

FINDING MUHAMMAD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: AN ORTHODOX MUSLIM'S INTERPRETIVE  
METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

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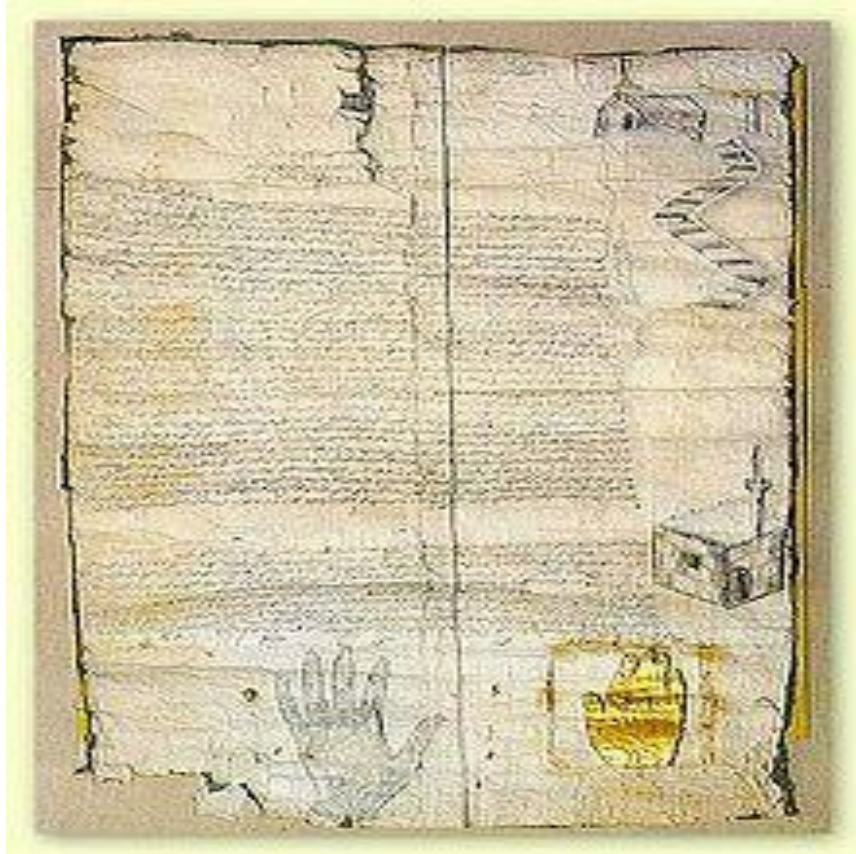
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Finding Muhammad in the New Testament:

An Orthodox Muslim's Interpretive Methodological Approach to the Christian Scriptures.



**Λιθον ον απεδοιμασαν οι οικοδομουτες, ουτος  
εγενηθη εις κεφαλην γωνιας (Mark 12:10)**

(Psalm 118:23) אָבן מֵאֲסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים הָיְתָה לְרֹאשׁ פֶּנֶה

Ali J. Ataie

*Introduction*

According to the Qur'an, the prophet Muhammad was clearly announced in the various books of the Jews and Christians as one who would come as God's chosen vessel to fulfill various temporal, spiritual, and eschatological roles. The tragedy, however, is that quite often contemporary interfaith discourse probes no further than a Muslim speaker finding him or herself before a hostile crowd desperately struggling to prove that Muhammad wasn't a pedophile due to his marriage to the young 'Aisha, or a terrorist due to his participation in numerous military expeditions. In some cases, Muslim apologists, fed up with what they perceive to be blatant Christian hypocrisy, draw attention to the Christian notion that the Holy Spirit chose to impregnate Mary when the latter had scarcely reached puberty, and that the incarnated God decided to enter the temporal world through the birth canal of a twelve-year-old virgin.

I should know – I used to participate in such debates or rather *debacles* but discovered quickly that constructing superficial caricatures of religion, although highly amusing and self-serving, are essentially antithetical to what these religions purport to preach. That is, love and concern for others. When I was told that Allah was the moon god, I responded that Christians worship two men and a bird. When I was told that Muhammad was violent, I responded with reminding my Christian opponents that Jesus ordered Moses and Joshua to annihilate populations of women and children.<sup>1</sup> I was more concerned about the public *image* of Islam that was being presented and not nearly concerned enough about acting on Islamic principles and doing what was right simply because it was right. And as Dr. Sherman Jackson mentioned recently, when we

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<sup>1</sup> According to orthodox Christology, Jesus Christ is the god of the Old Testament.

compromise our principles to chase after images, we are in reality, compromising the teachings of the very ones we claim to follow.<sup>2</sup> In fact, very few Muslims actually know about the documents which issued from Vatican II (1962-1965), such as the *Nostra Aetate*, which states that upon the Muslims, “the Church looks with esteem.”<sup>3</sup>

Admittedly, superficial post-modern Islamic so-called “scholarship” is to blame for much of the intellectual quagmires that many non-believing Westerners have unfortunately fallen into headfirst. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, created a colossal vacuum which many average Americans sought to fill with sound and reliable knowledge about Islam and its prophet; a golden opportunity that initially slipped through the fingers of Muslim intellectuals and academics but was seized upon ravenously by profligate post-911 opportunists such as Robert Spencer, Daniel Pipes, Steve Emerson, and Ayan Hirsi Ali, and many other pseudo-intellectuals. The damage was done, but I certainly don’t believe that it is irreparable.

As the rhetoric of Islamophobia continues to influence the masses, I often find myself completely bewildered by statements made by “experts” in the field of Islam about the Qur’an, the holy scripture of the Muslims. Some, such as Palestinian Christian apologist Anis Shorosh, claim that the Qur’an teaches belief in the Trinity and advocates the deity of Christ and his incarnation. He points out that in the very first verse in the Qur’an, *Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the

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<sup>2</sup> These comments were made by Dr. Jackson at the “Reviving the Islamic Spirit” Conference in Toronto, Canada in December, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Kate Zebiri, *Muslims & Christians, Face to Face* (Boston: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 32.

Merciful), Allah represents the Father, while the Beneficent and the Merciful represent the Son and Holy Spirit respectively. What Shorosh does with clear condemnations of the deity of Christ and the belief in a triune deity in the Qur'an remains a mystery (4:171; 5:17; 5:116-117; etc.), due to the fact that he is quiet as a mouse on the issue. (His method can be likened to a man standing at a salad bar; he simply picks what looks tasty). However many Christian authors, convinced by Shorosh's claims, after all he does speak Arabic, followed suit, and boldly maintained their teacher's Christological stances with respect to the Qur'an. Others will claim that the entire Qur'an is a revelation of Satan, thus accounting for the Qur'an's inimitable, or supernatural, use of language and phraseology, as well as its blatant disagreements with New Testament teaching. Still others claim the Qur'an is an admittedly beautiful book that contains good and sound teachings, but it is simply the machinations of a single man, and contains no *real* authority.

They maintain that Muhammad was an extraordinarily gifted and talented human being, "one of the giants of human history," "a truly remarkable man of unimpeachable character,"<sup>4</sup> but certainly not an emissary from the Divine. His contacts with various heterodox Christian groups in Mecca and abroad and his apparent access to non-canonical Christian writings and treatises in Syriac and Arabic easily explain away his claims of the Qur'an's metaphysical origin. One will find glowing tributes to Islam's prophet in the writings of George Bernard Shaw, Alphonse de la Martaine, Thomas

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<sup>4</sup> Zebiri, *Muslim & Christians, Face to Face*, 110.

Carlyle, and Michael H. Hart<sup>5</sup> yet it seems that very few of these intellectuals have earnestly entertained the notion that Muhammad was in fact a mouthpiece of the Lord of the worlds. Muhammad is afforded every type of compliment yet denied his most essential claim of divine messengership. In short, there really is no standardized Christian judgment or *methodology* with respect to the Qur'an or its prophet.

While it can be argued that the Protestant Reformation and invention of Guttenberg's printing press in the sixteenth century as well as the emergence of higher biblical criticism in the nineteenth century led to the massive movement of apostasy currently being experienced in Europe and proving to be disastrous for the faith of Christians the world over, the Qur'an actually invites this type of criticism, or close analysis, upon itself: "Do they not reflect deeply upon the Qur'an? If it were from other than God, they would have found much discrepancy therein" (4:82). The Arabic verb, *yatadabbaru*, translated "reflect deeply," from the infinitive *tadabbur*, means to penetrate, or to find the end of something. Muslims believe that the more one reflects upon and sincerely studies the Qur'an, the more likely that individual will come to accept it as a revelation from God. Similarly, the more one studies and analyzes the life of Muhammad, the more one will likely accept his essential claim of prophesy. It is little wonder why many contemporary anti-Muslim Christian apologists and polemicists, such

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<sup>5</sup> Michael H. Hart places Muhammad at the top of his list of the most influential people in the history of the world, just ahead of Sir Isaac Newton and a third place Jesus of Nazareth in his book, "*The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History*," 1978. He says, "My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular level." Michael H. Hart, *The 100: A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (New York: Kensington Publishing, 1978).

as Robert Spencer and his putrid “The Truth about Muhammad,” have authored books which seek to “expose” so-called unknown facts about the life of Muhammad (the most transparent life ever lived).

When it comes to the Bible, however, Muslims are much too quick to dismiss it as an unrecoverable corrupted text that has nothing meaningful to offer the world. The truth is, easily the most influential book in the history of Western civilization has been and continues to be the Bible. It is my contention that it is absolutely imperative for Muslims, especially those living in the West, to possess the ability to apply a reasoned interpretive methodology with respect to the Bible, in light of Islamic theology, prophetology, and Christology. Only then will the discourse rise above the childish polemics in which it is now wallowing and enter into a truly meaningful and substantive realm.

The Qur’an advocates a very interesting position with respect to the scriptures of the Jews and Christians that deserves much attention. We are told: “It is He who sent down to thee (O Muhammad) the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)” (Qur’an 3:3). But the Qur’an also teaches that these scriptures have suffered major revisions, redactions, and fabrications, known as *tahrif* (Qur’an 2:79; 3:78). The aim of this thesis is to academically propose what an orthodox Muslim might do with the New Testament –



how to separate the wheat from the chaff in light of Muhammadan<sup>6</sup> teaching, and how to recognize Muhammadan or Islamic typologies within the New Testament canon of scripture in order to effectively articulate these findings and contribute something fresh and compelling to modern religious discourse and interdisciplinary studies.

The method of a Muslim requires rigorous scholarship and a vast historical consciousness. It is not simply an issue of “divining,” or intuitively leaping into the mind of the original author as Schleiermacher maintained, but rather the practice of “fusing our horizons” with the world of the text in order to begin an ongoing dialogical relationship. The Muslim cannot simply pick and chose what he wants to use with no apparent explanation for his choices, but must blend his vital *forestructure*, to use Gadamer’s word, with the mind of the author, the latter only being known through intense study, not divination. It is my earnest hope that this thesis will act as a springboard, a motivating force for those who came after to continue this essential dialogue with the goal of attaining a greater understanding. I will limit my analysis to the New Testament, and endeavor not to delve into the vast ocean of the Hebrew Scriptures, unless we are presented with a passage in the New Testament which quotes or alludes to the books of the Jews. Therefore, it should be noted that some of the most

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<sup>6</sup> My use of the term “Muhammadan” is not intended to be synonymous with Islamic or Muslim (as Western Orientalists have used it), but rather as something pertaining specifically to the prophet Muhammad. In Arabic, we would say *Muhammadiya*.

celebrated passages of the Old Testament which Muslims have deemed to be clear descriptions of Muhammad will not be dealt with in the present work.<sup>7</sup>

“Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet,<sup>8</sup> whom they find mentioned in their own scriptures, in the Law and the Gospel...” (Qur’an 7:157a).

### **John’s pre-existent Jesus and Abu al-Hasan al-‘Ashari’s<sup>9</sup> Muhammad**

It may actually surprise many Christians to learn that Islamic orthodoxy, as espoused by many *Ash’ari* theologians, advocates a mystical prophetology not unlike certain aspects of Johannine Christology. The only difference, and admittedly it is a vast difference, is how theologians from both traditions interpret these purported mystical utterances of their respective luminaries. In order to demonstrate this point, let us look at the famous statement of Christ as recorded by the fourth evangelist in chapter eight of his gospel. After a heated exchange between Jesus and a group of aggressive Pharisees, in which the latter accuses by implication the former of being “born of fornication” (John 8:41), Jesus unleashes a whirlwind rebuttal culminating with the claim “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). The enraged Jews, apparently having no interest in the Law’s due process, are immediately compelled to pick up stones and deal

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<sup>7</sup> Such as Genesis 49:10; Deuteronomy 33:2, 12; Song of Songs 5:10-16; Isaiah 9:6, 21:13-19, 29:12, 42:1-25; Malachi 3:1.

<sup>8</sup> Arabic: “*al-nabiy al-ummi*,” may be translated “the gentile prophet” according to traditional exegetes who call attention to the fact that the Arabic speaking Jews of Muhammad’s time used the word *ummiyoon* (pl. of *ummi*) to refer to Gentiles. If we construe the phrase from Isaiah 42:6, *l’or goyim*, as being in construct, we may dispense of the traditional translation “a light for the gentiles,” and opt for the more exact “as the light of the gentiles,” with “light” being definite by position.

<sup>9</sup> Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari (d. 324 CE/936 H) was the founder of an orthodox school of Islamic theology who refuted many of the obfuscations of heretical Muslim groups. His school has enjoyed universal acceptance by the Sunni world.

with the gross blasphemers themselves. Alas, Jesus slips through the very midst of them and so “passed by” unharmed (John 8:59).

It is interesting to note that before Jesus drives his final nail in the proverbial Pharisaic coffin, so to speak, he stated that Abraham rejoiced to see his (Jesus’) day, and when he saw it, he was glad (John 8:56). The Jews retort by reminding the young Nazarene that he had not even reached his fiftieth year, how could he have seen Abraham? – A man who strutted the earth eighteen centuries earlier. The problem is obvious: Jesus never said that *he* had seen Abraham, but only that Abraham had seen his, meaning Jesus’, day. This misunderstanding, however, is summarily overshadowed by the next verse in which Jesus ostensibly claims to possess ontological precedence over the ancient Patriarch of the Jews, hence the ensuing provocation to pick up stones.

Both the Jews, as well as the vast majority of Christian theologians, since the composition of the Fourth Gospel have qualified this statement as a claim of deity made by Jesus. John, however, who is no doubt extremely versed in the Septuagint, chose not to include in the proclamation of Christ the crucial second half of the statement given to Moses by God in Exodus chapter three at the burning bush, where the Hebrew אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is translated ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, meaning literally, “I am *He who is*.” John tells his audience that Jesus only said, “πρὶν Ἀβραάμ γενέσθαι ἐγώ εἰμι” (Before Abraham was I am), without the highly mystical ὁ ὢν, which consists of the masculine singular nominative article and the nominative active participle of εἰμί.

In other words, John elects to leave off the divine aspect of Exodus 3:14, namely “The one who is,” thus causing Jesus to fall noticeably short of possessing absolute pre-eternal existence. Jesus did exist in *some* capacity before Abraham, but not in an absolute or essential sense, or as the followers of the anathematized Arius (256 – 336 CE)<sup>10</sup> used to proclaim “*ayn pote hote ouk ayn*” meaning “there was a time when he was not.” Arius affirmed Christ’s “pre-existence” in relative terms and said that the Son’s causal subordination (from Origen of Alexandria, d. 253 CE) became also the Son’s *temporal* subordination and essential inferiority.<sup>11</sup> Certainly Arius knew of Jesus’ statement in John but was simply not convinced that it constituted a divine claim. Hence the above Muslim exegesis of John 8:58 finds unmistakably established precedence in pre-Islamic times, amongst the very group which prompted Constantine to call the first ever ecumenical Synod no less.

In addition to this, the fact that John’s three evangelical predecessors do not even record the statement yet are very intent on informing their readers about Jesus’ choice of conveyance while entering Jerusalem, has led many scholars of the New Testament, Bart Ehrman included, to conclude that the authenticity of such so-called “I am statements” are highly suspect. Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem certainly fulfilled ancient prophecy, but I cannot possibly imagine why Matthew, a supposed ear and eye-witness to Christ, would not record any of the crucial Johannine “divine” claims of Jesus if in fact the latter made such statements.

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<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus (239 – 390 CE) claimed that Arius died on the “latrine,” while heresiologist Epiphanius of Salamis (320 – 403 CE) said that Arius was “infused with the power of the devil.”

<sup>11</sup> Tarmo Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007), 82.

