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More Than a Prophet: Jesus and Islam

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SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

MORE THAN A PROPHET: JESUS AND ISLAM

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Introduction

During an interview about his faith, Bono, the face of the popular band U2 made the following statement about Jesus:

“[Who is Christ] is a defining question for any Christian. You’re not let off easily by saying a great thinker or a great philosopher, because he went around saying that he was the Messiah. He was crucified for saying that he was the Son of God. So, he was either the Son of God, or he was nuts...”¹

This claim from a pop culture icon brings out an interesting point. The Christian faith is centered on the person of Jesus and the claims that he made. What, then, should be the response to those who claim that Christ was nothing more than a “great thinker or a great philosopher? Or what should be the response to the adherents of Islam, the second largest religion in the world, which claims that Jesus Christ was nothing more than a prophet amongst other prophets? The following chapters will seek to answer that question.

The following chapters consist of an analysis of several primary sources, some historical, some contemporary, that address the divinity of Jesus from both Christian and Islamic perspectives. The questions that will hopefully be answered by the end of this thesis are as follows: (1) What are the Christian views concerning Jesus and why are they important? (2) What are the Islamic views concerning Jesus and why are they important? and (3) How can Christians witness to Muslims about the divinity of Jesus?

Before beginning to answer those questions, however, it is important to take a look at what scholars have been saying about Jesus, Islam, and the relationship between the two.

¹ <http://www.show2.me/en/video/bono-who-jesus?ep=znURZNPZPZPN>

Reviewing the Literature

In the Great Commission of Christ to “make disciples of all nations...” the Muslim world remains the most prominently unreached group of people. Of the estimated 7,000 remaining unreached people groups in the world, nearly half (about 3,000) are considered to be followers of Islam.² Because of this large number of people that have yet to be reached with the Gospel of Christ, there has been much discussion and debate amongst missiologists as to how this people group can be reached and how to properly address areas of theological difference and conflict. One of the major points of conflict between Muslim and Christian thought remains to be the Christian theology of the Trinity, specifically the Christian practice of referring to Jesus as the “Son of God.” This literature review will examine what scholars from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds have to say about the issues. Topics to be covered will include the Christian view of God, the Islamic/Muslim view of God, issues concerning translation of the phrase “Son of God,” and guidelines for how to advance the solution to the problem.

CHRISTIAN VIEW OF JESUS

There are several Christological references dealing with the divinity of Jesus, as this issue has been highly debated, even among Christian traditions, for well over 1,900 years. Because of this debate and the complexity of the issues inherent in the question of Christ’s divinity, there is a lack of consensus among Christian scholars in this area. However, the majority Christian scholarly opinion affirms the concept of Christ’s divinity.

² Joshua Project. World Religions of All Ethnic People Groups. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/global-religions.php> (accessed March 10, 2014)

Throughout the history of the Christian Church, from the first century all the way to the twenty-first century, the idea of Jesus as divine has been continually reaffirmed as a non-negotiable truth in Christianity.

DIVINITY OF CHRIST IN HISTORY

Starting from an historical perspective, some scholars would argue that the idea of Jesus as the divine Son of God was affirmed, even among the disciples, in the foundations of the original church. In “Explaining Christian Beliefs About Jesus,” a chapter of “Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenges of Islam,” Colin Chapman shows that this idea of Jesus being divine did not come from outside cultures when Christianity spread throughout the nations (as Islam would suppose) but came from the disciples close interaction with Jesus, in which they witnessed miracles and the authority with which he spoke. Thus, Greek mythology did not produce the idea of a “Son of God”, but the idea came from a Judeo-Christian background. This source shows that, even from the beginning, the doctrine of the Incarnation has been an important part of Christian doctrine and did not develop later as a result of syncretism.³

Also in line with historical sources of the Christian idea of Trinity, it is important to analyze some of the documents of the early church to understand the importance of the concept of Trinity and, specifically, the divinity of Christ to the early church. The creeds that emerged from the council of Nicaea in A.D. 325 are significant to study concerning the nature of Christ. The “Nicene Creed” leaves no room for interpretation as to the nature of Christ, asserting that Jesus is “the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God...of one substance with the Father...” The other creeds that emerged from the Council of Nicaea essentially convey the same message, only in slightly different

³ Colin Chapman, “Explaining Christian Beliefs About Jesus,” in *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 340-52. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007.

