

Some major Christian beliefs and Muslim objections
and responses to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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Abstract:

Our aim in this thesis is to set out major Christians beliefs about the person and work of Jesus Christ, such as his conception and birth, his Incarnation as God's Word, his crucifixion as atoning death, as well as His resurrection, ascension and return. We will also examine Muslim objections and responses to these beliefs and set out a Christian case for continuing to hold them with integrity and to commend them to Muslims.

Each chapter will be devoted to particular beliefs, the objections to them and to Christian responses to them. In each chapter there will be presentations of scholarly opinion on both the Muslim and the Christian sides, with an attempt to assess their respective strengths.

We will begin with the virginal conception and birth of Jesus and the estimates by Muslims and Christians of these events, affirmed by both traditions. We will then go on to the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus as God's living Word and as the locus of his Spirit and from there to the historicity of the Cross and its atoning value. Finally, we will consider the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his ascension into heaven and his promised return to earth for both sides and how they understand these beliefs,

It is hoped that this will provide some material for further Muslim- Christian discussion, debate and dialogue on these hugely important topics for both sides where there is both much in common, as well as major differences.

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Introduction:

Islam and Christianity have various similarities in that both faiths acknowledge belief in one God and Islam acknowledges at least some of the biblical prophets. One topic that has been a constant matter of debate between the two faiths over 1400 years of the history of Islam is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Although the Bible and Islamic traditions share similarities in their recorded accounts of Jesus, there are also issues of conflict. As we have seen throughout the 1400 years of the existence of Islam, there has been a history of dialogue and debate between Christians and Muslims concerning the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Muslim argument has always sought to refute the Christian doctrine of Christ being divine, whereas the Christian argument has sought to prove that Jesus Christ is divine and refute the Islamic idea that Jesus was nothing more than prophet. The first recorded dialogue can be traced back to the encounter Muhammad had with the Christians of Najran, after which Muhammad criticized the Christian claim that Jesus is unique because he was born without a father, because Adam was also created without a father, on the basis of 80 verses of Surah 3 which were revealed after this encounter.¹

Between the 7th and the 10th centuries, the Middle Eastern Christian apologists such as John of Damascus and Timothy of Baghdad can be seen to be defending their faith against the objections raised by their Muslim opponents. Timothy of Baghdad, in his debate with the Caliph Mahdi, has defended the idea that God the Son did die, but only in his humanity.² John of Damascus stated in his dialogue with a Muslim that if Jesus is

¹ Ibn Ishaq, Life of Muhammad, 272.

² Young, Patriarch, Shah and Caliph, 201.

God's Word and Spirit, therefore he must be equal with God, that is, God himself as God cannot be God without his Word or his Spirit.³ Also, there have been eastern Christian apologists such as Theodore Abu Qurrah, Habib Ibn Khidma Abu Ra'ita and Amr Al Basri who engaged in dialogue with Muslims.⁴ In the Middle Ages, missionaries like Raymond Lull, Raymond Martin and William of Rubruck, and Ricoldus De Monte Croce engaged positively and rigorously with Islam. Another instance of such dialogue is that of the Jesuits at the Mughal court.

K.G. Pfander challenged the claims of Islam in his 'Mizan-al-Haq' meaning 'the balance of truth'. He was also the leading Christian participant in the great 'Agra Debate' in the 19th century. His Muslim opponent was the Maulvi Rahmatullah Kairanwi. Moreover, there have been Muslim converts to Christianity who eventually became Christian apologists and defended the Christian faith against Islamic objections. These include Rev Maulvi Imaduddin, Maulvi Abdul Haq and Maulvi Safdar Ali Shah from the south Asian subcontinent.

20th century theologians include Jean-Marie Gaudéul who has recorded a survey of most of the historical dialogues that have taken place between Christians and Muslims concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Others include Mark Beaumont who is a 21st century apologist and has written a critical book about how Christians use certain methods in bringing the gospel to Muslims. The debate is still continuing even in the 21st century and some of the famous contemporary Muslim polemicists and apologists from the 20th and 21st century can include Ahmed Deedat, Yousaf Chishti, Dr Shabir Ally, Mariam Jameelah and Dr Zakir Naik. Christian apologists include Dr David Wood, the late Dr Nabeel Qureshi, Dr Anis Shorosh, Dr William Lane Craig and Jay Smith. Christian-Muslim engagement on matters of belief can take different forms. It can be informal discussion between neighbours, colleagues at work and friends. It can be more formal dialogue to learn about each other's beliefs or to witness to one's faith or to discover commonalities and differences about building community or respect for human

³ Beaumont, *Christology*, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*

rights.

I write as a person from both a Christian and Muslim family background in Pakistan. My interest in this subject was aroused because of the need to address questions I was asked by my peers concerning the deity of Christ. The Bible and the Quran both agree that Jesus was born of a virgin, was a man who was sent to the people of Israel, he performed many miraculous signs which include the curing of the sick and raising the dead to life. According to Islam, Jesus was a great messenger of God to whom God gave the gospel to deliver to the children of Israel. But, Islam denies that Jesus was divine in any way, shape or form, he was not the eternally begotten Son of God, he did not claim to be God, he only told his followers to worship God and none other and most importantly, Jesus did not die by crucifixion. Islam rejects the bedrock of the Christian doctrine, which is that Jesus was the eternally begotten Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Christians believe his followers worshipped him, he claimed to be God and claimed that he will rise again and will return again to judge the living and the dead and those who have believed in his name and confessed him as Lord, he will grant them eternal life, and those who have rejected his name will stand condemned. Even though Islam believes in the second coming of Jesus, it does not perceive it as the coming of a divine judge, but merely as a prophet returning at God's command to fulfill his mission.

What creates questions in the minds of the Christians, from the time of John of Damascus (675- 753) and Timothy of Baghdad (727-823), is the fact that the Quran calls Jesus the Word of God and a Spirit proceeding from him, titles that no one else in the Quran has been given. In the prophetic Islamic traditions, the prophet of Islam himself claims that Jesus and his mother Mary are the only two people whom Satan could not cause to sin. The response to all of these claims is simply because that is the way Allah wanted it to be, that does not mean Jesus was divine but because that was all due to the will of Allah.

The Islamic side does not appear to grasp the concept of God where His Word and his Spirit are integral aspects of his being. Just as a person's will and reasoning are part of his humanity.

When a Christian says Jesus is God, Muslims usually misunderstand this to mean that the Christian is also claiming that Jesus is the Father and the Holy Spirit. According to the Christian belief, that is not the case. God is one being; but in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit or God, his Word and his Spirit. Jesus dying on the cross is a demonstration of God's suffering love, but this does not mean that somehow, the Father, the Eternal Word and the Holy Spirit also died. The Eternal Word proceeds from God, and is not a product of sexual union, something which even the Quran agrees with. Moreover, the Quran does not acknowledge that Jesus is unique in the manner of his birth because the Islamic response usually is that Adam was also created without a father, so Jesus should not be given exclusivity. According to Islam, the crucifixion does not take place, but there is a dilemma in terms of the references to the death and resurrection of Jesus that will be discussed later in one of the chapters.

The question is who was the historical Jesus? Was it the person of Jesus portrayed in the Quran or was it the person of Jesus portrayed in the Bible? Why does the Quran place so much importance on him if he was not divine? There are elements in the Quran, which suggest that the person and work of Christ is not just that of a prophet (nabi) or of a messenger (rasul), but possibly something more than these. The reason these questions are of great significance is because the Quran rejects the core doctrines of Christianity, yet Jesus appears to be portrayed as a unique character in the Quran. Although Christian belief about Jesus is based on the Bible, nevertheless, it is possible to discuss the person and work of Christ with Muslims on the basis of what is said about him in the Quran and Islamic traditions.

In the first chapter, we shall consider the uniqueness of Jesus' conception and birth in the Quran and the Bible. From the Christian side, the argument will include the Early Church Fathers' teachings, the Creeds and biblical references.

After that, we shall examine the Islamic doctrine of the virginal conception and birth of Christ, since he is the only one in Islam to be born in this unusual manner. We shall also tackle the Islamic argument that Adam was also created without a father, hence, this does not make Jesus more than a prophet. In addition to that, the fact that Jesus is called uniquely sinless in the Quran is a subject of great interest and significance and that shall also be looked at.

In the second chapter, there will be debate around the fact that the Quran calls Jesus the Word of God and a spirit proceeding from him. We shall tackle the Islamic argument that Jesus is a created word and spirit, and the Arabic word used 'kun' was also used in the creation of Adam, hence there are similarities between Jesus and Adam, according to Islam. Also, the Islamic and Christian concepts of the Word and the Spirit will be discussed and compared and challenged, the main challenge will be whether God is God without his Word or his Spirit. If God is eternal then, how are his Word and Spirit not eternal as well? Church Fathers and early Christian doctrines shall be included in the Christian argument.

The focus of the third chapter will be the crucifixion of Jesus and both the Islamic and Christian views will be discussed and debated. Islam denies the crucifixion ever took place and the Christian response to the Islamic claims will be supported with biblical references and the historical evidence from Christian and non-Christian sources. The Christian question to Muslims will be that since, according to Islam, several prophets were killed and even the possible death of the prophet of Islam is discussed, what is so special about Jesus that Allah intervened to save him from the cross? Moreover, the Islamic dilemma within Surah 3:55, 4:157-158 and 19:33-34, where it is not clear whether Jesus died, was resurrected or ascended will be discussed.

In the fourth chapter, the resurrection, ascension and return will be examined. These are beliefs held by both Christians and Muslims; Christians believe Jesus will come back to judge the living and the dead and will have an unending kingdom, Muslims also believe Jesus will return as a just judge, but to destroy the cross, the Jews and kill the swine. What is the significance of Jesus being a just judge and why does he return to earth a second time to judge people? Why is it that Muslims do not perceive Jesus as a unique

character in the Quran when he, indeed, appears to be the most different and unique character in Islam, distinct from all the other prophets? Both the Christians and Islamic points of view will be set out, and the reader will be able to judge the respective strengths of each point of view.

In the following chapters, we hope to show the extent of common ground between Muslims and Christians on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and also very important differences both in the text of the Quran and in the traditions of the prophet, as well in their interpretation by Islamic scholars. This will reveal both the relatedness of Islam and Christianity to one another but also their distinctiveness as systems of belief and particularly in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Christian beliefs and Muslim objections to the Incarnation, virginal conception and birth of Jesus Christ:

Matthew: the uniqueness of the birth of Jesus:

The Gospel According to Matthew, chapters 1&2 and Luke chapters 1&2, both give detailed accounts of the birth of Jesus. In Luke's account, the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and brings her the good news about the birth of Jesus. Interestingly, these two accounts do not give details of an ordinary birth. Mary is startled at first at the appearance of the angel, but then questions the angel how she will have a child when no man has ever touched her. The angel then tells her that the child will be conceived by the Holy Spirit, who will also overshadow Mary through the power of the Most High God, so that the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God. The uniqueness of these accounts lies in the idea that it is a virgin birth (meaning it is not the result of sexual union), the Holy Spirit is involved in the conception and will overshadow Mary. Matthew goes on to say in that 'all this took place in order that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: "behold, the virgin shall conceive and give birth to a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel, which, translated, is, God with us"' (Isaiah 7:14). Gospel commentator William Hendriksen comments that 'this

introductory formula, “all this took place in order...” (verse 22) makes clear that, as Matthew by inspiration sees it, whatever anticipatory fulfillments these predictions may have had during the old dispensations, they attain their consummation in Jesus Christ, in him alone...The introductory formula also makes clear that the prophecy about to be quoted had its origin in God himself, not in the mind of the prophet. In fact, in the present case the prophet’s name is not even mentioned! The words were spoken by the Lord through the prophet. The latter functioned as God’s mouthpiece.’⁵ Also, the fact the Jesus is called ‘Immanuel’, meaning ‘God with us’ carries divine implications in that the Messiah to be born is not an ordinary human being.

Concerning Isaiah 7:14 as quoted in Matthew 1, Floyd Filson writes that ‘The Hebrew word used for virgin in Isaiah reads “maiden” and the Isaiah passage speaks of a sign; it may well mean a supernatural though hardly a virgin birth, it refers to a child soon to be born, in whose early childhood the international situation will change radically and the danger to God’s people will be removed. It promises God’s coming and intervention to his people.’⁶ Maiden may mean a young woman who is ready for marriage. ‘Even though the Hebrew of Isaiah does not contain the literal virgin birth idea (although the translators of the LXX certainly understood it in this way), the specific redemptive action of God is present even there, just as it is in the virgin birth of Jesus.

Matthew explains what Emmanuel means, to emphasize that God comes redemptively to men in the person and saving ministry of Jesus.’⁷ The fact that Isaiah may not have literally emphasized and made the virginity of Mary his focus does not mean Matthew and Luke’s accounts are false, their emphasis was to highlight the reason and purpose Jesus Christ came into this world. That of course does not nullify the significance of the virgin birth but highlights God’s plan of salvation. Matthew and Luke speak of a miraculous conception and birth, involving a woman giving birth to a son who is not the product of sexual intercourse. ‘But the theological truth that they express is that God sent Jesus; he was more than a human Davidic king; as the Son of the living God he is indeed the Christ, the expected Jewish Messiah, but in his life and work he is linked with God in a deeper

⁵ Hendriksen, Matthew, 12.

⁶ Filson, Gospel, 55.

⁷ Ibid., 55.

way, so that his coming means “God with us”.⁸

Luke: Uniqueness of the virginal conception and birth:

In Luke 1, when Mary receives the news from the angel, she visits her cousin Elisabeth, who is also pregnant. Before the news of the birth of Jesus reaches her ears, the baby in her womb ‘leaps for joy’ (1:46). And Elisabeth exclaims in a loud voice, ‘blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord’ (Luke 1:42-44). ‘In verse 43, Elisabeth’s question indicates her unworthiness that the mother of her Messiah should visit her: what has she done to deserve this honour? The Greek word used (Ho Kurios) to describe Jesus (1:76, 2:11, 7:13, 19; 10:1, 39, 41; 11:39, 12:42, 13:15, 17:5f.; 18:6, 19:8, 31, 34, 20:42, 44; 22:61; 24:3, 34; cf, 1:15, is used as a title of God. The use of this title is distinctive of Luke.’⁹

Elisabeth called the Messiah, ‘Lord’. Isaiah 9:6 gives the Messiah titles such as ‘Mighty God and Everlasting Father’. David calls the Messiah, ‘Lord’ in Psalm 110 (which Jesus himself confirms in Matthew 22:45), and ‘your throne O God will last forever’ (also later confirmed in Hebrews 1) in Psalm 45, Isaiah 7:14, ‘the virgin shall be with child “Immanuel” meaning “God with us”.’ It is clear from these accounts and verses that even though the Messianic expectation was not easily perceived as divine, by the Jews, the prophecies suggest that the Messiah will be a divine figure in some way, and all these prophecies came to fulfilment, some of which even came to fulfilment at the conception. The unworthiness of Elisabeth suggests that she called Mary ‘blessed’ because of the baby in her womb and that she did not just regard the Messiah as an ordinary human being.

⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁹ Marshall, Gospel, 81.

The wise men:

Matthew chapter 2 gives an account of wise men from the East who had had revelation that the Messiah, the king of the Jews was to be born. 'In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking "where is this child who has been born King of the Jews? For we have observed his star at its rising and have come to worship him' (Matthew 2:1-3). Hendriksen comments again that 'not for a moment do the wise men express any doubt with reference to the fact as such of the recent birth of the One whom they call "the king of the Jews". For them the birth is real and true. Unless they receive this information, they cannot fulfill the purpose of this long and arduous journey. We are left in the dark and should attempt no further explanation as to the identity of this astral phenomenon. Suffice it to say that the wisdom and kindness of God is evident from the fact that he 'spoke' to these students of the stars in a language which they could understand, namely, a star.'¹⁰

According to Messianic expectation in John 4:25, the non-Jews had an idea of a Deliverer because it is made clear that Jesus did not just come for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles, too. Also, the idea that they wanted to pay homage to him. Why would these men who were not even Jews come all the way from a land far away in the East just to worship a child they've only heard about? Indeed, 'it is to be noted that the Persians used this term (proskuneo) equivalent for the worship of a deified king.'¹¹ Biblically, these men must have had a revelation from God through the star that they followed. Aside from recognizing him as the king of the Jews, they worshipped him because they must have perceived him to be divine, not an ordinary human being or an ordinary 'king'.

John:

Furthermore, John's gospel speaks of Jesus as the eternal Son of God, as one equal to the Father in essence. John's gospel opens up with the verse 'in the beginning was the

¹⁰ Hendriksen, Matthew, 153.

¹¹ Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon, 716,

word, and the word was with God and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him not one thing came into being (John 1:1-3). John also goes on to say in verse 14 that 'the word became flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.' John proclaims that the Eternal Word, who manifested himself in the person of Jesus Christ did not just preexist and coexist with God, but for that reason is God himself. He is equal with God. Psalm 33:6 claims 'by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath (spirit) of his mouth' and in verse 9 the Psalmist goes on to say that 'he spoke, and it came to be'. So, there are even references in the Old Testament that the heavens and the earth came into being by God through his word and John says that it is the Eternal Word who is God through whom everything came into being.

Genesis 1:3 states 'and God said, "let there be light" and there was light.' In the first few verses of the Bible, it is seen that God is creating through his word. C.K. Barrett comments that 'the Word does not come to be with God; the Word is with God in the beginning and at the ascension, Jesus returns to the position of glory he occupied before creation'¹² The Word of God is also seen as creative but later on, it is also seen as a prophet's message, the means through which God communicates his message to his people. For example, Jeremiah 1:4. 'now the Word of the Lord came unto me; Ezekiel 1:3; Amos 3:1. In all these verses, the Word is seen to be spoken and active and is not abstract. 'Both creation and revelation are in mind in the Johannine prologue, and the rest of the gospel encourages us to suppose that the influence of the Old Testament may be found here.'¹³ The Hebrew word in the Old Testament 'dabar' is used mainly for the speaking command of God. As the last verse of John's Prologue confirms, the incarnation is the exegesis of God for us.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us (verse 14). Here, John speaks of the incarnation of the Word, the Word becoming man and dwelling amongst his own creation. And goes on to say in the next verse 'we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only son of the father, full of grace and truth. The point to be noted here is that Moses longed to see the glory of God face to face but could not see it (Exodus 33:20).

¹² Barrett, Gospel, 130.

¹³ Ibid., 128.

God told Moses in the same passage that 'no man can see me and live'. But the last verse of John's prologue confirms that 'no one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart who has made him known.' The Christian understanding of this passage is that God himself became one of his own creation in order to connect with it in a way that it would understand him. Jesus says in John 14:7, 'he who has seen me has seen the Father'.

