much in common with the New Testament, albeit at a very elementary level.

The continuity between the Qur'ān and the New Testament is, however, maintained at a deeper level of understanding. The human power of men to exterminate Jesus is denied by verse (4:157). God's omnipotence is declared by both the Qur'ān and the New Testament. Indeed the Gospel records present those responsible for the crucifixion as being under the control of God.⁴⁶ All in all, the substitutionist theory can find no support in the Qur'ān. In addition, the Qur'ān itself has no notion of a future eschatological death for Jesus and gives no evidence for thinking that Jesus did not die in the manner related in the New Testament.

Yet even if it were granted that the Qur'ān allows the death of Jesus on the cross, the fact still remains that the Qur'ān is silent about the Christian significance of his death and resurrection. Nor can

the Christian be satisfied with the acknowledgement of the mere fact of Jesus' death on the cross, since there is nothing characteristically Christian about the fact in isolation. The first generation of Christians, like all Christians ever since, were convinced that Jesus' death on the cross had a profound effect on their own lives. The New Testament has a variety of deeply significant terms to describe what Christ accomplished by his death on the cross, namely, redemption, reconciliation, atonement, justification, and propitiation. All these terms are metaphors and analogies. Why did the first Christians come to think of Jesus' death in these terms? The answer seems to lie in the fact that Jesus came to life again. If they had not believed that, then the cross would have meant nothing to them. But because of their belief in the resurrection and their experience of the risen Christ at work in their own lives, the earliest Christians were totally convinced that Jesus really was who he had claimed to be. On the cross he had fought and won the decisive battle against evil. He had made it possible, in some mysterious way, for God to pardon sinful humanity.

The death of Jesus, from the Christian viewpoint, cannot be separated from his resurrection. If Jesus had died without rising from the dead, then his death

would have been a pathetic defeat. The Muslim already believes that God raised Jesus from this world, but in traditional Islam Jesus probably never died and therefore was not raised from the dead. Islam therefore lacks the profoundly significant truth of the cross and resurrection together. However, in the light of the Qur'ān, as opposed to Islamic tradition, the death of Jesus need not be denied. Moreover, the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection and ascension likewise is not denied by the Qur'ān. Parrinder, commenting on this point, states:

'The phrase 'God raised him to himself' suggests the Biblical story of the Ascension. But if Jesus is held to have returned to send out the disciples, then the parallel is rather with the resurrection appearances of the Gospel. These are not mentioned in the Qur'ān, but they are not denied, and they agree with the common interpretation. There is a Biblical passage which recalls the Quranic statement, showing that men could not defeat God's plans and so Jesus was exalted. 'He was not abandoned to Hades, and his flesh never suffered corruption ... The Jesus we speak of has been raised by God, as we can all witness. Exalted thus with God's right hand, he received the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2, 31f).'⁴⁷

Finally, if the death of Jesus on the cross is accepted as not being denied by the Qur'ān, then such an affirmation is the starting point for a theological re-think on the Muslim side. Consequently, the Muslim conception of prophethood would be open to debate, not to mention the doctrine of God. Of course Islam does

not admit any belief in soteriology, but this need not be a barrier to dialogue. If the crucifixion of Jesus is accepted as an historical fact, within the purposes of God, then this in itself is enough for serious consideration. The significance of the crucifixion is something which cannot be defined once and for all, as the many Christian theories of atonement clearly show. Hussein, with regard to the notion of Jesus' crucifixion, states:

'I contend that the Apostles on that day had no idea of the Divine significance of Crucifixion or that it had been decreed from eternity. They had no idea of Redemption, Atonement or the role of Jesus Christ as Saviour. All this (I hope I am not wrong here) was defined and explained clearly by the most remarkable of men, St. Paul. On the day of Crucifixion the Apostles were mere men, leaving their Master to be tortured and crucified by His enemies.'⁴⁸

Thus, the Quranic testimony to Jesus' death on the cross may be seen as being tentatively parallel to the Apostles' understanding of the crucifixion, prior to the advent of Pauline theology.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