language. Understanding these creeds and the situation out of which they developed will help in understanding the importance of the Trinity, specifically the divinity of Christ.⁴

Tertullian, who is considered the person who coined the term “Trinity,” did so in his book *Apologeticus*, which was written in approximately 197 A.D. In this piece of apologetic literature, Tertullian defends the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. He also gives a metaphor using the sun and its rays to help his readers understand the simultaneously divine and human nature of Christ. Tertullian also maintains that in the formation of Jesus’ humanity, there was no type of sexual union between God and Mary. This separates Christ’s birth from all other pagan religious demi-gods. Finally, Tertullian appeals to the actions of Christ to confirm his deity, arguing that the miracles performed at the hands of the Messiah confirm his identity as the “*Logos of God.*”⁵

In *De Decretis Nicaenae Sinodi (In Defense of the Council of Nicaea)* Athanasius, an early church father, defends the conclusions of the church fathers at the council of Nicaea and simultaneously denounces the Arian heresy, which states that Jesus was not, in any way, divine. In defending the decisions of the Church fathers, Athanasius essentially restates what was argued at the Council of Nicaea. He shows his readers how it is necessary to maintain that Christ was divine in his nature and that any theology that is different is irreligious and heretical. Also within this text is a portion of a letter from Dionysius of Rome to Dionysius of Alexandria in further support of the idea of both the Trinity and the divine nature of Jesus. In this letter, Dionysius of Rome rebukes those who would attempt to separate the members of the Godhead by essence, thereby reaffirming the doctrine established by the Council of Nicaea that the Father,

⁴ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches: a reader in Christian Doctrine, from the Bible to the Present*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982) 28-30.

⁵ T. R. Glover, trans., *Apology, de spectaculis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966)

Son and Holy Spirit are all of one essence. Also, Dionysius of Rome reaffirms the importance of believing in all three of the members of the Godhead, not just picking one or two.⁶

St. Thomas Aquinas is another early church father who established the importance of the divine nature of Christ. In his *Compendium of Theology*, Aquinas devoted an entire section to explaining the nature of the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Christ. Aquinas believes that the nature of Christ is one of the central focal points of the Christian faith, and that a working understanding of this aspect of Christian faith is vital. He claims that, “Christian faith, as I said at the beginning, is chiefly concerned about two things, namely the divinity of the Trinity and the humanity of Christ.” In his section regarding the nature of Christ, Aquinas covers everything from Christ’s perfection, the way that the Christ’s divinity and humanity coexisted and even the way in which Christ’s human body was formed. Aquinas also addresses several “heretics” of his time, such as Nestorius, Arius, and Sabellius, not only discrediting their theories but also explains why their theories were wrong.⁷

Continuing with the historical theme of sources, Michael D. Bell writes about Maccovius, an influential scholar in the Reformation period. According to Bell, it is because of Maccovius that the doctrine of the Trinity was important to the Reformation thinkers. Maccovius affirmed that Jesus was not a separate entity from the Father, but that Jesus was, in fact, God Himself. Maccovius’ contributions to Reformed thought concerning the Trinity were important because they reaffirmed the idea of the disciples that Christ was an expression of the divine person. Maccovius’ writings were also important because they stressed the unity of the divine person.

⁶ New Advent. De Decretis Nicaenae Sinodi. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2809.htm> (accessed January 12, 2014).

⁷ Richard J. Regan, trans., *Compendium of Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 35-53.

The Holy Spirit and the Son are not division of God, but they proceed from and are, in themselves, God.⁸

Donald Fairbairn explains the significance of the Council of Chalcedon in his essay “The One Person Who is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective.” Fairbairn argues that the conclusion of the Council of Chalcedon was not a compromise on the subject of Christology, but an affirmation of the views of the Church fathers and the Body of Christ in the 5th century. Along with explaining the significance of the Council of Chalcedon, Fairbairn analyzes the views of Cyril of Alexandria, one of the most influential leaders of the church during this time. The author points out specifically that much of the Christology of Cyril and others like him was based in soteriology, or the doctrine of salvation. In other words, the Council of Chalcedon affirmed what they did about Christ because they believed that it was necessary for their salvation.⁹