This is where one can conclude that Biblically, the Eternal Word was made flesh in order to explain God and what the Father heart of God is like. No prophet in Biblical history has ever made a statement such as 'whoever has seen me has seen God'. And in Christian thought, this verse means that Jesus is claiming to be God. Jesus also says in an earlier verse that 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father, except through me' (John 14:6). 'Jesus claims to be the way because the way leads to the Father and he is the only way to the Father, the unique and saving revelation of God. God is revealed in the life and word of Jesus, and the disciples should know that Jesus' departure to the Father will be through a lifting up and a death. It must also be the way of his followers.'¹⁴

If the disciples want to follow the way to God, they must follow Christ and follow in his footsteps, his way is the way of suffering, which the believer must also endure (Matthew 10:28). Christians perceives these kinds of sayings, especially the 'I am' sayings of Jesus as someone who is claiming to be more than a prophet. Two examples of these sayings would be 'I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live (John 11:25), and also, 'very truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, "I am"! (John 8:58). Francis J. Maloney thus comments on 8:58: 'Jesus calls upon having existed as the Logos, turned in loving union towards God from before the beginning (1:1). Abraham, for all his greatness belongs to the sequence of events that mark the passing of time. His (Abraham) story is finished; he has come and gone but that is not the case with Jesus' who has existed with the Father from the very beginning. In 11:25, 'Jesus not only points out that he is the resurrection and the life but also points to the essential nature of belief in him as

¹⁴ Maloney, Sacra, The Gospel of John, 395.

the only way to resurrection and life. This self-revelation of Jesus to Martha announces that faith in him brings life both now and hereafter (5:19-30). The believer, even if he or she dies physically, and the believer who is alive spiritually will never die spiritually.¹⁵

Philippians 2:5-11:

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul talks about humility and is urging the Philippians to act in humility at all times. He uses Christ's humility as an example and urges the Philippians to pattern themselves after his humility. He writes 'have in yourselves the mind that was also in Christ Jesus, who being in very nature, God, did not consider equality with God, something to be grasped, but took the disguise of a slave and emptied himself by making himself nothing, therefore God exalted him to the highest place so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:5-11). Paul says that though Christ was God, in the flesh, he made himself humble before the Father and if he, being God, can be humble, who is a mere human being to be boastful or arrogant?

Throughout the gospels, it is clear that Jesus is making divine claims. For example, Mark 14:62, where he claims to be the Son of Man and the Son of the Blessed One, John 14:7 where he states that 'whoever has seen me has seen the Father', John 8:58 (before Abraham was, I am'), accepts worship from his disciples and others, born of a virgin, claims to be the final judge of all of mankind, worshipped by the wise men at his birth. Why then does Jesus also say that he does not know the hour when he is returning? Why does he call the Father his God? Why does he believe that the Father is greater than he is or that he only works with the Father's authority and can't do anything by himself? That is all because of his humility, as Paul describes in this particular passage of Philippians 2. According to Biblical understanding, in order for Christ to be human, he had to lay aside certain privileges or 'empty himself, making himself nothing, taking the form of a slave' (verse 7). As will be seen, these Biblical passages are important in

¹⁵ Ibid., 284.

Muslim-Christian discussion on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Philip P. Martin, commentator on the book of Philippians, comments that ‘the eternal Son of God, however, faced with a parallel temptation, renounced what was his by right, and could actually have become his possession by the seizure of it, viz. equality with God, and chose instead the way of obedient suffering as the pathway to his lordship.’¹⁶ Martin appears to be commenting on the phrase ‘he emptied himself’, showing that God was humble enough to lay aside his majestic prerogatives in order to become one of his own creations, and that is exactly St Paul’s emphasis in this chapter of the epistle to the Philippians that if Almighty God can be humble what gives a mere human being the right to live in arrogance. ‘The obedience, humiliation and exaltation of the Lord are also foreshadowed in the picture of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 52-53.’¹⁷ ‘It is the record of the pre-existent, humiliated and glorified Lord who is ever the object of the church’s worship and the destined Ruler of all created life.’¹⁸

Church Fathers:

One of the earliest church Fathers who combated heresies and pagan beliefs of his time was Justin Martyr. He demonstrated that ‘the immoral behavior of pagans was a direct result of their distorted thinking. He went as far as calling them ‘those who live without reason’ and “those who have been brought up to indulge their passions in undisciplined living”. Pagans are what Christians once were: people who delighted in fornication, practiced magic, valued wealth and possessions above all things, hated and killed one another and refused to live with others of different customs.’¹⁹ That is why he believed that pagan life was opposed to reason and that is why he also believed that it was a necessity to offer Christianity as the best alternative in order to show how irrational that life is. According to Justin, Christians are people who in both belief and practice are eminently rational. They associated Christian identity with the light of reason. ‘At the base of the Christian experience stands the Logos, the Word, in sharp contrast to the

¹⁶ Martin, Philippians, 104.

¹⁷ Ibid., 104

¹⁸ Ibid., 104.

¹⁹ Sider, Gospel, 18.

demons The Word is the creative reason at the heart of the universe; the same Word is the Spirit that breathed in the prophets enabling them to predict future events; and that Word is also incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, who therefore becomes the authoritative Teacher of the Christians.²⁰ Justin taught that it is the Christ, the Incarnate Word who is the Reason for all reason and the teacher of all Christians and when Christians are taught by Christ, they become chaste, gentle, patient and free from anger and obedient to civil authorities.²¹ He states that 'the Word makes clear, who, after the God that begot him, is the most kingly, the most just ruler we know. For just as everyone avoids poverty, suffering and disgrace, so the reasonable person refuses to do whatever the Word says should not be done. Our Teacher, I say, foretold that all these things would happen. He taught also our fathers and is the Son and Apostle of the Lord God, Jesus Christ, from whom we Christians have received our name. We are confident of everything he has taught, since in fact many events are occurring which he had earlier predicted. This is the work of God, to predict an event which can later be shown to have happened as predicted.'²²

Clement of Alexandria's approach was also similar and he was also attacking the pagan, false doctrines at his time. 'In its major themes, Clement's message has the powerful simplicity of Paul's message to the Athenians. It is a message about one God in the face of idolatry, a God who is creator of the world and has implanted in man an intimation of himself. It is a message about repentance and judgement, and about a saviour who can rescue mankind from impending destruction. For Clement, the impending destruction is as much one's own eternal death, already reflected in the despicable quality of life seen in idolatry, as it is the future eschatological judgement.'²³ The message of the gospel is therefore a hope of salvation against all those Satanic forces that corrupt and destroy the life of a person, a message which restores our vision of God and sets us on a journey that is a journey lived with God, hence it is a full of life.

Clement stated that 'this is the new Song, the epiphany of the Word which was beginning and before the beginning, an epiphany which now has cast light among us. For the

²⁰ Justin, as cited in Sider (page 69).

²¹ Ibid., 70.

²² Ibid., 69.

²³ Clement, as cited in Sider.

Saviour who has before has appeared just now, the One who is in “Him who is” (for “the Word was with God”) has appeared as our Teacher, the Word by whom things were created has appeared, our Creator who in the beginning not only formed us but gave us life.’²⁴ Because of Christ’s mercy on us, we are now on the path of living well in order that we might receive eternal life. Not that he has not had mercy on us before, but because of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, or because of this epiphany, he has saved those who are perishing. All because of the Incarnate Word.

Irenaeus was the bishop of Lyon. Irenaeus believed that God is one; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He claimed that ‘by the very essence and nature of His being there is but one God, while at the same time, according to the economy of our redemption, they are both Father and Son. The Father is the author of whatever exists. Nevertheless, being altogether Word and mind together, God utters what he thinks and thinks what he utters, his thinking is his Word and his Word is his intelligence and the Father is that intelligence comprising all things’.²⁵ Since God is rational, he creates whatever he wills by his Logos, or by his Word.

The Father and the Word have coexisted from all eternity. As far as the Word and the Son are concerned, it is by the Word and the Word alone that the Father reveals himself; ‘he is ineffable, but the Word declares him to us. The Son reveals the knowledge of the Father through his own manifestation, for the Son’s manifestation is the making known of the Father, so what is invisible in the Father is the Son and what is invisible in the Son is the Father. So, in the Old Testament theophanies, it was really the Word that spoke with the patriarchs. Naturally, the Son is fully divine: the Father is God, and the Son is God, for whatever is begotten of God is God.’²⁶ And the third member of the Godhead is the Holy Spirit, through whom the prophets prophesied, and the fathers learned the things of God, and the righteous were led into the way of righteousness; and who in the end of times was poured out into a new way upon mankind and in all the earth.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁵ Irenaeus, as cited in Kelly’s *Christian Doctrine* (page 105)

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

Heresies:

Though the earliest Biblical and Christian writings after the resurrection and ascension of Christ were the epistles of Paul, which do not appear contrary to the portrayal of Christ and his teachings in the gospels, there were also a number of heresies circulating. Heresies could simply be defined as a false belief or something that stands in contradiction to Biblical teaching and understanding. It is a fact that the early church did face and generate heresies that caused problems for the early Christians as to what was the true, Biblical understanding of God. Some of these heresies were generated in the fourth century whereas some were earlier.

Some of these well-known heresies include Ebionitism, Docetism, Adoptionism, Apollinarianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism and Arianism. Ebionitism taught that Jesus was only human and not divine. Docetism taught that Jesus was divine but not human, and that he only “seemed” human. Adoptionism taught that Jesus was a created human being but was adopted by God to become divine. Apollinarianism taught that Jesus had a human body but a divine mind and soul. Nestorianism taught that Jesus had both divine and human natures, existing side by side in his person. Whereas Monophysitism taught that Jesus only had a divine nature and no human nature and finally, Arianism (started by Arius) taught that Jesus was not the eternal Son of God; he was created by God.²⁷ As his associate, Alexander Presbyter commented that ‘there was when he was not’. Some of these heresies have affected Christian-Muslim debate about the person and work of Jesus Christ and will be discussed later.

Creeds: Nicene Creed:

The Nicene Creed is one of the main Creeds professed by the church worldwide up to the present day. It can be considered the basis of faith of many Christians and even today it is held as a Bible- based faith statement of the church. It was a reply to Arianism, one of the heresies created by Arius, who taught that Jesus was not the eternal Son of God. The Nicene Creed affirms all three members of the Godhead as being equally divine but yet of the same ‘ousia’, or substance. The Arians believed that the Word is God, but not “true” God. If he is called God, he is nonetheless not true God,

²⁷ Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines.

he is God by favour like all the others, and is called so in name only. As a response to this statement, the phrase in Nicene Creed ‘God from God, light from light, true God from true God was formed.’²⁸

The Arians liked to emphasize that the Son’s coming into being was an act of the Father’s will, that is, God had created Jesus, hence he was not eternal. According to them, ‘the Word was a creature, a perfect creature admittedly and in a class altogether apart from other creatures, but he had been brought into existence by the divine decree out of nothing. To suggest that he had in any real sense been begotten or proceeded from the Father, implied subjecting the Godhead to a kind of necessity.’²⁹ ‘In an answer to the objection that then the Father must, since it is natural for Fathers so to be, be prior to the Son, the Nicene Fathers had recourse to Origen’s well-known teaching of the eternal generation of the Son by the Father. The Godhead had never been without his Word or His Wisdom: so, the Father had never been other than the Father, and had never been without his Son. The Son and Father must therefore have existed from all eternity, the Father eternally begetting the Son.’³⁰

The Arian slogan about the Son that “there was when he was not”, once again denying the eternity of the Son and asserting that the Father is superior to the Son because he is the true, eternal God, unlike the Son.³¹ ‘It was in this particular characteristic of the creed the words “one substance with the Father” that the full weight of the orthodox reply to Arianism was concentrated. The Son, it implied shared the very being or essence of the Father. He was therefore fully divine: whatever belonged to or characterized the Godhead belonged to and characterized him.’³² So, the Nicene Creed responded to Arianism in the major ways stated above that Biblically, Jesus was in fact the eternal Son of God and nowhere in the Scriptures does it imply that he was not eternal.

Athanasian Creed:

The ‘Athanasian’ creed is also one of the three ecumenical creeds held by the church today and is also supposed to reflect the teachings of the great Church Father, St

²⁸ Kelly, Early Christian, 237.

²⁹ Ibid., 23.

³⁰ Ibid., 238.

³¹ Ibid., 233

³² Ibid., 238.

Athanasius. St Athanasius speaks of the concept of the divine Sonship; 'God, he holds, can never be without his Word, any more than the light can cease to shine or the river source to flow. Hence, the Son must be eternally alongside the Father. The explanation of this is that his generation is an eternal process; "just as the Father is always good by nature, so he is by nature always generative. It is entirely correct to call him the Father's eternal offspring. The Father's being was never incomplete, needing an essential feature to be added to it; nor is the Son's generation like a man's from his parent, involving his coming into existence after the Father. Since God is eternal, he belongs to God as Son, he exists from all eternity".'³³

The creed claims that the Son's divinity and the Father's divinity are identical to one another and the fullness of the Father's deity lies in the very being of the Son. The Son is of course other than the Father as offspring, but as God he is one and the same. He says, 'he and the Father are one in the intimate union of their nature and the identity of their Godhead, thus, they are one, and their Godhead is one, so too that whatever is predicated of the Son is also predicated of the Father.'³⁴ They are two, the Father is the Father and not the Son, and the Son is the Son and not the Father. Athanasius affirmed in his creed the Nicene position on the Biblical doctrine of the Father and the Son and that Biblically they are of the same substance and essence-wise, one is not inferior or superior to the other. They are both separate persons in the Godhead. They are one in essence but not the same person.

The Apostles Creed:

The Apostles Creed can be described as an earlier creed that gained widespread acceptance. What the early followers of Jesus and the apostles believed can be seen in the epistles of the New Testament. For example, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:6 that 'we, however, have one God the Father, from whom are all things, and we to him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.'

Romans 10:9 states that 'if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved'. Some of these

³³ Athanasius, as cited in Kelly's Early Christian Doctrines (page 244).

³⁴ Ibid., 245.

epistles were written even before the gospels and they would give us an affirmation of what the early Christians believed. 1 Peter 3:18 states that 'for Christ also suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, slain indeed in the flesh but quickened in the Spirit, in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison...through the ris angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to him.' Romans 4:24 claims 'because of us...who believe on him who has raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our transgressions, and was raised for our justification.' And another such example would be 2 Corinthians 13:14 where Paul prays, 'may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forever, Amen.' Lastly, 1 Peter 1:21 states 'you who through him (Jesus) believe on God, who has raised him from the dead and has given him glory.'

These epistles (some of which were written before the gospels) give an affirmation of what the early church were being taught and what they believed about God. Paul, the author of the first epistle of Peter and the letters to Timothy all locate God the Father and Jesus Christ in the same equation and this was the doctrine being held by the early Christians, even before the heresies mentioned above and the credal responses (Nicene and Athanasian creeds) to them were formed.

Though there were false beliefs even at the beginning, St Paul in his letters is concerned to hold together 'God our Father' and 'the Lord Jesus Christ'. 'Theological motives are in part at work, for St Paul is concerned to bring out the cosmic roles of the Father and Son, but polemical ones are for the moment uppermost. St Paul is asserting the unity of the God of the Christians as contrasted with the "many gods and lords" of paganism.'³⁵ Traces of these thoughts can also be seen in 1 Timothy 2:5 which states that 'for there is one God, and likewise, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all'. 'The juxtaposition of the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as parallel realities and the collocation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit had become categories of Christian thinking long before the New Testament documents were written down.'³⁶ 'The impulse towards their information came from within, not from

³⁵ Kelly, *Early Christian*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

without; and at the New Testament stage we can observe the process in full swing with confessions of all three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) coexisting and interacting. The story that the Twelve, meeting in a solemn conclave, composed an “Apostles Creed” is no doubt pious fiction, but the second-century conviction that the “rule of faith” believed and taught in the Catholic Church had been inherited from the Apostles contains more than a germ of truth.³⁷ ‘Not only was the content of that rule, in all essentials, foreshadowed by the “pattern of teaching”, accepted in the apostolic church, but its characteristic lineaments and outline found their prototypes in the confessions and credal summaries contained in the New Testament documents.’³⁸

Muslim objections to Christian beliefs:

Islam and Christianity agree on several things. Islam believes in some of the Biblical prophets but with reference to Christ, the Quran holds Jesus as one of the four major prophets, out of 124000 prophets whom God sent to the world, to whom God gave the “gospel” to deliver to the children of Israel, however the Quran vehemently denies the Sonship of Christ in relation to God, it rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and associates it with polytheism and rejects the divinity and the crucifixion of Jesus. Islamic scholars throughout 1400 years of Islamic history have sought to oppose the Biblical teachings on Christ. Surah 5:75 of the Quran states that ‘the Messiah, Son of Mary was no more than a messenger, others (messengers) have passed on before him. And his mother was a supporter of the truth. They both used to eat food. Look how We make clear to them the signs; and look how they delude from the truth!’

Surah 9:30 states ‘the Jews say “Ezra is the son of Allah” and the Christians state “the Messiah is the Son of Allah”. That is the statement coming from their mouths. They imitate the statement of those who disbelieved (before them) May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded!’ Also, ‘it is not befitting for Allah to take a son; exalted is he; when he decrees an affair, he only says to it “Be”, and it is!’ (Surah 19:35).

The Quran, however, indicates the virginial conception and birth, about which most Islamic scholars agree, but as we shall see, a few differ. The account can be found in

³⁷ Ibid., 28.

³⁸ Ibid., 29.

Surah Al Maryam (chapter 19), which states ‘then We sent to her Our Angel and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man. She said “indeed I seek refuge in the Most Merciful One from you (so leave me), if you should be fearing of Allah. He said “I am only the Messenger from your Lord, to give you news of a pure boy”. She said “how can I have a boy when no man has ever touched me and I have not been unchaste”? He said, “thus (it will be)”; your Lord says, “It is easy for me, We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from us. And it is a matter (already) decreed”. So, she conceived him and withdrew with him to a remote place’ (Surah 9:17-22).

When questioned concerning the chastity of Mary and the logical implication that Jesus had a virginal conception and birth, Islamic academia has often responded by claiming that even if Mary was a virgin and Jesus wasn’t born as a result of sexual union (without a biological father), that does not bestow a special status upon him because Adam, too, was created without a father and that does not make Adam divine!

Al Jalalayn in one of the major schools of Tafsirs, One of the most major Tafsirs regarded within Islamic thought is the ‘Tafsir Al-Jalalayn’ which is a compilation of Tafsirs formed by two commentators, the Egyptian scholar Jalal al-din Muhammad (d. 864 AH/1459 CE), and his student Abd al-Rahman al-Suyuti (911AH/ 1505CE). They belong to the Sunni school of Tafsirs. In its formal structure, this Sunni commentary is of the type known as musalsal (‘chained’) commentary, a step-by-step explanation of key aspects of the Qur’ānic narrative, allowing for quicker reference and digestion of the text. The method of exegesis used is known as tafsīr bi’l-ma’t’hūr (‘exegesis according to reports’), which means that it draws principally upon the ḥadīth narrations that go back to the Prophet, the Companions (ṣaḥāba) and prominent figures from among the Successor (tābi’ūn) generation’ (sic).³⁹

Jalalayn’s interpretation of Surah 5:75 is that his (Jesus’) mother was an extremely truthful woman and they both ate food like all other human beings and one who is such cannot be a god because of his compound being and fallible nature and because of the impurities such as urine and excrement that he produces. Behold, in amazement, how We make the signs clear of Our Oneness to them but behold how they turn away! How

³⁹ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 1.

they turn away from the truth despite the proof being established.⁴⁰ Jalalayn makes it clear that in Islamic thought, because Christ contained human attributes, for example, eating food and then answering the call of nature, he cannot be divine, as the deluded Christians believe. And if he was God he would not have passed away. It is his humanness that should make it clear that he is not God.

In the same way, concerning Surah 19:21, the account of the Angel, the virgin conception and birth, Jalalayn explains that ‘It the matter in question of creating a boy from you (Mary) without a father It shall be so! Your Lord has said “It is easy for Me, in other words, by Gabriel’s breathing into you by My command so that you become pregnant with him — since what has been mentioned is meant as a reason, the following statement is added as a supplement thereto and so that We may make him a sign for mankind of Our power and a mercy from Us to whoever believes in him. And the creation of him is a thing already decreed” according to my knowledge, Gabriel breathed into the opening of her shirt whereupon she sensed the formed foetus in her womb (**sic**).’⁴¹

The Arabic word used for the Angel in verse 17 actually means ‘spirit’, some translations translate it ‘angel’ and some translate it spirit. Nowhere in the actual verse does it mention that the spirit is Gabriel, some commentaries mention it being Gabriel whereas others don’t. The major tafsirs, like Jalalayn comment that the spirit God sent that appeared to Mary as a man, was Gabriel. Again, no uniqueness of this account is highlighted, but it is merely an act of the will of Allah. Jesus is just an ordinary human being, a servant of Allah and if he is born in this way, it does not make him unique.