Literalist Christians who believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God may contend that Matthew and John were simply touching two different parts of the same elephant while blind-folded. Naturally their descriptions would differ, and perhaps differ significantly. Matthew and John, however, were not blind-folded; they are alleged to be truthful disciples of Jesus Christ. If Jesus did in fact make such statements but were not recorded by Matthew, can we then, even with all the goodwill in the world, honestly trust Matthew to give us an accurate account of anything? Perhaps Matthew felt as if they did not suit the personality of his very “Jewish” gospel, or maybe he suspected that they were falsely attributed to Christ through unsound oral tradition. If the first scenario is true, then Matthew has done a major disservice to humanity, while the second scenario places portions of John’s gospel in the disturbing position of being pure fabrication. Historians determine history based on plausibility; so what is the most plausible answer in this situation? In my opinion, it is that Matthew never heard of Jesus’ “I am” statements simply because Jesus never uttered such things.<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, a trained Muslim theologian ought to recognize in John 8:58 something quite familiar. It is reported in a sound tradition (*hadith*) that Muhammad said, “I am the Seal of the Prophets when Adam was between dust and water,” or in another transmission “...between the soul and the body.” The Ash’ari theologians indeed maintain that although the prophet was the last to be sent, in a line starting

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<sup>12</sup> “The Jesus Seminar,” (founded by Robert Funk in 1985) which consists of about seventy-five leading North American scholars concluded that 18% of statements attributed to Jesus in the New Testament are “actual” or “probable.” Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ; Is Blind Faith Killing Christianity?* (New York: Walker & Company, 2004), 224.

from Adam, he was the first one to be created. The ontological precedence of Muhammad over the other prophets, known as “*al-Haqiqatah al-Muhammadiya*,” or the Reality of the Muhammadan Nature (also called the Priority of the Muhammadan light, or Schimmel’s phrase, the Archetypal Muhammad),<sup>13</sup> can be gleaned from both the traditions as well as the Qur’an. Surah 33:7 states: “And remember when We took the covenant from the Prophets, from *you* (وَمِنْكَ), and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary. We took from them a solemn covenant.” The classical Malikite exegete Qadi ‘Iyad (d. 1149 CE) states in his magnum opus “The Healing,” that this verse indicates the prophets’ chronological order with respect to creation, not with respect to commission. Muhammad is essentially first while temporally last.<sup>14</sup>

Classical Muslim exegetes also quote the tradition of Adam’s repentance to God after his fall by interceding (*tawassul*) through the prophet Muhammad and thus finding favor with God in their commentaries of Qur’an 2:37 (“Then Adam learned from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him”). When the Almighty questioned him as to how he knew of Muhammad, a man who would be sent into the world many thousands of years later, Adam responded that when God blew into him of His Spirit, he read the great creedal formula, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His Emissary,” written on the base of the majestic throne. Adam concluded, “I knew that You would not place a person’s name beside Yours unless he was beloved to You.” God

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<sup>13</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 64.

<sup>14</sup> Qadi ‘Iyad ibn Musa al-Yahsubi, *The Healing by the Recognition of the Rights of the Chosen One*, translated by Aisha Abdarrahman Bewley (Granada: Madinah Press, 1991), 132.

responded, “If I had not created Muhammad, I would not have created you.” Although *tawassul* is condemned as idolatry by the literalist Wahhabi sect, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE), who was a famous student of Wahhabi favored Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), surprisingly mentions this tradition of Adam in his *Qisas al-Anbiya* (Stories of the Prophets).<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary Muslim scholar Hamza Yusuf mentions the following as note number fifty with reference to the creedal statement, “The [Prophet’s] Intercession that God deferred for them is true, as narrated by the traditions,” in his marvelous translation and commentary of “The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi:”

“The hadith that is related by Jabir in the Musannaf of al-Hafiz Abu Bakr ‘Abd al-Razzaq b. Hammam al-San’ani and considered sound by recent scholarship indicates that the very first of God’s creation was the light of the Prophet. According to the hadith, Jabir b, ‘Abd Allah asked the Prophet, ‘What is the first thing that God created?’ To this, the Prophet replied, ‘O Jabir! The first thing God, the Sublime and Exalted, created was the light of your Prophet from His light, and that light remained in the midst of His power for as long as He wished, and there was not at that time a Tablet or a Pen or a Paradise or a Fire or an angel or a heaven or an earth. And when God, the Sublime and Exalted, wished to create creation, He divided that light into four parts, and from the first He

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<sup>15</sup> Imam Abu al-Fidaa Ismail ibn Kathir, *The Stories of the Prophets*, translated by Duraid & Faiz Fatoohi (New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2005), 21.

made the Pen, from the second the Tablet, from the third the Throne, and from the fourth everything else.’”<sup>16</sup>

Yusuf goes on to state that this hadith does not achieve the status of an infallible (*mutawatir*) narration and should not be a point of contention in creedal matters.<sup>17</sup> This view of Muhammad may be loosely approximated to the “proto-orthodox”<sup>18</sup> Arian position regarding Jesus as being “*ktsima teleion*,” or best of creation; a position that lost the day at Nicea in 325 CE, but would rise again and represent the dominant Christology amongst the bishops of the Empire by 360 CE. Hilary of Poitiers (300 – 368 CE) wrote a five hundred page refutation of Arianism, yet only named his opponent twice, which testifies to the fact that this was truly a massive movement with many contributors.<sup>19</sup> For Arius, “only begotten” (μονογενής) meant dissimilar to the Father and unique amongst creation.<sup>20</sup> Certainly none of the Bishops summoned to the Council by Constantine represented earlier Ebionite, Marcionite, or Modalist “blasphemies” as those who adhered to such theologies were already marginalized into oblivion by the early fourth century CE. One may also note the similarity between the following *hadiths* of Muhammad and statements of the Johannine Jesus respectively: “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Truth” (Bukhari & Muslim<sup>21</sup>); “Whoever has seen me, has seen the

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<sup>16</sup> Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Tahawi* (Berkeley: Sandala, 2007), 117.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> A marvelous term coined by Bart Ehrman signifying the beliefs of those who would eventually be considered “orthodox” Christians. I consider the Arians to be a sub-group of the proto-orthodox and have thus applied the term to them as well.

<sup>19</sup> Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> These are the two most famous canonized books of sacred traditions (hadith).



Father (John 14:9).” “Whoever obeys me, obeys God” (Bukhari & Muslim); “The Father and I are one” (John 14:6).

Muslims have always maintained, however, that although Muhammad may have been the best and first of creation, he was exactly that, creation. The poet al Busiri (1211 – 1294 CE) described the Prophet in his world famous work *The Mantle (Qasidah al Burda)* by declaring: “Muhammad is a human, but not like other humans. He is a pearl while others are merely stones.” The point is that Muhammad is also a human being, but his prominence over other human beings is analogous to the prominence of a pearl over other stones. Interestingly, al Busiri then warns the Muslim reader to reject what the Christians have erroneously attributed to their prophet (Jesus Christ) with respect to begotten sonship and divine incarnation, and to praise Muhammad unceasingly but within the parameters of creedal permissibility. Amazingly, while there have been Muslims in the past who claimed that Ali b. Abi Talib, the nephew and son-in-law of the prophet, was God in the flesh, no sect has ever made this claim about Muhammad.

- **Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed about Jesus (381 CE):**

θεον αληθινον εκ θεου αληθινου (true God from true God)

γεννηθεντα ου ποιηθεντα (begotten not made)

ομοουσιον τω πατρι (same essence as Father)

ενανθρωπησαντα (became “enfleshed” [man])

- **Creed of Tahawi about Muhammad (around 300 H):**

“Muhammad...only a Messenger” (Qur’an 3:144)

- Muhammad is the lord of the messengers; created

Nothing shares God's essence; nothing is like Him

God radically transcends the physical world

### ***Mark's Apocalyptic Jesus***

The unknown author of Mark's Gospel, whom we will conveniently refer to as Mark, wrote around 70 CE, presumably during the destruction of the holy temple by the Romans, and therefore exhibits a very noticeable apocalyptic tinge. Jesus is a "no nonsense" earnest character in the story who immediately (εὐθὺς ἄνωγες: According to the Lexicon Strongs' Concordance (LSC),<sup>22</sup> used seventeen times in just sixteen chapters in Mark and opposed to six, fourteen, and five times in Matthew, Luke and John respectively) travels from place to place spreading the good news of the coming kingdom of God, or *malkutha d'allah* in Jesus' native Galilean Syriac. Choosing not to mince his words, unlike the vastly different Jesus of the Fourth Gospel, the Jesus of Mark is all business, dropping short pithy statements with a probable steely glare, or as (one of my professors and students of Ehrman), Dr. Jean-Francois Racine, called him, "the Clint Eastwood of Jesus'."

With respect to sources, scholars of higher biblical criticism do not exactly know from what channel Mark received his information about Jesus, but certainly agree that there was a very strong early Christian oral tradition (*kerygma*) consisting of various pericopes attributed to Christ that more or less resembled what Muslim scholars would

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<sup>22</sup> Available at: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/index.cfm>.

later call hadith.<sup>23</sup> The task of Mark was to take all, or at least some, of these loose pericopes and string them together into a single narrative about the life, or more appropriately, the death of Jesus, since Mark's Gospel is in essence little more than extended passion narrative with an introduction. Former Anglican priest and Professor of Greek and New Testament at the University of Toronto, Tom Harpur, maintains that Mark's use of "immediately" (ευθεως) is actually a cover-up for this lack of knowledge about time sequences.<sup>24</sup>

Mark's attempts at constructing contexts and circumstances for the various pericopes transmitted to him from early oral tradition remains a truly fascinating area of study for modern scholars. When Mark recorded Jesus saying that it was "easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25), how did Mark know the context of this statement? How did he know where, when, and to whom Jesus allegedly made this pronouncement? Does this mean that "prosperity-Gospel" Christians who follow Joel Osteen, Creflo Dollar, or Joyce Meyer and drive BMWs and sport Rolex watches are hopeless cases? The mystery deepens when we come to Matthew and Luke who also constructed their own contexts for traditions that they had in common, material from the hypothetical Q source document, but missing from Mark, as well as special material unique only to their gospels known as M and L respectively. The author of the "Gnostic" Gospel of Thomas, however, whose composition may pre-date the Gospel of John, elected not to construct

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<sup>23</sup> We will deal with hadith in much more detail a bit later in the present work.

<sup>24</sup> Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 144.

narratives for his collection of sayings of Jesus, but rather to simply list them devoid of their conjectured contextual circumstances. Perhaps Thomas did not want to repeat the mistakes of his predecessors, or perhaps his humility prevented him from presuming to know the exact details of his recorded traditions.

### ***What to make of the Markan “hadith”***

It would behoove us at this point to take a quick glimpse into the science of prophetic hadith authentication and how a Muslim scholar would ultimately judge the Markan statements attributed to Jesus Christ. This is admittedly an extremely vast science, with much terminology, but as a basic level, hadith is divided into three main groups:<sup>25</sup> 1) *marfu’*: Any statement attributed to a prophet; 2) *mauquf*: A narration attributed to a *sahabi*, or disciple, of a prophet; 3) *maqtu’*: A narration attributed to a student or follower (*tabi’ee*) of a disciple. These final narrations are also known as *athar*. A hadith that is *marfu’* can only be deemed *sahih* (sound and rigorously authenticated) when the narration is found to be *muttasil*, meaning that the chain of narrators is complete with no missing link, and all the narrators in the chain are of probity (*‘adala*) and widely known to be thoroughly accurate, intelligent, sane, and mature at the time of narrating the hadith (*tamm al-dabt*). In other words, the narrators have good reputations as being God-fearing and upright persons who were never known to commit disgraceful or disreputable acts in Islamic society. For instance, the *muhadditheen* (hadith masters) mention that if a man was seen eating in public while standing, his

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<sup>25</sup> Ibrahim Madani, *The Preservation of Hadith: A Brief Introduction to the Science of Hadith* (New York: Madania Publications, 2010), 22-27.

*'adala* would be called into question!<sup>26</sup> The importance of accurately preserving his statements concerned the prophet to the point of saying, “Whoever ascribes something to me falsely, let him take his seat in the Fire” (Bukhari & Muslim).

Indeed Mark records many *marfu'* hadith in his gospel, and Christian tradition has maintained that Mark was a follower (*tabi'ee*) who took his teaching from the eminent disciple (*sahabi*) Peter. Although we know nothing about the probity and intelligence of Mark, we may well assume that he was an honorable man who did not willfully fabricate statements and attribute them to Jesus. But simply assuming things about Mark is not enough to establish rigorous authenticity (*sahih*); his good reputation needs to be attested by his contemporaries, and as we will see, the fact that Matthew took liberties in editing much of Mark's material calls the latter's probity into question (and possibly the former's as well). The major problem, however, is the fact that Mark's gospel was anonymous until about 180 CE, when Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202 CE), realizing the importance of chains of transmission, attributed the gospel to Mark in order to bolster its credibility over and against writings he deemed to be heretical. Furthermore, the oldest versions of the gospel are written in Greek, a foreign language to the Syriac-speaking Jesus and his disciples. No translated hadith of Muhammad no matter how strong its chain would ever be deemed sound if the Arabic text was missing.

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<sup>26</sup> Although eating in this manner is permissible, the normative practice (*sunnah*) of the prophet Muhammad was to eat while sitting and not standing nor reclining. Jonathan Brown defines *'adala* (*'adl*) as: “Muslim, of age, of sound mind, free of the paths of sin and flaws in honor.” Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 276.

If Irenaeus truly believed that Mark wrote the gospel that is today associated with him, the Muslim scholar would have demanded from him a chain of transmission (*sanad*) beginning with Jesus to Peter to Mark and ending with a reputable contemporary of Irenaeus from whom he took his traditions. The massive gap between Mark and Irenaeus disqualifies every single *marfu'* Markan narration of Jesus from being granted the status of *muttasil*, and renders them *munqati'* (severed) and *mu'dal* (two or more narrators are missing from one area of the chain), and ultimately weak (*da'eef*) if not altogether fabricated.

Comparatively, the great hadith master Imam Muhammad b. Ismail al-Bukhari (d. 870 CE), once traveled hundreds of miles to a different country because he had heard that a certain man knew a statement of Muhammad that he did not. Upon arrival, however, the Imam saw the man from afar deceiving his horse by pretending to hold food in his hand. The Imam, convinced of the man's lack of *'adala*, immediately turned around and returned home. Out of over 600,000 hadiths<sup>27</sup> attributed to Muhammad in his possession, Imam Bukhari included just over 7,000 in his celebrated compilation *Sahih al-Bukhari*, the fruit of sixteen years of meticulous research.<sup>28</sup> Hadiths granted the status of *sahih* were used to derive legislation and in some cases creedal statements, if deemed multiply-attested (*mutawatir*), while weak hadiths were, and are, primarily used for edification and counseling as long as they do not contradict essential theology. The statements of the Markan Jesus would be judged as weak by Muslim scholars,

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<sup>27</sup> We will use "hadiths" for the plural of hadith rather than the actual Arabic broken plural transliterated *ahadith*.

<sup>28</sup> Madani, *The Preservation of Hadith*, 35.

having very little authority, but permissible to quote for the purposes of edification and education, although with caution. The Muslim must, however, take Mark seriously if he or she wishes to undertake an earnest study of the historical Jesus simply because of the antiquity of his statements and also because of the fact that there is no mention of Jesus in any other first-century Jewish or Pagan documents.<sup>29</sup> Mark becomes important by default.

Several years ago, the eminent contemporary hadith scholar from Syria Shaykh Muhammad al-Ya'qubi b. Ibrahim, visited California and I was fortunate enough to sit in several of his gatherings of sacred knowledge. He mentioned to us that when he was five years old, he was taught his first hadith which was the short and sweet prophetic statement, "Show mercy to those on earth, and the One in heaven will show you mercy" (transliterated: *Irhamu man fi al-ard, yarhamukum man fi al-samaa*).<sup>30</sup> I remember thinking to myself that any five-year-old could easily commit this to memory, but then the Shaykh proceeded to recite the entire chain of narration starting with himself, then his immediate teacher (who was also his father the late Shaykh Ibrahim al-Ya'qubi, d. 1986 CE), then his teacher, and so on, until he reached a *tabi'ee*, then a *sahabi*, then the prophet himself! The recitation consisted of well over twenty-five names and took him almost fifteen minutes to recite. I immediately thought of the statement of the great Malikite jurist and Andalusian theologian Abu Bakr b. 'Arabi (d. 1148 CE) who said that

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<sup>29</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 103-106.

<sup>30</sup> Hadith from the compilation of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 H/855 CE).

the secret or distinguishing characteristic of this (Muslim) religious community was its *isnaad* (chains of transmission).

### ***Mark and the Son of Man***

According to historian Bart Ehrman, the earliest sources of the canonical Gospels, that is Mark and Q, depict Jesus as being an apocalyptic Jewish prophet who speaks quite frequently and fondly of an enigmatic cosmic judge of sorts who will soon come to the world accompanied by legions of angels – the eschatological Son of Man ( בֶּרֶךְ אֲנִי , *Barenash*).<sup>31</sup> Also, absolutely central to the Gospel of Mark is the death of Jesus on the cross, a death that outshines its fellow synoptics with respect to its graphic descriptions of agony and forsakenness. If we regard the true end of Mark's Gospel as being chapter sixteen verse eight, as this was the opinion of the eminent Dr. Bruce Metzger (d. 2007 CE)<sup>32</sup> and attested to in the most ancient Greek codices א01 and B,<sup>33</sup> Jesus' final recorded words with the exception of the "cry of dereliction" (15:34), are spoken to Pilate at his trial and consist of a single sentence: "It is as you say" (15:2). The taciturn Jesus is tortured and dies a quiet death and speaks to no one after he is raised from the dead. A scribe in the late second or early third century found this ending disturbing or at least a bit too abrupt and thus took the liberty of deciding that Mark's Gospel should end on a much higher note.

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<sup>31</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, 128.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 103.

<sup>33</sup> Codex Sinaiticus & Vaticanus respectively.



The crucial point to note is that Mark, that is original Mark, constructed his own contexts and that these contexts were highly influenced by his central premise that Jesus died on the cross. Mark's placement and interpretation of the various traditions and pericopes that he inherited from oral tradition always point to the passion narrative, the seminal event in human history according to Christianity. Interestingly, Matthew and Luke borrow approximately ninety percent from Mark's Gospel verbatim, therefore making the supposed death of Jesus the central theme of the entire synoptic tradition. Mark set the trend and his successors simply followed suit.