JESUS IN THE GOSPELS

In “From the Historical Jesus to the Jesus of Testimony,” which is a chapter from Richard Bauckham’s book *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, Bauckham outlines the credibility of the Gospel narratives in portraying who Jesus actually was. The author appeals to traditions of ancient historiography, which valued eyewitness testimony over written sources. Bauckham argues: “Testimony offers us, I wish to suggest, both a reputable historiographic category for reading the Gospels as history, and also a theological model for understanding the Gospels as the entirely appropriate means of access to the historical reality of Jesus.” In other words, Bauckham is

⁸ Michael D. Bell, “Maccovius (1588-1644) on the Son of God as $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\ \epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ ” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1 (April 2011). <http://search.ebscohost.com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=79970563&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 10, 2013)

⁹ Donald Fairbairn, “The One Person Who is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective,” In *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology* ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 80-113.

arguing that the Gospels are not negated by the fact that eyewitness testimony was the main source of information, but rather strengthened by this fact and should be taken more seriously. In Bauckham's opinion, it is likely that the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus accurately portray the life of Jesus.¹⁰

Murray J. Harris affirms the idea that the gospel writers were very intentional with their description of Jesus as divine. In "The Word Was God," a section of his book *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, Harris outlines the specific use of the word *theos* in relation to Jesus in the prologue of John's gospel, the gospel in which Jesus' divinity is presented on 29 different occasions. Harris dissects the possible meanings of the sentence from the Greek, and concludes that John was being very specific with the language that he chose to use in the first chapter of his gospel. In Harris' opinion, John was clearly stating that "The Word" (Jesus) was, in essence, God.¹¹

William Lane Craig, in "The Self-Understanding of Jesus," outlines the importance of recognizing the fact that Jesus often referred to himself as divine. Craig begins by outlined current debate concerning the "historical" Jesus and explaining why many of these claims lack substance. The author asserts that those who claim that the accounts of Jesus as divine were the constructs of the Gospel writers fail to adequately answer the question of the origin of these claims. Dr. Craig goes on to show how three specific titles which Jesus used for himself make an excellent case for his divinity. Jesus referred to himself as the Messiah, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. Craig points out that all three of these titles imply a divine essence in the person of Jesus. Also, Dr. Craig points to the actions of Jesus as an indication of his divine nature.

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, "From the Historical Jesus to the Jesus of Testimony," In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: the Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1-12.

¹¹ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

Some of the actions that are considered to reveal Christ's divinity are: His authority in interpreting Scriptures, the miracles that he performed, and his teaching that he was responsible for establishing people's destiny. Overall, Craig establishes with certainty that Jesus was aware of his shared divine essence with the Father.¹²

In "Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels," D.R. Bauer provides readers with a survey of the usages and meaning of the term "Son of God" in the Old Testament, in the Life of Jesus, and in each Gospel account. Bauer argues that "Son of God" is "arguably the most significant Christological title in the New Testament." In regards to the Old Testament, Bauer points out that interpreters of the Old Testament did not necessarily always view the "Son of God" and the Messiah as divine. However, this is not to say that the idea of a "Son of God" was completely foreign. The idea was existent within the Jewish culture and not unheard of. Bauer also claims that Jesus thought of himself as the Son of God and acted as though this were true. (i.e. healing the sick, teaching with authority, preaching good news to the poor, etc.) Finally, Bauer outlines the uses of "Son of God" in each of the 4 Gospel accounts. In doing so, Bauer effectively shows how the different aspects of divine sonship (pre-existence, intimate relationship with the Father, etc.) are stressed more heavily than others depending on which Gospel is being read.¹³

D.A. Carson, in his book "Jesus: the Son of God," takes a deeper look at the biblical idea of sonship in a variety of usages and explains how the word "son" was not restricted to instances describing biological sonship. Carson gives several examples of different uses of sonship in both the Old and New Testaments, ranging from biological sonship to describing "sons of X" as those who share similar qualities with the person of "X." Carson then goes on to present to readers the

¹² William Lane Craig, "The Self-Understanding of Jesus," In *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 287-332.