As far as Surah 9:30 is concerned, it pronounces Allah’s curse upon those Jews of Medina who are alleged to have claimed that Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians of Najran who said that the Messiah is the son of Allah. The verse claims that in this they are imitating the pagans. As Jalalayn say, ‘they imitate the saying of those who

⁴⁰ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 125.

⁴¹ Ibid., 329.

disbelieved of old) before them, i.e. the disbelievers of Mecca who said that al-Lat, al-'Uzza and Manat were His daughters, just as the Jews claimed that Ezra was the son of Allah and some of the Christians claimed that Jesus was the son of Allah, others that he was Allah's partner while there were others who said that he was Allah Himself or one god among three. Allah Himself fights against them, Allah curses them. How perverse are they! And from where do they get their lies.'⁴²

Muslims point out that this Surah is teaching about God's eternity, whereas the Christians themselves believe that Jesus died. As Ibn Ishaq, the earliest biographer of the prophet of Islam says: 'Allah is the Living, the Ever-existing one who remains unceasingly in the place of his sovereignty in his creation whereas Jesus, according to their own doctrine, was removed from the place where he was and sent somewhere else. Hence, the surah begins with the statement that He transcends what they say, and His oneness in creation and authority, without associate therein, in refutation of the infidelity they have invented, and their making rivals to Him; and using their own arguments against them in reference to their master to show them their error thereby.'⁴³

The Christians of Najran tried to challenge Muhammad but Muhammad, according to Islamic thought, refuted their claims through Surah Al Imran, again implying that God is eternal but that it is impossible for eternity to be limited and confined to mankind. That is why he is the ever Living and the ever existing, where human beings are not, instead they are frail and mortal creatures whose times are in Allah's hands and they cannot do anything apart from the will of Allah. He is the Lord of all worlds.

Surah 3:59 states that 'the similitude of Jesus before Allah is that of Adam; he created him from dust, then said to him, "Be", and he was. This Surah is believed to be revealed during the encounter Muhammad had with the Christians of Najran when they asked Muhammad who the father of Jesus was. From the Sufi school of Tafsirs, Al Qushairi's tafsir comments that:-

⁴² Ibid., 197.

⁴³ Ibn Ishaq, Life of Muhammad, 272.

'Truly the likeness of Jesus in God's sight is as Adam's likeness. He chose to purify the spirit rūḥ in them from the act of passing from one body to another tanāsukh in the loins but He singled out Adam as the first of men while He singled out Jesus for the special distinction of breathing the spirit into him in the most exalted way. But even though these two were weighty beings the imperfection of being in time and being mortal was nonetheless unavoidable for them: He created him of dust then He said to him "Be" and he was(sic)⁴⁴. Another Tafsir from the Sunni school, Tanwir Ibn Ibbas in Tanwir Al-Miqbas interprets this verse in the following manner:-

'Allah then explained the creation of Jesus without a father because the delegation of Najran asked the Prophet to provide proof from the Qur'an for his saying that Jesus was not the son of Allah, so Allah said: (Lo! the likeness of Jesus) the likeness of the creation of Jesus (with Allah) without a father (is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust) without a father or mother, (then He said unto him) to Jesus: (Be! and he is) a son without a father(sic)⁴⁵. This is the most common Islamic response when questioned about the virginal conception and birth. Christ is often likened to Adam, stating that they both did not have human fathers, but it was merely an act of Allah's will that that is the case and who is a mere human being to question what Allah wills. He is the Almighty and can do whatever he pleases.

Al Jalalayn put it this way: 'Truly the likeness of Jesus his remarkable case in God's sight is as Adam's likeness as the case of Adam whom God created without father or mother this is a comparison of one remarkable thing with another more remarkable so that it convinces the disputer and establishes itself in one's mind more effectively. He created him Adam that is his form of dust then said He to him 'Be' a human being and he was; similarly, He said to Jesus 'Be' — without a father — and he was(sic).⁴⁶

Jalalayn addresses this issue as a 'remarkable' act of God. In some ways, Jalalayn may be suggesting that this act of God's will may be miraculous, both the creation of Adam and of Jesus, but still, divinity should not be assumed as his miraculous origin does not mean Jesus was divine, just as Adam who was created without a human father was not

⁴⁴ Qushairi, Lataif, 289.

⁴⁵ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 61.

⁴⁶ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 62.

divine.

Moreover, Surah Al Ikhlas (chapter 112), meaning the chapter of the sincerity, states ‘Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah the Eternal, the Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten’ (verses 1-3). Ibn Abbas comments on verse 3 that, ‘And it is also said that al-Samad means: He begets not nor was begotten. He says: He did not succeed and cannot be succeeded; and it is also said this means: He does not have a son who will inherit His dominion and He was not begotten, which means that He did not inherit His dominion(sic)⁴⁷

Also, Al Wahidi gives a brief background of this verse and interprets it thus: ‘Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all... [112:1-4]. Qatadah, al-Dahhak and Muqatil said: “A group of Jewish people went to the Prophet, Allah bless him and give him peace, and said to him: ‘Describe to us your Lord, for He has revealed His description in the Torah. Tell us: what is He made of? And to which species does He belong? Is He made of gold, copper or silver? Does He eat and drink? Who did he inherit the world from? And to whom will He bequeath it?’ And so, Allah, gloried and exalted is He, revealed this Surah. It is Allah's specific lineage. Abu Nasr Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al- Mihrajani related a Hadith that the idolaters said to the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and give him peace: “What is the lineage of your Lord?” and so Allah, exalted is He, revealed, Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally Besought of all(sic)⁴⁸.

Al-Wahidi (d. 468/1076) was a poet, philologist, grammarian and Qur’anic commentator. He was, in fact, hailed as the greatest commentator of the Qur’an of his time. ‘He studied the different sciences of the Qur’an and Qur’anic exegesis with Abu’l-Qasim ‘Ali ibn Ahmad al-Busti, Abu ‘Uthman Sa‘id ibn Muhammad al- Hiri (d. 427/1036) and Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Farisi (d. 431/1040). But his main teacher in this field was the famous scholar Abu Ishaq Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tha‘labi (d. 427/1036) the author of al- Kashf wa’l-Bayan ‘an Tafsir al-Qur’an, among others. He studied lexicography and philology with Abu’l-Fadl Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-‘Arudi (d. 416/1025), and grammar with Abu’l-Hasan ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Darir and Abu ‘Imran al-Maghribi al-Maliki (d.

⁴⁷ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 776.

⁴⁸ Al Wahidi, Asbab, 168.

430/1039).23.

According to these scholars, Allah is the eternally Besought of all, for anyone who is said to be begotten is mortal and will face death and whoever dies will have someone else to replace them. Allah is immortal and does not face death, he is the author of all eternity and it is impossible for eternity to die. No one can take Allah's place and there is no one who can challenge him or be compared with him. He is incomparable. Nor does he have anyone who even remotely resembles him and whoever tries to challenge his authority will surely fail. The doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus has always been a topic that has received criticism from within Islamic thought, since Islam obviously denies that God can become human. The Johannine idea of the 'Logos' or the Word becoming flesh (John 1:14), too is criticized. Islamic scholars have often criticized the idea of the 'Word' being called God and that this is not even biblical, but rather Christians themselves over time have turned Jesus into a divine being.

Professor Yousaf Saleem Chishti, a scholar from the south-Asian subcontinent who was widely known for being a critic of Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, Trinity and Atonement, writes 'Christians believe that Jesus was God incarnate. But the fact remains that the dogma of his divinity was not accepted by the early Christians; for had it been an established fact from the very beginning there would have certainly been no controversy on this topic, amongst his followers. And it was only through the pressure of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 350 AD that the church silenced, not by any logical argument, but by sheer imperial scepter.'⁴⁹

Chishti's view implies that the early church did not originally believe Jesus was divine, in fact there was a lot of dispute he says in the early church over his divinity, but the church forced this doctrine upon its followers. Had Jesus said he was divine plainly, as the Muslim usually asks, 'where in the Bible does Jesus say "I am God, worship me"', then there would never have been any disputes or any controversy or questions about his divinity. This doctrine, according to Chishti, was created by the Church and imposed upon its followers. 'The Nazarene, the Ebionites, the Alogians, and the Arians, denied the

⁴⁹ Chishti, What is Christianity, 46.

divinity of Jesus; but all these dissenting sects were compelled to surrender at the point of anathema- a weapon forged by the church to coerce the unwilling souls into silence or acquiescence against their will.⁵⁰

Chishti criticizes the idea of the Logos, in John's gospel, being God. Why do the Christians call the Word God? How can the Word be God and with God at the same time from the beginning? He argues that the Logos, in its original sense meant something completely different before it appeared in the Johannine prologue. He believes that the author of the fourth gospel (John) borrowed this word 'Logos' from Philo. He says 'in short, philosophical writers and religious thinkers, before the compilation of John's Gospel, invariably used this term Logos to designate a being inferior to God and superior to mankind, by whom this world of matter was brought into being. He was distinct and separate from God and to use Philo's own language, he was "second god" and "manifestation of the Divine Mind".⁵¹ He also states that the literal translation of the Greek text for the word "God" is "Ho Theos" (for God the Father) and simply Theos for the Logos. And in accordance with the real usage of the Greek word for the Real God, he is always referred to as "Ho Theos" (the God), "Ho" in Greek being the definitive article (singular number, third person, masculine gender).⁵²

So, if the Logos is not being called Ho Theos, then that would mean he is not the real God. Theos, without the definitive article can be used to describe other gods or inferior gods. Professor Chishti thinks that this statement alone is enough to disprove the whole idea that the Logos is equal to the Father or shares the same substance as the Father. He states in the very next sentence that 'I have hereby conclusively proved by St John's own writing that he regarded the Logos not as God or equal to God but as god only- inferior and subordinate to the real God or the Father.'⁵³ He claims that the true meaning of the word, Logos does not mean the same as the real God or the Father. This refutes the idea that Jesus Christ is God, as Christians claim and if that is true, then the doctrine of the Incarnation, the Trinity and Atonement are null and void! If Jesus is not God, according to their own Scriptures, then what Christians have been believing for

⁵⁰ Ibid., 46

⁵¹ Ibid., 51.

⁵² Ibid., 52.

⁵³ Ibid., 54.

centuries is false. In addition, Chishti also claims that since Matthew, Mark and Luke, the other three gospels, never use this word 'Logos' that John must have borrowed this word 'Logos' from Philo, as this word, in its original meaning doesn't not imply that Jesus is equal to the Father at all.

Syed Ahmed Khan was a modernist from the Indo-Pak subcontinent who held the view that just Mary's chastity does not mean Jesus had a virgin birth. That is of course not the orthodox view, and even though the Quran does not explicitly use the phrase that 'Jesus was born of the virgin Mary', the implications within Surah Al Imran suggest that due to Mary's chastity one may logically conclude from the passage that it must have been a virgin birth. Ahmed Khan comments that 'nowhere in the Quran does it state clearly that the birth of Christ happened without the intermediary of a father, nor that he was a son of Joseph. Still, in the case of other Quranic prophets no mention of their fathers is made. For example, the mother of Moses is mentioned but his father isn't! When Mary received the news of a son she was leading the life of a nun in the temple.'⁵⁴

And then Mary questions the angel in Surah 3:42-47 about having a child when she's chaste not because it was a virgin birth, but because of her nunnery (assumed by the commentator) and life of purity, so 'therefore, the answer comes that even so God creates what he wills. Observe! The very same answer was also given in connection with the birth of St John (Surah 3:35-40) and it simply means to say: like all that is created under God's will. And in due course, Mary shall become pregnant.'⁵⁵ So Ahmed Khan's view is that the Quran does not seemingly find it necessary to give a detailed description of the event. It is an act of God's will, so it wouldn't be right to assume that Mary had a virginal conception because there are others in the Quran, too whose fathers are not mentioned, for example Moses! And the father of Jesus not being mentioned in Surah 3 and Surah 19 should not mean anything since Moses' father was not mentioned either.

Lastly, as a conclusion to the Muslim view on this particular subject in this section, Al-Baji writes in his letter that: 'God, who is Exalted, created Jesus, on whom be peace,

⁵⁴ Khan, Reforms, 82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 82.

without a father, as he created Adam- may God bless him and give him peace- from the dust and a mother bore Jesus. Adam had neither father nor mother. Since Adam is not a God, though he is (our) first father, but was created, much less is Jesus a God, being of the posterity and children of Adam, but is a servant under his authority(sic)⁵⁶. For Al Baji, this is plain ignorance on the part of him who knows not the meaning of 'created-ness' and doesn't understand the difference between the Creator and the created. As far as the virgin birth is concerned, this has appeared to be the view of most orthodox Islamic scholars.

Christian responses to the Muslim objections:

The person and work of Christ has been a subject of debate between Christians and Muslims over the last 1400 years of Islamic and Christian history. Scholarly discussions have taken place, especially concerning the divinity of Christ. Muslims have held him as one of God's greatest prophets to whom God gave the gospel to preach to the children of Israel, whereas Christians hold him as the Messiah, the Incarnate Word of God, who is God in the flesh himself. But how does the Christian respond to the objections Muslims raise in terms of the divinity of Christ. The first objection, as discussed earlier is the virgin birth. One thing to be careful about would be acknowledging the fact that the Quran does not explicitly state that Jesus was born of a virgin, but only implies the idea by making references to Mary's chastity (Surah 19:18). Muslims only believe that it was a mere act of God's will and nothing special whereas some modernist Islamic scholars do not even believe it was a virgin birth because the Quran does not mention it. However, is that really the case? Is there really nothing special or unique about Jesus' birth?

Firstly, according to the Quranic account of the annunciation, a spirit from God, appearing as a man bring greetings to Mary of a 'holy' son (Surah 19:19). This word in Arabic, 'Zaki' can literally be translated as 'pure, 'holy', 'spotless' or 'blameless'. It can simply mean something or someone that is free of error or fault. According to both Islam and Christianity, no human being is capable of possessing such an attribute, as the only

⁵⁶ Al Baji's letter (Ca 1078), as cited in Gaudeul's Encounters and Clashes (page 180).

one who is perceived to be perfect is God himself, whereas man is sinful and has a fallen nature. Ibn Abbas comments on this verse in this way: ‘He (Gabriel) said to her: “I am only a messenger of thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee that Allah may bestow on you (a faultless son) a righteous son”**(sic)**’.⁵⁷ Ibn Abbas agrees with the text and puts it straightforwardly that according to the Quran, Jesus is faultless. Al Jalalayn interpret it thus: ‘he said that I am only a messenger of your Lord that I may give you a boy who shall be pure in his prophethood’.⁵⁸ It is to be noted here that Jalalayn is very careful how they interpret this verse, in making sure that they clarify that Jesus is only faultless in his prophethood and not in his complete humanity, even though that is not what the text states.

The general Islamic view is that all prophets are sinless, all the 124000 that Allah sent into the world were righteous and without sin. The Muslim may say here that just because Jesus is called ‘zaki’ in Surah 19:19 does not makes him special because all prophets were sinless. Contrary to popular Islamic thought, the Quran does not appear to agree with this particular view. The Quran talks about the sins of prophets Abraham (Surah 26:82), Moses (28:15-16), Jonah (37:142) and even Muhammad (47:19 and 48:1-2). In Muhammad’s case, even his future sins are forgiven. They are all either seeking for forgiveness or Allah is demanding they seek repentance for the sins they committed. Although all believers are called to purity and the term purity is also used of John the Baptist, but only Jesus the son of Mary is called ‘zaki’. In fact, the word ‘zaki’ is used only of him in the entire Quran. Not even Muhammad is called ‘zaki’, it has been exclusively used of Isa Al-Masih (Jesus).

The Muslim may again say that it is only because of his mighty prophethood and doesn’t mean anything unique, however, according to Sahih Al Bukhari (which is believed to be one of the most trusted, authentic collections of the sayings and doings of the prophet within the Sunni sect of Islam) book 55, Hadith 641: Narrated Sayid bin Musaiyab: Abu Huraira said, ‘I heard Allah’s apostle saying that “there is none born among the off-spring of Adam, but Satan touches it. A child therefore, cries loudly at the time of birth because of the touch of Satan, except Mary and her child”. Then Abu Huraira recited: “I seek refuge with you for her and for her offspring from the outcast Satan” (3:36). Another

⁵⁷ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 329.

⁵⁸ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 328.

Hadith, in the same collection of Bukhari, book 5, Hadith 506 states: Narrated Abu Huraira: 'The prophet said, "when a human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch, but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead".' So, there are two Hadiths about a sermon by the prophet of Islam which confirm the term 'zaki' in Surah 19:19 refers to Jesus' sinlessness in a unique way.

According to Islamic sources, if Jesus has not been touched by Satan at the time of his birth, then how is the virgin birth not unique? How is it that even Muhammad, the last prophet in Islam, is not being put in such an exclusive position? If Jesus was pure, or faultless or sinless, then how is the virginal conception and birth not unique? It would surely elevate him to a special position and make more sense as to why he did not have an ordinary birth that was not the result of a sexual union. Also, as a response to the Muslim argument that Adam was also created without a father (Surah 3:59), Adam's case was different because he was the first man to be created by God and it would only be rational or logical to assume that in order for him to have been the first man, he did not have parents and God did create him out of dust. According to Islamic doctrine, Jesus was not the first man created by God. There was a long line of prophets that came before that were born in an ordinary way but he is not. The fact that Jesus, despite not being the first man like Adam has an extraordinary birth is the main factor here.

In 3:47, Mary claims in amazement that no man has ever touched her and the question then arises as to why this extraordinary and unique situation is created specifically for Jesus only and why not for any other prophet or prophets that arrived before Jesus. In the famous historic debate between Timothy of Baghdad and the Caliph Mahdi, Timothy states: 'You admit that Christ was sinless. If he who is Lord of everything and a Creator is not in need, and He who is not a sinner is pure, it follows that Jesus Christ worshipped and prayed to God neither as one in need nor as a sinner, but...to teach worship and prayer to His disciples, and through them to every human being.'⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Timothy I's apologetics, as cited in Young's Patriarch and Shah (page 199).

In this particular section, the first part of the statement concerning the sinlessness of Christ applies but Mahdi, however, did not respond to this question addressing the sinlessness, but instead responds with a question that is not relevant to what Timothy says about sinlessness. Mahdi's response is: 'How is it that you accept Christ from the testimony of Law and Prophets, and not Muhammad?'⁶⁰ Mahdi here appears to avoid the argument presented by Timothy and does not give an answer to the question about the sinlessness of Christ. The Quran clearly claims that Christ is sinless, whereas it does not speak of any other human being in this particular way, as such Muslims may respond by stating that angels are also sinless but they are not equal to God, why can Christians claim that Jesus is equal to God because he is without sin? The response can be that humanity has been corrupted by the sin of Adam, not the angels of God.