The phrase "Son of Man" is uttered by Christ thirteen times in Mark alone according to the LSC. Historical critics maintain these statements constitute the most accurate teachings of the historical Jesus of Nazareth for four reasons.<sup>34</sup> 1) The traditions are extremely early – found in Mark (70 CE) and Q (50-60 CE), which is assumed to be written either before or concurrently with the Pauline epistles according to a consensus of New Testament scholars. These passages also point to Jesus' immediate future *parousia*, a central Pauline theme found in his earliest genuine letters. 2) Multiple Attestation. Scholars are careful to mention that material found in all three synoptics is not considered multiply-attested if it originated in Mark and was simply copied by Matthew and Luke. In order to fulfill this condition, material or themes must not only be present in Mark, but also in Q, utilized by Matthew and Luke (and possibly Thomas) *independent* of Mark. 3) Context. The texts or readings in question are consistent with the historical context of Jesus, a man who was raised in the backwater

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<sup>34</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, 122-126.

town of Nazareth of Galilee in Roman occupied first-century Palestine, during a time of great apocalyptic fervor. 4) Lastly, the traditions that mention the coming Son of Man seem to “cut against the grain” of what the early proto-orthodox, or rather proto-trinitarians, would have wanted to say about Jesus, unlike the “I am statements” of the Fourth Gospel in which Jesus’ status reaches unprecedented heights, and were thus the favorite proof-texts of anti-Arian/Ebionite proto-trinitarians. Mark’s predictions leave the reader with the sense that even after the work of Jesus on the cross, there is still much to be done on earth; a far cry from Jesus stating in John that he had finished the work which God had given him to do (John 17:4). Additionally, John’s “I am statements” are neither early, nor multiply-attested, nor consistent with Jesus’ very Jewish historical context.

From a Muslim perspective, hadiths judged to be multiply-attested (*mutawatir*) are considered to be equal to factual statements and have the creedal and legislative weight of a Qur’anic *ayah* (verse). In order for a hadith to qualify, however, it must be established that groups and groups of Muslims from several different regions around the Muslim world reported the same statement from the prophet with an unbroken chain of narration from reliable witnesses thus rendering it impossible for these groups to have conspired in order to fabricate a statement and attribute it to the prophet. These hadiths are less than one thousand in number and include some of the prophet’s most celebrated sayings.

I realize that one could make the case that Jesus' apparent self-identification as the Son of Man in several passages in Mark, however, does indeed *raise* his status considering how the phrase is used in the book of Daniel, but even with this said, the Markan Jesus very evidently pales in comparison to the "Word made flesh who dwelt amongst us" (John 1:14). John does in fact incorporate the Son of Man into his Gospel, perhaps because he felt its strong prevalence in the synoptic tradition necessitated its inclusion. But John's statements about the Son of Man are uniquely highly mystical and deal exclusively within the context of Jesus' ascension, glorification, and consumption of his flesh and blood – elements indicative of the Johannine community's beliefs that have no concrete parallel in how the synoptic tradition speaks of the Son of Man.

A careful reader of the Gospel of Mark will notice that there are in fact two sons of man mentioned by the first century evangelist. This is interesting given the fact that the phrase is also used in two seemingly different ways in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>35</sup> The sixth century BCE prophet Ezekiel is called "Son of Man" (*ben Adam*) an astonishing ninety-two times in his book which scholars maintain is simply a title denoting his humanity, a reminder that he is only an instrument or prophet of God. But then there is the powerful apocalyptic Son of Man (*Barenash*) mentioned in the book of Daniel who will come in the clouds, ascend unto God, and vanquish the four evil beasts representing idolatrous earthly kingdoms according to the classical exegetes. Mark inherited these two strains of tradition and understood them as both referring to Christ, the former

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<sup>35</sup> The concept of a "dual-Messiah" is visible in the writings of the first-century monastic Essene community of Qumran.

pointing to his sacrifice and death, “for the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and the latter pointing to his immediate *parousia* which the “present generation” will experience without “tasting death.” Interestingly, both of these understandings of Mark about Jesus and his mission were influenced by Paul who wrote his corpus of literature about a half-generation prior to Mark’s composition of his gospel.

“The time is short” Paul writes, “for the whole frame of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:29, 31). Paul’s advice on marriage, celibacy, divorce, and commerce are all predicated upon his belief that Jesus’ return will occur *during his lifetime*. In his earliest genuine letter he says:

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive [and] remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15, 17-18).

Paul’s signature theme of Christ’s immediate *parousia*, however, is extremely downplayed in his second letter to the congregation at Thessalonica in which he mentions that certain ambiguous events must first manifest themselves before the second coming, such as a mysterious “falling away” and the appearance of “the lawless

one” (ἄνομος). This fact has led the majority of New Testament scholars to conclude that 2 Thessalonians is in fact pseudonymous, an revisionist epistle attributed to Paul by a later pupil of the Pauline school of thought with the purpose of “saving” Paul from his many critics who had accused him of being a noncommissioned antinomian (literally “lawless”) sham of an apostle who was woefully wrong about Christ’s immediate return. Muslim scholars have referred to Christianity in its present state as a “super-structure of dogma,” based on the “whimsical musings of a self-proclaimed and self-styled apostle of Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

The crucial question which bothers the fundamentalists is, if Paul can be so mistaken about such an important issue, what else did he get wrong? A disturbing “no-show” immediate second coming can be remedied in various ways, pseudo-Paul in 2 Thessalonians mystifyingly delays it indefinitely while John replaces it altogether with the coming of the Paraclete in the interim. But if Paul is also wrong about the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection (or apparent death and resurrection), no amount of textual cosmetics will be of any use for if “Christ is not raised,” Christian “faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:17).

The internal Christological evolution within the canonical gospels I alluded to earlier can be easily seen when we consider John’s attitude towards Jesus and service: “If anyone serves me, him shall the Father honor” (John 12:26). This is exactly diametrically opposed to what Mark tells us about the role of the Son of Man as one

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<sup>36</sup> Zebiri, *Muslims & Christians, Face to Face*, 69.

who serves and is *not* served (Mark 10:45). The Greek word in both places is the same (διακονεω). In other words, Mark's statement cuts against the grain of what the proto-trinitarian/Nicean Christians would wanted to have said (and *did* say in the Fourth Gospel) about Christ with regards to service. We should keep in mind that all of the so-called proto-orthodox Christians, whether pre-Arian or pre-Nicean, believed that Jesus died on the cross as a demonstration of sacrifice, either to serve as an exemplar for those who believe in him and strive to emulate his obedience unto death, or as a redemptive act or vicarious atonement of sin to save all of humanity. There were certainly several denominations, however, who professed to follow Christ before the Islamic era who believed that Christ wasn't crucified at all!

In short, if Christ does not die, then the very foundation of the various proto-orthodox understandings of the Messiah and the work he supposedly did on earth becomes utterly compromised. Mark is operating under the belief that Christ died, period. It was totally inconceivable for any Christian document whether gospel, epistle, or apocalypse which did not subscribe to the death of Christ to even have been considered for canonization during the defining years of the Christian scriptures. This is the greatest testament to the vast influence of Pauline dogmatism in the Greco-Roman regions in the first century CE – a dogmatism and understanding that would eventually come to define modern Christian orthodoxy. Mark carefully weaves the necessary centrality of the cross together with the multiply-attested traditions concerning the Son

of Man and places four passion predictions into the mouth of Christ, penned nearly forty years after the supposed event (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33; 14:21).

In the last of these passages, Jesus indicates that the Son of Man will fulfill all that is “written concerning him” (γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ), which according to the previous passages, means that he will suffer betrayal, rejection, and death. The problem is that there is nothing written anywhere in the whole of the Hebrew Bible that states the Son of Man will suffer such a fate, unless of course Mark, in a very Origen-esque hermeneutical manner, esoterically interpreted passages such as Deutero-Isaiah’s suffering servant (chapter 53) as a foreshadowing of what would happen to the Son of Man who apparently is also the Jewish Messiah. Neither the title “Son of Man” nor the word “Messiah” appears, however, in Isaiah’s mysterious passage. There is indeed present in the synoptic gospels, especially in the very “Jewish” Matthew, an overzealousness to convince their audiences that every single meaningful prophecy of the Old Testament is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, and no one else. Even when a Hebrew text seems to be lacking, such as the suffering “Son of Man” described above, or Matthew’s quote from the “Prophets” that “he shall be called a Nazarene” (2:23), the evangelists do not shy away from claiming to possess textual authorities. I am reminded of the greatest preacher of the early Church and first bishop of Constantinople (347-407 CE), John “the golden mouth” Chrysostom who said while explicating 1 Corinthians 9:19-24: “Great is the force of deceit, provided it is not excited by a treacherous intention.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 58.

Six verses after the first passion prediction in which we are told that the Son of Man “must suffer, be killed, and rise after three days,” Mark records Jesus saying, “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). Jesus now clearly speaks of the Son of Man in the third person distinct from himself who will arrive sometime in the future. Traditional exegetes have dealt with this type of internal dissonance found in the gospel tradition in various innovative ways. Basically they contend, when Jesus speaks of the Son of Man in the present tense, he is referring to himself in the present age, but when he speaks of him in the third person and coming in the future, he is referring to his own *parousia*. In accordance with the findings at Chalcedon in 451 CE, the orthodox, spearheaded by the anti-Arian Cappadocian fathers, maintained that Jesus had a dual nature. He was fully god (100%) and fully man (100%) simultaneously. Thus when Jesus speaks of himself as possessing some sort of limitation or weakness, such as not knowing “the day” (Matthew 24:36), or when fig trees (that he supposedly created) were in or out of season, he is simply reflecting his limited human nature. However, when he makes his highly mystical “I am” claims in John, he is speaking as God and reflecting his divine nature.

This methodology, however, fails to grasp both the purpose of the gospels, as being highly polemical writings intended to persuade their respective audiences towards a specific belief about Jesus, as well as their extremely important theologically-motivated historical developments from Mark’s suffering prophet and hidden Messiah



to John's *Logos* made flesh. John admits: "But these (things) are written, *that ye might believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (John 20:31). Claims that all of the words of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospels are true and inerrant leaves one in an awkward position that is, quite frankly, indefensible. Certainly if Matthew believed that his predecessor's gospel was inspired by God and thus inerrant, we can't imagine why he would revamp, rewrite, and redact much of its content. If Matthew was inspired to do this, then what does this say about Mark's inspiration? According to Bruce Metzger, there are actually four endings of Mark's Gospel that are attested to in various Greek manuscripts.<sup>38</sup> If God inspired Mark to write his autograph around 70 CE, then why did God not ensure that we received this autograph as a clear proof of divine authorship? Should we take the position of Westcott & Hort and claim that the New Testament possesses a providential preservation of sorts, and that scribes did not possibly change things intentionally?

In most English translations of the Bible, Mark begins: "Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ," (The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God). Tischendorf's magnificent  $\kappa 01$ , however, does not contain the phrase "the Son of God," and scholars have since concluded that it was most-likely a "scribal expansion," or added gloss – the work of an overzealous scribe who perhaps found it unacceptable that the only other beings who refer to Jesus as "Son of God" in Mark are a severely rebuked exorcised demon (Mark 3:11), and a Gentile Roman centurion who apparently

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<sup>38</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 102-106.

worshipped several sons of gods (Mark 15:39). No one, however, ever maintained that scribes were perfect. But how could God allow such clear corruption of His Word? Muslims would find it extremely shocking that Christian academics at the highest levels of scholarship have authored books with titles such as “The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture” or “The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, *Corruption*, and Restoration.” Our only conclusion must be that the Markan autograph itself, written in *koine* Greek, was *not* inspired by God but did contain many of the early oral traditions attributed to Jesus in the diasporic regions that were evangelized and indoctrinated by Paul and his adherents, and therefore only reflect aspects of the divinely inspired words of *Jesus Christ*, the apostle of God. These “aspects” were then shaped and contextualized into a narrative by Mark who was copied and edited by Matthew and Luke.

Neither Mark nor his synoptic successors believed that Mark’s original composition was inspired by God. Mark does not make this claim anywhere in the text, nor does he even identify himself as being an eye-witness or student of an eye-witness, and Matthew would not have shown such blatant audacity by streamlining (correcting) portions of a text that he believed was divinely revealed. Furthermore, if the author of Matthew was a disciple of Christ, as tradition claims, I find it untenable that he would copy large portions of Mark’s Gospel verbatim while knowing somewhere in the back of his mind that Mark never even saw the historical Jesus. The answer lies in the fact that Matthew was not an eyewitness and thus used Mark’s Gospel as his narrative skeleton, but also freely edited many of the Markan pericopes he found defective because he was

writing at a different time and for a distinct audience. Here are just a few examples of Matthean redactions to Markan pericopes:<sup>39</sup>

1) The Cleaning of the Leper (Mark 1:40-45; found in Matthew 8:1-4): In Matthew, the leper prefaces his request by calling Jesus “Lord” (Κυριε), a touch missing from Mark. Matthew also elected to ignore that fact that Jesus was “moved with pity” (σπλαγχνισθεις) before his decision to cleanse the man. Interestingly, there are several manuscript witnesses that attest that Jesus was rather “moved to anger” (οργισθεις) towards the man. Although the committee of the United Bible Society ultimately concluded that the former represents the most ancient reading, there is no good reason why Matthew would omit the description of Jesus as being compassionate, unless of course his copy of Mark’s gospel presented the variant reading of being angry. Furthermore, if we follow the assumption of Westcott & Hort, namely, that the more difficult reading is usually the more authentic, then we must conclude that Matthew simply found Mark’s angry Jesus too disturbing for reproduction.

2) The Man with the Withered Hand (Mark 3:1-6; found in Matthew 12:9-14): In Mark, Jesus asks, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or kill?” Matthew, however, found this too wordy and has Jesus state as factual, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Matthew also elected to leave out the fact that Jesus “looked

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<sup>39</sup> These differences can be easily found if one has a synopsis of the gospels such as: Kurt Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: American Bible Society, 1982). It is revised on the basis of the Nestle-Aland 26<sup>th</sup> edition (NA26) and the Greek New Testament 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (UBS3).

around with anger, and grieved at their hardness of heart.” Apparently, an angry Jesus proved too problematic.

3) Jairus’ Daughter and the Woman with a Hemorrhage (Mark 5:21-43; found in Matthew 9:18-26): Matthew literally cuts this story in half, apparently deeming much of its narrative material as nonessential. This includes the setting, the ruler’s name (Jarius), the fact that Jarius “besought” Jesus, and how the hemorrhaging woman had “suffered under many physicians” and “spent all that she had.” Even more interesting is Matthew’s change to the grave condition of the ruler’s daughter as “at the point of death (εσχατως εχει)” in Mark, to “just now died (αρτι ετελευτησεν),” using the aorist. Matthew’s point is that the girl was in fact dead thus upgrading the miracle from a great healing to an extraordinary resurrection.

4) Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Many Others (Mark 7:31-37; found in Matthew 15:29-31): Matthew again dramatically edits the Markan pericope by substituting the methods employed by Jesus during the healings which included putting fingers in ears, spitting, touching tongues, looking up at the heavens (presumably in supplication), and crying out “*Ephphatha*,” meaning “be opened!” with the simple three-word Greek phrase “και εθεραπευσεν αυτους” (and [he] healed them, and verb again in the aorist). Comparatively, Mark’s description consisted of sixty-five Greek words according to the wording in the UBS3 and NA26. If Matthew believed that Mark was inspired to write by God, why wouldn’t he include these details as to how to heal the sick and lame?

In addition to inheriting a vast collection of oral traditions passed down through the Greco-Roman congregations founded by Pauline elements, Mark also received, perhaps more importantly, a method of understanding those traditions as a result of his indoctrination, and interpreted Jesus' purported sayings through a very Pauline hermeneutical lens where the cross and immediate return of Christ were absolutely central. This is only natural. Students will innately interpret information through the looking-glass of their teachers. (In fact, I am doing it right now). Therefore according to Mark, the indispensable Son of Man *is* the suffering Christ, but he is *also* the Christ of the immediate future. It would be fascinating to know in what form Christians communities before Paul, the Ebionites in particular, received the traditions of the coming Son of Man and how they were interpreted in light of their Torah-abiding adoptionist Christology. Q, also known as the Sayings Gospel, does not mention a whisper about Jesus' passion or even contain a single passion prediction. In other words, the earliest source of the synoptic tradition is devoid of, to quote the orthodox, "the greatest event in salvation history." If Mark interpreted the Son of Man prophecies in light of the cross, how would the Q community or early Judaizers have interpreted them - communities that did not place central importance upon the cross or an immediate *parousia*?

### ***Mark's reference to Daniel's Barenash***

Perhaps the most striking reference to the Son of Man in the Gospel of Mark comes during the trial of Jesus before the High Priest. Caiaphas asks Jesus point-blank, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed" (14:61)? It should be noted that the phrase

“Son of the Blessed” is a messianic title which demonstrates the highly personal relationship shared between God and the Messiah according to the Jewish conception. We must be careful not to construe this phrase in orthodox Christian terms as one who is the literally begotten of God and shares an essential nature with Him. We must keep in mind that the Jewish High Priest is the one asking the question, and his description of the Christ as “Son” suggests a definition that is vastly different than that of Paul, Augustine, or Gregory of Nyssa.