There is much common ground between Muslims and Christians in the Christological debate. The Quranic Jesus can find some parallels with the Jesus of the New Testament. Indeed no other prophet is praised as highly in the Qur'ān as is Jesus. Some of the titles ascribed to Jesus in the Qur'ān may tempt the Christian reader to see the Quranic Jesus as being more than a prophet. However, all such titles, regardless of form, are stamped with the Quranic understanding and limitations of prophethood. In short, the Christology of the Qur'ān is shaped by the Quranic concept of radical monotheism which allows nothing whatsoever to come into contact with God. Such a belief in the absolute oneness of God, as seen from the Quranic perspective, can only permit the ministry of prophethood and any notion of Incarnation is totally rejected.

The above sentiments and the Quranic reasoning behind the idea of prophethood is certainly logical and accommodating to the human intellect. Therefore, is Islamic Christology worthy of consideration as a legitimate Christology? In brief, the answer must be

yes, and no. Yes, Islamic Christology is most certainly acceptable to those Christians who favour non-incarnational Christologies, namely, Unitarians and liberal theologians. However, non-incarnational Christologies are superficial and unsatisfying, and accordingly orthodox Christian theologians take the doctrine of Jesus' humanity and divinity with full seriousness. Yet, even from the orthodox Christian position, it must be said that Islamic Christology is not utterly rejected. There is much to praise in the Christology of the Qur'ān, but the Qur'ān does emphatically deny the divinity of Jesus. Thus, from the viewpoint of orthodox Christianity, Islamic Christology is not worthy to be considered as a legitimate Christology.

Nonetheless, there must be dialogue between Muslims and Christians. It is logical for the Muslim to think in terms of the absolute oneness of God and the inherent goodness of man. Hence, in order to keep man on a straight path God employs the ministry of prophets. Consequently, it is unthinkable that a prophet should be killed in the cause of God and therefore Muslims refuse to accept the death of Jesus. Though, if the Qur'ān, as opposed to Muslim tradition, is understood as not denying the crucifixion of Jesus, but affirming it, then perhaps Muslims will be led to

think again about the meaning of suffering within prophethood. This in turn may lead to an appraisal of the significance of Jesus' death, within the purposes of God. Subsequently, the Islamic doctrine of God may become open to debate which may lead to a fresh examination of the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, the Trinity and the Atonement. The acceptance of Jesus' death and resurrection as a basis for theology, both Muslim and Christian, cannot be overstressed. Indeed, without the reality of Jesus' death and resurrection, it is doubtful if any Christian doctrine would have been originated and formed.

All in all, the differences in viewpoint should not be taken as grounds for antagonism or heated theological arguments between Muslims and Christians. For what is common between the followers of the two faiths is many basic beliefs and the vast legacy of moral injunctions and principles of behaviour inspired by belief in the same God.

What is needed today is not missionary activity in the colonialistic style with Christians converting Muslims, but a mutual exchange of information, a mutual challenge, and so, ultimately, a mutual transformation.

CHAPTER 1

NOTES, pages 10-33

1. °Īsā: the name for Jesus in the Qur'ān.
2. The belief that Jesus was conceived in the womb of a virgin without the intervention of a human father; i.e. without male seed.
3. See sūrah 3:42.
4. The angel Gabriel (Jibrīl) is not named though he appears elsewhere, (sūrah 2:97), as the angel of revelation, commentators assume that it was he who appeared to Mary.
5. sūrah 19:17.
6. sūrah 19:17; Arberry, A.J., The Koran Interpreted, O.U.P., 1983, page 303.
7. sūrah 19:19-21.
8. sūrah 3:45-47.
9. See sūrah 19:1-15.
10. sūrah 3:59.
11. See sūrah 19:22-26.
12. A. Yūsuf °Ali, The Holy Qur'ān, Text, Translation and Commentary. 1st edn., 1934; new edn., Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1975. Hereafter AQ.
13. sūrah 19:30.
14. sūrah 3:46.