¹³ D.R. Bauer, "Son of God," In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 769-75.

unique aspect of the sonship of Jesus. He does this by examining certain biblical passages in both the Old and New Testament that point to or reference Jesus as the divine “Son of God.”¹⁴

LOGIC OF THE INCARNATION

Millard Erickson, in a 2-chapter section entitled “The Logic of the Incarnation,” part of his book *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* defends the Incarnation as a logical possibility and explains why it is not irrational to believe that such an event could have occurred. Erickson’s goal in this section is to present his readers with a Christology that takes into account the successes and failures current trends in Christological study and attempts to answer questions posed by contemporary study into the act of the Incarnation. Firstly, Erickson points out that, in order to create a legitimate, contemporary Christology that will be impactful to current society, one must be willing to realize the flaws inherent within certain aspects of Orthodox Christology, while also maintaining the essential doctrine that Jesus Christ was both fully God and fully man. Erickson argues that the best way to achieve this goal is through the adaptation of a form of kenotic Christology, in which God limits himself in the person of Jesus while still maintaining all of his divinity and embracing every aspect of the human essence. The remainder of the section is spent on explaining, in great detail, how the kenotic act of the Lord did not take away from his divinity or humanity in any sense.¹⁵

Richard Swinburne, in his book *Was Jesus God?*, outlines two reasons for the necessity of the incarnation of God in the person of Christ. Firstly, Swinburne argues that it was necessary for God to take the form of a human in order for God to show creation that he was in solidarity with them in their suffering. Swinburne admits that this could have been done in another way,

¹⁴ D.A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

¹⁵ Millard Erickson, “The Logic of the Incarnation,” In *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 531-76.

such as God simply telling humans how to deal with suffering, but this would not have allowed God to experience suffering in the way that a human being would, thus making his solidarity incomplete. The second reason Swinburne gives for the Incarnation is for the atonement of human wrongdoing (sin) against God. Swinburne asserts that humans owe God a great debt because of their sin against God, yet are unable to pay that debt. Therefore, although He was not obligated, God became man in order for the debt to be paid in the person of Jesus. These two aspects of the Incarnation show its importance to the Christian faith.¹⁶

Anselm of Canterbury further explains the necessity of the Incarnation in his book, “Cur Deus Homo?” Cur Deus Homo means “Why the God-Man?” and documents a discourse between Anselm and a man named Boso. Boso is asking Anselm every question that “infidels” have about the Incarnation and asking Anselm to explain them. The main theme of the book is why it was necessary for God to become a man in order to atone for our sins. Anselm lays out the answer in a syllogism over several chapters. The syllogism is as follows: (1) Man owes God a great debt because of sin. (2) Man deserves to pay this debt. (3) Man cannot pay this debt, but it must be paid. (4) Therefore, God became a man in order to pay the debt that man could not pay.¹⁷

BACKGROUND OF ISLAM

In order to become a “Muslim”, a follower of God, one must recite the shahada, which states that “there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.” This is important to note because Muslims do not affirm the doctrine of the Trinity in any sense at all. The sources that follow will explain the way in which Muslims disagree with Trinitarian Theology, namely with the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus.

¹⁶ Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Fordham University. Medieval Sourcebook: Cur Deus Homo? <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-curdeus.asp> (accessed on Feb 1, 2014)

Firstly, it is important to realize the importance of the name in the Islamic faith. Morrow, Castleton, and Vittor, in their article “In the Name of Allah,” talk about the importance of what they call the “Allah Lexicon.” This lexicon is a collection of words and phrases that help the Muslim believer to refocus their attention on God throughout the day. These phrases are important because they are part of the Muslim believer’s way of honoring God and drawing close to Him and His law, and because they show the importance of the Arabic language to the Islamic faith. Arabic is seen as a holy language and is therefore directly tied to the Islamic faith.¹⁸

In “Understanding Islam and Muslim Traditions, author Tanya Gulevich gives an introduction to the core beliefs of Islam, which are referred to as “pillars” by most Muslims. The five pillars consist of one belief statement and four applications that are intended to draw the believer closer to God. First, and most importantly, believers must recite the “shahadah”, which states “there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.” The other pillars are more practical and include formal prayer (salat), almsgiving (zakat), fasting (sawm), and a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). Also, Gulevich touches briefly on what the Qur’an says about how Muslims are supposed to relate to Judaism and Christianity and the Muslim beliefs about Jesus.¹⁹

In “Muslim/Non-Muslim Relations”, a chapter in *Introducing the Qur’an*, written by John Kaltner, the author provides an overview of the Quranic verses that speak about the way in which Muslims should interact with people of other religions. As Kaltner shows in this chapter, if these verses are looked at as a whole, they present an ambiguous picture in regards to other religions from a Muslim perspective. To clear up the questions raised by the examination of