Jesus begins his response with “I am” (Ἐγώ εἰμι), a simple admission that has nothing at all to do with God’s response to Moses in Exodus chapter three. Jesus concludes, “And you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). The keen Bible reader will recognize that Jesus is loosely quoting from Daniel chapter seven. Knowing that the context of this statement is a Markan construct that would have made Paul proud, namely because it is placed in the midst of a passion narrative and has second-coming implications, how might we interpret the statement independent of Mark or from a Muslim perspective?

From a historical standpoint, we can say with confidence that Jesus of Nazareth, an apocalyptic Jewish sage or prophet from the first century CE, spoke of a great figure to come after him, but we have no idea apart from Mark’s christologically subjective and contrived context, where and when Jesus made such predictions. Before we attempt to identify the object of this prophecy, however, let us take a closer look at the passage from Daniel chapter seven. The majority of the book of Daniel was written in Aramaic,

the language of Jesus Christ himself, probably sometime in the fourth century BCE.

Although Daniel is not mentioned in the Qur'an, there are several hadiths of Muhammad where he is mentioned by name and is therefore regarded by Sunni orthodoxy as being a legitimate prophet of God. According to the narrative in the Hebrew Bible, Daniel had a vision of four beasts: a lion with eagle's wings, a bear with three ribs in its mouth, a four-headed winged leopard, and finally, a terrifyingly hideous creature with huge iron teeth and ten horns. Classical Christian exegetes often identified the four beasts as being graphic personifications of the empires of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome respectively, while also speculating about the significance of the multiple wings, heads, horns, etc. The many details of their findings, however, fall far beyond the scope of this present work.

In the midst of these visions, Daniel describes that he saw one "like the Son of Man, coming in the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before Him" (Daniel 7:13). Muslim theologians who have attempted to find Islamically relevant prophetic archetypes and typologies in the Hebrew scriptures, maintain that this Son of Man is none other than Muhammad of Arabia (570 – 632 CE). A central tenet of Islamic prophetology is the belief that Muhammad represents the finality or Seal of all prophecy. This notion is indicated in one of his many noble titles, "*nabiy akhir al-zaman*," which may be translated literally as "the prophet of end times" or equivalently as "the eschatological prophet." Muhammad repeatedly described his

own coming as being the first major portent of the coming Day of Judgment,<sup>40</sup> when the whole of resurrected humanity will stand before the tribunal of their Lord and face either eternal torment or bliss. This type of dualist approach to the universe is an especially prevalent theme in the Meccan chapters of the Qur'an revealed between (610 – 623 CE), and thus an integral feature of Islamic cosmology. Belief in this Day, along with many other supra-rational events (*sam'iyyaat*), is incumbent upon every Muslim due to the fact that they are derived from sources considered to be fundamentally established (*daleel qati'*) through multiple attestation.

Muhammad also left for posterity a vast corpus of apocalyptic predications in which he described many other signs of the last days. The most famous of these, and considered to be from the major (*kaba'ir*) signs, are the manifestation of the anti-Christ (*al-Dajjal*), who is interestingly portrayed as “one-eyed” (*'awar*) by Muhammad, the sun rising from the West, which may indicate the present fact that 20,000 Americans convert to Islam annually, the arrival of a great spiritual/military leader (*Imam*) from the progeny of Muhammad known as *al-Mahdi*, and ironically, the *parousia* of Jesus Christ, who will defeat *al-Dajjal* at Jerusalem just prior to the blowing of Seraphiel's Trump.<sup>41</sup> Among the minor (*sagha'ir*) signs mentioned by Muhammad are the prevalence of music, illegitimate children, and sudden death, as well as “burning rain,” massive floods, the vast exploitation of women, open fornication, corrupt political leadership, and

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<sup>40</sup> Muhammad said, “The Hour and I are like this (*ana wa al-sa'ah ka-hatayn*),” and then lifted up two fingers.

<sup>41</sup> Imam 'Abdullah ibn 'Alawi al-Haddad, *The Lives of Man: A Guide to the Human States Before Life, In the World, and After Death*, translated from the Arabic by Mostafa al-Badawi (Louisville: The Quilliam Press, 1991), 87.



skewed perception in which the best people will be perceived as being the most evil and vice versa. It will be a time of double-standards, massive hypocrisy, and values turned topsy-turvy.

There is an old Chinese blessing, although some claim it to be a curse, which says, “May you live in interesting times.” Recently I was asked to give the keynote address at a Muslim fundraising dinner in Pittsburg, California and found it to be a great opportunity to speak about these interesting times of ours. Below is an excerpt from that speech.

“These are interesting times... times in which freedom of expression is used to justify the denigration of the holiest of Islamic sanctities, like international book burnings or cartoon drawing days, yet when the Muslim wants to exercise that very same freedom and build a mosque, for the love of God, a house of prayer, it is called inappropriate, offensive, and unacceptable.<sup>42</sup> They’re letting us on the bus, but pushing us to the back. These are times in which those who actually use their intelligence and point out the massive contradictions, inconsistencies, and inconceivabilities in the “official” version of events are called crazy conspiracy theorists, yet these same people (who are doing the name-calling) believe whole-heartedly that a Muslim conspiracy was successfully carried out to take the White House. A recent poll said that one out of every five Americans believe that the President of the United States is a secret Muslim. These are times in which a government like that of France believes that it must protest Islam’s mandated dress code for women (there is also a dress code for men) by mandating a dress code

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<sup>42</sup> Not surprisingly, the so-called “ground-zero mosque” issue simply died after mid-term elections.

for women! These are times in which *Islam* is blamed for an American-Muslim army psychiatrist's violent rampage at a U.S. army base – a man who has seen and heard the ravages of war firsthand. Yet a woman in the Bay Area who drowns her four children in a bathtub one after the other because she claimed that the voice of Christ told her to do so is immediately, and rightfully so, deemed insane. I am often reminded of Jesus telling his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew that when believers are reviled, persecuted, and wrongfully indicted, they should 'rejoice and be exceedingly glad' for great is *our* reward in heaven."

***Muhammad is the future Son of Man***

Fourth century CE orthodox theologians Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi (d. 321 H/933 CE) and Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324 H/926 CE) mention in their early authoritative creedal treatises that also included amongst the fundamentally established supra-rational transmissions is the belief in the Night Journey and Ascension of Muhammad, known as *Laylah al-Isra wa al-Mi'raj*. The Qur'an says:

"Glory to the One who took His servant on a Journey by Night from the Inviolable Mosque (in Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (Temple in Jerusalem) whose precincts We did bless in order that We may show him some of Our Signs" (Qur'an 17:1).

It is believed that in the eighth year of his prophecy (27<sup>th</sup> of *Rajab* 618 CE), Muhammad was transported in body and soul from his home city of Mecca in the Arabian peninsula to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem while seated upon a majestic

animal known as *al-buraq*,<sup>43</sup> and accompanied by the archangel Gabriel. After leading a holy congregation of resurrected prophets in prayer at the holy site, Muhammad then ascended into the heavens and passed through the seven celestial realms until he arrived at a place of proximity to the Divine Throne (*'arsh*) where he experienced the "Beatific Vision," and gazed upon the glorious countenance of the Lord of the worlds with his own eyes.

At this point in the narrative, theologians usually stress that it was at this exalted station (*maqam*), not place (*makan*), that Muhammad experienced his ineffable vision. Islamic theology teaches that God transcends space (*makan*), time (*zaman*), and direction (*jihah*) and possesses the so-called "negating attribute" (*al-siffah al-salbiya*) of complete dissimilarity to His creation (*mukhalifatun li al-hawadith*). The Qur'an says: "Then he approached and came closer, and was within the distance of two bow lengths or even closer" (Qur'an 53:8). This description of Muhammad's nearness (*qurb*) to the Deity is considered to be an idiom in the Arabic language by all classical exegetes simply meant to emphasize the loving relationship between the prophet and his Lord. Therefore, the anthropomorphic notion of a deity incarnating into matter or substance such as flesh and blood and entering into the temporal world, as Christian orthodoxy maintains, is viewed by Muslim theologians as an inconceivability for God and thus categorically rejected and deemed heretical. They maintain that the moment we claim that God entered into His creation, either as a man, angel, or burning fire, is the exact

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<sup>43</sup> From the root word *barq*, meaning "lightning." The *buraq* was reportedly smaller than a horse but larger than a donkey (mule-sized) and possessed the ability to cover long distances at the speed of light or even faster. "For as *lightning* cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:27).

moment that we make an idol out of Him.<sup>44</sup> As an added twist, however, Muslims believe that there is essentially no difference between the theological teachings of the historical Jesus with that of the historical Muhammad. They allege that the theology of Christians, very much like the New Testament, has significantly evolved over time even to the point where the original or “autograph” teachings of Christ have been rendered almost entirely unrecognizable.

Muhammad was indeed the eschatological Son of Man envisioned by Daniel and prophesized by Jesus Christ, the Messenger of God. Muhammad, the *adon* of the prophets and Messenger of the Covenant (מְלֹאךְ הַבְּרִית), came suddenly as lightning to the temple (Qur’an 3:81; 17:1; Malachi 3:1) in “the clouds of heaven” (Daniel 7:14; Mark 14:62) to Jerusalem where he was brought near to the “Ancient of Days,” and became an honored guest in His Holy throne room. Muslim historians will also point to the fact that Muhammad’s temporal kingdom spelled an end to the previous idolatrous dynasties, or “four beasts,” as Daniel had predicted. Iraq and Iran, Babylon and Persia respectively, converted to the faith of Muhammad within a generation of his death and became major centers of learning from which literally thousands of eminent and world-renowned scholars, poets, and theologians emerged. And while the sack of Rome by invading Visigoth barbarians in 411 CE signaled the beginning of the end of the Greco-Roman Empire, it was the spread and adoption of Islam in many of the regions previously under Roman rule that would decisively end the glory of the Caesars, thus

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<sup>44</sup> Consider the commandment: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or the *likeness of anything* that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth” (Exodus 20:4).

killing the four-winged leopard and the ten-horned terror. Even the likes of Norman Geisler and 'Abdul Saleeb ("the slave of the cross") have admitted that it was Islam's stress on brotherhood and low taxes, as opposed to the sword, that led to the massive conversions in North Africa.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, according to Geisler, Islam's theology and scripture had absolutely nothing to do with it.

The critic will cry, "But Muhammad just copied the Bible and passed it off as the word of God!" It is interesting to note that there isn't a single verse in the entire Qur'an that is exactly identical to any verse in the Bible. The closest candidate is probably Genesis 37:9 which states that "the sun, the moon, and eleven stars made obeisance" to Joseph. In the Qur'anic narrative, however, the word order is slightly different with the mention of the stars coming first (Qur'an 12:4). The critic may retort, "Okay, fine. Muhammad did not plagiarize the Bible verbatim, but rather borrowed many of the stories from the Bible, such as the Deluge, Exodus, aspects of the creation story, etc. and simply edited them." Keeping in mind that there was no Arabic translation of the Bible available to Muhammad during his lifetime, I find it simply untenable to claim that an illiterate man was able to rehash biblical stories told to him through a foreign translator in classical Arabic prose that remains to this day, in the opinion of the vast majority of Arabic linguists and grammarians, the greatest piece of Arabic literature ever composed in history. Furthermore, the claim made by Christian apologists, such as Harvard's J.

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<sup>45</sup> Norman Geisler & 'Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 201.

Dudley Woodbury,<sup>46</sup> that Islam is a “reversion” to the Old Testament, completely ignores the fact that Muslims would find a significant portion of the Old Testament, with its graphic depictions of sex and violence, to be *utterly disturbing*.

As a graduate student learning biblical Greek, I recall one of my professors one day, after noticing the impoverished use of optative and pluperfect moods in the New Testament, refer to the *koine* of Luke-Acts as “vulgar,” a sentiment shared by Nietzsche who sarcastically praised God for choosing such a remedial version of Greek with which to communicate His Word. Furthermore, when it comes to borrowing, biblical scholars of higher criticism do not shrink away from establishing its prevalence in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. One does not need to exert much energy in order to detect both the Chronicler and Deutero-Isaiah borrowing from the Deuteronomistic historian, as well as the synoptic evangelists Matthew and Luke sponging freely from Mark. In both of these cases, however, the borrowers quite often plagiarized *verbatim* from their respective sources. Can we honestly say that Matthew and Luke were inspired by God to write their narratives about Jesus Christ in a dialect of Greek whose style and grammar is far outshined by the likes of Homer and Plato and despite establishing their obvious employment of plagiarism, yet dismiss Muhammad as an imposter for his retelling and summarizing of biblical narratives in inimitable Arabic prose?

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<sup>46</sup> I actually confronted Dr. Woodbury about this issue during an interfaith discussion on the morning of February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011 at the Lafayette & Orinda Presbyterian Church as part of a three-week series of interfaith events.

I believe that it is high time for Western biblical scholarship to take the prophetic claims of Muhammad much more seriously and to leave aside polemical caricatures. The erudite professor of the mid-twentieth century William Montgomery Watt began this process with his objective and well researched two-volume biography of Muhammad but unfortunately, the process was stalled and then derailed altogether by extremist and hateful voices. One out of four or five human beings who strut the earth today believe that Muhammad was a prophet of God who received divine revelation and Americans are converting to Islam at the rate of 20,000 people annually, as stated earlier. These figures reflect the fact that despite the best efforts of the secular and religious extremists who occupy powerful and influential positions in Western governments to vilify and dehumanize Muslims and “refutiate”<sup>47</sup> their beliefs in order to secure their hegemony in the world and imperial control over its natural resources, there seems to be a popular movement of sorts towards independent study and personal enlightenment.

### ***Paul’s Anti-Gospel***

Sometime before 55 CE, Paul of Tarsus traveled to Galatia, modern-day Turkey, to spread the good news about what he believed God did in Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> The Galatians accepted his message despite Paul’s mysterious “weakness” in “his flesh,” (4:13) and went so far as to even treat him like an “angel” (3:5), as so Paul claims. After Paul’s departure, however, a group of “agitators” visited Galatia in order to correct many of

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<sup>47</sup> A word coined by governor turned celebrity and outspoken tea-partier Sarah Palin.

<sup>48</sup> Frank J. Matera, *Galatians: Sacra Pagina Series* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 46.

Paul's deviant and apparently, highly abhorrent teachings. When Paul was informed of this, he wrote an extremely strongly-worded polemical correspondence to the "stupid" churches in Galatia; a letter in which diplomacy was thrown out of the window and anger caused "Paul to say what he really thought."<sup>49</sup> Before Paul rains down his chastisement upon his former adherents, however, he begins the letter with an opening formula in which he claims confidently that he is an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father and then quickly reminds his readers about the indispensable Pauline doctrine that Christ "gave himself for our sins" in order to deliver us ἐκ τοῦ ἐνεστώτος αἰῶνος πονηροῦ (from this present evil world). Then without mincing words, Paul conveys his main concern in verse six. Paul writes:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel.

Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον .

My contention is that the gospel preached to the Galatians by these mysterious opponents was not only fundamentally opposed to Paul's understanding of the Christ event, but also vehemently opposed to Paul himself whom the opponents seem to regard as a sham apostle and "enemy" (Galatians 4:16). Before we attempt to identify exactly who these opponents and agitators were, we must take a closer look at the

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<sup>49</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc., 1997), 467.



above verse in question. Paul begins by using the verb θαυμάζω in the first person present active indicative meaning “to marvel, be amazed, or astonished.” Paul’s amazement at the time of the composition translated into burning sarcasm and raging anger. This is the only occurrence of this word to be found in the whole of the genuine Pauline corpus of literature according to the Lexicon Strongs’ Concordance (LSC), that is, if we accept for now that the authorship of 2 Thessalonians is indeed pseudo-Pauline (2 Thessalonians 1:10). It is for this reason that New Testament scholars have appropriately dubbed this verse along with the next four as Paul’s “statement of astonishment.”<sup>50</sup>

But why is Paul so astonished? The answer is because the churches in Galatia seemed more than willing to completely, drastically, and very *quickly* (ταχέως) change their attitudes regarding Paul, “him who called” the Galatians into χαριτι Χριστου, the “grace” or “favor” of Christ - a word used sixty times by Paul in the genuine corpus, including five more times in Galatians.<sup>51</sup>

The most fascinating aspect of the above indictment against the Galatians, however, is what Paul mentions next as being the cause of the Galatians wholesale apostasy - they came to believe in “another Gospel.” The preposition εἰς, literally meaning “into” or “toward” is also used in Greek grammar to signify the object of one’s belief which would follow in the accusative case. For example, if one were to convey

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<sup>50</sup> Matera, *Galatians*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

that he believes in God, he would literally say, “I believe *into* the God” or πιστευω εις τον θεον, with “God” as well as its definite article in the accusative case. Therefore, we notice from Galatians 1:6 that the Galatians were not only persuaded by Paul’s opponents to go *towards* a different Gospel, but they actually came to *believe* in it (εις ετερον ευαγγελιον). Although the word (ετερος) is generally used to distinguish between two different entities, Paul uses it interchangeably in his epistles with the word (αλλος), meaning simply a different entity, and not necessarily one of two.