Angels are not human but are agents of God in Islam and in Christianity (even though Lucifer and the fallen angels are mentioned) but the whole miracle of the virgin birth was that it was an extraordinary birth involving someone who is fully human and fully divine (Jesus in Christian doctrine), who entered humanity which was tainted with sin but yet he was the only human being in both Islamic and Christian thought that was born as a man but yet without sin. He even thus challenges the Pharisees in John 8:46 stating 'which one of you could prove me guilty of sin'. Mark Beaumont presses an important exegetical point when he states that 'now Christ could be rescued from an inferior status to Muhammad by reference to the sayings of the Prophet. If Muhammad himself claimed to have needed forgiveness and yet taught Jesus was without fault then the Christian case is made by the Prophet of Islam.'⁶¹

Chapter 2: Christians beliefs and Muslim objections to Jesus as The Word and the Spirit:

As we have seen in the first chapter, Jesus is uniquely called 'sinless or 'pure' (zaki), but 'Zaki' is not the only title used for Jesus in the Quran, he is also called the 'Word of God' (Surah 4:171) and the Word of truth (Surah 19:34), again two titles used exclusively of him. Surah 4:171 states: 'O people of the Book, do not commit excess in your religion; Jesus, Son of Mary was the Messenger of God, and his Word that he cast into Mary and

⁶⁰ Ibid., 199.

⁶¹ Beaumont, Christology, 118.

a spirit from Him'... Ibn Abbas comments on this verse: 'The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary) and through His word he became a created being, (and a spirit from Him) and through His command, Jesus became a son without a father.'⁶² Also, Kashani comments that '[Jesus is] His Word, a disengaged soul, a word from among the words of God, that is, one of His spiritual realities, a spirit from among [many] spirits.'⁶³ Kashani attempts to dismiss any idea that the Word of God may mean that Jesus is divine by stating that he is 'one of many words' of God and Ibn Abbas claims that Jesus was created by God 'through his Word' but that is not what the text says. Since the text says that Jesus is his (God) Word. The question is then raised, how can Ibn Abbas come to this conclusion when Jesus himself is called Allah's word?

On the one hand, Islamic scholar Badawi comments that 'Jesus is called the word because he came into existence without a human father, so that he resembled the new creations, who are the world of command.'⁶⁴

On the other hand, the former Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, states that 'he (Jesus) is called the Word of God (4:171) and (possibly) the Word of Truth (19:34), i.e. the Word which proceeds from God. It is around this phrase that controversy is centred. In 4:171 Jesus is called the Kalima of God. The ancient Christian apologists such as John of Damascus and Timothy of Baghdad understood this to mean that Jesus was being identified with the eternal Word of God in the Quran.'⁶⁵ This argument was used by Timothy of Baghdad and John of Damascus in order to prove the divinity of Christ from within the Quran. If the Word of God is eternal and Jesus is called the Word of God then the Word of God is equal to God, which would mean that Jesus is also God. In the that the Word and the Spirit of God are God, because they are aspects of God just as there is one sun which releases heat and light. Mahdi does not agree with this and claims that his (Mahdi's) word can disappear and vanish but Timothy replies that because God is God, His Word and Spirit are eternal, nor can the Word and Spirit be separable from God, or exist without Him, or He without them (he also quotes John 17:5, the Psalms

⁶² Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 110.

⁶³ Kashani, Tafsir, 186.

⁶⁴ Badawi, Names of God, 79.

⁶⁵ Nazir-Ali, Frontiers, 32.

and Matthew 28:19). Mahdi responds by asking how the can Son **be** distinguished from the Spirit? To which Timothy replies just as you would distinguish the reason of man from his mind, the light of the sun from its heat, the scent of an apple from its taste. One is begotten, the other proceeds.⁶⁶ Timothy presents the case that God cannot be separated from his Word and Spirit because they are of his essence so how can one not take seriously the titles that Jesus is given in the Quran?

The eternity of the Word and Spirit of God can be shown in biblical passages such as Psalm 33:6 which states that 'by the Word of the Lord the heavens were made and by the breath of his mouth all their host'. In John 17:5, Jesus says 'now, Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory that I had with you before the world was'. Whilst commenting on Psalm 33:6, commentator A.A Anderson states that 'creation by the divine Word, was not strictly speaking unique to Israel. It may well be the result of the emphasis upon the divine in the prophetic preaching. The distant stars are beyond a man's reach and Yahweh is their creator, and this is a display of his creative power. The "breath of his mouth" should not be understood as the Holy Spirit (ruah) of his mouth.'⁶⁷

On John 17:5, Barrett comments that 'in his obedient ministry, Jesus has glorified the Father; now with response to the death which sets the seal upon his obedience and ministry, let the Father glorify him. Jesus also refers to the divine position he enjoyed before the Incarnation. The glory he speaks of is the heavenly glory of Christ; the prayer is one of exultation and ascension.'⁶⁸ Barrett explains how Jesus has always been with the Father from before the creation of the world and has always shared in the Father's glory.

Similarly, the Word can be seen active in creation. According to Genesis 1:3, 'God said "let there be light", and there was light.' Christians perceive this Word to be the divine, eternal Word of God who has been with God from the very beginning (John 1:1). Gerhard von Rad in his commentary of Genesis, comments that 'the idea of creation by the word preserves first of all the most radical essential distinction between Creator and creature. Creation cannot be even remotely considered an emanation from God; it is not

⁶⁶ Timothy, as cited in Young's Patriarch and Shah (page 200).

⁶⁷ Anderson, Psalms, 262-263.

⁶⁸ Barrett, St John, 421.

somehow an overflow or reflection of his divine nature but is rather a product of his personal will. The only being between God and his work is the Word (Bonhoeffer).⁶⁹ 'The creative word is different from any human word; it is not "empty" (Deuteronomy 32:47; Isaiah 55:11), but powerful and of the highest creative potency. In the second place, therefore, this conception contains the knowledge that the world wholly belongs to God; it is the creation of his will and he is the Lord.'

We have seen that God's creative command or 'Amr' (kun fayakunu), is used of both the creation of Adam and of Jesus' conception in 3:59. It is not surprising why Islamic scholars compare the account of Jesus and Adam since the verse states that God's 'Amr' was involved both in the creation of Adam and the conception of Jesus so Jesus is not the divine word of God. The issue here for the Muslim apologist is that Adam is not called the Word of God whereas Jesus is! Nazir-Ali comments that 'the significant difference for the Christian apologist is that Adam is never identified with the creative Kalima of God, whereas Jesus is. In other words, we may say that whereas the divine Word brings both the human Jesus and the human Adam into being, it is only with the former that he comes to be "associated".'⁷⁰

In earlier discussions, John of Damascus (657-753) was one of the foremost Christian theologians who described a dialogue involving a Muslim and a Christian where the topic of debate is concerning the Word and the Spirit. 'The Saracen says (as he puts it in his writings), that "Christ is called Spirit and Word, which God created." John says the response should be, "but before God created the Word and the Spirit did he have neither Spirit nor Word? And he will flee from you not having anything to answer, because those who hold that opinion, are considered heretics by the Saracens, and are held as repulsive and abominable among them: thus, if you wanted to denounce him to the other Saracens he would be in great fear of you".'⁷¹

Here, the Damascene John is seeking to convince the Muslim that one cannot say that God's Word and Spirit are created because that would mean they are not Eternal. If the Word and Spirit are Eternal, that would mean Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is indeed

⁶⁹ Von rad, Genesis, 51-52.

⁷⁰ Nazir-Ali, Frontiers, 33.

⁷¹ John of Damascus, as cited in Gaudeul's Encounters and Clashes (page 13).

Eternal, something the Muslim does not believe and would not admit.

Thus, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Quran translator and commentator comments on Surah 4:171 concerning Jesus the Word: 'Jesus was the Son of a woman, Mary, and therefore, a man; but an apostle, a man with a mission from God, and therefore entitled to honour; a Word bestowed on Mary, for he was created by God's word, 'Be' (kun) and he was.'⁷² Yusuf Ali tries to make sure the reader is clear that Jesus is a created word and the reason he is called the word is because he is created by God's Word "Be" (kun). It is true that Jesus is conceived in Mary's womb by the creative command or Word of God. But why is he then called the Word of God whereas no one else is? As we have seen although Adam is also created by God's creative word 'kun', he is never called the Word of God.

The Spirit:

The concept of the Spirit is well known in both Islam and Christianity. In Christianity, the Spirit can be seen active at the very beginning of creation, in the opening verses of the Bible. Genesis 1:1-2 states that 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and deep; darkness was over the surface of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.' In the creation of the first man (Adam), 'then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being' (Genesis 2:7).

Psalms 33:6(AA Anderson notwithstanding) says 'by the word of the Lord the heavens were made, by the breath (ruach) of his mouth all their host.' Job says, 'the Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.' So, the Spirit is seen active in the creation process, even the creation of man. The prophets throughout the Old Testament claim to have spoken by the Spirit of the Lord, for example, the prophet Joel claims 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me' (Joel 2), In 1 Samuel 16:13, 'the Spirit of the

⁷² Yusuf Ali, Quran, 234.

Lord came mightily upon David', the prophet in Isaiah 61, Ezekiel and others.

In the New Testament, there is a much clearer picture of the Holy Spirit because according to the Christian understanding, he is perceived as both God and as person. In the Gospels, the Holy Spirit is the promised Helper or Advocate that reminds the believer of all the teachings of Jesus. Jesus says this Helper will abide with the disciples forever (John 14:16, Matthew 10:16-23). He is also believed to have overshadowed Mary and is involved in the virginal conception of Jesus (Luke 1).

In Mark 3:29, Jesus states that 'every sin will be forgiven every man, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven but is guilty of an eternal sin.' Jesus claims to 'drive out demons by the Spirit of God' (Matthew 12:28). The Spirit gives life (John 6:63, 2 Corinthians 3:6). The Spirit helps the believer with prayer, praying perfectly in accordance with the will of God with groaning that cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26). He is also called 'Spirit of Christ' (Romans 8:9) and the 'Spirit of the Father' (Matthew 10:20). As we shall see, throughout the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the references about the Spirit indicate that he is divine, and that is where the Christian gets the understanding that the Holy Spirit is God, equal in essence with the Father and the Son.

Cranfield thus explains Mark 3:29: 'The scribes are blaspheming against the Holy Spirit here in that they are attributing to the agency of Satan, exorcisms wrought by Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.'⁷³ While commenting on Romans 8:9, F.F Bruce comments that 'if a man does not possess the Spirit of Christ, he cannot call himself a Christian, since it is the Spirit alone who brings men into living relation with Christ, there can be no such relation with Christ apart from the Spirit.'⁷⁴ According to Bruce, it is the Spirit of God that enables us to follow Christ. Bruce also comments on 2 Corinthians 3:6 that 'the Spirit of God is the very principle of life in the old creation

⁷³ Cranfield, St Mark, 141.

⁷⁴ Bruce, Romans, 163-164.

(Psalm 104:30) and in the new (Ezekiel 37:5, 14), and those who serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit (Romans 7:6) are set free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2, 8:10, 1 Corinthians 15:45). It is by the Spirit the new covenant becomes effective.⁷⁵

In the context of Matthew 12:24, Jesus is accused by the Pharisees of driving out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons because he is possessed by Beelzebub himself. Floyd Filson comments that 'if he does it by the power of Beelzebub, then the Pharisees must say that their own disciples do so by the same Satanic power. This they dare not admit. So, he suggests the logical and true explanation. He does these beneficent acts by the power of the Spirit of God.'⁷⁶ In addition to F.F Bruce's comments about blasphemy against the Spirit, Filson also states that 'these are among the sternest words Jesus ever spoke. By the power of the Spirit he has given health to needy people. Yet the Pharisees call these healing acts the works of Beelzebub (devil). He knows the Spirit directs his life; to call these Spirit-effected healings the work of Satan reveals the speaker's hopeless bankruptcy.'⁷⁷

Concerning the sending of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, Francis Maloney explains that 'the Holy Spirit or the "paraclete" (Greek) is described as the "Spirit of truth", "the Spirit who communicates truth", the ongoing presence of the revelation of God in the world. The Paraclete belongs to the realm of Jesus but there is a world that does not recognize him as a result of the request of Jesus because that world has rejected the revelation of the Father in Jesus, along with Jesus' origins with the Father.'⁷⁸ In other words, the Paraclete comes to those whom Jesus calls 'his own', because they have accepted his teaching and have chosen to follow him, that is why the Spirit of truth will abide with the disciples forever. He cannot be perceived by those who reject Christ, but only those who accept him.

⁷⁵ Bruce, 1&2 Corinthians, 190-191.

⁷⁶ Filson, Gospel, 150.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 150.

⁷⁸ Maloney, Gospel, 401.

In Islam, the Holy Spirit (Ruh Al Quds) has various interpretations. In Islamic thought where the Spirit is mentioned alongside God, it is sometimes not made clear whether he is the Spirit of God in the Christian sense. Surah 19:17 states that 'then We sent to her (Mary) Our Spirit, and he appeared before her in the likeness of a man'. Yusuf Ali comments thus: 'It was in the state of purity the angel appeared to her in the shape of a man. She thought it was a man. She was frightened, and she adjured him not to invade her privacy.'⁷⁹ Yusuf Ali claims that God's Spirit manifested in the form of a man and appeared to Mary. Various other commentators believe this 'Spirit' to be the archangel Gabriel. Al Jalalayn comment:

'Thus she veiled herself from them she draped herself in a veil to conceal herself while she washed her hair from lice or washed her clothes or cleansed herself from her menses; whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit Gabriel and he assumed before her after she donned her clothes the likeness of a well-proportioned human perfect in physical form.'⁸⁰ According to Ibn Abbas's interpretation: 'And when (Mary) had chosen seclusion from them so that she purifies herself after the end of her menses. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit) Our Messenger Gabriel when she had finished purifying herself and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man(**sic**)'⁸¹. Imam Al Qurtabi states that "'we breathed into her of Our Spirit" means that we sent Gabriel who breathed into her bosom of our spirit, that is one of our spirits, which is the spirit of Jesus.'

The link between Gabriel and the Spirit indicates the Quranic confusion with reference to the Lukan account. It is not clear here what the commentators mean because the verse does not mention Gabriel's name, he is only assumed to be 'the spirit'. Qurtabi appears to be one Islamic commentator who believes that the spirit here also means the spirit of Jesus distinct from Gabriel. How can Gabriel be thought to have breathed the Spirit of God into Mary? Surely, it should be God breathing his Spirit into Mary as the Quran says (21:91 and 66:12)?

⁷⁹ Yusuf Ali, Quran, 771.

⁸⁰ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 328.

⁸¹ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 329.

Even though these commentators are claiming that it was Gabriel that came down to Mary, the text does not mention Gabriel. It is only assumed that the spirit who appeared to Mary in the form of a man is the angel. The Spirit is also mentioned with reference to Jesus in Surah 2:87 saying that God gave him clear signs as proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit (also mentioned in Surah 2:253). Yusuf Ali comments that 'it is against reason to call Jesus God or the son of God, as he is only a man. He is called the son of Mary to emphasize this. It is praise to God, who, by his word, gave him spiritual strength- "strengthened him with the Holy Spirit".⁸² Here, Yusuf Ali does not mention the angel Gabriel, even though he does mention the angel in 19:17, possibly because Surah 3 says 'angels' came to Mary. Ibn Abbas thus comments on 2:87: 'We gave unto Jesus son of Mary clear proofs commands, prohibitions, wondrous things and signs, and We supported him strengthened and helped him (with the holy Spirit) with Gabriel, the purified.'⁸³ Ibn Abbas also indicates that the Holy Spirit talked of here is the angel Gabriel. And lastly, the Al Jalalayn interpretation states: 'And We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear proofs and confirmed him strengthened him with the Holy Spirit namely Gabriel who would accompany him wherever he went.'⁸⁴

The reason the Holy Spirit is assumed to be Gabriel here is because of Surah 19:17, where the interpreters believe it could only be an angel who manifested himself in the likeness of a man. When compared with the Lukan account, it is clear that the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, and when she declares herself to be a virgin and questions how she will conceive the child in spite of the impossibility, the angel makes it clear that 'the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most High will overshadow you, so the holy child to be born will be called "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The Lukan account makes a very clear distinction between the angel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit whereas, the Quranic account in Surah 3 and Surah 19 seems to be in a dilemma and it isn't clear as to who the Holy Spirit is. To add to the confusion, Jesus is also called 'a spirit proceeding from God' (Surah 4:171). The Spirit in 19:17 is assumed to be Gabriel

⁸² Yusuf Ali, Quran, 138.

⁸³ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 16.

⁸⁴ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 16.

and Islamic commentators are very careful in making sure that the Holy Spirit, when used with reference to Jesus, does not mean the verse is affirming his divinity.

Surah 17:85 states, 'they ask you concerning the Spirit. Say: "The Spirit is from the word of command (Amr) of my Lord: Of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, O men"!' Here is another Quranic verse that speaks about the Spirit. Yusuf Ali comments thus on this verse: 'the Spirit (Gabriel) does not come of his own will. He comes by the command of God and reveals what God commands him to reveal. Of the sum-total of true spiritual knowledge what a small part it is that ordinary mortals understand! They can only be given that which they can understand, however dimly. We are not in a position to ask anything we wish. If we did so, it would only make us foolish, for the guidance comes from God's Wisdom, not from our worldly knowledge.'⁸⁵

Yusuf Ali implies that the Spirit is a mystery that can only be fully comprehended by God for the Spirit and God's word of command are related to one another so that God's "Amr" sends the Spirit (just as Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, promises he will send the Holy Spirit to be with his disciples in John 15:26) and human minds are very limited in understanding of divine matters. But Yusuf Ali believes the Spirit (he translates the term "ruh" as Spirit of inspiration) to be Gabriel. Whereas Jalalayn identifies the Spirit in this verse as that which gives life to the body⁸⁶, and there is no mention of the angel Gabriel, or of any angel at all in Jalalyn's interpretation.

Similarly, Ibn Abbas comments: 'They will ask thee, O Muhammad, concerning the Spirit. It was the people of Mecca-Abu Jahl and his host-who asked. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord the Spirit is of the marvels of my Lord; it is also said that this means: it is the restricted knowledge of my Lord, and of knowledge which is with Allah... you have been given but little(sic)⁸⁷. So would all of the above then mean, that there is another spirit of Allah, other than Gabriel, called the 'Spirit of inspiration' but what spirit is that? And if Jesus is also called a 'spirit proceeding from God' (Surah

⁸⁵ Yusuf Ali, Quran, 719.

⁸⁶ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 306.

⁸⁷ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 310.

4:171), then that means that Allah's Spirit manifests himself in the form of Gabriel, Jesus and the Spirit of inspiration. It is not really clear who the Holy Spirit of God in the Quran is, although the Quranic commentators mention Gabriel, the texts discussed above do not mention him. With reference to 17:85, Yusuf Ali is only one of the three commentators referred to, who believes the Spirit of inspiration to be Gabriel, the rest are hesitant, which shows that Islamic scholars are generally divided on this verse, but the question still remains as to why there is so much ambiguity concerning the Spirit within in Islamic thought.

In response, Nazir-Ali states that 'he (Jesus) is explicitly referred to as a Spirit proceeding from God (Ruhun Minhu) in 4:171. A common Muslim title for Jesus is Ruh Allah or Spirit of God. Whatever Christian apologists might say, the Muslim does not intend this title to ascribe divinity to Jesus. Jesus is a spirit of God, but he is a created spirit. The Quran refers to Jesus as a spirit proceeding from God.'⁸⁸ Whatever the Quran says, this surely is the Islamic perspective, but at the same time, it is also important to establish what the early Church's view was on the Holy Spirit and why it believed him to be divine.