15. See sūrah 3:49.
16. sūrah 3:50.
17. See sūrah 42:13.
18. See sūrah 5:49.
19. See sūrah 5:46-47.
20. sūrah 26:108.
21. See sūrah 5:113.
22. See sūrah 5:81.
23. sūrah 3:52.
24. See sūrahs 5:114; 61:14.
25. sūrah 3:49.
26. AQ, page 135, note 391:
'I do not know whether this clause refers to a particular incident, or generally to a prophetic knowledge of what is not known to ordinary people.'
27. sūrah 4:157 to 159.
28. sūrah 19:33.
29. See sūrah 19:15.
30. See Parrinder, G., Jesus in the Qur'ān. 1st published Faber and Faber 1965, repr., Sheldon Press, London, 1976, page 123. Hereafter JQ.
31. See sūrahs 3:55; 4:157-159; 19:33.
32. Goldsack, W., Selections from Muhammadan Traditions. Christian Literature Society, Madras, 1923, page 268.

33. See Hayek, M., Le Christ de l' Islam. Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1959, page 242.
34. See sūrah 43:61.
35. See sūrah 3:45B.
36. See Cragg, K., Jesus and the Muslim. An Exploration. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1985, pages 37 and 38. Hereafter JME.
37. See Encyclopaedia of Islam Vol. IV. New edn., London and Leiden, 1960, article °Īsā, pages 81 to 86.
38. Ibid., page 81, see also Malachi 1:2f, R.S.V., i.e. Esau symbolises those whom God has not elected.
39. JQ, page 16.
40. See sūrahs 3:45; 4:157, 171; 19:34.
41. See sūrah 3:47.
42. See sūrah 4:172.
43. See sūrah 19:30.
44. See sūrahs 3:45; 4:157, 171, 172.
45. sūrah 4:171; N.B. Christ = Messiah (al-masīḥ).
46. See sūrahs 19:30; 5:78.
47. See sūrah 4:13, 64, 80; (obedience);
sūrah 4:14, 42: (disobedience).
48. See sūrah 5:70.
49. 'I and my apostle' (i.e. apostle referring to °Īsā) occurs once; see sūrah 5:111.

50. See sūrah 4:41.
51. See sūrah 30:47.
52. See sūrah 4:42.
53. See sūrahs 3:21, 112, 181; 4:155.
54. See sūrah 3:183.
55. See sūrah 3:84.
56. See sūrahs 87:19; 53:36.
57. See sūrah 3:50; (Law and Gospel, sūrah 3:3).
58. See sūrah 4:163.
59. See sūrah 3:48.
60. See sūrah 19:16.
61. See sūrahs 3:101; 4:136.
62. See sūrahs 15:29; 32:9; 38:73.
63. sūrah 4:171.
64. See sūrah 58:22.
65. See sūrah 3:47.
66. sūrah 3:39.
67. This confirmation or worship (so called by Di Matteo) implies no admission of Christ's divinity. See O'Shaughnessy, T.J., Word of God in the Qur'an. Biblical Institute Press, Rome, 1984, page 13, note 52. Hereafter WGO.
68. See sūrah 6:100.
69. sūrah 19:92; see also, surahs 3:80; 4:48, 116; 19:35.
70. See sūrah 5:119.

71. See sūrah 4:171.
72. See sūrah 5:76.
73. See sūrah 5:19, 75.
74. See sūrah 19:21; Rodwell, J.M., The Koran,
Rodwell's Translation. Everyman's Library,
London, 1953.
75. See sūrah 43:57.
76. See sūrah 3:39.
77. Sell, E., The Life of Muhammad. Christian
Literature Society, Madras, 1913, page 226.
78. See sūrah 3:36.
79. See sūrahs 18:110; 41:6.
80. See sūrah 5:78.
81. See sūrah 3:45.
82. sūrah 4:172.
83. See sūrah 61:6.
84. See sūrah 33:40.
85. See sūrah 3:59.