Paul, however, quickly corrects himself in the very next verse by saying “ο ουκ εστιν αλλο,” (which is not another.)<sup>52</sup> The question arises, why does Paul call it a gospel to begin with and not refer to it as a false teaching or “philosophy” or some sort?<sup>53</sup> It seems that the opponents referred to their teaching as being the true “Gospel” or *bissar* in Hebrew, over and against what Paul had been preaching. Therefore Paul assures the Galatians that what they had heard from his opponents was only a pseudo-gospel or a so-called “gospel,”<sup>54</sup> not simply a different version of the same message, but fundamentally a different message altogether.<sup>55</sup>

Paul concludes his statement of astonishment by stating that if an angel from heaven or even *himself* should preach unto the Galatians a different gospel then he is accursed. In other words, even if Paul has a change of heart later, the Galatians should

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<sup>52</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary, Galatians Series* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1990), 13.

<sup>53</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 133.

<sup>54</sup> Nolan B. Harmon, *The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 10* (New York: Abington Press, 1953), 451.

<sup>55</sup> Matera, *Galatians*, 46.

not? We will never know exactly what the opponents preached that caused Paul to proverbially blow his top to the point of exhorting his enemies to transcend their foreskins and make eunuchs of themselves (5:12), but perhaps we may be able to reconstruct their views by looking closely at Paul's various refutations. Interestingly, gospels attributed to the Nazarenes, Hebrews, and Ebionites have only partially survived in the refutations of their opponents such as Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, and other early patristic figures. By employing such a methodology, we may be able to pinpoint the identity of these nearly-forgotten opponents, or "ghosts" as Avery Gordon would call them,<sup>56</sup> who insisted on castigating Paul, and greatly *haunted* the early church fathers.

There are three opinions amongst New Testament scholars as to who persuaded the Galatians against Paul and his teachings.<sup>57</sup> One opinion holds that they were Jews from Galatia who advocated at least a partial adherence to the Law of Moses. Another opinion surmises that they were syncretistic Jewish-Christian Gnostics who found Pauline views too simplistic and narrow-minded. A third opinion, first proposed by F.C. Baur and now enjoying a general consensus, identifies the opponents as Jewish-Christians (Judaizers) from Jerusalem, while F. Watson goes a step further and dubs them "men from James," thus establishing the Pauline vs. Petrine/Jamesonian

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<sup>56</sup> Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

<sup>57</sup> Matera, *Galatians*, 2.

paradigm.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, Paul's royal rumble with Peter in Antioch was instigated by the arrival of messengers sent by "James" from Jerusalem. (2:12). These were the same men whose appearances caused Peter to retreat from sharing a meal with Gentiles, thus provoking Paul to stand toe to toe with Simon Cephas, the chief disciple of Jesus Christ whom Paul accuses of hypocrisy. Even Raymond Brown, who tends to refrain from extreme positions says, "Christians of Jewish origin had come, probably from Jerusalem, preaching another gospel, i.e., an understanding of what God had done in Christ different from Paul's."<sup>59</sup> Paul, however, is clearly not impressed by titles and personal distinctions such as "brother of the lord" or "firm rock" and refers to James, Peter, and John as "οι δοκουντες στυλοι ειναι" (*so-called pillars*), who imparted nothing further to him.

Mark Nanos, however, takes strong exception to the term "Judaizer," believing it to be a misnomer due to the fact that it derives from an intransitive verb and would thus refer not to Jews who wish to impose the law on Gentiles, but to Gentiles who chose to adopt the Jewish law. "To speak of judaized Jews, like hellenized Greeks, makes no sense," Nanos says.<sup>60</sup> Nanos makes a good point, but given the climate of first-century "Christianity" and the premise that there was clearly a difference of opinion between Semitic-speaking believers in Jesus' Messiahship and their Greek-speaking co-religionists living around the Mediterranean, it remains quite conceivable that the former would "judaize," in the transitive sense of the verb, proselytes of the latter

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<sup>58</sup> Matera, *Galatians*, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 469.

<sup>60</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 117.

group who were gravely misunderstanding the message of the Semitic-speaking and Torah-abiding Jesus of Nazareth.

If Paul's opponents (Nanos dislikes this term as well and prefers "influencers") were in fact messengers sent from James, the successor of Jesus Christ, then it is only in the re-discovery of James that will lead one to the true, or original Gospel as preached by Jesus himself. This, however, is not an easy task. Even a casual reader of the four canonical gospels in the New Testament will notice that James is simply missing in action, unless as some Roman Catholics have pointed out, he is indeed James the son of Alphaeus, a character who has no substantial role in the narratives. The usual pre-packaged Protestant response to this problem is that James was not yet a believer in Jesus until after the latter was resurrected. This proposition, however, is highly problematic. Are we to suppose that the successor of Jesus and leader (Bishop) of the mother church in Jerusalem, not to mention the lord's brother, willingly remained an infidel until he finally had to *see* in order to believe? Why then would he be elected leader? And who elected him? If Jesus appointed him either before or after his passion then would this not reek of nepotism on the part of Christ?

Clement of Alexandria contended that it was in fact Jesus who bestowed upon James his role in the early church, but Jerome quoted Hegesippus' account that James was "holy from his mother's womb," and a priest (*kohen*) whose knees were reputed to have acquired the "hardness of camel's knees" due to his excessive prayers.<sup>61</sup>

Contemporary scholar Robert Eisenman even suggests that the popularity of James in

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<sup>61</sup> Available at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/hegesippus.html>

the first century C.E. and the alleged illegal manner in which he was killed may even have been the impetus for the Jewish insurrection against Rome in 66 C.E.<sup>62</sup> Although more conservative scholars would label Eisenman a “revisionist,” historians have consistently contended that the original believers in Christ did not believe themselves to be anything other than law-abiding Jews who simply regarded Jesus as the Messiah.

Eisenman further theorizes that James and the Nazarene Jews were eventually marginalized by Pauline elements and his Gentile sympathizers. The centrality of James, however, remains very noticeable when we venture outside the New Testament canon. Consider Jesus’ statement number twelve from the Gospel of Thomas found at Nag Hammadi in 1945: “Where ever you are, go to James the Righteous (*Ya’aquv ha Tsadiq*<sup>63</sup> or *Ἰακωβος ο δίκαιος*), for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.” What an amazing tribute to a “so-called pillar” (Galatians 2:9)! Harvard’s Elaine Pagels argues that the highly mystical Gospel of John may have been written in reaction to Thomas’ Gospel, and like James, Thomas is portrayed as a man who must see and touch in order to believe.<sup>64</sup> Since its discovery, the Gospel of Thomas has been more or less written off by the orthodox as being “gnostic,” a term invented by the patristic fathers to describe early writings and treatises that they considered heretical. The Gnostics, however, only referred to themselves as Christians. In fact, one could certainly make the case that the

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus: The Key to Unlocking the Secrets of Early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997).

<sup>63</sup> The successor of Muhammad Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah, was given the honorable title of *al-Sadiq* by the prophet, the Hebrew cognate of which is *ha Tsadiq*, the title of James.

<sup>64</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003).

Gospel of John with all of its unique Christological pronouncements regarding the exalted nature of Jesus, it just as “gnostic” as Thomas.

While Paul and those who have posed to be Paul wrote over half of the books of the New Testament, you will find only one epistle representing the Jamesonian school appropriately called “James” (and possibly the book of Jude<sup>65</sup> as well) - a letter dubbed “an epistle of straw” by Martin Luther presumably due to its lack of theology *about* Jesus. But maybe we can think of James’ epistle as a letter delineating the religion *of* Jesus.<sup>66</sup> While Paul expounds upon the meaning of the apparent death of Christ and his subsequent resurrection from the grave, James feels more inclined to comment on the actual teachings of his brother.

According to Paul, living in grace, no doubt from the “bondage” of the law (Galatians 5:1), is directly related to what he believed Jesus did in the present evil world. Paul’s scandalous and highly controversial opinions regarding adherence to the law, or lack thereof, eventually reached the ears of James who consequently ordered Paul to prove himself to the people by debunking the rumors that he spoke against the law of Moses (Acts 21:24). Yet consider Paul’s statements in Galatians: “O stupid Galatians...you started with the spiritual. Do you know look to the material to make you

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<sup>65</sup> Jude begins his letter by stating that he is ἀδελφός Ιακώβου (a brother of James, 1:1), and presumably also the brother of Jesus Christ. Jude’s exhortation to his adherents to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (1:3) reveals major dissention amongst the early congregations. Jude continues, “I say this because some godless people have wormed their way in among you, saying that God’s forgiveness allows us to live immoral lives. The fate of such people was determined long ago, for they have turned against our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (1:4, New Living Translation). It would be interesting to analyze and compare these texts with the primarily Shi’a claim that religious authority always remained in the family and progeny (*ahl al-bayt*) of Muhammad and how this authority was wrenched away by the most corrupt Umayyad caliphs.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 725.

perfect?...Those who rely on obedience to the law are under a curse...Christ brought us freedom from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:1, 3, 10, 13).” Apparently, the rumors that reached James about Paul were true. Paul then uses the example of Abraham to demonstrate that the patriarch of the Jews was justified by faith alone. Ironically, the author of the epistle of James, while addressing a “foolish man” (James 2:20), uses the same Abrahamic story to demonstrate an opinion diametrically opposed to that of Paul, mainly that it was by Abraham’s *action* that his faith was perfected (James 2:20-25). Could it be that one was responding to the other?

But why would Paul resort to Abraham to make his point when the institution of circumcision as an “everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:3) between God and his seed clearly runs counter to Paul’s beliefs? The answer is because the Jerusalem missionaries brought it up first. Paul’s response is quite imaginative. He claims that uncircumcised Gentiles who eat swine, summarily ignore the Jewish holy feasts, yet believe in Jesus are the true covenantal children of Abraham through Sarah, while Jews who are circumcised, celebrate the holy days, and strictly adhere to the law of God are actually the outcast children of the “bondswoman Hagar” (Galatians 4:22-31)! The bottom line is that Paul and James had major disagreements over fundamental issues relating to the role of Jesus as Christ and that these differences were so deep-seated, that they ultimately caused Paul to viciously attack those who swore allegiance to the first Bishop of the Jerusalem episcopate by essentially calling them a bunch of bastard Arabs.



But what were those differences? As stated above, our only recourse is to reconstruct Jamesonian theology by examining Paul's numerous polemical refutations of his opponents. Galatians 1:6 sets the tone for the remainder of the letter whose central theme can be summed up by the word "freedom." For Paul, the law was an interim measure promulgated by angels that has now been rendered obsolete by the work of Christ (3:19). Believers in Christ were now free from the law and stand justified by faith alone. The Jewish-Christian missionaries, however, while stressing the importance of belief in Jesus as the true Messiah promised to the Jews, also stressed that justification was only completed by adherence to the law of God including circumcision and the observance of the calendrical feasts. Brown states: "Indeed, Betz would see in Matthew 5:19 a condemnation of Paul as one who teaches to relax the commandments."<sup>67</sup> The author of James reminds his readers that faith divorced from works is "dead," and that *even demons believe in God* but have nothing to show for their imperfect and lacking "faith."

Baur, who was highly influenced by German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Hegel, also noticed that there is a major discontinuity or dissonance between Jesus and Paul, as did Maurice Goguel<sup>68</sup> and U. Luz.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Paul lacks a single reference to any of the great miracles, teachings, and other events related in the gospel narratives that were integral to Jesus' life and ministry. Furthermore, William Wrede, along with many others, contended that Paul borrowed the Greco-Roman mythos of a dying and rising

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<sup>67</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 469.

<sup>68</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "The Jesus-Debate: From Baur to Bultmann." *Collected Essays*, pp. 17-50, ed. AJM Wedderburn, JSNTSup, no. 37; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1989.

<sup>69</sup> Alexander Wedderburn, "Paul and Jesus: The Problem of Continuity." *Collected Essays*, pp. 99-115, ed. AJM Wedderburn, JSNTSup, no. 37; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1989.

Savior (*soter*) man-god and applied it to Jesus.<sup>70</sup> Arnold Meyer and Arthur Cushman McGiffert, even maintain that while Jesus was the primary source of Christianity, Paul was the principal founder of the form of Christianity with its fundamental dogmas that eventually won the day and enjoyed acceptance in the Roman Empire.<sup>71</sup>

I remember that on one fine Sunday morning as I was studying for my Hebrew midterm, I was approached by an older Christian gentleman of the evangelical persuasion who asked me why on earth I was learning Hebrew, noting that it seemed a bit “suspicious.” Before answering his question, however, I informed him about the WestPoint graduate who was recently dismissed from the armed forces due to his professed homosexuality, and despite his fluency in Arabic. I asked him, “Why did he learn Arabic?” But before giving him a chance to answer, I continued, “- to render himself a more effective killer?” I then directed him to a book by Harvard educated Christian scholar Chris Hedges entitled, “American Fascism,” in which the author makes the claim (an obvious one, in my mind) that the greatest threat to world peace in the world is the terrorist element within Christianity that believes in facilitating Armageddon through militarized means.<sup>72</sup> While shaking his head in disagreement, I continued, “I am learning Hebrew so that I may become a more effective communicator and teacher in order to foster better understanding between human beings. Do you see the difference between him and me?”

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<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> A bumper sticker I read recently stated, “America’s war is terrorism with a bigger budget.”

Wanting to redeem himself, he cleared his throat that asked me how I planned on getting to heaven. “You tell me,” I retorted. He then began a long-winded rant paraphrasing Paul from 1 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians and concluded that it was only through belief in Jesus’ redeeming blood that salvation was given, and not through obedience to any law code. Thumbing through my NKJV, I responded, “That’s amazing because a Jew asked Jesus the very same question in Matthew 19, namely, ‘What must I do to gain eternal life?’ Let’s look at Jesus’ answer to his question.” Nodding his head in hesitant agreement, I read in a clear voice, “*follow the commandments*, and you shall enter the life” (Matthew 19:17). As the man took leave of me, I began to wonder what Paul’s reaction to Jesus’ response might have been. Obviously I know that the issue is much more complicated and nuanced than this, but I definitely understand the conclusions of many scholars that Paul and Jesus would have disagreed over fundamental issues of faith and practice.

Several years ago when I was an up and coming Muslim apologist, I found myself at a debate at the U.C. Davis campus against North American Mission Board’s golden son, Dr. Mike Licona, who would go on to debate the master himself, Bart Ehrman. During the course of the spirited discussion, Licona presented a self-authored book to the audience entitled “Paul vs. Muhammad,” which depicts a fictional debate on the Day of Judgment between Paul of Tarsus and Muhammad of Arabia over the issue of whether or not Jesus Christ rose from the dead. I found this title very interesting and asked the audience, “Do you know why Mr. Licona named his book ‘Paul vs. Muhammad’ and not ‘Jesus vs. Muhammad?’ Because Jesus and Muhammad are in

perfect agreement! Mr Licona is right, Paul is the problem here.” Matthew recorded Jesus saying:

... “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach [them], the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”  
(Matthew 5:18b-19)

We may assume that the Judaizers quoted such attributed statements of Christ in order to convince the Galatians of the truth of their gospel over and against Paul’s understanding. Quoting from Jesus himself was no doubt the strongest argument they could make for their case and adequately explains why the Galatians were so quick in forsaking the message of Paul, a man who admittedly never met the historical Jesus. This also explains why Paul felt compelled in his correspondence to the Galatians to defend his apostleship by appealing to his calling through grace. It was an *apocalypsis*, or unveiling that Paul had experienced on the road to Damascus that establishes his authority according to him. Paul did not consult with a single person, but rather went into Arabia for three years before arriving in Damascus and then met with *Cephas* and James in Jerusalem. What exactly Arabia has to do with the Galatians and missionaries of James is open to much speculation. Did the missionaries from Jerusalem speak of an apostle who would arise from Arabia? Could Paul’s condemnation of Hagar and her children be the result of the missionaries’ praise of her and her children? Paul then

takes an oath by God that he does not lie (1:20). But why would he need to take such an oath? It is certainly conceivable that the Judaizers accused Paul of being a false freelancing “apostle” who was never commissioned by anyone of repute to preach the Gospel to the gentiles - not by *Cephas*, James, and certainly not Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians we learn that the Paul’s rivals, whom he calls “some others” (τινες) present “letters of recommendation” (συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν) to the congregation at Corinth as proof of their teaching authority and legitimate transmission (*sanad*), while Paul has nothing to show for himself but his supposed revelatory experience in the desert (2 Corinthians 3:1). However Paul feels that resorting to sarcasm and name-calling (dogs and “super-apostles,” Philippians 3:2; 2 Corinthians 11:5) somehow convinces people of his integrity. Nanos quotes Baur who says, “Paul’s autobiographical remarks respond apologetically to specific accusations made by invading Judaizing opponents, against which he defends the independent and/or consistency of his gospel and apostleship.”<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, when it comes to the canon of scripture, we only hear one side of the story. According to historian Bart Ehrman, the church only included books that demonstrated a relatively congenial relationship between James and Paul, or Peter and Paul, like Acts written by Paul’s protégé Luke. Ehrman contends, however, that Acts does not provide a reliable account of the internal

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<sup>73</sup> Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 122.

conflicts of the earliest Christian Church and closes by stating that these “conclusions of scholars are now so widely held as to be virtually commonplace.”<sup>74</sup>

Yet when we trek outside the canon, for instance, we find documents written by faithful students of the Jamesonian and Petrine schools that tell us a slightly different story than what we find in the New Testament.

In the Letter of Peter to James and its Reception (probably early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), a pseudonymous author claiming to be Peter writes to James saying:

...For some among the Gentiles have rejected my lawful preaching and have preferred a lawless (antinomian) and absurd doctrine of the man who is my enemy (presumably Paul). And indeed some have attempted while I am still alive, to distort my words by interpretations of many sorts, as if I taught the dissolution of the law and, although I was of this opinion, did not express it openly, God forbid... only a man who has been circumcised can be a believing Christian.”