¹⁸ John Andrew Morrow and Barbara Castleton and Luis Alberto Vittor. “In the Name of Allah” *Islamic Horizons* 38, no. 6 (November/December 2009) <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rgm&AN=504348135&site=ehost-live> (accessed February 28, 2013)

¹⁹ Tanya Gulevich, *Understanding Islam and Muslim Traditions* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2005).

these Quranic verses, Kaltner enlists the help of contemporary commentators on the Qur'an. The conclusion that these commentators come to is that the overarching theme of passages regarding pluralism in the Qur'an is one that places judgment in the hands of the Lord rather than in the hands of the followers of Muhammad.²⁰

Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, in their book *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future*, also provide an overview of the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, the five pillars. However, the authors make it a point to show that not all Muslim beliefs are listed directly in the Qur'an. In fact, as Riddell and Cotterell point out, the traditions and extraquranical sayings of Muhammad hold nearly the same amount of influence in Muslim doctrine. The authors also stress the importance of the doctrine of "tawhid," or radical oneness, in the theology of Muhammad. In the opinions of the authors, the idea of "tawhid" affected the way that Muhammad wrote about Jesus in the Qur'an and was central in his condemnation of the idea of the Trinity. Riddell and Cotterell also talk about the concept of abrogation in the Qur'an, meaning that, if two passages seemingly contradict, the passage that was written later will, in effect, negate the earlier passage.²¹

Continuing with an overview of Islamic beliefs and practices, John Esposito, in his book entitled *Islam: The Straight Path*, explains the diversity of religious life among Muslims around the world, dealing with such topics as predestination and freewill, the importance of works, the unity of God and many other aspects of Muslim theology. Esposito shows his readers how the religious practices and beliefs of those who are followers of Muhammad have been shaped by philosophy, culture, and desire to know God. Esposito's conclusion is: "the inherent unity of faith, implicit in statements like "one God, one Book, one [final] Prophet," should not deter one

²⁰ John Kaltner, "Muslim/Non-Muslim Relations," In *Introducing the Qur'an for Today's Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 136-64.

²¹ Peter Cotterell and Peter G. Riddell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

from appreciating the rich diversity that has characterized religious life of the Islamic community.²²

ISLAM AND JESUS

Clinton Bennett, in his book *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations*, outlines some of the contemporary conflicts that exist between Muslims and Christians. One of the major points that stuck out was the vehement denial of the crucifixion. The Muslim man who was contributing to this section (Deedat) argued that he was disgusted by the claims of Christians that the only thing that was able to redeem the “soul of the heathen” was the blood of Christ, while he argued that most Muslims are, by far, more righteous than any Christian that he has encountered. Another contention that was expressed in this section was the supposed corruption of the Bible. Deedat argued that the corruption of the minds of the early church can be seen clearly in the Christian scriptures and, therefore, they should be ignored as false stories that lead people astray. Finally, Deedat argues that, just as the Christian scriptures were falsified, the idea of Jesus as the Son of God was thrust on him by the early church. Deedat asserts that Jesus actually tried to defend himself from being given such a divine title, yet the early Christian church thrust it upon him and propagated this myth to its followers.²³

In “An Open Letter of 38 Muslim Scholars to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI,” the Muslim scholars that are mentioned in the title attempt to find some common ground between Christianity and Islam, claiming that the main goal of the two religions is identical: to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. The main point to take away from this source is the fact that Muslims do not consider there to be a

²² John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²³ Clinton Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations: Past and Present* (London: Continuum, 2008).

difference between the God of their faith and the God of the Christian faith. The difference, they believe, lies in the messenger.²⁴

Nancy Roberts reinforces the idea that any differences between YHWH and Allah are imaginary in her article entitled “Trinity v. Monotheism: A False Dichotomy?” Roberts, much like Miroslav Volf, claims that a poor understanding of the Trinity is to blame for the divide between Christians and Muslims on the issue. No good Muslim, according to Roberts, would deny that Allah can behave in different ways or that there are different expressions of Allah’s character. What Roberts is arguing for is a form of Sabellianism, or Modalism, which would unify believers of both faiths. The author moves this unification outside of even Christianity and Islam, claiming that several other religions, such as Hinduism, reflect Trinitarian values, just not in the same way that Christians (or Muslims apparently) represent those values.²⁵