The Church Father St Basil the Great, one of the fathers of the Church, criticizes those who do not believe the Holy Spirit to be one with the Father and the Son. There was an idea that the Holy Spirit is not of the same nature as the Father and the Son and is inferior to them in rank and in dignity, so it would not be appropriate to equate the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son. Basil argues that 'when the Lord established the baptism of salvation, did he not clearly command all His disciples to baptize all nations "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit"? He did not disdain His fellowship with the Holy Spirit, but when men say that we should not rank him with the Father and the Son, are they not openly disregarding God's commandment?'⁸⁹

We have established earlier, how Jesus himself spoke of the Holy Spirit and if the Holy

⁸⁸ Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers*, 32.

⁸⁹ Magnus, *On the Holy Spirit*, 45.

Spirit were not one with the Father and the Son then why would Jesus put him in the same equation as a means of the baptism of salvation? Basil further comments that 'the Lord has delivered to us a necessary and saving dogma: The Holy Spirit is to be ranked with the Father. Our opponents do not agree; instead they divide and tear away the Spirit from the Father, transforming his nature to that of a ministering spirit. Can anyone dispute that they make their blasphemy more authoritative than God's Law?'⁹⁰

According to Basil, Baptism, is the confession of faith made by a Christian when he confesses his faith in Christ as his Saviour and enters the body of Christ by affirming his understanding in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19) and rejecting belief in the Holy Spirit as one with the Father and the Son would be rejecting the commandment of Jesus because that is the great commission for the Christian. Basil further comments that 'we made this profession when we first entered the Church; we were delivered from idols and came before the living God. Whoever does not hold fast to this confession as his sure foundation at all times, to the end of his life, makes himself a stranger to God's promises. Through this confession I was made a child of God, who was his enemy for so long because of his sins.'⁹¹ St Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 states that 'therefore, I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus is accursed"; and no one can say "Jesus is Lord", except by the Holy Spirit.' The Bible is consistent in its teaching about the Holy Spirit and nowhere in the Bible does it implied that the Spirit is an inferior element to the Father and the Son.

Basil goes on to argue that 'if a man calls upon God, but rejects the Son, his faith is empty. If someone rejects the Spirit, his faith in the Father and the Son is made useless; it is impossible to believe in the Father and the Son without the presence of the Spirit. He who rejects the Spirit rejects the Son, and he who rejects the Son rejects the Father. No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Spirit.'⁹² Indeed, he states that John 1:18 claims that 'no one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made Him known'. Basil appears to make a correlation between what

⁹⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁹¹ Ibid., 47.

⁹² Ibid., 48.

he says and this particular verse in John's gospel, explaining that belief in the triune God includes belief in all persons, which includes the Spirit. One cannot believe in one and then reject the other. In defense of Basil's argument, one can say, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:17 that 'the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.' Basil bases his argument upon what is said of the Holy Spirit in the Bible and according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit is believed to be God. Paul would not have said the 'Lord is Spirit' if he believed the Holy Spirit to be inferior to the Father and the Son.

Paul does not call anyone Lord in his letters except God. Basil also talks about the doxology. He says 'may I pass from this life to the Lord with the confession on my lips. I exhort them (my opponents) to keep the faith inviolate until the day of Christ's coming: they must not divide the Spirit from the Father and the Son but must preserve in the profession of faith and in the doxology, the teaching they received at their baptism.'⁹³ The Doxology can be defined as the praising of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, all three persons in the triune Godhead and Basil makes the point that unless one does not believe in all three of them then they cannot profess faith in Christ and be baptized.

The early Church Father Irenaeus of Lyons believed the Holy Spirit to be the Wisdom of God. He never made claims such as "the Holy Spirit is divine, or the Holy Spirit is God", but for Irenaeus, 'the Holy Spirit is the Wisdom of God; in creation, He is associated with the Word; it is He who speaks through the prophets, and in Scripture, but it is the Word who communicates Him to men.'⁹⁴ Irenaeus explains this in his 'three articles of faith', the three articles being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The third article, the Holy Spirit is the one who cries 'Abba Father'. St Paul writes in Romans 8:15: 'for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba Father".' So, according to Irenaeus, 'it is the Spirit who manifests the Word, and therefore the prophets announced the Son of God, but the Word articulates the Spirit, and therefore it is Himself who gives their message to the prophets, and therefore takes up man and brings him to the Father.'⁹⁵ The Spirit is the

⁹³ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁴ Irenaeus, Proof of Apostolic, 26.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 51.

one that leads the bearers of the Spirit to the Word, and the Word then leads to the Father. We are led to the Father through the Son, by the Spirit.

Irenaeus states further that 'without the Spirit there is no seeing of the Word of God, and without the Son there is no approaching the Father; for the Son is knowledge of the Father, and knowledge of the Son is through the Holy Spirit. But the Son, according to the Father's good-pleasure, administers the Spirit charismatically as the Father's will, to those to whom He will.'⁹⁶ As we have seen, Irenaeus's understanding of the Godhead is very Biblical, that it is only through the Spirit one can realize the fullness of God and come to the Father through the Son, but the important thing to be noted here is that he labels the Holy Spirit as his third article of faith, indicating the importance of believing in the Holy Spirit as a divine being because if he were not divine, how could he lead to the Father through the Son. It is the work of the Spirit to wholly sanctify us in order for us to walk in the way of God.

The Apostles' creed as well as the original Nicene Creed did not go into detail concerning the belief in the Holy Spirit. After stating detailed belief in the Father and the Son, the original Nicea (325AD) only read 'and in the Holy Spirit'. It was the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381AD) that gave detailed significance to the third person in the Godhead. The Fathers thought it important to emphasize the Holy Spirit as God. The later insertion read: 'and in the Holy Spirit; the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.'⁹⁷ Also, the words 'and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary' were inserted.⁹⁸ These insertions into the new version of the Nicene Creed were made in order to establish full faith in all the three persons of the triune God. These additions are based on a fuller understanding of the Holy Spirit as taught in Scripture (they are not additions to Scripture as is the general Muslim perception). It is from Scripture, the Creeds, and the teaching of the early Church that belief in the Holy Spirit as divine is formed. There is nowhere in Scripture where there is mention of the Holy Spirit being less than divine.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁷ Kelly, *Early Christian*, 298.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 297.

‘Several years before the insertions were made, ‘St Basil had reached the conclusion that, while not the smallest addition must be made to the Nicene faith in general, an exception was the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.’⁹⁹ The Scriptural references with reference to the Holy Spirit can be seen within the creed. For example, the use of the words ‘the Lord is the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:17), also the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2), and the epithet life-giver in John 6:63 and 2 Corinthians 3:6. ‘The description “proceeding from the Father” was borrowed from the Lord’s own words, “the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father”, recorded in John 15:26. Also, Paul refers to the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:12 as “the Spirit who is from God”.’¹⁰⁰ 2 Peter 1:21 states that ‘no prophecy ever came down by the will of man, but men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit’ and the Scriptural reference can be seen in the phrase ‘who has spoken through the prophets’. ‘It is obvious that the creed was intended to convey the conception of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, though in language which was guarded and calculated to give no more offence than unavoidable. Also, the Greek word Lord (Ho Kurios) was the Septuagint equivalent of the Hebrew “Adonai” which is a way of referring to the unsayable Tetragrammaton.’¹⁰¹ The Nicene Fathers realized that based on Scripture, it would be essential to clarify that the Holy Spirit is an equally divine and significant person along with the Father and the Son and the conclusion they drew appears to be based wholly on Scripture, the belief that is held by the Church up to the present day.

St Athanasius, expressing his views on this doctrine states that ‘the Holy Spirit is glorified with the Father and the Son. His writings agree with St Basil’s views on the subject who writes: ‘Glorifying the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son because of the conviction that he is not alien from the divine nature. For that which is foreign in nature could not have shared in the same honours’.¹⁰² He also called this particular teaching “sound doctrine” ‘according to which the Son is confessed as homoousios (of the same substance) with the Father and the Holy Spirit is numbered and worshipped together

⁹⁹ Ibid., 340.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 341.

¹⁰² Athanasius, as cited in Kelly (page 342).

with them with identical honour.’¹⁰³ This doctrine is also recorded in the so called Athanasian Creed, one of the three ecumenical Creeds. This Creed recognizes that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit cannot be separated and are of the same substance and if the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God according to Scripture then he must be God.

The Christian response then to the Muslim beliefs about the Spirit is that the whole tenor of the Scriptures is that the Spirit is fully divine in creation, in inspiration and in salvation. This has also always been the teaching of the Church and is reflected in the ecumenical Creeds. There is no suggestion of the Spirit being an angel or any other kind of inferior or created being.

With reference to the dilemma concerning the Holy Spirit being called Gabriel, even though the Quranic text does not mention it, the confusion within Islamic teaching remains as to who is the Holy Spirit. The confusion remains because Jesus is also referred to as a spirit proceeding from God, even though Muslims claim that he is a created spirit¹⁰⁴ (also something which the Quran does not state). Hence, the questions that arise are “who is the Holy Spirit in Islam”? Is it Gabriel? Or is it Jesus, as he is also referred to as ‘a spirit proceeding from God’ (in later terms, ‘Ruh Allah’ or the ‘Spirit of God’?) or is it the eternal Spirit of God active in creation? It is unclear. That is why John of Damascus makes a very important point in terms of the Spirit. If Jesus is referred to as the Spirit, even though Christians do not believe that Jesus is the Spirit, then what significance does that hold in Islam, as it has already been established that God cannot be eternally God without his Spirit.

The term ‘Spirit of God’ naturally occurs in the mind of a person to mean the eternal Spirit of God that has been with God from all eternity. So, the challenge before the Muslim is to explain whether the Spirit of God mentioned in the Quran is eternal. If the Spirit is eternal, and Jesus is called ‘Ruh Allah’, is he then the eternal Spirit of God? If the Spirit of God is not eternal, then there must have been a time when God was without his Spirit. This is

¹⁰³ Ibid., 342.

¹⁰⁴ Nazir-Ali, Frontiers, 32.

also the case, as we have shown, with the eternity of the Word of God and the Quranic reference to Jesus as the Word of God (Kalimatullah).

Chapter 3: Christian beliefs and Muslim objections to the crucifixion and atoning death of Jesus Christ:

Another topic of debate between Christians and Muslims has been the doctrine of the crucifixion and atoning death of Jesus Christ. The doctrines of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus lie at the heart of the Christian faith. In this particular chapter, the crucifixion will be the main focus whereas the resurrection will be discussed in a later section. Although the gospel accounts may vary in terms of certain events (even though the core message does not change) in the sense that one account may be recorded in the synoptic gospels, but it wouldn't be recorded in John for instance. The point is that all four canonical gospels record the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the time of the Galilean crisis and his turning his face towards Jerusalem, Jesus is seen to be predicting his death in several verses, for example in Mark 9:31 he tells his disciples 'the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.' Another one would be Mark 10:33 where he says 'see, we are going up to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles.'¹⁰⁵ Already, in the earliest epistles, which were written before the gospels, we see that the death of Christ was part of the kerygma of the apostolic preaching.¹⁰⁶

In Acts 2:23, Peter says that 'this Jesus whom you delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men'.

Howard Marshall recognizing the different factors operating in the execution of Jesus, comments: 'for instead of recognizing Jesus as a man of God the Jews had taken steps to crucify and so kill him. The lawless men are usually taken to be the Romans who actually execute Jesus. Nothing is said to minimize the fact of Jewish guilt in crucifying Jesus (cf. verse 36). Nevertheless, at the same time crucifixion took place according to the plan and purpose of God (cf.4:28)'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Cranfield, Mark, 266ff.

¹⁰⁶ Morris, see further Apostolic preaching.

¹⁰⁷ Marshall, Acts, 75.

Paul writes in Romans 5:6-8 that 'For while we were still weak at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good reason one would dare even to die- God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.' F.F Bruce writes that 'Paul's argument is clear enough: even for one who is just or good you will scarcely find anyone willing to lay down his life- well, perhaps a few people might go as far as to do so- but God's love is seen in Christ's laying down his life for those who were neither good nor just, but ungodly sinners.'¹⁰⁸ This shows the radical nature of God's love in the Bible which extends to sinners, whereas in the Islamic tradition, even where God's love for us is mentioned, it is restricted to the righteous.

According to John 19:28-30, 'Jesus, knowing that all was finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst". A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus received the sour wine, he said "it is finished", and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.' C K Barrett comments thus: 'Now that the last prophecy had been fulfilled it could be spoken by Jesus himself. His work was done. The cry is to be thought of in the positive sense, not as the mere announcement of imminence of death.'¹⁰⁹ The word used by Jesus suggests completion, fulfillment and perfection (Telew). Concerning verse 30, Barrett considers the possibility that the Greek word used for spirit in John's mind, was not the human spirit of Jesus, given up when his body died, but the Holy Spirit, which when he died, he was able to hand over to the few representative believers who stood by the cross. He comes to the conclusion, however, that such a view cannot be sustained because Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to the disciples in John 20.¹¹⁰ It is the case, nevertheless, that **in** St John's gospel (7:39), the Holy Spirit is given after the death, resurrection and glorification of Jesus.

¹⁰⁸ Bruce, Romans, 124.

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, Gospel 460.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 460.

Coming to the early Creeds, we see that the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed reads ‘I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God...who was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered death and was buried.’¹¹¹ The original Nicene Creed of 325 AD held that “he suffered and rose again on the third day”. Though it does not explicitly state that he died by crucifixion, it speaks about his resurrection, implying that he did suffer death but the Fathers in 381AD felt it important to make that insertion in order to provide a more Biblical understanding of the Creed.¹¹² This shows that the Nicene Fathers believed that Jesus’ suffered death and they wanted the church to hold fast to that doctrine as the basis of their faith. The Apostles’ Creed, reflecting the profession of faith at the time of baptism, reads ‘I believe in Jesus Christ His (the Father’s) only Son our Lord; who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried’ and the so called Athanasian Creed states that he ‘suffered for our salvation, descended into hell and rose again on the third day.

This is the faith of the early Church, as expressed in the Apostolic Fathers, before these Creeds were finalized, it is preached throughout that Christ died for the sins of the world as a means of salvation for all mankind. Even the most minor modifications and insertions that were made to these Creeds were not un- Biblical. In fact, they were biblical, providing a clearer understanding of the particular doctrines mentioned and from the beginning, Christians have held these beliefs in the death of Christ throughout 2000 years of the history of Christianity.

Islamic views and arguments against the crucifixion:

Islam, contrary to the Christian view, does not believe in the crucifixion, just as it denies that Jesus was fully God and fully human. The Quran explicitly denies that Jesus was even crucified, let alone acknowledging the atoning value of his death, as the Quran says, ‘no one can bear the burdens of another’ (e.g 6:164). In the whole of the Quran, there is one verse that speaks of the crucifixion. Surah 4:157 reads: ‘That they said in boast: “We have killed Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the Apostle of God”- but they killed

¹¹¹ Kelly, Early Christian, 232.

¹¹² Kelly, Early Christian, 311.

him not nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not.’ Islamic scholars have had a great deal to say concerning this verse. Yusuf Ali comments that ‘the Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced that illusion in the minds of some of his enemies: that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain...’¹¹³ Yusuf Ali also comments that ‘the Orthodox Christian Churches make it a cardinal point of their doctrine that his life was taken on the cross, that he died and was buried, that on the third day he rose in the body with his wounds intact, and walked about and conversed, and ate with his disciples and afterwards was taken up bodily into heaven. This is necessary for the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins, which is rejected by Islam.’¹¹⁴ So Yusuf Ali agrees that the orthodox churches do believe that Jesus died, but claims that for those who originally thought that Jesus was killed were deceived into believing this and it was an illusion in their minds.

In the same way, Al Jalalayn’s interpretation is: And for their saying boastfully ‘We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary the Messenger of God’ as they claim in other words for all of these reasons We have punished them. God exalted be He says in repudiating their claim to have killed him And yet they did not slay him nor did they crucify him but he the one slain and crucified who was an associate of theirs the Jews was given the resemblance of Jesus (sic).¹¹⁵ In other words, God made someone look exactly like Jesus and so that is why they thought it was Jesus. And those who disagree concerning him, that is concerning Jesus, are surely in doubt regarding the killing of him for some of them said when they saw the killed man, the face resembled Jesus but the body is not Jesus’ body and so it cannot be him, no matter what the opponents say.

In addition to that, Ibn Abbas’s interpretation states: ‘And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger, Allah destroyed their man Tatianos. (They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them Allah made

¹¹³ Yusuf Ali, Quran, 230.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 230.

¹¹⁵ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 110.

Tatianos look like Jesus and so they killed him instead of Jesus; and lo! those who disagree concerning his killing are in doubt thereof about his killing; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture not even conjecture; they slew him not for certain(sic).¹¹⁶

Similarly, Al Qushairi's Tafsir puts it this way: 'It is also said that Jesus said, "Whoever agrees to have my resemblance cast upon him so that he is killed in place of me will have the garden" and one of his companions agreed. It is said that because [this companion] patiently bore the injury talaf he was not deprived of the recompense khalaf from God.'¹¹⁷

He (Qushairi) continues further stating that 'God most high said "Indeed We do not leave the reward of those of good deeds to go to waste" [18:30]. It is said that because this man who was a companion of Jesus was without any imperfection in his lower self nafs he became [Jesus's] friend in spirit rūḥ. When Jesus was raised up to the place of intimacy maḥall al-zulfa the spirit of this one who ransomed Jesus with his lower self was raised up to the place of nearness maḥall al-qurba.'¹¹⁸ Hence, the general Muslim perception concerning this verse is that it was only made to appear to the onlookers that Jesus is crucified, but in actuality, God made someone else look like Jesus and raised him (Jesus) up to himself.

Another verse that speaks about Jesus possibly dying in the Quran is Surah 19:33, where Jesus himself says, 'peace on me the day that I was born and the day that I die and the day I am raised alive.' Yusuf Ali comments thus on this verse: 'Christ was not crucified (4:157), but those who believe he never died should ponder over this verse.' Yusuf Ali uses 4:157 as an argument to show that this verse does not mean that Jesus was crucified.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 109.

¹¹⁷ Qushairi, Tafsir, 465-466

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 466.

In the same way, Ibn Abbas comments thus: 'Peace on me the day I was born, safety to me from Satan's touch when I was born, and the day I die and safety to me from the compression of the grave when I die, and the day I shall be raised alive when I am resurrected alive from the grave!'¹¹⁹ Ibn Abbas appears to believe that this verse means Jesus is not talking about crucifixion, but it is not quite clear as to what he means. His phrase 'resurrected alive from the grave' technically means that Jesus did die but the Muslims claim he did not die. The fact that he even mentions that particular phrase means that Jesus did die is contrary to what Muslims claim. Additionally, Al Jalalayn comments: 'And peace from God be upon me the day I was born and the day I die and the day I shall be raised alive!' — the same is being said about him as was said above regarding the lord John (meaning John the Baptist, Surah 19:15).'¹²⁰ Thus, if the Quran teaches Jesus died, in what way did he die? As we shall see, the evidence that he died by crucifixion is overwhelming.

M. Ali, from the Ahmaddiya sect of Islam interprets Surah 4:157 in a slightly different way. He says that 'Jesus was on the cross for a few hours, the two thieves were not dead neither taken down, and Jesus also was taken away by his friends, and later appeared in disguise or in hiding. This leads on to his Ahmadiyya belief that Jesus wandered away before going to Kashmir where he finally died.'¹²¹ This is clearly not the orthodox Islamic view because orthodox Islamic scholarship generally does not agree that Jesus went to the cross at all, as explained earlier. It is only the Ahmadiyya, who are a minority sect within Islam, who hold this view. According to the Sunni view, Surah 4:158 states that God raised Jesus up to himself, in other words, he saved him from being crucified, a verse that will be discussed later.

Moreover, another verse that talks about the potential death of Jesus is Surah 3:55. The standard Muslim translation for this would be 'Allah says, "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 you superior to the those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection. Then ye shall all return unto me and I will judge between you of the matters

¹¹⁹ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 330.