In the Homilies of Clement, also known as the Clementine Literature (probably 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE), “Peter” speaks of “Simon” (most scholars believe this to be a cipher for Paul) in the following way:

...who as first and before me went to the Gentiles... I who came after him as the light follows darkness, knowledge ignorance, and healing sickness... How can we believe you

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<sup>74</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scriptures and Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, New York, 2003), 168.

even if he has appeared unto you? But if you visited by him for the space of an hour and were instructed by him and thereby have become an apostle, then proclaim his words, expound what he has taught, be a friend to his apostles and do not contend with me, who am his confidant. For you have in hostility withstood me (presumably at Antioch), for I am a firm rock, the foundation stone (*petros*) of the church.”

Paul says in Galatians 3:1: “You stupid Galatians! You must have been bewitched - you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly displayed on the cross!” The dominant opinion of New Testament scholars is that the Galatians did not feel that Jesus’ death on the cross released them from their legalistic obligations. In Philippians, however, after an exhortation to “imitate” him, Paul admonishes his readers about those “heading for destruction,” calling them “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (*toos echroos too stauroo too christoo*). Brown points out that this warning may be in response to the doctrines of various Gnostic elements that had cropped up in Philippi at the time of Paul.<sup>75</sup> The weakness of this assertion can be demonstrated when we consider that Gnostic Christians viewed the world as an evil creation of a lesser god known as the Demiurge or *Yaldabaoth* whose material trappings must be escaped through saving gnosis. The missionaries that Paul is referring to in Philippians, however, are undeniably Jewish-Christians who are stressing obedience to sacred Mosaic Law revealed by the God of Israel, not Gnostics who insult that God. Furthermore, the cosmological views of the early Christian Gnostics were not developed until a few generations after Paul’s death, unless we consider the agitators in Philippi as being “proto-Gnostics” of sorts who

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<sup>75</sup> Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 488.

initially honored Israel's god and his law. But if this is the case, then there is essentially no noticeable difference between them and the Judasizers and may actually be one and the same.

Brown also states that "enemies of the cross" can be taken in the sense that the missionaries from Jerusalem outright denied that Jesus died on the cross at all.<sup>76</sup> This would have flown right into the face of Paul who believed that Christian faith was ultimately in vain if Christ was not raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:17). It's also possible that the missionaries pointed to places in the *Tanakh* that seemed to prophesize the saving of God's Anointed from death (Psalm 20:6; 91), as Paul was also known for his consistent references to the Hebrew Bible when promoting his understandings in his attempts to "reason from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2). Furthermore, we may consider that along with the Gospel of Thomas, the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter and 2<sup>nd</sup> Treatise of the Great Seth were discovered at Nag Hammadi, and although these treatises are strictly viewed as being Gnostic in their Christology in the traditional sense, they testify to the fact that for many Christians, denial of Christ's death on the cross was central. The Acts of John (2<sup>nd</sup> century CE) also advocated this idea. Could this notion have started with the Judaizers from Jerusalem? We also notice that Q, most likely written before or concurrently with Paul's letters, fails to contain a passion narrative or even a single passion prediction. Bearing this in mind, one begins to feel the force of the words of Paul to the Galatians, "I fear that all my hard work on you may have been wasted" (4:11).

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*



Perhaps the Qur'anic claim that Jesus was neither "killed nor crucified," but was made to "appear so" (Qur'an 4:157) unto the enemies of Christ finds some support in the early proclamations of the Judaizers and writings of various early "heretical" Christian elements. Certainly the fourth evangelist's omission of the person of Simon of Cyrene bearing the cross for Jesus and well as Matthew's omission of the first name of the "δεσμιον επισημον" (notable prisoner," Matthew 27:16) Barabbas, which was also Jesus (Ιησους, Yeshu'a), according to Harvard seminary's Dr. Jerold Dirks, was influenced by the viewpoints of these very elements within the fold of the early believers in Christ. Both John and Matthew, or a Matthean redactor, wanted to make it crystal clear that it was in fact Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth, who was crucified, and not Simon of Cyrene nor Jesus Bar Abba.<sup>77</sup>

The modern trend in New Testament scholarship seems to be an attempt to place Jesus into his historical Jewish context. Ehrman believes that the Ebionites (Jewish adoptionists) taught an understanding of the faith that was close to Jesus' original message. These were Aramaic-speaking Jews who remained obedient to Jewish laws

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<sup>77</sup> Barabbas was "notable" because he was a popular Jewish insurrectionist and claimed Messiah. His name, Barabbas, or more correctly *bar Abba*, is actually an honorific patronymic meaning, "Son of the Father," a Messianic title. Matthew, or his redactor, must make it clear that the right Jesus was crucified, although traditionally, it was believed that Barabbas' first name was removed out of reverence for Jesus. According to Metzger, Origen said in his commentary of Matthew 27:16: "In many copies it is not stated that Barabbas was also called Jesus," implying that the majority of manuscripts did in fact state his first name as Ιησους. Metzger also states that a tenth century uncial manuscript (S) and about twenty miniscule manuscripts contain a marginal comment stating: "In many ancient copies which I have met with, I found Barabbas himself likewise called 'Jesus.'" Metzger concludes, "A majority of the Committee (of the UBS) was of the opinion that the original text of Matthew had the double name in both verses and that Ιησους was deliberately suppressed in most witnesses for reverential considerations." See: Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 56. If Jesus Barabbas was crucified rather than Jesus of Nazareth, this may help explain the Qur'anic statement: "...but it was made to appear so unto them" (4:157).

and customs even after believing in Jesus' Messiahship.<sup>78</sup> Ehrman's conclusions echo those of Dr. Albert Schweitzer who maintained that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was an apocalyptic Jewish prophet who constantly spoke of a future eschatological judge, the enigmatic *Barenash*, who will wreak havoc on the forces of evil and institute the Kingdom of God (*Malkutha d'Allaha*) on earth.<sup>79</sup> This might have been the very essence of Jesus' *bissar* or Gospel (good news).

### ***Dealing with John's Gospel***

Admittedly, venturing into the Gospel of John can potentially be problematic for the Muslim reader of the New Testament who wishes to find evidence that Jesus Christ heralded Muhammad to the world. The Fourth Gospel's unique Christology coupled with its vastly different chronology and tone when contrasted to the synoptic tradition causes Muslims to hesitate even delving into this document altogether. At the surface, John appears to resemble much more of a theological afterthought about Jesus rather than an attempt at an accurate narrative. The paradox, however, lies in the fact that it also appears that John actually got a few things right which the synoptic authors did not. For example, Jesus' ministry in John is three years long, while it lasts only a single year in the synoptics, and scholars as well as historians have gravitated toward the former. Also, the obvious problem of the "no-show" immediate second coming of Christ is dealt with by John in a fashion indicative of not only his advanced date of composition when compared to the Pauline epistles and synoptics, whose authors were highly influenced

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<sup>78</sup> Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 253.

<sup>79</sup> Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, 128.

by the immediate *parousia* motif, but it also shows how John used his advantage of retrospect to seemingly replace this motif with the tradition of the Paraclete. In short, John elected not to perpetuate the synoptic tradition of Jesus saying that the end was near, within the present living generation, simply because it was obvious by then (around 90 CE) that it just wasn't true.

John crucial vantage point in history enabled him to not fall into the same traps as his predecessors. However, his statements constructed through his hindsight also produce a major problem for those who wish to identify the earliest understandings of Christ. John's Gospel is reflective of a more developed proto-orthodox theology; a theology which contaminated, if I may use that word, many of the attributed statements of Christ, including the nature and function of the Paraclete, a figure who is invariably identified as Muhammad by Muslim theologians, apologists, and polemicists. But Muslims cannot have it both ways. They cannot claim that the predictions of the Paraclete represent the best or most accurate statements of the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but simultaneously summarily dismiss as fabrication all of the "I am statements" of Christ found in the very same Gospel.

My solution for the Muslim involves a recognition that John seems to have had access to traditions, either written and/or oral, that were not known to the synoptic evangelists, and that these traditions, much like Q, represented the early Christian *kerygma* from the late first half of the first century. But John, in a very Markan fashion, recorded these traditions through the lens of his own distinctive understandings. While

Mark's unmistakable eschatological tone and "messianic secret" took center-stage in his narrative, John interpreted Jesus through Hellenized *Logos* theology, which was later further developed by Justin Martyr and many others. Therefore our task with John is identical with what we did with Mark, that is, we must "de-John" John in order to understand the original Jesus. While John seems to be correct about Jesus predicting the coming of a great future figure, over and against the immediate *parousia*, he also attributed fabricated statements to Jesus, such as the "I am" tradition, which functioned to convince his Pagan hearers and readers of Christ's exalted status by employing language reminiscent of the Hymn to Isis or literature in praise of Horus.<sup>80</sup> But even with the seemingly correct tradition of the Paraclete, John does not fail to inject his own Christological flavor into the text.

My proposed interpretive methodology with respect to John is multifaceted and ultimately challenges aspects of the Historical Critical Method (HCM). If a certain text, tradition, or pericope is found in all three synoptics (and even Paul), but missing from John, then the former must be deemed more accurate or original and given precedence, *unless* it can be demonstrated that the synoptics (and Paul) were simply wrong. The only occurrence of this, which I know of, is with regards to the immediate second-coming. In this case, one must now consider how John, reflective on the shortcomings of his predecessors, dealt with and solved the issue. At this point, John introduces the

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<sup>80</sup> In the Ritual, Horus says, "Verily before Isis was, I grew up and waxed old." Gerald Massey (1828-1907) mentioned nearly two-hundred correspondences between the orthodox Christ and Horus. For example, Horus was associated with the fish (ΙΧΘΥΣ) – he was a fisherman. The patristic fathers referred to Jesus as "that great fisherman." This was also the title of Bacchus and Marduk (Babylon). Consider also the Pope's "ring of the fisherman." Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 208.

Paraclete, an interim advocate of sorts who will guide humanity in the meantime. John may very well have invented the Paraclete out of thin air, but even so, his tradition must be prioritized over Paul and the synoptic evangelists' *verifiably* incorrect immediate second-coming of Christ.

However, if a statement is found exclusively in John that does not attempt to solve a verifiable error or inaccuracy with the synoptic tradition, then the synoptics must be given preference, as the statement in John is most likely a distinctive theological expression that uses carefully chosen language intended to convert Pagans through a smooth conversion process or to persuade heretics. Example of these texts are the "I am statements" of Jesus and John's passion narrative in which Jesus bears his own cross to Golgotha and is pierced during his crucifixion ensuring non-survival; the former facilitates the conversion process for Pagans and the latter debunks the *docetic* Christology of various Gnostic or proto-Gnostic elements that were noticeably gaining popularity at the time of John's composition.

But even with this said, there have been many textually critical attempts by Muslims to uncover what Jesus "really meant" when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) or "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). In these situations, the Muslim accepts the text at face value but interprets it through a radically monotheistic hermeneutical lens. However, before a Muslim can decide to make fish of one text and foul of the other, he must utilize a consistent and reasoned *interpretive methodology* and be both willing and able to explain the factors behind his choices. And

although I did in fact accept and interpret John 8:58 from the parallel Muslim perspective of Muhammad's ontological precedence earlier in this work, the scriptural and historical evidence leads me to believe that Jesus Christ made no such statement in reality. But even if he did, I am prepared to Islamically defend it.

The Qur'an says: "And remember when Jesus the son of Mary said: 'O Children of Israel! I am the Apostle of God sent to you; confirming what is with you concerning the Torah, and to give you glad tidings (*bushra* in Arabic; *bissar* in Hebrew) of a Messenger to come after me whose name is The Most Praised (*Ahmad*)" (Qur'an 61:6). The above Meccan verse begins with the *waw*-conjunction followed by the particle (*ith*), which is thought to be an apocopated form of *uthkuru* meaning "remember" in the masculine imperative, or may be translated as "behold" or "look," thus rendering its meaning comparable to the Hebrew *hinna* (הִנֵּה), the demonstrative particle used hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible. Even if we adopt the first translation it should be noted that the classical exegetes do not hold to the opinion that Muhammad is necessarily quoting from any particular Christian text, but rather informing his audience about an integral aspect of the *bissar*, or Gospel of Jesus Christ; an aspect that may or may not have recognizable traces within canonized Christian scripture. "And to those who say, 'We are Christians' We made a covenant; but they forgot a portion of their message..." (Qur'an 5:14a).

### ***Muhammad as Paraclete***

The most interesting feature of 61:6, however, is the inclusion of the name “Ahmad.” According to the rigorously authenticated hadith tradition, the celestial name of Muhammad, or the name by which he will be called on the Day of Judgment, is Ahmad – a superlative form of the name Muhammad. The Qur’an teaches that the prophet Muhammad is the prophet of “guidance,” (61:9) sent “in truth,” (61:9) who does not speak except by inspiration (53:4), confirms the true message of Christ (3:3), predicts future events (30:1-5); He is the ultimate judge and authority over the religious affairs of the world (4:165) as well as the intercessor or advocate of humanity before God in the next world (4:41). Islamic Christology asserts that although Jesus Christ confirmed and followed Mosaic Law as well as made certain amendments and addendums to that Law, the primary focus of his message was spiritual in nature. Jesus reaffirmed the transcendental or relational aspect of Jewish piety, known as *al Ihsan* or technically as *tasawuf* (Sufism) in the Islamic tradition, by stressing the importance of loving God and one another (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29). Therefore, Jesus naturally used the spiritual name of Muhammad when predicting his advent.

We will probably never know what exact word Jesus used in his Syriac vernacular to call the Paraclete primarily due to the fact that the four evangelists chose to write their accounts in the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean, which was *koine* Greek. Interestingly, several Roman Catholic translations of the Bible render the Greek ὁ παράκλητος as “the Intercessor” (*al Mushaf’i*), a famous title of Muhammad

indicative of his spiritual station before God.<sup>81</sup> In this sense, the Greek “Paraclete,” rather than being an exact equivalent of the Arabic Ahmad, since the former is a title while the latter is a proper name, may in fact be a descriptive designation which illustrates a key role of Ahmad.

When filmmaker Mel Gibson prepared his script for his film “The Passion of the Christ,” he must have found the *Pshitta*’s<sup>82</sup> translation of Paraclete as “*Paraqlayta*” problematic for obvious reasons. It would have been awkward for an Aramaic-speaking Jesus, in the midst of a discourse with his Jewish disciples, to use a recognizable Greek word with a Semitic twist. He rather opted for the translation as it occurs in the Syriac lectionaries used by the Assyrian churches in Iraq, also known as the Ancient Apostolic Church of the East. In these texts, the word for Paraclete is rendered “*Munahma*,” which according to author Karen Armstrong, may be equivalent to the Arabic Ahmad, and certainly sounds as if they are derived from a common root.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the scene as it occurs in the film has “Jesus” say, “Do not be afraid, the Helper (*Munahma*) will come, who speaks the truth about God (*Allah*).” Nineteenth century Scottish orientalist William Muir, who once said that Islam is the “only undisguised and formidable antagonist of Christianity,”<sup>84</sup> claimed in his book “The Life of Mahomet” that there were

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<sup>81</sup> Παρακλητος is translated by the NKJV as “the Helper.” In *The Light of Asia: The Life of Buddha*, Sir Edwin Arnold states that the Buddha prophesized the coming of the “Helper of the worlds,” which immediately reminds the Muslim reader of Muhammad’s Qur’anic title *rahmatu ‘l lil ‘alamin* (a mercy of the worlds, Qur’an 21:107).

<sup>82</sup> This is the Aramaic translation of the Greek New Testament completed in the fourth-century CE which eventually replaced Tatian’s Diatesseron as the standard Aramaic text.

<sup>83</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 67.

<sup>84</sup> Zebiri, *Muslims & Christians, Face to Face*, 7.



Arabic translations of the Gospel of John from the eighth and ninth centuries CE that translated Paraclete as “Ahmad,” albeit erroneously according to Muir.<sup>85</sup>

In John 16:7, Jesus makes it clear that the coming of the Paraclete is directly contingent upon his (Jesus’) departure: “ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω ὁ παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς” (For if I do not go, the Paraclete will not come unto you). This is interesting because the orthodox has consistently told us that the Paraclete and the Holy Spirit are one and the same. But if the Paraclete and the Holy Spirit is essentially the same person, are we then to suppose that Jesus and his disciples were completely devoid of him? The Gospel of Luke tells us that the Holy Spirit was with Elizabeth (1:41), John the Baptist (1:15), Zacharias (1:67), as well as with Simeon (2:25). All of these people chronologically predated Jesus Christ, yet the latter says clearly in John that the Paraclete had *not* yet arrived.

The Synod at Constantinople in 381 CE testifies to the fact that the early Christian church also found the Johannine readings about the Paraclete problematic and thus attempted to better define his nature and function. The most crucial verdict arrived at by the bishops of the Council was undoubtedly the judgment that the Holy Spirit was co-equal, co-eternal, and co-substantial with the Father and Son and therefore fully God, the third person of a triune deity.<sup>86</sup> The old Nicene Creed hammered out over fifty years earlier was revised and the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed was born. The bishops

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<sup>85</sup> William Muir, *Life of Mahomet* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1912).