Regarding the Islamic view of Jesus, a good starting point is the book *Prophets in the Qur’an* by Brandon M. Wheeler. This book provides every single Quranic reference to Jesus along with excerpts from Quranic commentaries written by Muslim scholars. This book covers everything from what the Qur’an has to say about the virgin birth, Jesus as the Son of God and the miracles of Jesus to mentions of Jesus’ disciples in the Qur’an. Through this book, one can begin to gain an understanding of what Muslims believe about Christ.²⁶

Colin Chapman, in “The Islamic View of Jesus,” points out that Muslims actually think more highly of Jesus than Christians often believe they do. Muslims actually value Jesus as a true prophet and one of the messengers of God. The Qur’an even affirms that Jesus was born of

²⁴ An Open Letter of 38 Muslim Scholars to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI. *A Common Word Between Us and You*. Amman, 2007. The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. *A Common Word*. Amman: RISSC, 2012

²⁵ Nancy Roberts, “Trinity vs. Monotheism: A False Dichotomy?” *Muslim World* 101, no. 1 (January 2011). http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=5750988_2&site=ehost-live (accessed February 19, 2013).

²⁶ Brandon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur’an* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002).

a virgin and that he performed many mighty miracles. The difference, however, lies in the fact that Muslims do not believe that Jesus was anything more than a prophet. Chapman points out that, in the Islamic faith, it is clearly a sin to elevate Jesus to any position higher than a prophet, much less a divine position.²⁷

Continuing with the theme of the Muslim view of Jesus, Peter Kreeft provides an overview of Muslim objections to the divinity of Christ in “Jesus and Muhammad,” a chapter of *Between Allah and Jesus*. Kreeft’s main points are that Muslims view Jesus as a good teacher and honor him as a prophet and servant of Allah, yet do not concede that he was, in any way, divine. Kreeft also shows his readers how Muslims believe that the actual Jesus is not the Jesus of the Gospels and the New Testament. The Jesus of the Christian scriptures, they argue, has been corrupted by people like Paul and Peter, who took the teachings of Jesus and manipulated them for their own selfish gain.²⁸

Brothers Ergun and Emir Caner, in their book *Unveiling Islam* speak of the philosophy of salvation in Muslim contexts and the Qur’anic, Muslim view of the person of Jesus. Firstly, these authors point out the Muslim doctrine of “mathematical salvation”, or the idea that the good and bad works of every human being will, in the Day of Judgment, be placed on scales. If the good deeds outweigh the bad, the believer is welcomed in to Paradise. However, if the good deeds are outweighed by the bad, the person will suffer eternity in Hell. The authors point out that this idea is in stark contrast with the Christian idea of the sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ, that all of the punishment for sin was placed on the person of Christ at the cross. The authors also briefly discuss the Muslim view of Jesus. They point out such differences as not

²⁷ Colin Chapman. “The Islamic View of Jesus.” In *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 251-259.

²⁸ Peter Kreeft, “Jesus and Muhammad,” In *Between Allah and Jesus* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010). 47-66.

believing in the divinity of Jesus, the purpose of Jesus' coming and the death/ascension of Christ.²⁹

In his book *The Prophet and the Messiah*, author Chawkat Moucarry, an Arab Christian, also discusses Muslim contentions to the divinity of Jesus. Unlike the authors previously discussed in this review, Moucarry brings out an important point about the origin of the Islamic denial of the divinity of Christ. The author addresses the cultural situation out of which Islam arose. The Arabic culture in which Muhammad ministered was plagued with rampant pagan polytheism, and several of the pagan deities during this time were demi-gods, formed by the result of a pagan deity coming to earth and procreating with a human being. With this in mind, one can see how the radical Unitarian monotheism within Islam developed.³⁰

Also along the lines of the development of the Islamic view of Jesus, Hans Kung argues that Muhammad's view of Jesus was shaped by his interaction with Arabian Jewish-Christians. In his book: *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, Kung asserts the likelihood of Muhammad encountering Christians throughout his life, pointing out the fact that the cousin of Muhammad's first wife was a Christian, one of his later wives was a Christian, and that Muhammad definitely encountered Christian monks during his caravan journeys. Also, Kung points out the verse in the Qur'an which points out that Christians are the closest to Muslims in their beliefs. Kung claims that the "Christians" referenced here had a Jewish Christology rather than a Hellenistic Christology.³¹

While the views listed above are the ones that have typically been held strongly by Muslim believers, some research indicates that some doubts may be arising in Islamic youth. In

²⁹ Emir Fethi Caner and Ergun Mehmet Caner, "Salvation: Mathematical Righteousness," In *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 142-51.