¹²⁰ Jalalayn, Tafsir 330.

¹²¹ M.Ali, as cited in Parrinder (page 113).

wherein ye dispute”.’

The Arabic word that most translator appear to avoid the usage of is “mutawaff’ika”, and according to Geoffrey Parrinder, ‘this word is taken to mean “cause thee to die”. It is used of people dying (Surah 2:240/241), and of believers being called to God in the night, raised up the next day to a stated term and returning to him when their time **on** earth is complete (6:60). The same verb is used of Jesus in 5:117 (verse 120 in Yusuf Ali’s translation) where the death of Jesus is mentioned. He also states that “Muslim commentators have had trouble over these verses, as they have let themselves be dominated by 4:156-157, which they assumed denied the crucifixion.’¹²²

Parrinder believes that the verses stated above mention the death of Jesus which has become problematic for Islamic scholars, as they deny the death of Jesus ever took place. Nazir- Ali also takes a similar position on this issue. He also believes that according to the Arabic text, these verses refer to the death of Jesus and in Surah 3:55, Allah said he will cause Jesus to die.¹²³ As a response to these claims made by Nazir-Ali and Parrinder, Muslims might argue that this would naturally be a Christian response because Christians believe Jesus died by crucifixion. As a response to this view, Christians could argue that even certain Islamic commentators, to some extent, though seemingly reluctantly, agree with that view. As stated in Parrinder’s works, Muslim scholar Baidawi ‘gives five alternative meanings on 3:55. He says it could mean “achieve the whole of thy term and tarry on till the 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”.’¹²⁴

Baidawi appears reluctantly to admit that Jesus did die for seven hours, because that is what the verse means but he mentions it as his last point. His first four interpretations suggest that he is reluctant to accept that the verse mentions Jesus will die. At least he accepts it as an interpretation (as he probably realizes the literal meaning of the word

¹²² Parrinder, Jesus, 106.

¹²³ Nazir-Ali, Frontiers, 17.

¹²⁴ Parrinder, Jesus, 106.

“mutawaff’ika”). The majority of Islamic scholarship interprets this to mean that he was simply taken up by Allah, but if the text says Allah will cause Jesus to die then that surely is problematic for the Islamic view since Surah 4:157 says Jesus did not die but was raised up to Allah instead. Al Jalalayn explain 3:55 in the following way: ‘And mention when God said ‘O Jesus I am gathering you seizing you and raising you to Me away from the world without death and I am cleansing you or removing you far away from those who disbelieved and I am setting those who follow you those Christians and Muslims who believed in your prophethood above those who disbelieved in you namely the Jews becoming above them through definitive argument and the sword until the Day of Resurrection...**(sic)**’¹²⁵ As we have seen, even Jalalayn, one of the major, accepted commentators on the Quran avoids translating the word ‘mutawaff’ika” as ‘causing to die’.

Ibn Abbas comments thus: ‘And remember when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing saving thee of those who disbelieve in strong argument and triumph until the Day of Resurrection then I shall make you to die after descent; it is also said this means: I shall make your heart die to the love of the life of this world. Then unto Me ye will all return after death, and I shall judge between you as to that wherein in religion ye used to differ to argue**(sic)**’¹²⁶. Ibn Abbas interprets this verse in a slightly different way from Baidawi, he does talk about death but how can somebody be made to die after the Day of Resurrection? That is not what the text says, the text speaks of Jesus’ followers being made better than the disbelievers until the Day of Resurrection, but the potential death of Jesus is mentioned before that, giving the implication that Allah was saying ‘I will cause you to die and raise you to myself’ and then make your followers better than the disbelievers. Nowhere does the text say that Jesus will die after the Day of the Resurrection and the love for the world is not mentioned in the text either, as Ibn Abbas states (similar to one of Baidawi’s interpretations).

There is an interesting verse, Surah 4:159 that states ‘there is none from the people of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them **(sic)**.’ Is that before Jesus’ death or the death of the believer? As Jalalayn comment, ‘and there is not one of the People of the Scripture but will assuredly believe in him in Jesus before his death that is before the death of one belonging to the People of the Scripture upon seeing the angels of death with his very eyes at which point his faith will not profit him; or it means before the death

¹²⁵ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 62.

¹²⁶ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 61.

of Jesus after he descends at the approach of the Hour as is stated in hadīth; and on the Day of Resurrection he Jesus will be a witness against them of what they did when he was sent to them (sic).’ The interpreters naturally interpret this verse to mean it is talking about the death of the People of the Book, and this is another example of the Quranic dilemma when it talks about Jesus death, resurrection and return. The verse does not make it clear whether it is mentioning the death of Jesus or the death of the People of the Book.

Arguments against the crucifixion:

Ibn Ishaq comments that ‘No one can be associated with God in terms of his authority. The Ever-Living, the Ever-existent, the living one who cannot die, while Jesus died and was crucified, according the Christian’s own doctrine.’¹²⁷ Ishaq quotes the same account mentioned earlier, regarding the encounter between Muhammad and the Christians of Najran, where he puts forward the prophet of Islam’s argument in order to refute them. The general Islamic argument has been that if Jesus is God, as Christians claim, then he cannot die on the cross because God is eternal and it is impossible for eternity to face demise.

Muslim scholar Al Baji writes that ‘among the strangest things which you (Christians) people bring forward is your statement is that Jesus gave his blood for the salvation of men. How could the Lord have blood, when blood belongs to caused and created human beings? If you defined the expression, you would say it was the blood of humanity, not divinity and you would have to say that it was his humanity crucified, not the son of God, who is Exalted.’¹²⁸ Baji points out that if Christians claim that Jesus is God then why does he have human attributes, such as blood, when God is omniscient and timeless and cannot limit himself in this way. This, once again, shows the sharp contrast between the biblical and the Islamic understanding of God. Baji goes on further: ‘He (Jesus) belonged to one of your (Christian) communities. How then could he be a God, everlasting, living, self-existent forever, to whom death was possible and whose life was subject to negation? Why did he not remove himself from death, and was not able to defend himself

¹²⁷ Ibn Ishaq, Life of Muhammad, 272.

¹²⁸ Al Baji, as cited in Gaudeul (page 180).

against it?’¹²⁹ In the famous dialogue between Timothy the Patriarch and the Caliph Mahdi, Mahdi then asked Timothy, ‘can God himself die then? The Quran says that God made a similitude for him. It is not honourable to Jesus Christ that God should have allowed the Jews to kill him.’¹³⁰

In the same way, Yousuf Chishti argues that ‘the Nicene Creed teaches that Jesus was both perfect man and perfect God and the two natures were so united that you cannot separate the one from the other. According to this creed, when Jesus died on the cross, his divinity and humanity both died simultaneously. The question is that did the Father also die with the Son? If so, then that means the world remained without God for three days...If God can die, we would like to know why such a being is entitled to divinity at all.’¹³¹ Chishti’s argument stems from a typical Muslim objection where the Islamic concept of God dying on the cross is perceived as the whole triune Godhead dying; meaning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all died on the cross. That is not the Christian view. The Christian view has always held that it was the Incarnate Son of God who was crucified on the cross and Chishti’s argument concerning the two natures of Christ also appears to stem from a typical Muslim objection that if Christians claim that it was only the humanity of Jesus that died, that would mean that God did not really die because Christians themselves admit that divinity cannot die.

Christian responses:

Looking at the three Surah which talk about Jesus’ death mentioned in the Islamic objections, Surah 3:55 suggests that God will cause Jesus to die, 4:157 suggests he was surely not killed, despite the claims made by the Jews and in 19:33 Jesus himself talks about the day he will die and be raised (bodily) to life again. The question arises as to what these accounts in the Quran actually say in terms of the death of Jesus because all of these verses give a different account. In 4:157, Allah saves Jesus from being crucified, why then does the Quran claim that Allah will cause Jesus to die in Surah

¹²⁹ Ibid., 180.

¹³⁰ Mahdi, as cited in Young (page 201).

¹³¹ Chishti, What is Christianity, 100-101

3:55? The Islamic response as seen above may be that he will die after the Day of Resurrection, but that is not what the text says. What does then the Quran say? How is it possible that Allah in one verse claims that Jesus will be caused to die and then suddenly decides to save him, and the Islamic response could possibly be that Allah is Almighty and can do anything he wills, but would that mean that Allah changed his mind in the end when the Jews wanted to kill Jesus?

Despite the Quran claiming that Allah would cause him to die, there is a general Muslim reluctance to admit that he died at all, but rather was taken up by Allah to himself. There are two more passages in the Quran that need to be looked at that do not specifically mention Jesus but can be linked to Jesus. These verses are Surah 2:61 and 2:87. Surah 2:61 talks about the Jews killing the prophets of Allah without cause, due to their rebellion and disobedience towards him (Allah). As a result of this, they carried on transgressing. Ibn Kathir comments that 'Allah's anger that descended on the Children of Israel was a part of the humiliation they earned, because of their defiance of the truth, disbelief in Allah's Ayat and belittling the carriers of Allah's Law i.e. the Prophets and their following. The Children of Israel rejected the Messengers and even killed them. Surely, there is no form of disbelief worse than disbelieving in Allah's Ayat and murdering the Prophets of Allah.'¹³²

In the same way, Al Jalalayn interpret 2:61 as saying that they 'ended up with God's wrath; that is the affliction and wrath was because they used to disbelieve the signs of God and slay prophets such as Zachariah and John without right, that is unjustly; that was because they disobeyed and they were transgressors overstepping the bounds in disobedience.'¹³³ Similarly, Ibn Abbas comments that 'they were visited with wrath from Allah as they deserved to be forsaken by Allah. That being forsaken by Allah and visited by humiliation and wretchedness was because they disbelieved in Allah's revelations and they disbelieved in Muhammad (pbuh) and in the Qur'an and slew the prophets wrongfully without any right and for no crime whatsoever. Allah's wrath was for their disobedience on the Sabbath and transgression slaying the prophets and declaring

¹³² Ibn Kathir, Tafsir, 65.

¹³³ Jalalayn, Tafsir, 12.

transgressions to be lawful.¹³⁴

According to the Quran, the prophets were persecuted and killed because of the Jews' refusal to follow in their way of righteousness. If that is the case and Jesus is only a prophet, as Muslims believe, then why could he not also be killed? There is also a reference to the death of Muhammad mentioned in the Quran in Surah 3:144 which reads: 'Muhammad is no more than a messenger: many were the messengers that passed away before him. If he died or was slain, will ye then turn back on your heels? If any did turn back on his heels, not the least harm will he do to Allah, but Allah (on the other hand) will swiftly reward those who serve him with gratitude. According to the Quranic accounts, when the Jews claim to have killed Jesus, Allah saves him by raising him up to himself. In Islam, Jesus is prophet (nabi) and messenger (rasul) whom Allah saves from death. Why is it that Allah saves Jesus from death and not the others? Are we seeing here a docetic view of the person of Jesus Christ which views him as divine and not really human at all?

We have seen from the unanimous testimony of his friends that Jesus Christ of Nazareth died on the cross. The gospels, the epistles and the Church Creeds all are in agreement that Jesus Christ died by crucifixion under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. There is also some extra biblical evidence, testimonies from Jesus' enemies that he was killed by crucifixion.

First of all, it is seen from the testimony of the Gospels that Jesus' side was pierced with a spear and blood and water flowed out as a result when the soldiers came to break Jesus' legs and saw that he was already dead. Jesus was taken for burial and was placed in the tomb. We shall first see the gospel narratives that mention the death of Jesus of the cross.

One verse worth mentioning would be John 19:33-34 which reads 'and when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. C H Dodd comments that 'the blood and the water are a sign of the life that

¹³⁴ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 12.

flows from the crucified and risen Christ.¹³⁵ C K Barrett comments that ‘the question of the historical value of this verse is of the utmost difficulty. On the one hand, John emphasizes that the effusion of blood and water caused by the lance thrust was a historical event, vouched for by impeccable testimony (verse 35). On the other hand, according to Barrett, the presence of an eye-witness is not probable, and the alleged fact is clearly related to, and could conceivably have arisen out of John’s theology.’¹³⁶

This is one view, concerning the blood and water and the eyewitness argument. Barrett states, on the face of it, is improbable. However, Barrett then goes on to comment concerning the eyewitness testimony in verse 35 that ‘it must be conceded that the event described is physiologically possible. Blood might flow from a corpse shortly after death followed by a fluid resembling water. It may be asked, however if John thought he was describing a normal event, one which might have been observed in any corpse, or an abnormal event which exclusively involves the body of Jesus?’¹³⁷ Regardless of whether the author meant it as symbolic or not, the outpouring of blood and water may have medical significance. Barrett does not point out that the flowing of blood and water, according to scientific research in this present day, means that a person has died and the author of John’s gospel most likely would have been familiar, as many other people in the ancient world with such events, without necessarily understanding their modern scientific basis.

Drs Brad Harrub and Bert Thompson make this medical assessment: ‘A more likely scenario would suggest that the piercing affected a lung (along with any built-up fluid), the pericardial sac surrounding the heart, the right atrium of the heart itself, the pulmonary vessels, and/or the aorta. Since John did not describe the specific side of the body on which the wound was inflicted, we can only speculate about which structures might have been impaled by such a vicious act. However, the blood could have resulted from the aorta, heart or any other pulmonary vessels. Water probably was provided by pleural or pericardial fluids (that surround the lungs and heart).’¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Dodd, Interpretation, 428.

¹³⁶ Barrett, Gospel, 461.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 462.

¹³⁸ Harrub and Thompson, as cited in Bernis (page 195).

Harrub and Thompson provide scientific evidence from their medical expertise, stating that blood and water pouring out from the body may possibly be the result of **this** explanation. Their medical assessment is in agreement with Dr Alexander Metherell's theory who stated that Jesus 'died of a heart failure.'¹³⁹ Apart from that, the kind of suffering that Jesus experienced throughout his trial, the flogging, the nails through his hands and feet and the agony can speed up the process of death. It could very well be a possibility that the author was trying to make this point in order to challenge the docetic claims about Jesus (Docetism was a heresy that taught that Jesus was fully divine but only appeared human), in that Jesus was truly human and did not just appear human.¹⁴⁰ Neither is it impossible that the testimony recorded in verse 35 actually happened. Even though the synoptic gospels don't record this particular event, Mark 15:38-39 records the testimony of the centurion.

D.E. Nineham comments that 'if verse 38 represents the significance of Jesus' death for the Jewish world, this verse gives the Gentiles' acknowledgment of its significance. For St Mark, at any rate, the centurion's words do not mean "a son of God", but the Son of God. It was not just a Gentile converted, but it was a conversion of an unbeliever by a dying Saviour.'¹⁴¹

Apart from the testimonies of the gospels, there were also neutral testimonies from extra Biblical sources, such as the historian Josephus, who did not know Jesus.

Josephus was a Roman Jewish historian who wrote about Jesus in his 'Jewish Antiquities', possibly in the year 93AD. Louis H Feldman translates his writing about Jesus in this way: 'About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. And when the accusation upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had him condemned to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease...'¹⁴³ This piece of Josephus' writing was called the 'testimonium

¹³⁹ Methrell, as cited in Bernis (page 195).

¹⁴⁰ Maloney, Sacra, 509.

¹⁴¹ Nineham, Saint Mark, 37.

flavianum'.¹⁴²

Due to the Christian parallels found in this piece of writing, there were criticisms made that this was a Christian insertion, later on in the third or fourth century and the original writing was corrupted. However, a Jewish scholar named John P. Meir, in his book *A Marginal Jew* challenges this view that the text of Josephus had been corrupted by Christian insertions. He writes:-

'If my reconstruction is correct, while the Testimonium gives a fairly objective, brief account of Jesus' career, nothing is said about the Christians' belief that Jesus rose from the dead - and that, after all, was the central affirmation of faith that held the various Christian groups together during the first century. That Josephus drew directly on oral statements of Christians and yet failed to mention the one belief that differentiated them markedly from the wide range of Jewish beliefs at the time seems difficult to accept. My sense is that, paradoxically, Josephus seems to have known more about Jesus than he did about the Christians who came after him. Hence I remain doubtful about any direct oral Christian source for the Testimonium.'¹⁴³

Meir's main objection is concerning the resurrection, even he agrees that Jesus died but denies the resurrection, another factor that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Whatever difficulties scholars may have about alleged Christian insertions, there can be little doubt about his neutrality once such insertions are removed and there can be no doubt that Josephus mentions the Jewish leaders giving up Jesus to Pontius Pilate for crucifixion.

The Roman historian Tacitus wrote around 115AD about Nero persecuting the Christians in Rome and covering up for the fire in Rome around 64AD. He stated that 'Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius...'¹⁴⁴ Tacitus was not a follower of Jesus.

¹⁴² Josephus, as cited in Feldman, book 18-19, page 48-49.

¹⁴³ Meir, *Marginal Jew*, 67.

¹⁴⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* XV.44.

Here is more extra Biblical evidence concerning the death of Christ. The reason for the credibility of this piece of Tacitus's writing is that he was a Gentile, affirming that the founder of Christianity was put to death under Pontius Pilate's governorship.

Regardless of where Tacitus got his information, what matters is whether he was accurately presenting a historical fact. Josh McDowell claims that 'Tacitus states that he used reliable sources and followed the majority of historians; Tacitus is careful to record conflicts in his sources; he does not quote his sources uncritically; he qualifies his opinion when others do not; he distinguishes between rumor and fact; and even if Tacitus did not have independent sources concerning the historicity of Jesus, he still records the fact that Christians were willing to be martyred for their beliefs.'¹⁴⁵

Another piece of extra biblical writing concerning the death of Jesus can be found in the Babylonian Talmud, which is a central text of Rabbinic Judaism. The Tractate Sanhedrin reads: 'Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve. Forty days previously the herald had cried, "He is being led out for stoning, because he has practiced sorcery and led Israel astray and enticed them into apostasy. Whosoever has anything to say in his defense, let him come and declare it."¹⁴⁶ As nothing was brought forward in his defense, he was hanged on Passover Eve.' This is the testimony of the death of Christ found in Jewish texts. The words found in the text show traces of what the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law accused Jesus of, for example claiming he has a demon in Mark 3:28-29 (which has been discussed earlier) and it is by the prince of demons he drives out demons. The Talmud clearly does not believe Jesus was the divine Son of God, but it affirms that Christ died, contrary to the Islamic belief.

'The mode of his death was by "hanging." This is an expression that was used for crucifixion. Note Peter's description: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed, hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Literally, the text reads, "whom you killed, having hanged him on a tree." The participle, "having hanged," is "coincident with that of the verb".¹⁴⁷ This is how we know that the cross is also sometimes referred to as a 'tree', since the apostle Peter himself uses this language in Acts 5:30. According to the Bible,

¹⁴⁵ McDowell&Wilson, 50-51.

¹⁴⁶ Wayne, Jesus, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Lenski, Acts, 225.

there was divine orchestration involved in the crucifixion (Acts 2:23) of Jesus. In his act of atonement, he was bearing the 'curse' of sin, that is, the consequence of human sin committed by Adam. He was carrying the burden of the sins of humanity upon his shoulders. As Paul would later explain: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, cursed is every one that hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23).