<sup>86</sup> Toom states, however, that the Council did not call the Spirit “ὁμοουσιος” (co-substantial) nor “θεος” (God). Rather it was a little known post-council in 383 CE that made it clear. Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 143.

proposed a creative solution to the problem of the apparent incongruities between the Holy Spirit and the Paraclete of the Fourth Gospel. The Cappadocian Fathers,<sup>87</sup> representing the orthodox findings, concluded that the Holy Spirit possesses the divine attribute of pre-eternality, meaning that he eternally proceeds from the Father (and scandalously from the Son as well [*filioque*]<sup>88</sup> in the Western churches), but is also sent to the earth at certain times in history. In other words, the Holy Spirit *eternally proceeds* but is also *economically sent*.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore, when Jesus speaks of the Paraclete coming after his departure, he is simply referring to the coming of the Spirit to the physical world in temporal terms, and just as the Son was *eternally begotten* by God before the creation of time and matter, yet economically sent into the world over two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit also pre-existed and was sent, not once, but many times into the world. This solution, however, still fails to adequately account for the presence of the Holy Spirit before and during the ministry of Christ. When Jesus made the conditional statement recorded by John in 16:7, the Paraclete was clearly not with him on earth yet apparently accompanied his cousin John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth. This also creates a major problem when trying to reconcile the Augustinian orthodox notion that the presence of the Son *necessitates* the presence of the Father and Holy Spirit and that all

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<sup>87</sup> Basil of Caesarea (d. 379 CE); Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 390 CE); Gregory of Nyssa (d. 395 CE).

<sup>88</sup> This notion was one of the major contributing factors, along with the papacy, which led to the irreparable divide between the Latin West and Greek East in 1054 known as the Great Schism.

<sup>89</sup> Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 27.

three persons are inseparable in their actions. The intercommunion of the three persons “guarantees the involvement (of all three).”<sup>90</sup>

The theological gymnastics of the early orthodox, as well as the vastly diverse opinions regarding the nature of Christ during the first four centuries of the Common Era, demonstrate the obvious and painful truth that the deficiencies lie in the scriptures themselves. There are over 5,500 manuscripts of the New Testament in Greek, from credit-card sized John Ryland’s papyrus number 52 (P52) to the vast  $\times 01$ , but *no two* of these manuscripts are identical.<sup>91</sup> John Mill’s 1707 CE attempt at an eclectic text of the Greek New Testament led him to state in his primitive apparatus that he found over 30,000 differences in the one hundred or so manuscripts that he had at his disposal.<sup>92</sup> The irreconcilable Christologies of the synoptic evangelists coupled with John’s Logos simply render it impossible to arrive at a coherent and consistent profession of Christian faith. Even a theologian as early as Origen of Alexandria (d. 254 CE) once complained: “The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either

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<sup>90</sup> Toom, *Classical Trinitarian Theology*, 24.

<sup>91</sup> Comparatively, there are approximately 250,000 hand-written Arabic manuscripts of the Qur’an on earth, and while naturally these contain multiple copying errors and various spelling conventions, there is no sign of theologically-motivated intentional fabrication (*tahrif*). The simple reason was because such fabrications would have been detected immediately due to the preservation of the Qur’an in the memories of thousands of Muslims, not to mention the fact that there are extant *Masahif* (MSS of the Qur’an) from the first-century (*hijri*) written in the Hijazi script. Imam Malik’s (d. 179 H) *mushaf* written by his grandfather, Malik b. Abi ‘Amr al-Asbahi, differed from Uthman’s Median master copy in a total of eight characters. See M.M al-Azami, *The History of the Qur’anic Text from Revelation to Compilation* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 13, 100.

<sup>92</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 83-84.

neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, *they make additions or deletions as they please*" (emphasis mine).<sup>93</sup>

Consider also Origen's Pagan opponent, Celsus, and Dionysius, the orthodox bishop of Corinth (d. circa 171 CE) who said respectively:

"Some believers, as though from a drinking bout, go so far as to oppose themselves and alter the original text of the gospel three or four or several times over, and they change its character to enable them to deny difficulties in the face of criticism."<sup>94</sup>

"When my fellow-Christians invited me to write to them I did so. These the devil's apostles have filled with tares, taking away some things and adding others. For them the woe is reserved. Small wonder then if some have dared to tamper even with the word of the Lord himself, when they have conspired to mutilate my own humble efforts."<sup>95</sup>

John 16:13 reads: ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀληθειάν οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλ' ὅσα ἂν ἀκούσῃ λαλήσει καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν

"However when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak: and he will show you things to come."

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<sup>93</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 53.

As stated earlier, John (and possibly his redactors) did not fail to inject his (their) own Christological flavor into the ancient and original traditions of the Paraclete. In the above verse, the Paraclete is referred to as “the Spirit of Truth,” which of course leads credence to the orthodox position that the Spirit and Paraclete are one and the same. However, it is impossible to know whether this phrase was originally part of the autograph of John, since it is somewhat parenthetical, and scribal-inserted parenthetical clauses (John 4:2) as well as wholesale fabrication, although rare, (John 7:53-8:12, the *pericope adulterae*) are not absent in John, or whether the phrase was added by the original author himself in order to “clarify” the mysterious prediction of Christ. According to Metzger, however, there is no extant variant reading of John 16:13 that is missing the phrase “the Spirit of Truth, but οσα ακουει was “a dogmatic improvement (κ, L, 33, 1819 al)<sup>96</sup> introduced to suggest the eternal relationship of the Holy Spirit with the Father, and οσα αν ακουση (A, G, K, M, S, U, Γ, Δ, Π al) is a grammatical improvement.”<sup>97</sup> Hence, additional variants of this verse are certainly conceivable.

The same can be said about the apparently parenthetical “who is the Holy Spirit” (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον ὁ) in John 14:26 after mention of the Paraclete. One of the core assumptions of Westcott & Hort with regards to textual criticism is that the text will tend to grow over time, as scribes were more inclined to “correct” problematic passages

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<sup>96</sup> Greek manuscripts are classified according to format. 1) papyri begins with the letter “P” as in P52 or P46; 2) Uncials (majuscule, all caps) begin with a zero then a number (sometimes the zero is preceded by a letter) as in κ01, A02, B03, or simply abbreviated as κ or L; 3) Minuscules (lower case, cursive) are listed as numbers with no preceding zeros as in 33 or 1819; 4) Lectionaries begin with the letter “l” then a number as in l1 or l2. See D.C. Parker, *New Testament Manuscripts and their Texts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 35-38.

<sup>97</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 210.

by providing additional information. Therefore, the more difficult and shorter readings were believed to be the most original. Interestingly, scribe “ca” did not like the placement of the verb πέμψει before the clause “who is the Holy Spirit” in John 14:26 while editing the great  $\kappa 01$ <sup>98</sup> and believed that it should come at the end of the clause. The Textus Receptus, Westcott & Hort, and Nestle-Aland agreed with him and followed suit. Although this certainly isn’t enough evidence to cast doubt upon the entire clause, it does show that there were at least variant readings of the clause which may have been the result of earlier scribal modifications to the text.

However, we may also consider that τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας to be a reference to a human being. Martin Lings mentions in his (award-winning) biography of the prophet Muhammad that included amongst the titles of the prophet is “the spirit of truth,”<sup>99</sup> a seemingly loose translation of the famous title of the prophet bestowed upon him by his kinsmen before his prophetic commissioning, *al Saadiq al Ameen*, or “the truthful and trustworthy.”<sup>100</sup> However, the central focus upon the *spirit (ruh)* of Muhammad in the mystical prophetology of the Ash’ari theologians would not make Lings’ translation unsustainable. In fact, the phrase, *al Ruh al Ameen* (literally, the Spirit of Truth) appears in the Qur’an (26:193) as a reference to the archangel Gabriel, the one believed by Muslims to have brought the divine revelation to Muhammad piecemeal over a twenty-three year period. According to orthodox theologians, Gabriel recited

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<sup>98</sup> Codex Sinaiticus: (4<sup>th</sup> century CE uncial) originally discovered in 1844 by Constantine von Tischendorf at St. Catherine’s Monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai in Egypt.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based in the Earliest Sources* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1983), 345.

<sup>100</sup> The absence of the *waw*-conjunction between the two participles is an example of emphatic hendiadys.

words to the prophet through both interior and exterior locution utilizing material vehicles such as language and sound; created words in Arabic that *indicated* upon some of the infinite and pre-eternal meanings of the uncreated Speech of God (*al Kalam*), and the prophet would repeat these words as he heard them. This doctrine and process are known as *al dalalah* (indication) and *al mu'aradhah* (presentation/dictation) respectively. In this sense, the inspired prophet acted as the instrument or mouthpiece of the Spirit of Truth, who spoke on behalf of God. Therefore, the prophet speaks only with the authority of God and this is how we come to understand the Qur'anic statement: "Whoever obeys the Messenger, obeys God" (Qur'an 4:80a).

There is also a hint of this idea in the Johannine literature when we notice that the words "prophet" (προφητης) and "spirit" (πνεῦμα) are used interchangeably in the first epistle of John. Consider 1 John 4:1: "Beloved, believe not every *spirit*, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false *prophets* are gone out into the world." A true prophet is a true spirit and a false prophet is a false spirit. It seems as if John, as he had done in the gospel that bears his name, is responding to heretical elements of the late first century and early second century who apparently maintained that Jesus Christ "did not come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2-3).

Furthermore, the fact that the notorious second-century heretic Montanus claimed to be the Paraclete, or rather be under the inspiration of the Paraclete, during his self-proclaimed prophetic utterances, provides us a better understanding as to how many early Christians understood these Johannine traditions, that is to say, the view

that the Paraclete was a sanctified and guided human being and not a ghost or a spirit. Tertullian, the great second-century apologist, heresiologist, and former champion of proto-orthodoxy, actually came to believe in the new prophecy, thus giving Montanism a huge boost of credibility. Additionally, Jesus' description of the Paraclete as "another" (ἄλλος, John 14:25) as well as the reference to Jesus in 1 John 4:1 as παρακλητος (Paraclete), which is invariably translated as "Advocate" in English translations, implies that the future Paraclete will be of identical nature to Christ, namely, "another" man and certainly not "another" god, nor even "another" spirit, as the central theme of 1 John is to denounce those who claim that Jesus was pure spirit.

According to the above verse, the Comforter will "guide us (you all) into all truth" (ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀληθείαν), "for he will not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, [that] shall he speak" (οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἑαυτοῦ ἀλλ' ὅσα ἂν ἀκούσῃ λαλήσει). If we accept the notion for the time being that the Paraclete is the Holy Spirit, the above descriptions of the Paraclete recorded by John present major problems for the educated Muslim reader in light of Christian theology. First of all, Christian orthodoxy maintains that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune deity and essentially God. How can God not speak of Himself, but only what he hears? Hears from whom? - Himself? If one person of the Trinity seeks permission from and obeys another person, *while both are essentially equal*, then does this not constitute exactly what Origen surmised, namely, a hierarchy of the godhead? Secondly, if we were to suppose that Jesus economically sent the Paraclete at the end of John's



Gospel (John 20:22)<sup>101</sup> which apparently enabled the disciples to forgive sins (John 20:23) and eventually perform feats even greater than those of Christ himself (John 14:12), how did he (the Paraclete) guide us unto all truth? Perhaps it happened on the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit descended causing the disciples to speak in the many tongues of the earth. The problem, however, is that not a single word as to what was uttered on that day was recorded by anyone and those who passed by thought that they were listening to the alcohol induced ramblings of drunken fools. To claim that this event constituted “guidance unto all truth” not only greatly undermines the mission and purpose of the Paraclete but also renders Christ’s high-sounding predictions about him ridiculously exaggerated.

Muhammad’s enormous contributions to history, on the other hand, cannot be denied even by the worst of bigots. His biography is vaster and more detailed than any other figure in history. Muslims know how he ate, walked, talked, clipped his toe nails, and tied his turban through narrations that have unbroken chains of transmission. Karen Armstrong says, “We know more about Muhammad than about the founder of any other major religion.” Muslims maintain that similar to the Qur’an, the *Sunnah*, or normative practices of the prophet, have been providentially preserved for posterity because as God’s final Messenger, his guidance must be clear and holistic. There is no Muhammadan “wikileaks.” The most intimate details of the life of Muhammad are known and studied because he lived a truly transparent life. Mani, the founder of the

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<sup>101</sup> “And when he had said this, he breathed on [them], and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost” (καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς Λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον).

religion of Manichaeism also claimed to be the Paraclete. However, we don't even know his real name, his scripture is lost, and his religion extinct.

R. Bosworth Smith says, "By a fortune absolutely unique in history, Muhammad is a threefold founder of a nation, of an empire, and of a religion."<sup>102</sup> Alphonse De Lamartine tells us, "If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad?... Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational beliefs... that is Muhammad. *As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured*, we may well ask, is there any man greater than he?" (emphasis mine)<sup>103</sup>

I will end this section on the Paraclete with a quote from Raymond Brown:

"The word paraklaytos is peculiar to the Johannine literature. In 1 John 2, Jesus is a paraklaytos, serving as a heavenly intercessor with the father... Christian tradition has identified this figure as the Holy Spirit, but scholars like Spitta, Delafosse, Windisch, Sasse, Bultmann, and Betz have doubted whether this identification is true to the original picture and have suggested that the Paraclete was once an independent salvific figure, *later confused with the Holy Spirit*" (emphasis mine).<sup>104</sup>

### ***Muhammad is "the prophet" mentioned in John's Gospel***

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<sup>102</sup> R. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammad and Muhammadism* (Kessinger, 1946).

<sup>103</sup> Alphonse De Lamartine, *The History of Turkey* (Paris: 1854).

<sup>104</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John xiii-xxi*, vol. 29a (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970), 1135.

From John's (the evangelist) context, it appears that the Jews of the first century were awaiting the appearance of three great luminaries. He tells us that priests from Jerusalem sent messengers to John the Baptist to ask him "Who are you?" The Baptist initially answers the question by stating who he is not – "I am not the Christ" (John 1:20). The persistent messengers then ask him if he is Elijah, the ninth-century BCE Hebrew prophet who was carried up in a whirlwind into heaven. John again answers in the negative. The messengers ask him a third question; a question that undeniably raises the interest of the Muslim reader of the New Testament. "Are you the prophet?" (Ο προφήτης ει συ) John confesses, "No."

Despite the major Christological differences, Muslims and Christians will agree that Jesus of Nazareth was definitely the Messiah (Christ), as he is mentioned by this title several times in the Qur'an and in the sound hadiths of Muhammad. And although the Baptist cousin of Jesus outright denies being Elijah, Jesus does in fact identify him as one who comes "in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Mark 9:13, etc.). Muslims would not contend this point. In addition to both prophets being mentioned in primary Islamic sources, the Muslim will also notice John and Elijah as being rugged desert prophets who spoke with unparalleled boldness and courage.

Therefore, the only person left unidentified is "the prophet," which Muslim readers will immediately spot as a reference to Muhammad. I am well aware that Luke has Peter claim in the book of Acts (3:22) that Jesus is the Christ as well as "the prophet," a fulfillment of "the prophet like unto Moses" of Deuteronomy 18:18. But I

find no warrant in conflating these two distinct lines of ancient Jewish prophecy, and find the evidence for Muhammad being “like Moses” far more compelling than the evidence for Jesus. From a standpoint of doctrine, for instance, the orthodox Jesus is a divine incarnation, the second person of a triune godhead, who died for the sins of humanity – none of which is anything similar to Moses. Moses and Muhammad, however, were simply chosen men who were given spiritual *as well as* temporal kingdoms, in the sense that they were the final authority from a sacred as well as governmental standpoint. Additionally, both men were shepherds, had wives and children, participated in military expeditions, and made major migrations with their people – none of which is anything similar to Jesus.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, Muhammad was an Ishmaelite (Kedarite),<sup>106</sup> and also considered to be from the brethren of the Israelites, just as the Edomites, an Arab nation descended from Isaac, are called “brethren” to the Jews (Deuteronomy 2:4, 8, 23:7).<sup>107</sup>

In John 7:40, the general populace of Palestine who had seen the miraculous feats performed by Jesus Christ, exhibited an interesting difference of opinion as to the

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<sup>105</sup> It was indeed Waraqa b. Nawfal, the learned Christian of Mecca, who commented to Muhammad after the latter’s initial experience in the cave, “*Laqad ja’akum al-Namus al-Akbar, kama ja’a ilaa Musa,*” or “There has come to you the Great Law (ο νομος), just as it came to Moses.” The Qur’an also draws several parallels between the two Prophets (Qur’an 32:23; 33:69; 46:10, 12; 73:15; etc.).

<sup>106</sup> Kedar was the second son of Ishmael (Genesis 25:13) whose name is synonymous with Arab (Ezekiel 27:21: Arabia, and all the prices of Kedar...). His name is used in several Old Testament passages which Muslims will claim contain clear Muhammadan typologies (Isaiah 21, 42; Song of Songs 1). Additionally, some Muslim genealogists trace Muhammad’s ancestry to Kedar, although this is certainly conjecture, as the Prophet did not state the names of those who preceded Adnan, his grandfather of twenty-three generations prior to his birth.

<sup>107</sup> The beginning of the prophecy reads: “I shall raise them up a prophet, from amongst their brethren...” (Deuteronomy 18:18a). Esau (Edom) is defined as “a progenitor of the Arabians” according to the LSC, who married two daughters of Ishmael, Basemath and Mahalath. In fact, Moses, the very man who supposedly penned this verse, himself married an Arab woman (Zipporah), the eldest daughter of the Midianite priest Jethro, and so had children who were half-Arab.

sacred identity of the man from Nazareth. “Some said, ‘Truly this is the Prophet, while others said, ‘This is the Christ’ ... so there a division amongst the people because of him” (John: 40a – 41a, 43). The Pharisees, however “dead” they were internally, knew the scriptures inside and out, and their comment as it seems, convinced the crowd that “searching the scriptures” would lead them to conclude that “the Prophet does not come<sup>108</sup> from Galilee” (7:52).