³⁰ Chawkat Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

³¹ Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2007).

“A Sociological Approach to the Concept of God Amongst Iranian Youth,” authors Safa and Ahmadi conclude, after studying a large number of Iranian youth from the ages of 15-28, that many youth in contemporary Islamic societies have questions about their faith that they are simply afraid to ask for fear that they would be condemned by their families and elders. While this fear is constricting the youth from asking questions, the fact that they exist at least shows that the way that Muslims think about God may be changing. Also of importance, the authors found that a majority of the youth felt that have a personal relationship with “some God” was more important than ascribing to any one particular religious system.³²

TRANSLATING SON OF GOD

Because of issues raised by the sources listed above, one can clearly see that the problem between Christian and Muslim theology does not lie in the way that each party sees “God the Father”, but in the way that each party views Jesus. Is he the divine “Son of God” or just a “messenger?”

Faithful translation requires faithful exegesis, and faithful exegesis, according to Robertson McQuilkin, author of “Exegeting the Audience,” requires getting down out of the ivory tower and observing closely the people for whom the translation is being made. If the audience cannot understand the translation that you have done, then you have wasted both your time and the time of the audience, according to McQuilkin. McQuilkin boldly asserts that translators must set aside their own feelings and desires and try to put themselves in the shoes of

³² Mina Safa and Habib Ahmadi. “A Sociological Approach to the Concept of God Amongst Iranian Youth.” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 3 (March 2011). <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=79325517&site=ehost-live> (accessed February 27, 2013).

those who are being translated for. The author calls his readers to be like Paul and change the way that they do things in order that some might be saved because of the adjustments.³³

In the article “A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible,” Rick Brown, a leading Christian expert in Muslim-Christian relations, gives an overview of the problem of the term “Son of God.” Many Muslims have a problem with the phrase “Son of God,” because they believe that it has implications that God procreated with a human being. Also, if God procreated and this being were equal to God, that would defy the words of the shahada. (There is no God but Allah.) Brown points out that the reason that many Muslims believe that the sonship of Jesus implies intercourse is because, in the Arabic language, there is no figurative word for “son.” Every word to describe the relationship between a father and son in Arabic implies either procreation or adoption. Brown points out to his readers that, every time the word “son” is used in the New Testament to describe Jesus, it is used in a sense that implies an extremely close relationship, not biological, but personal. Brown argues that any attempt to reach Muslim believers must take into account these translations of the phrase “Son of God” and attempt to find the translation that accurately translates meaning in a way that the target culture (Islam) will understand it.³⁴

Collin Hansen, author of “The Son and the Crescent” would agree wholeheartedly with Brown. In his article, he argues that Arabic Bible translations that literally translate “Son of God” leave the text empty and lacking an important aspect. These translations, according to Hansen, have made no significant advances in Muslim cultures but actually seem to alienate the Christian community even more. Hansen points out that certain translations that have taken a more liberal approach in order to maintain meaning have seen greater welcoming into Muslim

³³ Robertson J. McQuilkin, “Exegeting the Audience” *Trinity Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 199-207.

³⁴ Rick Brown, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. “A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28 (Fall 2011): 121-5.

communities, increased dialogue with Muslims, and even more conversions than in situations where a traditional translation was used. Although these new translations seem to be “working,” many questions are being raised as to whether or not the true meaning of the text is being preserved with phrases like “Beloved one who comes from God.” Should the church run to “results” if the means by which those results were acquired is contrary to the gospel that is being preached?³⁵

Another view of translating “Son of God” comes from Michael LeFebvre and Basheer Abdulfadi. These authors suggest that a word-for-word translation is best whenever possible. Their reasoning for this is that the term “Son of God” carries so much more connotations that simply a close personal relationship. The meaning is multi-faceted and therefore there is no simple answer. The authors also point out that Muslims object to the Father-Son relationship between Jesus and YHWH because Muslims are opposed to dividing God, even in the slightest. Finally, the authors point out that the true responsibility of relating an accurate message does not rely on the translation, but on the translator. Simply reading the text on a page will not convey the full gospel message to a reader. That is why God has chosen people to come alongside Him in ministry and walk with people through determining the meaning of the Gospel. Part of being a translator is the idea that one will actually translate something, and not just once onto paper, but over and over again onto the hearts of those who are seeking God.³⁶