CHAPTER 2

NOTES, pages 34-98

1. See Mark 6:3, which may be an indirect reference to 'Virgin Birth'.
2. See Galatians 4:4; First Corinthians 15:45-47; both references may betray knowledge of 'Virgin Birth'.
3. Luke 1:26-35.
4. See Luke 1:46-55.
5. Luke 2:7.
6. See Luke 2:21-52.
7. Matthew 1:18-25.
8. See Herbert, A.S., The Cambridge Bible Commentary, Isaiah 1 to 39. C.U.P., 1973, page 64.
9. Matthew 2:1 and 2.
10. See Second Corinthians 5:17.
11. JME, page 66.
12. Armenian Book of the Infancy. Chapter 5, verses 5, 6, 8 and 9; cited in WGQ, page 30.
13. WGQ, page 30.
14. See Cowper, B.H., The Apocryphal Gospels. David Nutt, London, 1910, page 172.
15. See Hennecke, E., New Testament Apocrypha Volume One. Lutterworth Press, London, 1963, page 392.

16. I.e. before the prophet began to herald his religion.
17. Nöldeke, *Delectus*, page 26; cited by Bell, R., The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment. Cass, London, New Impression, 1968, pages 43 to 44.
18. *Imru'ul-Qais*, see Ahlwardt, *Divans of Six Arab Poets*, page 118; cited by Bell, R., op.cit., page 44.
19. See sūrah 21:105; compare Psalm 37:29.
20. See sūrah 26:57 to 60.
21. See sūrah 6:84 to 86.
22. See sūrahs 6:25; 8:31.
23. See sūrah 5:115 to 118.
24. See Matthew 24:17 to 35.
25. See Acts 10:9 to 16.
26. See Matthew 14:13 to 21.
27. See Bell, R., The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment. Frank Cass, London, New impression, 1968, pages 90 and 91.
28. WGQ, page 28.
29. See Watt, W. Montgomery, Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān. Edinburgh University Press, 1970, pages 33 to 37.

30. See Encyclopaedia of Islam Vol. I. New edn., London and Leiden, 1960, article Bahīrā, pages 922 to 923.
31. See Rodinson, M., Mohammad. Pelican Books, repr., 1983, pages 47 to 48.
32. See Nau, "L'expansion", pages 217f; cited in WGQ, page 29.
33. See Peeters, P., 'Evangiles apocryphes'. Paris, 1914, tom 2; cited in WGQ, page 30.
34. On the problem of influences upon Muḥammad, see Watt, W. Montgomery, Muhammad at Mecca. O.U.P., 1953, pages 158 to 160.
35. Mark 2:27 to 28.
36. Mark 7:15.
37. Mark 10:5 to 9.
38. See Bornkamm, G., Jesus of Nazareth. Hodder and Stoughton, new edn., 1973, page 99.
39. See Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44.
40. See Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28.
41. See Isaiah 19:19 to 25; Micah 4; Zechariah 8:20f.
42. Matthew 8:11.
43. See Matthew 20:16.
44. See Mark 9:14-29.
45. See John 5:19; Luke 11:20; Matthew 12:28.
46. See Mark 6:5.

47. Origen, Cels. lib. ii., Scct. 48, cited by Paley, W., Evidences of Christianity. New edn., London 1849, page 362.
48. See Mark 8:12; Luke 11:29f; Matthew 12:39f.
49. See Küng, H., On Being a Christian. Fount, 1978, pages 232 to 233.
50. Luke 7:22.
51. See Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1.
52. Mark 2:5-12; see also Matthew 9:1-8; Luke 5:17-26.
53. See Exodus 34:6-7; Isaiah 43:25-26; 44:22.
54. Vermes, G., The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. Penguin, repr., 1977, page 229.
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56. See Mark 13:32.
57. See John 14:2; Romans 8:34.
58. See John 16:8; 14:26.
59. See Acts 1:11.
60. See Hebrews 1:3; 12:2; 1st Corinthians 15:25.
61. See Hebrews 4:8.
62. See Matthew 1:21.
63. See Mark 6:3.
64. See Hennecke, E., New Testament Apocrypha Volume One. Lutterworth Press, London, 1963, page 401.
65. Hennecke, E., op.cit., page 400.
66. See Mark 10:45.