David Guzik comments that 'this passage did not refer to crucifixion (which the Jews did not practice), but to the hanging on a tree or wooden post of the corpse of a criminal who had been executed. But in the New Testament, a cross was often called a tree and there is no doubting that that is what Paul has in mind here (Morris).¹⁴⁸ Guzik further comments that 'The punishment of being hanged on a tree, and left to open exposure, was thought to be so severe that it was reserved only for those for which it was to be declared: "this one is cursed by God." So, Jesus not only died in our place, but in his obedience to God's will, he endured punishment which he did not deserve, but which we did. He took the place as the cursed of God, being hung on a tree in open shame and degradation.'¹⁴⁹

There are very few modern scholars, regardless of their religious beliefs and convictions who disagree with the historical fact that Jesus lived and died. The testimony from non-Christians adds a lot of weight to the credibility of these historical claims. 'G.A. Wells is an example of a modern scholar who has attempted to argue that Jesus was purely a mythical character, but even he admits that "nearly all present-day scholars" do not agree with his views.'¹⁵⁰ The Quran appears to be one of the few historical documents that denies the crucifixion. 21st century skeptic Barth Ehrman states that 'despite the enormous range of opinion, there are several points on which virtually all scholars of antiquity agree. Jesus was a Jewish man, known to be a preacher and teacher, who was crucified (a Roman form of execution) in Jerusalem during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea.'¹⁵¹ That shows us that the testimony of the credibility Jesus' death is even stated by those who don't believe in what he claimed to be.

¹⁴⁸ Guzik, Galatians

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Wells, Historicity, 1.363.

¹⁵¹ Ehrman, Did Jesus, 12.

Atonement:

According to Surah 35:18 (see also 6:164) of the Quran, 'No soul laden bears the load of another; and if one heavy-burdened calls for its load to be carried, not a thing of it will be carried, though he be a near kinsman. Thou warnest only those who fear their Lord in the Unseen and perform the prayer; and whosoever purifies himself, purifies himself only for his own soul's good. To God is the homecoming.' This is the Islamic view of atonement, which is clearly contrary to the Christian view which states that Christ is the ultimate atonement for the sins of humanity.

Al Jalalayn thus comments on 35:18: 'And no burdened soul shall bear the burden of another sinful soul. And should one soul burdened heavily with sin call for some of its burden to be borne by another nothing of it will be borne even if the one called be a relative such as a father or a son — the impossibility of "having something borne by another" in both instances is something ordained by God (sic).'¹⁵²

Jalalayn further comments, 'you can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret in other words those who fear Him despite not having seen Him for they are the ones to benefit from the warning and observe the prayer maintain, performance of it. For whoever purifies himself, cleansing himself of idolatry and other similar abominations is purifying himself only for the sake of his own soul because the reforming of his self pertains to him. And to God is the end of the journeying the return in the Hereafter when He will requite according to deeds (sic).'¹⁵³

According to Jalalayn, it is God who forgives, even one's own family members cannot take that burden upon themselves for the sake of another. Ultimate forgiveness comes from God and it is in his fear that one has to live. A human being cannot do what God can. Additionally, according to Ibn Abbas who also comments on the same verse, 'And no burdened soul can bear another's burden i.e. with a good disposition of the soul but only insofar as it is forced to do so; it is also said that this means: no soul will be taken to task for the

¹⁵² Jalalayn, Tafsir, 497.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 497.

crime of another; and it is also said that this means: no soul will be tormented without having committed a crime, and if one heavy laden with sins cries for help with his load, naught of it, none of the sins will be lifted even though he unto whom he cries be of kin his father, mother, son or daughter (sic).¹⁵⁴

He (Abbas) goes on even further: 'thou warnest only; your warning, O Muhammad, benefits only those who fear their Lord in secret, those who work for their Lord even though He is invisible to them, but nothing is invisible to Him, and have established worship and perform the five daily prayers. He who grows in goodness, he who believes in Allah's divine Oneness, does good works and spends of his wealth in charity, grows only for himself the reward of all this goes to his own soul. Unto Allah is the journeying unto Allah is the return in the Hereafter (sic).¹⁵⁵

We see thus that the Quranic and Islamic doctrine about sin is that each person is responsible for their own sin and no one can help them to achieve freedom from their sin, except themselves.

Christian doctrine of Atonement:

In the Old Testament, we see that there is a concept of the sacrificing of animals as a means for atonement of sin. However, there is a growing sense that God wants self-sacrifice in terms of obedience to his will, rather than merely cultic offerings (for example Psalm 51:17, Micah 6:6-8). Psalm 40:6-8 states that 'In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, "Lo I come; in the roll of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart".' To understand this concept, one must establish what these offerings actually mean. 'Sacrifice or "zebah" is a communion sacrifice or shared-offering. Its main characteristic was that only a part of it (that is the fat) was burnt upon the altar, while the rest, was eaten by the worshippers (apart from the portions given to the priests). The sacrificial victim was taken from the cattle, sheep, or goats, either male or female.'¹⁵⁶

'A sin offering is an expiatory sacrifice similar to, and often indistinguishable from, the "guilt offering". The animal used for the sacrifice depended on the rank of the guilty

¹⁵⁴ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 494.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 494.

¹⁵⁶ Anderson, Psalms, 316.

person(s). The flesh of the sacrifice was not eaten by the sacrificer, but it could be consumed by the priests, except in cases where the sin-offering was intended for the priests.¹⁵⁷

This is the point made by Psalm 51:19 that it is not wrong to make sacrifices, as long as they are made in obedience to him, with an upright attitude and a clean heart.

Anderson comments that 'as in 1 Samuel 15:22, obedience is regarded as more important than sacrifice. Those obedient to Yahweh will always offer right sacrifice.

But not all who bring their offering to God are faithful to him, flagrantly breaking the Covenant of God. What is said of sacrifices is equally true of prayers, cultic songs, etc. It is not a mere repetition of prayers that is acceptable to God, but the obedient, humble attitude.¹⁵⁸ The Old Testament contains a concept of the atonement of sin and God has honoured sacrifices made by his ancient people who were sincere in their hearts, but these sacrifices were a shadow, or an anticipation of the perfect sacrifice made by Jesus Christ for the sins of humanity. In the new covenant, it is the blood of Jesus Christ that atones for our sins and that is a sacrifice made by God, not just by humans.

Isaiah 53 is a passage that has been a subject of debate over the years. It is a passage which talks about the suffering servant of the Lord who will take the transgressions and the sins of the people upon himself. The Jewish understanding of this account suggests that it is talking about Israel, however, it appears that the suffering servant is a representative figure suffering on behalf of the people as a whole. Whereas the Christian understanding is that it talks about the suffering servant of the Lord, which is Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God because it confirms the crucifixion account in the canonical gospels. The parallels between Jesus and Isaiah 53 are so precise that it does not leave any doubt in the mind of a Christian that the subject of the passage is Jesus. Isaiah 53:5-6 say about the suffering servant, 'but he was wounded for transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned,

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 317.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 317.

everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

'In this connection it should be noticed that two things are involved in what the servant bears, what he has loaded upon him- the sin of others and the punishment which results upon them. Thus, the healing gained for the others by his stripes includes as well as the forgiveness of their sins and the removal of their punishment, that is to say, the suffering.'¹⁵⁹ The identity of the suffering servant however, is not mentioned. This is an Old Testament passage that was, of course, written and recorded years before the coming of Christ.

Isaiah 53, from the Christian perspective, confirms the Christian message, as spoken by Jesus that 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). Nineham comments that 'the reference to redemption here occurs only once, in the Marcan record of the ministry. Though Jesus may have included his death in his work of service and love for men, there is little or no evidence elsewhere in the gospels that he thought of it in terms of sacrifice or ransom.'¹⁶⁰ He continues further: 'the general idea behind the saying is so common in early Christian writing, especially in Paul's Epistles (cf. e.g. Galatians 3:13, Romans 3:24, 1 Corinthians 7:23), that Pauline influence may well account for its presence here.'¹⁶¹ Whatever the Pauline influence may have been on this verse, it is clear that throughout the New Testament, the influence of Isaiah 52 and 53 is pervasive.

In St Matthew's gospel 8:17, for instance, it is mentioned in relation to Jesus' healing ministry. On the other hand, Nineham also admits that 'the once-popular hypothesis that St Mark was greatly influenced by Paul is now discredited and in fact no precise verbal parallel to this passage can be found in Paul. His theology as revealed in 1 Corinthians

¹⁵⁹ Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, 263.

¹⁶⁰ Nineham, Mark, 281.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

6:39, 7:23, Galatians 1:4, 2:20, 3:13, 4:5 and Romans 3:24 is in line with Mark 10:45, but reveals its distinctiveness for itself.¹⁶²

Just because the central message of Mark 10:45 is the same as the Pauline passages mentioned by Nineham this does not necessarily mean that's where the gospel authors got Jesus' sayings from. In fact, Isaiah 52 and 53 serve as a general background to the New Testament writers' understanding of the cross of Christ.

Furthermore, the reason why Jesus went to a humanly extreme measure to shed his blood for humankind in the first place is simply because of God's love for the world. 1 John 4:10 states that 'In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' 1 John 2:2 states that He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.' But does that mean that human beings can carry on sinning and abuse the grace of God bestowed upon them? By no means is that the case. According to Howard Marshall, in his commentary on John's epistles, Jesus is our Advocate with the Father, but he is not asking the Father to declare us innocent in that we have never committed any sins, but that any sins of ours that have been committed can be pardoned, through his blood (if we acknowledge our sins).¹⁶³

He (Marshall) further comments that 'in order that forgiveness may be granted, there is an action in respect of the sins which has the effect of rendering God favourable to the sinner. We may, if we wish, say that the sins are cancelled out by the action in question. This means that the one action has the double effect of expiating the sin and thereby propitiating God.'¹⁶⁴ 'The atoning sacrifice is of course, the death of Jesus. This is clear from the fact that in the parallel statement in 1:7 it is the blood of Jesus which cleanses us from sin; blood is a metaphor for sacrificial death.'¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Ibid., 281.

¹⁶³ Marshall, Epistles, 118.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 118.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 118-119.

Thus, we have seen that orthodox Islam denies the fact of the crucifixion and also the possibility of atonement. Whereas in Christianity, everything depends on the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross. There are, however, points of connection in the Quran's admission of Jesus' death, and it at least in one place, the Quran acknowledges the possibility of a ransoming sacrifice (Surah 37:107). This is in connection with Abraham's willingness to offer his own son and of God rescuing the boy by providing the sacrifice with another victim. This victim is called 'great sacrifice'. Is this more than just about a ram caught in the bushes and remains a matter for Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Chapter 4: Christian beliefs about the Resurrection, ascension and return of Jesus, and Muslim responses:

The crucifixion of Jesus is not the end of the Christian story, but merely the beginning. If Jesus had died and that had been the conclusion of the New Testament, there would have been no Christian faith, no hope and nothing to look forward to. The event is the absolute bedrock of Christian belief. It is the event which the early followers of Jesus claimed to have witnessed, and which resulted in the birth of the Church.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:16-17, 'for if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.' In other words, Paul goes to the extent of claiming that without the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity is useless and does not make any sense.

According to Margaret Thrall, 'Paul tells his converts that their faith has nothing in it and they are still in their old state of sin. He thinks of death as the result of man's sin, and its punishment (cf Romans 6:23). Sin and death are imagined as twin powers which control man's existence. The resurrection of Jesus meant the defeat of death, and consequently the defeat of sin, too. But if Christ was not raised then death has not been defeated and

neither has sin.¹⁶⁶ Thrall's interpretation of this verse states that Paul associates death with sin and the resurrection is the victory over sin and death and if there is no resurrection then sin and death remain undefeated. Talking about the sin of Adam in Genesis 3, Thrall goes on to compare Jesus and Adam: 'For since it was a man who brought death into the world, a man also brought the resurrection of the dead. Christ resembles Adam because what happens to him potentially affects the whole human race. He differs from Adam because Adam brought about the death of mankind, whereas in Christ all will be brought to life as a result of his resurrection.'¹⁶⁷

The one question that has been asked over history is did Jesus really rise from the dead or was it an event fabricated by the early Christians. According to Gary Habermas, a New Testament scholar:-

"Historians employ a number of common-sense principles in assessing the strength of a testimony. Here are five of those principles:

- 1. Testimony attested to by multiple independent witnesses is usually considered stronger than the testimony of one witness.*
- 2. Affirmation by a neutral or hostile source is usually considered stronger than affirmation from a friendly source, since bias in favor of the person or position is absent.*
- 3. People usually don't make up details regarding a story that would tend to weaken their position.*
- 4. Eyewitness testimony is usually considered stronger than testimony heard from a second- or third hand source.*
- 5. An early testimony from very close to the event in question is usually considered more reliable than one received years after the event.'¹⁶⁸*

Firstly, Jesus was seen to be laid in a tomb. Mark 15:46-47 states that 'Joseph (of Arimathea) bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.' There were witnesses who saw Jesus being placed in the tomb. Nineham comments that 'the Jews buried their dead outside the city walls, in individual tombs cut out of the rock or formed by natural caves. Bodies were placed in recesses or on shelves

¹⁶⁶ Thrall, 1&2 Corinthians, 107.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 108.

¹⁶⁸ Habermas, Case for Resurrection, 40.

or slabs of stone, and the entrance was closed with either a rectangular block of stone (sometimes hinged like a door), or with a rounded stone fitted in a groove, which could be rolled back at need, but was too heavy to be casually tampered with.¹⁶⁹

All four gospels claim the tomb was empty and that Jesus rose again and if this was a fabricated event then where was the body of Jesus, since plenty of evidence from Christian and non-Christian sources suggests that he died and was laid in a tomb, guarded by Roman soldiers for fear that he will rise again, as he himself claimed (Matthew 27:62-66). The fact that the tomb was found empty is not disputed by either Jesus' followers, nor his opponents, up to the present day (Matthew 28:13).

Floyd Filson states that 'the Jews were attacking the resurrection story as a deliberate deception; Jesus died, and Jesus stayed dead, but the disciples stole his body then announced his resurrection. There was Christian contact with Judaism when Matthew was written, and vigorous debate was going on between the two groups; the Jews could not deny the story of the empty tomb; they explained it as a fraud; and "Matthew" countered this story with the bribing of the guard.'¹⁷⁰ The fact remains even if the tale was made up, the Roman authorities could not produce the body. If it is alleged that grave robbers stole the body it is known that grave robbers did not steal bodies, instead, they stole valuables that were buried with the body.

The first witnesses to the resurrection were women, according to all the four Gospels and this is an important fact in the resurrection account because within the cultural context of the time, a woman's testimony was not considered reliable. Due to this reason, the idea that these accounts were fabricated is highly improbable¹⁷¹ Hence, it is highly unlikely that the testimony of the women who appeared at the tomb and learned of the resurrection of Jesus is a lie.

Then there were other eyewitness accounts of the resurrection; the disciples claimed to have seen the risen Lord. The apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8: 'For I delivered

¹⁶⁹ Nineham, St Mark, 435.

¹⁷⁰ Filson, Gospel, 305.

¹⁷¹ O Collins, Easter, 42-43.

to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.’ Thrall comments that ‘The appearance to Cephas is referred to in Luke 24:34, and that to the Twelve may be the one which follows in Luke’s narrative (verses 36-49); Luke speaks of the “eleven” which is historically correct, since Judas committed suicide after his betrayal of Jesus.’¹⁷² Paul is probably referring to the “twelve” as a collective term for the original disciples. ‘James, the brother of Jesus; in Paul’s day James was the leader of the Jerusalem church. Again, we are told nothing of this appearance in the gospels, nor of the one to all the apostles, a phrase which includes more than the eleven, and possibly refers to missionaries such as Barnabas.’¹⁷³ Just because some appearances are not recorded in the gospels does not mean they did not take place.

The fact that Jesus appears to a few people first does not automatically disqualify the idea that he cannot appear to others. It is very well a possibility that after Jesus appeared to his disciples, he also appeared to 500 other people. Atheist scholar Gerd Ludemann concludes that ‘it may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus’ death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.’¹⁷⁴ Also, Luke Johnson states that ‘all that historical criticism can establish is that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection.’¹⁷⁵

Another key factor that has played a huge part in contributing to the evidence of the resurrection event is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who then later became known as the apostle Paul. He mentions himself in verse 1 Corinthians 15:8 that Christ appeared to him also and Acts 9 describes the incredible encounter he has with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Saul of Tarsus was a devout Jew who was breathing threats against the early Christians and was having them put to death (Acts 8) and according to Acts 9, he

¹⁷² Thrall, 1&2 Corinthians, 105.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 105.

¹⁷⁴ Ludemann, What, 81.

¹⁷⁵ Johnson, Real, 136.

had a transformative experience. The reason his testimony is reliable and is a key factor in the resurrection event is because he was a devout Jew who was not a disciple of Jesus while Jesus was on earth, nor was he a friend of his disciples or had anything to do with them. He was a persecutor of the early church who later confessed Christ as Lord, risking his life. Modern day atheist skeptic Barth Ehrman states that ‘that Jesus’ followers (and later Paul) had resurrection experiences is, in my judgment, a fact. What the reality was that gave rise to these experiences, I do not know.’¹⁷⁶ Here, an atheist scholar confesses that the disciples and Paul believed to have encountered the risen Jesus were reporting genuine experiences. Christian scholar Michael Bird claims that ‘Paul came to Christ through an experience in which he thought he encountered the risen Jesus. This account also dates very early. We need reasons for his conversion from unbelief, since his conversion was based on a personal appearance of Jesus and counts very heavily against embellishment.’¹⁷⁷ Habermas also states in an article of his that ‘if, as tradition tells us, Paul was executed in Rome, it was not because he practiced some kind of interiorized spirituality to the effect that “Jesus is Lord of my heart,” but something of his message and conduct brought him to the attention of the imperial authorities and warranted capital punishment in their eyes.’¹⁷⁸

Furthermore, another criticism that arises is that the 500 more people Jesus appeared to may have been hallucinating, along with his disciples. The fact is it is almost impossible that 500 people were hallucinating all about the same thing. Barth Ehrman, once again, comments that ‘Paul’s tradition that 500 hundred people saw Jesus at the same time has led some people to believe that Jesus’ followers suffered from mass hysteria. But mass hysteria does not explain the other traditions.’¹⁷⁹

Additionally, Will Durant, another non-Christian scholar, states that ‘although at least a few if not all of Jesus’ disciples may have been in an emotional state that rendered them candidates for a hallucination, the nature of some of the experiences of the risen Jesus, specifically those that occurred in group settings and to Jesus’ enemy Paul, and

¹⁷⁶ Ehrman, Jesus, 230.

¹⁷⁷ Habermas, Case, 86.

¹⁷⁸ Bird, Colossians, 91.

¹⁷⁹ Ehrman, Jesus, 230-231.

the empty tomb strongly suggest that these experiences were not hallucinations.¹⁸⁰ Here are the testimonies of non-Christian scholars that agree that it is impossible that large amounts of people can all be hallucinating simultaneously.

Finally, as a conclusion to the resurrection section, the early followers of Jesus were willing to give their lives up for the sake of the gospel (Acts 12:2). Moreover, Gerd Ludemann states that 'it may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus's death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ.'¹⁸¹

Christian New Testament Scholar Gary Habermas states that 'there is an important difference between the apostle martyrs and those who die for their beliefs today. Modern martyrs act solely out of their trust in beliefs that others have taught them. The apostles died for holding to their own testimony that they had personally seen the risen Jesus. Contemporary martyrs die for what they believe to be true. The disciples of Jesus died for what they knew to be either true or false.'¹⁸² The eyewitness experience of the apostles is a strong factor in believing in the resurrection, but, some modern day martyrs also have personal experience of the risen Christ in healings, visions or dreams.