### ***Muhammad, the powerful Coming One***

John the Baptist preaches: “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals<sup>109</sup> I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:7-8). Both Matthew and Luke expanded on Mark’s statement and added that the mighty coming one will “carrying his winnowing fan in his right hand,” and that he “will thoroughly cleanse his threshing floor” (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:15-18). Obviously, Christians throughout history have maintained that Jesus is the object of the Baptist’s prophetic utterances. If Jesus is the powerful one whose sandals John was unworthy to untie, however, why would John baptize him in the river like any other penitent Jew? If Jesus was truly the one spoken of by the Baptist, John would have clung himself to the son of Mary and

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<sup>108</sup> “οὐκ ἐγείρεται,” literally: “is not raised,” as in “I shall raise (אֶקְיָם) them up a prophet...” (Deuteronomy 18:18a).

<sup>109</sup> It is interesting to note that the sandal of the prophet Muhammad has been the subject of much devotional poetry. The fifteen-century Persian poet Jami commented that the blessed sandal was raised above the heavens (during the prophet’s ascension). An image of the sandal is the symbol of Shaykh Hamza Yusuf’s *Sandala* Publications.

would have instructed his disciples to do the same. Such was never the case, at least in the synoptic gospels.

The problem increases when we consider that in the synoptic tradition, we are told that at the baptism of Jesus the heavens open, a dove descends upon Christ, and a voice is heard proclaiming: “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” to quote Matthew (3:17). Matthew was obviously troubled by that fact that Jesus was quietly baptized without any sort of explanation since this implies the Baptist’s eminence over his Nazarene cousin. Perhaps this is evidence that Jesus was actually a disciple of John. Therefore, Matthew has John say, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus’ response is utterly unintelligible: “Let it be so now. It behooves us to fulfill all the justice.” Is it “just” for a student to baptize his Master? Luke decided not to comment on Mark’s brief scene simply because he didn’t have to. In chapter one of his gospel, John’s mother, Elizabeth, refers to Mary as “the mother of my Lord,” and informs Mary that her child “leaped” (ἐσκιρτησεν; some translations say “worshipped”) in her womb when she heard Mary’s greeting, thus causing Elizabeth to be filled with the “holy spirit.”

The author of the gospel of John takes it even a step further by pretending that Andrew was originally a disciple of the Baptist who began following Jesus around when he heard the former say about the latter, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Not only does this story horrendously contradict the synoptics, in which Jesus goes to *them* while casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee

and offers to make them “fishers of men,” but also greatly compromises the very message of John the Baptist – a message that he gave his life trying to convey, namely, bearing your *own* fruit worthy of repentance, from Q (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8). As expected, John (the evangelist) also omits the baptism of Christ in order to unequivocally demonstrate Jesus’ exalted position over the Baptist. The author of the fourth gospel has once again seized upon his crucial vantage point in history by seemingly silencing those who took strong exception to the apparently scandalous baptism of Jesus by an “inferior” prophet.

The problem reaches a crescendo when we learn that when John the Baptist is imprisoned by Herod Antipas, he sent two of his own disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the coming one (ο ερχομενος), or shall we look for another” (Matthew 11:3; Luke 7:19)? Considering the supposed facts that John saw the holy spirit alight upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22), heard the voice of God address Jesus to crowds as His Son (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22), admitted his own inferiority to Jesus at the baptism (Matthew 3:14), worshipped, or at least recognized Jesus as a fetus in his mother’s womb (Luke 1:41), and styled Jesus the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36), the notion that John, at this point, still does not know who Jesus is, is utterly disturbing. Has John acquired a terrible case of amnesia? The objective reader, or rather reasonable reader (as I believe that complete objectivity is a myth) must therefore conclude that when it comes to John the Baptist and Jesus in the New Testament, the gospels abound with embellishments for the purpose of implicating Jesus as the sole object of John’s high-sounding prophecies.

If we follow our aforementioned methodology with regards to the gospel of John, we can dismiss the statements of the Baptist found in that gospel on the grounds that the evangelist is not correcting a verifiable error in the synoptics but is rather articulating his advanced Christological positions. When we focus on the synoptic tradition, we will follow the rule that the earlier, the better. Therefore, Mark and Q must be given precedence. In Mark, the Baptist is mentioned sparingly – Jesus is baptized by him and then in chapter six, John is executed by Herod for condemning Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife. And that is basically it. In Q, however, we find the aforementioned story of John sending two of his disciples to ask about Jesus’ identity, and whether or not he is “the coming one” (ο ερχομενος). If the Baptist’s disciples took Jesus’ ambiguous answer in the affirmative, that he was indeed the coming one, why then did they not forsake their teacher John and follow Jesus? How could they find the master of mankind and possibly ignore him? In fact, the Mandeans (Sabians), followers of John the Baptist and so prevalent in the Arabian peninsula and Mesopotamia, remained faithful to John by never converting to Christianity, and history bears witness that there were many communities of them living in and around the covenant lands of Abraham’s seed that elected to retain their traditions of Sabianism. However, when the teachings of Muhammad reached them, they converted almost overnight. The usual polemical response to this is that the Sabians were “forced” to convert at the tip of the sword, but perhaps it’s high time for those who make such assertions to earnestly entertain the possibility that the Sabians found prophetic



fulfillment of the prophecies of John the Baptist in the person and message of Muhammad *al-Mustafa*, (the Chosen One) and not in Jesus Christ.

The full text of the preaching of the Baptist as recorded by Matthew and Luke states: "I baptize you with water as a symbol of repentance, but the one who comes after me is mightier than I whose sandals I am not worthy to remove. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will carry his winnowing fan in his hand right and thoroughly purge his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn and burn up the chaff with an unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11-12; also see Luke 3:16-17). Dr. 'Abdul Ahad Dawud (formerly Reverend David Benjamin Keldani) emphasizes the fact that the Baptist mentions the mighty one to come *after* him, while Jesus was a contemporary of his cousin John and born in one and the same year six months apart, and whose ministries ran concurrently for some time. Dawud then boldly claims that Muhammad was the powerful prophet announced by the Baptist<sup>110</sup> and that according to the Gospel of John (3:23) and the Secret Gospel of Mark discovered by Morton Smith at Mar Saba Monastery, Jesus' baptisms were identical to that of Johns,' namely with water as a symbol of repentance. Although a clever scribe notes in the parenthetical John 4:2 that it was actually Jesus' disciples doing all the baptizing, not Jesus!

It should be duly noted that the phrase "holy spirit" (*ruach qadosh*) as uttered by the Baptist has nothing whatever to do with a belief in a triune god. The camel-skin clad Hebrew prophet is not describing the third person of the Trinity, who is reportedly co-substantial (ὁμοουσιος) with the Father and Son, during his fiery sermons to the Jews at

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<sup>110</sup> Abdul Ahad Dawud, *Muhammad in the Bible* (Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Antara, 1969), 64.

the Jordan River. The concept of “Christolatry,” or worship of the Messiah, has no precedent in first-century Judaism. We must approach him in strictly monotheistic Jewish terms, as this was his historical context. Therefore, we can think of the Holy Spirit in terms of God’s created Spirit of Inspiration which sanctifies and aids His chosen servants. The title of Holy Spirit (*al-ruh al-qudus*) is used with reference to the archangel Gabriel in the Qur’an, the very angel who appeared to Muhammad in various forms in order to deliver the holy verses of the *Furqan* (Qur’an 25:1)<sup>111</sup> through exterior locution. With respect to baptism, the Qur’an says: “The Baptism of God! And who is better than God to baptize? And Him we indeed worship” (Qur’an 2:138). This baptism is not simply a “symbol of repentance” performed by a priest, pastor, or prophet. It is a complete internal and external metamorphosis performed by God Himself through the agency of the Spirit of Inspiration. The prophet uttered this divine Revelation, or Baptism of God, and by doing so, sanctified the world with true gnosis of the radically monotheistic nature of the Deity and with universal guidance for human beings until the Day of Resurrection – “for such He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself” (Qur’an 58:22). There is much to be written on this subject but I will end with a quote from Dawud.

“The *Sibghatu ‘l-Lah* (Baptism of God) is that divine baptism with fire which arms and equips the Muslim to become a bulwark against error and superstition, chiefly against idolatry of every kind. It is this baptismal fire that melts the soul and spirit of a Muslim,

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<sup>111</sup> *Al-Furqan*: A title of the Qur’an meaning the Criterion between right and wrong, true and false – that which separates the *wheat from the chaff*.

thus separating its golden substance from the rubbish and ordure... The sanctification by the Holy Spirit and fire which God works upon the spirit of a Muslim is that He impregnates and fills it with love for, and submission, to Him... It makes the spirit of a true Muslim believe in the absolute unity of Allah, to rely upon Him, and to know He alone is his Master, Owner, and Lord.”<sup>112</sup>

***Muhammad, the head of the corner***

Several years ago, an Assyrian Christian friend of mine invited me to the Sunday services at his church in Modesto, California, called the “Ancient Apostolic Church of the East.” The most amazing aspect of this visit was when I learned that this particular church continues to conduct its liturgical readings in the Aramaic language, the language of Jesus Christ himself. When I listened to the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, I was surprised to learn that it actually rhymed, a characteristic shared with the Qur’an, but completely lost in translation.

**Transliterated Lord’s Prayer:** Avoon da vash mayo; Nethqadash *shmokh*, Uti the *malkuthokh*; Unehwun tsevy *onokh*... (Our Father, who art in Heaven; Hallowed be thy Name; Thy Kingdom come; They Will be done...)

**Transliterated Surah 93:1-4:** Wadh-*duha*; Wal-layli itha *sajaa*; Maa wada’aka rabbuka wa maa *qalaa*... (By the dawn; And the night when it is still; Thy guardian Lord has not forsaken thee, nor is He displeased with thee...)

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<sup>112</sup> Dawud, *Muhammad in the Bible*, 194-197.

In addition to originating from the earliest source of the New Testament gospels, namely Q, one of the central aspects of the Lord's Prayer is the coming of the kingdom of God of earth, or what Jesus would have called the *malkukh d'Allaha*. Matthew and Luke record Jesus saying that this kingdom is "like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden, and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches" (Luke 13:19). In the Matthean version, Jesus concludes the parable by stating, "The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man" (ὁ σπειρων το καλον σπερμα εστιν ο υιος του ανθρωπου, Matt. 13:37). Jesus also comments that indeed the mustard seed is the "least of all seeds," but when it is grown, "it is the greatest amongst herbs" (Matthew 13:32). Certainly, from the perspective of many of the Israelites of first-century Palestine, the seed of Ishmael was viewed as illegitimate or even despised. Yet it was from the progeny of this first son of Abraham that God's universal emissary emerged, the eschatological Son of Man (*Barenash*), Muhammad. The Quran tells us:

"Muhammad is the Messenger of God; and those who are with him are strong against hostile unbelievers, but compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves in prayer, seeking grace from God and His Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, being the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Torah; and their similitude in the Gospel is like a *seed* which sends forth its blade, then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, filling the sowers with wonder and delight" (Qur'an 48:29a).

Furthermore, we read in Matthew 21:42 (also see Luke 20:17), that during a highly spirited discussion with the Pharisees, Jesus asks the latter, “Have you not read in the scriptures...” and then quotes from Psalm 118:22: “‘The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner.’ This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in your eyes?” Both Matthew and Luke borrowed this tradition of the rejected chief corner-stone from Mark who framed the saying in the context of the “parable of the wicked husbandmen” who kept abusing the servants of the vineyard owner until he finally sent his son whom they killed. Matthew, however, interpreted the saying as a prophecy of the departure of religious authority from the Israelites<sup>113</sup> and added, “Therefore I say unto you, that the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a nation that bears the proper fruit” (Matthew 21:43). Matthew was certainly on to something, but who is this rejected stone if not Ishmael and his progeny? The prophet Muhammad used the same analogy when he said: “My similitude to the prophets before me is like a man who built a beautiful house, except for one brick (or stone) in the corner. The people go about it and say, ‘Would that this stone be put in its place!’ I am that stone, and I am the seal of the prophets” (Bukhari).

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<sup>113</sup> Martin Lings says in his biography of Muhammad: “According to Islamic tradition, Muhammad is none other than the mysterious Shiloh (שִׁילֹה), to whom would be transferred, ‘in the latter days,’ the spiritual authority which until then had remained the prerogative of the Jews, Jesus himself having been the last Prophet of the line of Judah. The prophecy in question was made by Jacob immediately before his death: *‘And Jacob called unto his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days... The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be* (Genesis 49:1, 10). Lings, *Muhammad*, 34. The rigorous authenticated hadith of the prophet Muhammad states: “I am the Gatherer (*al-Hashir*) at whose feet people will gather” (al-Muwatta, Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, al-Nasa’i).

Dawud points out that the ancient archaic Semitic word for “stone” is *sapha*.<sup>114</sup> Derivatives of *sapha* in Arabic include the noun *safwah*, meaning “best” or “choicest,” and well as the verb *istafaa* (Form VIII), meaning “to choose or select” according to Hans Wehr.<sup>115</sup> In most Arabic translations of the New Testament, Jesus’ statement “Thou art Peter” (Matthew 16:18), is rendered “*Antas-sapha*.” The exalted title of Muhammad “*al-Mustafa*,” meaning “the Chosen One,” or literally “chosen stone” is also derived from the same ancient root, and although the vast majority of Muslims have heard of this appellation for their prophet, few have contemplated its significance, especially in light of the New Testament.

### **Conclusion**

The word Muslim is derived from *salam*, meaning peace, and is the active participle of the causative form (fourth form) of the verb *s-l-m* meaning “submitter (willfully, without compulsion), or “one who continuously causes peace,” as it denotes ongoing action. Muslims do not assert that Muhammad coined the designation Muslim, and even claim that Jesus Christ himself was a Muslim in the literal sense of the word. I cannot think of a better translation of “Muslim” in *koine* Greek than the compound word εἰρηνοποιός, consisting of the words “peace” and “doing,” and used by Matthew in the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for

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<sup>114</sup> Dawud, *Muhammad in the Bible*, 42.

<sup>115</sup> J.M. Cown (editor), *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Ithaca: Spoken Language Services, Inc., 1979), 606.

they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:9).

Through a Muslim hermeneutical lens, the reader of the New Testament will also notice the familiar greeting of Christ to his disciples after the passion narrative recorded by both Luke and John, (Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν, Luke 24:36). These words most likely represent a translation of the popular Jewish expression, “*sholam alaykhem*,” or “*al-salamu alaykum*” in Arabic. The Qur’an commands, “When you come into contact with those who believe in Our Signs, say, ‘Peace be upon you’” (6:54). Similarly, Jesus’ addition to his divinely directed request on the Mount of Olives, “Yet not as I will, but as you will,” reminds the Muslim reader of the Qur’anic prohibition of presuming to know what will happen on the morrow, without adding “if God wills” (18:24). Certainly Jesus was not a Christian, nor had he even heard of such a designation, as the book of Acts (11:26) testifies to its introduction into the world’s vernacular during the apostolic age and its original use was most likely pejorative in nature, denoting a heretical group of Gentiles and Hellenistic Jews who claimed that a state-executed rabbi from Galilee was the long-awaited deliverer of Israel.

As for Jesus being a Jew, it is certainly true that he was a faithful and devout practitioner of the law of Moses, but we must not forget that the word Jew doesn’t come into usage as a *religious* designation until the time of the divided monarchy a few centuries after Moses. Therefore, Moses and Judaism are as anachronistic as Jesus and Mormonism. Moses would have only recognized the term “*Yehudi*” as denoting a tribal

descendant of Judah and would not have applied even this term to himself as we are told in the book of Exodus (6:16) that he was a Levite. Therefore, while we may continue to refer to Jesus as a “Jew” in the sense that he was from the children of Israel (although this may also be contended), his religious or spiritual distinction has proved elusive.

It is in the ecumenically-centered teachings of Muhammad that we come to realize that in fact Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad all shared the same spiritual distinction as submitters unto the will of (Allah, *HaShem*, Yahweh, Jehovah), the god of Abraham, yet all came from distinct tribes and clans and at different times in religious history. This thesis is intended to be just a short overview of the vitally important yet seldom discussed topic of Muhammad in the Christian Bible and how a Muslim may methodologically approach the New Testament. Hans Kung said that Islam and Christianity need to understand each other or there will never be global peace.<sup>116</sup> These sentiments were echoed by worldwide Muslim leaders in their open letter to the Christian world entitled, “A Common Word” on the heels of the comments of Pope Benedict at the University of Regensburg on the auspicious date of September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006.<sup>117</sup> It is my fervent wish that both Muslims and Christians utilize this work to act as a springboard to engage in substantive and respectful dialogue with the aim of learning how to “love one another” by “spreading peace amongst ourselves” (~Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be upon him).

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<sup>116</sup> Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 184.

<sup>117</sup> The Pope’s remark that Muhammad brought “nothing new” except that which is “bad and inhuman” reminds me of the Pagan Celsus (Κέλσος) noting in a debate against Origen, “Christianity contained nothing new, but what Christians hold in common with the heathen, nothing new.” Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, 31.



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