67. Moule, C.F.D., The Origin of Christology. C.U.P., 1977, page 34.
68. See Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13 to 53:12.
69. See Buber, M., The Prophetic Faith. Macmillan, New York, 1949, page 218.
70. See Zimmerli, W., and Jeremias, J., The Servant of God, Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 20 (Naperville, Ill., Alec R. Allenson, 1957). This important article now appears in Kittels' Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.
71. Hebrews 3:1.
72. See John 3:17.
73. See Hebrews 1:14.
74. Tor Andrae, Mohammed, the Man and his Faith. George Allen and Unwin, London, 1936, page 52.
75. See Matthew 21:11; Luke 7:16; Luke 22:64.
76. See Acts 3:22f; 7:37.
77. Matthew 12:41.
78. Luke 16:16.
79. See Matthew 5:22, 28, 34.
80. See Mark 13:31.
81. Cullmann, O., The Christology of the New Testament. S.C.M. Press, 6th impression, 1977, page 49.

82. Hennecke, E., New Testament Apocrypha Volume One.
Lutterworth Press, London, 1963, pages 163 and
164.
83. Cullmann, O., op.cit., page 50.
84. Mark 3:29.
85. Luke 4:18.
86. John 14:15 to 17.
87. See sūrah 61:6.
88. Psalm 33:8 and 9; see also, Isaiah 55:10 to 11.
89. The Greek word used for Reason, Logos, was also
used to translate Word in the LXX.
90. See Proverbs 8:22 to 31.
91. Ecclesiasticus 24:3 and 4.
92. See Ecclesiasticus 24.
93. Wisdom of Solomon 7:24 to 27.
94. See 1st Corinthians 1:24 and 30.
95. John 1:1.
96. Conzelmann, H., An Outline of the Theology of the
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97. sūrah 50:16.
98. Cragg, K., Muhammad and the Christian. Darton,
Longman and Todd, London, 1984, page 137.
99. Theodori Abucarae, Opuscula, 25; P.G. 97, 1558-59,
cited in WGQ, page 22.

100. Extract from a letter of the Patriarch of Alexandria to the Bishop of Byzantium, taken from G. Gabrieli, "Gesù Christo nel Qorano", 45, cited in WGQ, page 22.
101. Abū-l-Barakāt, cap. 1, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 20, 663, cited in WGQ, page 24.
102. Hennecke E., New Testament Apocrypha Volume One. Lutterworth Press, London, 1963, page 380.
103. WGQ, page 33.
104. sūrah 43:81.
105. sūrah 19:89 to 91.
106. Conzelmann, H., An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament. S.C.M. Press, 2nd impression, London, 1976, page 129.
107. See Genesis 6:2 to 4.
108. Psalm 2:7.
109. Mowinckel, S., He That Cometh. Trans., Anderson, G.W., Blackwell, 1959, page 78.
110. Vermes, G., Jesus the Jew. 2nd edn., S.C.M. Press, London, 1983, page 209.
111. Vermes, G., op.cit., page 211.
112. Hebrews 1:1 to 3.
113. Hebrews 3:3 to 6A.
114. See John 1:18.
115. See John 5:18.
116. See Philippians 2:6.