Former Bishop of Durham and New Testament scholar N.T Wright writes that 'these three great facts—the resurrection appearances, the empty tomb, and the origin of the Christian faith—all point unavoidably to one conclusion: The resurrection of Jesus. Today the rational man can hardly be blamed if he believes that on that first Easter morning a divine miracle occurred.'¹⁸³ Lastly, atheist scholar Bart Ehrman claims that 'it is a historical fact that some of Jesus' followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead soon after his execution. We know some of these believers by name; one of them, the apostle Paul, claims quite plainly to have seen Jesus alive after his death. Thus, for the historian, Christianity begins after the death of Jesus, not with

¹⁸⁰ Licona, as cited in Evidence for God (page 78).

¹⁸¹ Ludemann, Historical, 39.

¹⁸² Habermas, Case, 59.

¹⁸³ Wright, Resurrection.

the resurrection itself, but with the belief in the resurrection.¹⁸⁴

These are the facts that build up the resurrection event that are attested to by both Christian and non-Christian historians and regardless of their personal beliefs and convictions, all conclude that it is highly improbable that the early followers of Jesus Christ would have fabricated the event and had they done so, they would not have been willing to be martyred for the sake of a stolen body, as they were accused of, or lying about the event. The empty tomb, the eyewitness accounts, the testimony of the disciples, the appearances to the disciples and the other 500 people, the miraculous conversion of Saul of Tarsus and the disciples' willingness to sacrifice their lives for the sake of following Christ are all strong pieces of evidence that stand in favour of the resurrection being a credible, historic event as portrayed in the New Testament.

Islamic view of resurrection and responses:

Now that we have looked at the resurrection in the Christian sense and the fact that without the resurrection, Christianity would be null and void, let us examine the Islamic view of the resurrection. Surah 4:158 claims that Allah, after he saved Jesus from being crucified according to the previous verse, raised him up to himself. That would mean Jesus had a bodily ascension. According to this particular verse, Jesus did not die. Quran commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments that 'there is difference of opinion as to the exact interpretation of this verse. The words are: the Jews did not kill Jesus, but God raised him up (rafa'a) to Himself. One school holds that Jesus did not die the usual human death, but still lives in the body in heaven; another holds that he did die (5:120) but not when he was supposed to be crucified, and that his being "raised up" unto God means that instead of being disgraced as a malefactor, as the Jews intended, he was, on the contrary, honoured by God as his Apostle...'185

¹⁸⁴ Ehrman, Jesus, 230-231.

¹⁸⁵ Yusuf Ali, Quran, 230.

Similarly, Ibn Abbas thus comments: 'But Allah took him up unto Himself in heaven. Allah was ever Mighty in His vengeance against His enemies, Wise by granting triumph to his friends: He saved His Prophet and destroyed their man.'¹⁸⁶In addition to his interpretation, Yusuf Ali implies that the Arabic word 'rafa'a' refers to being raised up and he also adds that 'the same word rafa'a is used in association with honour in connection with Mustafa.'¹⁸⁷ According to Surah 19:33, Jesus states 'peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I will be raised to life (interpretations have been done earlier). The Arabic word used in the text is 'ba'atha' for raised alive again, which literally refers to bodily resurrection from the dead.

There is a difference between someone being raised up to Allah (rafa'a) and someone experiencing a bodily resurrection from the dead (ba'atha). Islam appears to fail to distinguish between the resurrection and ascension due to failure to take seriously the testimony of the Quran itself that Jesus died (as seen earlier). According to orthodox Islam, he did not die but was raised by God (**rafa'a**) without enough attention being paid to the physical resurrection, after his death and before his ascension as referred to in 19:33 (ba'atha).¹⁸⁸

Regarding the ascension, Parrinder comments that 'in the past, Muslims had no objection to a physical ascension of Jesus to heaven. In the famous story of the night journey of Muhammad to Jerusalem and ascent to heaven, the prophet saw in the second heaven Jesus, son of Mary, and John, son of Zachariah.'¹⁸⁹ It is true that Muhammad also claimed to have ascended to heaven however it is not clear whether it was in a dream or in reality.¹⁹⁰

In Muhammad's case, it was a night journey, in the case of Jesus, there was an ascension, a way of Allah rescuing his apostle (Jesus) (4:158) and an implied bodily resurrection (19:33). In order for a person to be raised back to life, they would have had to be dead in the first place. This is where there appears to be confusion within the

¹⁸⁶ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 190.

¹⁸⁷ Yusuf Ali, Quran, 230.

¹⁸⁸ Nazir-Ali, Islam, 19.

¹⁸⁹ Parrinder, Jesus, 123.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn Ishaq, Life of Muhammad, 183.

Islamic account of ascension and resurrection of Jesus, and that creates a problem for the Islamic argument which claims that Jesus did not die. If that is the case, then why is his resurrection mentioned? In addition to that, Surah 3:55 states Allah will cause Jesus to die, 4:157-158 claims he did not die but in 19:33 Jesus speaks about the death he will die and be raised to life again. Comparing the ascension of Muhammad and the ascension of Jesus that 'for a long time Muslims have seen that such an understanding about the destiny of Jesus undermines the Muslim's claim about the uniqueness of Muhammad as the prophet. As Dr Steven Masood says, a comparison between Muhammad, whose body lay buried in the grave and the living Jesus in heaven could be unfavourable to the spread of Islam.¹⁹¹ This is one of the reasons why the Ahmaddiya, for example, deny the physical ascension. As the founder of the Ahmadiyya, Mirza Ghulam Ahmed states that 'nowhere in the Quran is there any warrant for the popular belief of many Muslims that God has "taken up" Jesus bodily into heaven.¹⁹² According to Steven Masood, it is no surprise that Muslims would reject the physical ascension of Jesus because it appears to trivialize the uniqueness of Muhammad when compared to Jesus.¹⁹³ The majority continue to believe that Jesus ascended in the physical ascension, but a minority including Ahmadis, still continue to believe that Jesus never ascended to heaven in the literal sense.. In their belief the expression "raf" or "rafa" employed in the verses of the Quran refers to Jesus' spiritual exaltation and not his physical ascension.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, Ahmed Deedat, who was a Sunni comments that 'there have been only two references (Mark 16:19 and Luke 24:51) in the canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to the most stupendous event in Christianity. OF JESUS BEING TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN (sic).¹⁹⁵ There clearly appears to be a Muslim reluctance to believe that Jesus ascended into heaven alive, not just because of excluding the Prophet's uniqueness but also so that Jesus' character may not be elevated to a unique position. In other words, Jesus was just a human and his character portrayed in Islamic traditions was an act of Allah's will (as seen earlier). As far as the Ahmadi sect is concerned, they do not even believe Muhammad ascended to heaven.¹⁹⁶

If the Islamic scholars above object to Jesus, a human being, ascending to heaven in bodily form, why is there is no objection in terms of Jonah being in the belly of the fish (Surah 37:139- 148)? The Quran says in verses 143-144 that 'had he not been of those who exalt Allah, he would have

¹⁹¹ Masood, Jesus, 85.

¹⁹² Ahmad, as cited in Masood's Jesus: the Indian Messiah (page 86)

¹⁹³ Masood, Jesus, 86.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid,, 85.

¹⁹⁵ Deedat, as cited in Masood's Jesus: the Indian Messiah (page 87).

¹⁹⁶ Masood, Jesus, 86.

remained inside its belly until the Day of Resurrection.’ Ibn Abbas comments that ‘he would have tarried in its belly, he would have remained in the belly of the fish till the day when they are raised from the graves.’¹⁹⁷‘If Allah can possibly keep Jonah in the belly of the fish until the Day of Resurrection, if he wills, then why can he not raise Jesus up to himself alive, in bodily form? Indeed, nothing is too difficult for God according to both Islam and Christianity. Masood, once again, comments in his response to Mirza Ahmed who also disagrees with the ascension that ‘if this is the case, why then did Mirza believe that Jonah was alive in the belly of the fish for three days? How could he accommodate other similar matters relating to the metaphysical domain, like revelation, angels, resurrection and to some extent reincarnation and the transmigration of souls?’¹⁹⁸ This is the Islamic dilemma if, according to the Quran, Jesus spoke of his death and bodily resurrection, was caused to die and rescued from being crucified. Which of these events actually took place? And if Muslims still claim that Jesus did not die then we have to ask why Jesus could not die if other prophets and messengers of God could be killed by their enemies (Surah 2:61, 2:87 3:144).

From the Christian perspective, also as a response to Ahmed Deedat’s claims that only Mark and Luke record the ascension event, Jesus says to Mary Magdalene in John 20:17, after rising from the dead, ‘do not cling to me; I am ascending to my Father and your Father; to my God and your God.’ Muslims fondly quote this verse in order to refute the deity of Christ, attempting to prove that since Jesus called the Father his God, he was denying his deity, hence he cannot be God since he cannot ascend to himself. As far as the ascension is concerned, Ahmed Deedat completely ignores this verse. C.K Barrett thus comments: ‘there is nothing unusual in the description of God as the God and Father of Jesus Christ, or as the God and Father of Christians. Here John emphasizes that the relation between Jesus and God is different from that between the disciples and God, even though it is described in the same terms and the disciples are said to be brothers. Jesus is eternally the Son of God; he gives to those who believe in him the power to become children of God (1:11).’¹⁹⁹ Jesus is both the eternal Son of God and fully human. In this sense God can be spoken of as both the Father and the God of Jesus.

Masood states that ‘if the whole doctrine of Jesus’ ascension were based on those two references only, indeed this would be a serious problem. However, we find that all of the inspired writers knew about the ascension...Acts 1:9, John 20:17, 6:62; 7:33; 8:21, 22; 14:2, 5, 28; 16:5, 17 etc.’²⁰⁰ The ascension is mentioned in several passages and is not just referred to in Mark

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 517-518.

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed, as cited in Masood’s Jesus:the Indian Messiah (page 86).

¹⁹⁹ Barrett, Gospel, 471.

²⁰⁰ Masood, Jesus, 87.

16:19 and Luke 24:51.

The Return of Jesus in Islam and Christianity:

The crucifixion, the resurrection and ascension are not the end of the Christian story. Jesus, throughout the gospels claims that he will return to earth and judge the living and the dead. Mark 13:24- 27 states, speaking about the last days: 'but in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.' Matthew 25:31-33 states, 'when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.'

Filson states that 'the illustration of the shepherd separating the sheep from the goats is incidental to the main scene. The passage, contains notable Christological teaching. The Son of Man returns with divine power and glory to execute the final judgement for his Father; he is called King (verse 34) and Lord (verses 37, 44)...'²⁰¹Here, as elsewhere, Jesus identifies himself with the figure of the Son of Man, for example, in the well-known saying in Mark 10:45.

The Son of Man is divine and has the authority to judge. He is the final judge. He claims he will judge all the nations. The glorious throne symbolizes royalty, honour, power and authority. Only Jesus has the right to judge in the end. 'The Son of Man as the King gives the decree; it is final. But it is the decree of his Father, for the King is the Son of God.'²⁰²

²⁰¹ Filson, Gospel, 266.

²⁰² Ibid., 267.

There are several verses in the New Testament where Jesus speaks of his return such as Matthew 10:23; 16:27; 24:27; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62 and 8:38.²⁰³

Mark 14:62 is a very key verse in the return of Christ. When the High Priest asks Jesus during his trial 'Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?' Jesus answers, "I am", and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven".²⁰⁴ These words of Jesus were what caused him to be charged him with blasphemy and had him sentenced to death. Jesus is quoting Daniel 7:13, a prophecy in the Old Testament, spoken long before Christ's time on earth. J. P Bercovitz comments that 'they will see the Son of Man when he comes as Judge- possibly indeed during their lifetimes, but equally possibly after their deaths, when they are raised up for the last judgement.'²⁰⁴ According to interpreters such as Taylor Glasson and J.A.T Robinson, there is no reference to the second coming at all.²⁰⁵ They see it simply as a reference to the exaltation of Jesus. If that were the case, then why did Jesus say he will come on the clouds of heaven? He was not just claiming to be God, but also claiming to be seated at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven and have everlasting dominion (see Daniel 7:13-14).

The return of Jesus is a belief that is not only held by Christians, but also by Muslims. According to Sahih Al Bukhari, a credible Sunni collection of the traditions of the Prophet, 'Abu Hurairah narrated that Allah's messenger (saw) said, "By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus,) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler); he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizya (i.e. taxation taken from non-Muslims). Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it".²⁰⁶

According to Surah 43:61 'and Jesus will be a Sign for the coming of the Hour of

²⁰³ Masood, Jesus, 87.

²⁰⁴ Bercovitz, as cited in Cranfield's Gospel of Mark (page 445)

²⁰⁵ Glasson and Robinson, as cited in Cranfield's Gospel of Mark (page 445).

²⁰⁶ Bukhari, 3448, Book 60, Hadith 118.

Judgement; therefore, have no doubt about the Hour, but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way. According to Sunni commentator Ibn Abbas, 'And lo! Verily in the coming of Jesus the son of Mary there is knowledge of the Hour and an indication of the coming of the Hour; it is also said that this means: his coming is a sign of the advent of the Hour. So, doubt ye not concerning it, so have no doubt in the coming of the Hour, but, follow Me by professing Allah's divine Oneness. This profession of divine Oneness is the right path an established religion with which Allah is pleased: i.e. the religion of Islam(**sic**)²⁰⁷. According to Islamic ideology, Jesus will return to be a just judge and will lead people to Allah in the right way. The question is what is the significance of Jesus being the sign of the last hour and why is he leading people to the 'straight way'? Why is it that it is Jesus who is the last sign?

Baidawi in his interpretation holds that 'Jesus would descend in the in the Holy Land, that he would kill al-Dajjal, the Anti-Christ, and go to Jerusalem, worshipping there, killing swine and all who do not believe in him, reign in peace for forty years, and finally die and be buried in Medina.'²⁰⁸The "twelver" Shia sect of Islam also has a view on this. There is belief, within this Shia sect, in twelve Imams. Steven Masood writes that 'there is a fanatical belief in the twelve Imams (leaders) who have appeared on earth from time to time to help the faithful. The twelfth Imam was Muhammad Al-Mahdi who they believed disappeared from the world in 880 A.H. at the age of six. They await his second coming as the Mahdi. Upon his return he will restore justice and righteousness in the world.'²⁰⁹ The character of the Imam is not clear, though. Is he the Messiah, according to Shiite doctrine? Will he return with Jesus? Ibn Khaldun, notable Islamic thinker, says that belief in the coming of a Mahdi is of popular origin, but he knows of no trustworthy authority for it.²¹⁰

A trace can be seen of Jewish messianic expectations in these beliefs, along with the Christian belief. H.A.R Gibb states that it is easy to see how such doctrines have been largely influenced by Jewish, Christian and heretical messianic hopes.²¹¹ 'The Sunnis

²⁰⁷ Ibn Abbas, Tanwir, 572.

²⁰⁸ Parrinder, Jesus, 124.

²⁰⁹ Masood, Jesus, 23. (See also, Apocalyptic Islam by Amanat)

²¹⁰ Khaldun, as cited in Masood's Jesus: the Indian Messiah (page 24)

²¹¹ Ibid., 24.

also believe in a war-like Mahdi, but not the same Mahdi who disappeared. Another major belief is that at the turn of each Islamic century God sends someone as a reformer to renew the zeal of the faithful.²¹² This is the reason why traces of Jewish messianic expectations can be found because the Jews were also expecting a war-like Messiah, a political figure.

As far as the coming of the Mahdi (whose character is not clear) and Christ are concerned, one should question whether we are faced with another Islamic dilemma, the dilemma being, if Jesus or the Mahdi are to return to earth again, does that mean that the coming of Muhammad was not the last time God had sent a prophet to this world? Since the orthodox Islamic belief holds that Muhammad is the final messenger, to whom God gave his final book (Quran), then why is it that Jesus is going to return first and judge humankind?

Thus, in this chapter we have seen how the holy books of both Christianity and Islam speak of Jesus' rising and exaltation or ascension and return at the last day. However, there are also serious differences in how the two traditions view these important beliefs. Again, this can provide interesting material for Muslim-Christian discussion on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

We have now been able to establish that Christians from the earliest times, basing themselves on the Bible, have believed that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God. Within the Islamic context, Jesus is the only human being in the Quran and the Hadith who is referred to as uniquely sinless, whom Satan could not harm because he was unable to cause Jesus and his mother Mary to sin. The whole concept of the virginal conception and birth is that Jesus was a product of divine intervention, and not sexual intercourse, something which even the Quran affirms. According to the Christian doctrine, the virgin birth does not only signify purity, but also that Jesus is God because

²¹² Masood, Jesus, 24.

he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and the power of the most High overshadowed Mary because she was to bear the eternal Son of the living God. No human being has ever been conceived and born in this manner. If Islam still does not accept that Jesus' virginal conception and birth had something to do with his divinity, then the question still remains as to why Jesus is called sinless in the Quran and the Hadith. The prophet of Islam himself claims that Jesus and his mother Mary are the only two human beings to be secure from Satan's touch. As we have seen, Islamic scholars may say that Jesus was sinless only in his prophethood, but that is not what the Quran says. The virginal conception and birth of Jesus in Islam signifies that he is much more than a mere prophet or an ordinary human being.

Furthermore, Islamic scholarship may claim that Jesus is called a word and a spirit proceeding from God because God created his word and spirit which he put into Mary, at the time of Jesus' conception and birth and the comparison of Jesus to Adam is repeated in this section too. However, we have established that in Islam, Jesus is not merely created by God's Word and Spirit but is actually himself called the Word of God in the Quran and the Spirit of God in later Islamic tradition. These are specific titles given to Jesus, whereas Adam is not given these titles. As a matter of fact, no other human being in Islam has except Jesus whose character is clearly elevated as a result. According to both Christianity and Islam, God's Word and Spirit have always existed. God cannot be God without his Word and His Spirit. If, as Islam declares, Jesus is the Word of God and the Spirit of God then he must be God Incarnate. God's Word and his Spirit are eternal and there cannot be more than one eternal. So, God's Word and his Spirit are of the very being of God.

Thirdly, we have given sufficient evidence to suggest that Jesus died by crucifixion from both Christian and non-Christian sources and regardless of their personal beliefs about Jesus, whether they perceive him to be the eternal Son of God or not, even the some of the most skeptical atheist historians have been shown to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was a man in the first century, whom his followers perceived to be the eternal Son of God who died by crucifixion. There is also evidence that suggests he rose from the dead and we have already established that some non-Christian scholarship agrees that the

disciples of Jesus believed that they had seen the risen Lord, in spite of the fact that they personally do not believe in the risen Lord, they still acknowledge these historical facts. We have also discussed the Islamic dilemma of Jesus possibly being caused to die by Allah, rising from the dead and then being taken up to Allah. We have seen how, in one place, the Quran appears to deny Jesus' death by crucifixion by simply stating that 'he was only made to appear to them', contradicting historical facts.

We saw also how the Quran confuses ascension with resurrection and how, according to the Quran, Jesus is one prophet who is still alive in bodily form because God decided to intervene and save his life from the Jews. We then showed how it is possible to ask our Muslim friends why God had specifically chosen Jesus on whom he could bestow such favour?

We have reviewed the Christian tradition in its belief that Jesus will return to earth to judge the living and the dead and his reign will be an everlasting one and those who have confessed Jesus as Lord will be saved and will inherit eternal life with him. We have also seen that Islam holds the belief that Jesus is returning to this earth and will act as a just judge between humankind. This implies that the series of prophets coming from God has not ceased, since Jesus, who is in the Islamic view, a prophet, is expected to come again.

We have been able to see that Muslims and Christians have a number of beliefs about Jesus in common, but that their differences about the person and work of Jesus Christ are even more important than what they have in common. This provides a significant agenda for future dialogue, discussion and debate between Muslims and Christians about the place of Jesus Christ in God's purposes for his world. It is our hope that this thesis will make a small contribution to the agenda for that discussion and debate.

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