117. See John 10:30; 17:21.
118. Watt, W. Montgomery, Islam and Christianity Today.
Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983, page 137.
119. See Hebrews 4:15; 2nd Corinthians 5:21; 1st Peter
2:22; 1st John 3:5; John 8:46.
120. See Barth, K., Church Dogmatics I. Edinburgh,
Clark, 1956, pages 188-192.
121. See Pannenberg, W., Jesus God and Man. S.C.M.
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CHAPTER 3

NOTES, pages 99-150

1. sūrah 3:67.
2. sūrah 2:87.
3. See allusions to these events in sūrah 59:1 to 8.
4. Islam and Judaism now go separate ways. For example, the change of direction for Prayer; formerly Muslims faced Jerusalem, now they are asked to face Mecca; see sūrah 2:142.
5. sūrah 5:85.
6. See sūrah 5:83.
7. sūrah 3:61.
8. See sūrah 5:3 and 4.
9. See sūrah 5:70 and 71.
10. See sūrah 9:30 and 31.
11. See sūrah 5:5 and 6.
12. Deuteronomy 6:4.
13. sūrah 3:18.
14. sūrah 3:64, (also 3:80).
15. sūrah 3:151.
16. sūrah 4:116, (also 4:36, 48; 19:81).
17. sūrah 96:1 and 2.
18. See Genesis chapters 1 to 3.
19. sūrah 3:84.

20. sūrah 3:129 (also 3:16, 17, 77, 129, 135, 155, 156; 4:16, 23, 25, 29, 43, 64, 96, 99, 100, 106).
21. sūrah 3:31 (also 3:159).
22. sūrah 4:171.
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25. Basetti-Sani, G., op.cit., page 176.
26. sūrah 5:119.
27. See JQ, page 135.
28. 1st Corinthians 8:4 to 6.
29. Mark 12:29.
30. 1st Corinthians 1:23 to 25.
31. See 1st Corinthians 12:3, also Romans 1:4.
32. See 1st John 4:15.
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35. Kelly, J.N.D., op.cit, page 232.
36. Kelly, J.N.D., op.cit, pages 339 and 340.

37. sūrah 2:115.
38. sūrah 11:37 (also 23:27; 54:14; 68:42).
39. sūrah 4:171.
40. sūrah 19:35.
41. sūrah 19:88 to 92.
42. Zaehner, R.C., 'The Qur'ān and Christ', in At Sundry Times: An Essay in the Comparison of Religions, Faber and Faber, London, 1958, page 201.
43. Zaehner, R.C., op.cit., page 202.
44. sūrah 5:19.
45. sūrah 9:30.
46. Zaehner, R.C., op.cit., page 203.
47. Zaehner, R.C., op.cit., page 216.
48. sūrah 4:152.
49. JME, page 204.
50. See Article Monarchianism, in The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. 2nd edn., edited by F.L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, O.U.P., 1984.
51. sūrah 3:110.
52. AQ, page 151, note 434.
53. Parke, D.B., The Epic of Unitarianism, 1957, pages 5 to 6; cited by 'Ata ur-Rahim, M., Jesus, A Prophet of Islam. MWH, London, 3rd edn., 1983, page 119. Hereafter JPI.

54. sūrah 3:51.
55. sūrah 3:79 to 80.
56. sūrah 4:171.
57. Reland, A., Treatises Concerning the Mohametonns, page 190; cited in JPI, page 130.
58. Reland, A., Historical and Critical Reflections Upon Mohametonism and Socianism, 1712; cited in JPI, page 139.
59. sūrah 6:164 (also 53:38 to 42; 2:123).
60. sūrah 4:123.
61. Parke, D.B., The Epic of Unitarianism, 1957, pages 31 to 32; cited in JPI, page 145.
62. sūrah 3:62.
63. sūrah 4:172.
64. sūrah 2:97.
65. sūrah 16:102.
66. Parke, D.B., The Epic of Unitarianism, 1957, page 47; cited in JPI, page 163.
67. Priestly, J., A History of the Corruptions of Christianity, 1871; cited in JPI, pages 170 to 171.
68. sūrah 2:75.
69. Wallace, A., Anti-trinitarian Biographies, 1850; cited in JPI, page 185.
70. Wallace, A., op.cit., cited in JPI, page 191.

71. Hick, J., (ed.), The Myth of God Incarnate. S.C.M. Press, London, 1977. Hereafter MGI.
72. MGI, Preface, X.
73. MGI, page 5.
74. MGI, Preface, IX.
75. MGI, page 148.
76. MGI, page 8.
77. Wiles, M.F., Essay in; Christian Believing. A Report by The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, S.P.C.K. London, 1979.
78. Wiles, M.F., op.cit., page 126.
79. MGI, pages 8 and 9.
80. MGI, page 168.
81. MGI, page 169.
82. MGI, page 171.
83. Lampe, G.W.H., God as Spirit. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1977, page 2.
84. sūrah, 4:163.
85. Lampe, G.W.H., op.cit., page 228.

CHAPTER 4

NOTES, pages 151-176

1. sūrah 19:33.
2. See JQ, page 105.
3. JQ, page 105.
4. sūrah 3:55.
5. JQ, page 106.
6. Tabarī, VI, 456-57; cited in Ayoub, M., Towards and Islamic Christology, II: The death of Jesus, reality or delusion, Muslim World, April 1980, pages 91-121. Hereafter MW.
7. Goldsack, W., Selections from Muhammadan Traditions. Christian Literature, Society, Madras, 1923, page 268.
8. The difficult reference to Jesus as the sign or knowledge of the Hour in verse 43:61, is not a basis for the Second Coming. Likewise, the reference in verse 4:159 speaks only of his rôle as judge on the Day of Resurrection.
9. Wahb B. Munabbih is one of the most famous of those traditionalists reporting stories from the People of the Book. The reliability of his material has always been open to question. See Juynboll, G.H.A., The Authority of the Tradition Literature. Leiden, 1969, pages 121 to 138.

10. See MW, page 108.
11. See Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44.
12. See Ṭabarī, VI, 458; cited in MW, page 108.
13. See JQ, page 106.
14. JME, page 177.
15. MW, page 108.
16. Rāzī, VII, 72; cited in MW, page 108.
17. Ibid., cited in MW, page 108.
18. sūrah 4:157 to 159.
19. Ṭabarī, IX, 367; cited in MW, page 96.
20. See MW, page 97.
21. Ayoub, M., MW, page 119, comments:
 "I translate this word nafs as 'life; in this context. This clearly theological statement has never been investigated by Muslim thinkers"; cf. John 15:12-14, for parallels.
22. Comments by Ayoub, M., MW, page 119.
23. Comments by Ayoub, M., MW, page 120.
24. Ṭabarī, IX, 367ff; cited in MW, pages 118 to 120.
25. Elder, E.E., 'Crucifixion of Jesus in the Koran', Muslim World, (Samuel M. Zwemer, ed.), Vol. XIII, 1923, Missionary Review Publishing, New York.
26. MW, page 97.
27. MW, pages 98 and 99.
28. JME, page 173.
29. Rāzī, XI, 100; cited in MW, page 101.

30. Ibid., XI, 100; cited in MW, page 102.
31. MW, page 102.
32. MW, page 102.
33. Bornkamm, G., Jesus of Nazareth, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 4th Impression, 1978, page 164.
34. See Luke 23:33, 35; Mark 15:27, 29; Matthew 27:38, 39; John 19:18, 25.
35. M. °Abduh and R. Riḍa, Tafsīr al-Manār, (12 vols., Cairo, 1373-1380 A.H.), vol. III, page 316.
36. Ibid., page 317.
37. Ibid., vol. VI, page 43.
38. Hussein, K., City of Wrong: a Friday in Jerusalem. Trans., Cragg, K., Amsterdam, 1959, page 222.
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42. Cragg, K., The Call of the Minaret. Collins, 2nd edn., 1985, page 294.

43. Elder, E.E., op.cit, pages 256 to 258.
44. See Matthew 20:19; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32.
45. See John 18:32.
46. See John 10:18.
47. JQ, pages 122 and 123.
48. Hussein, K., op.cit., page 224.

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