Continuing with the topic of translation, D.A. Carson, in his book *Jesus the Son of God*, argues from a slightly different viewpoint than that of Brown. While Carson sees the importance of presenting the scriptures in language that is understandable to those listening/reading, he also argues that what is truly debated in this situation is the Incarnation, not a metaphor. The idea of

³⁵ Hansen, *The Son and The Crescent*,

³⁶ Basheer Abdulfadi and Michael LeFebvre. “A Further Look at Translating ‘Son of God’” *International Journey of Frontier Missiology* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 61-74.

an eternal, unique Creator uniting with his creation and interacting with that creation in a very personal way is not readily acceptable by any culture, argues Carson. Therefore, Christian ministers must be prepared to bear witness to the Christ that is presented in biblical passages, the Christ that the early church has affirmed, and the Christ that is still being affirmed in Christian communities today. To remove this phrase from biblical text is, in the opinion of Carson, to remove Muslim converts from “the history of the confessionalism of the universal church.”³⁷

Wycliffe Bible Translators, a prominent Bible translation ministry, argues that, when translating key theological terms found in Scripture, it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice a literal, word-for-word translation for the sake of preserving the meaning that exists in the original text. While sacrificing word-for-word translation is not necessary for all Bible translations in Muslim contexts, Wycliffe maintains that the main goal of Bible translation is to maintain intended meaning, not literally translating every single word of the text. Others, such as Donna Toulmin, in her article “When Literal is Inaccurate” affirm the idea that word-for-word translations are seldom the best option when trying to convey meaning to an audience.³⁸

Wycliffe also points out the importance of community in Bible translation. In all of the translations that involve difficulty in translating the phrase “Son of God,” Wycliffe always brings in a third party organization (such as the World Evangelical Alliance) to ensure that their translations are accurately portraying the original intended meaning.³⁹

Rick Brown, in “A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,” expounds upon the idea that translators of the Bible should be concerned with preserving meaning more than an “accurate” word-for-word translation. Brown asserts that meaning can be conveyed in a more

³⁷ Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*.

³⁸ Donna Toulmin. “When ‘Literal’ is Inaccurate: A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Translating Scripture Meaningfully.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 127-137.

³⁹ Wycliffe Bible Translators. “A Translation Challenge: The Son of God; Summary of an Ongoing Controversy.” Wycliffe Bible Translators. <http://www.wycliffe.org/sonofgod.aspx> (accessed March 28, 2013).

effective way by making use of the paratext in Bible translation. The paratext includes introductions to books, footnotes, study notes and other extra-textual material that helps the reader to understand the meaning of a passage more clearly. Brown believes that reading the text through the lens of the paratext will allow for the meaning to be conveyed more accurately and in a clearer way than if the reader were to simply read the text without the extra information. Also, Brown points out the importance of involving the target culture in the translation process.⁴⁰

The Assemblies of God has released a statement concerning the importance of referring to Jesus as the Son of God when translating the Bible for Muslims and the implications that result from failing to include this terminology in the translation process. In *The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology in Scripture Translations for Muslims: Missiological Implications*, a group of scholars argue that, when familial terms in biblical literature are replaced, the essence of the Gospel is altered. The authors also argue that, while intended to aid in evangelism to Muslims, removing familial language from Bible translation often has the opposite effect of Christian witness in Muslim communities.⁴¹

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Some people, like Paul Knitter, would say that the two parties should just overlook their differences, keep their heads down, and continue living life in peace, striving after the same God. Justice, he says, comes in embracing each person's personal opinion when it comes to religion. He is hopeful that one day Christians and Muslims could even work together and use their similarities to bring about justice in the world.⁴²

⁴⁰ Rick Brown and Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. "A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 105-118.

⁴¹ Ben Aker et al., "The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology In Scripture Translation for Muslims" <http://www.fatherson.ag.org/download/paper.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2014).

⁴² Paul F. Knitter, "Islam and Christianity Sibling Rivalries and Sibling Possibilities." *Cross Currents* 55, no. 4 (December 2009) <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=45514795&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 10, 2013)

Unlike Knitter, there are those who wish to see the differences between Christians and Muslims reconciled in a peaceful and loving way rather than avoiding each other and acting like no tension exists. Miroslav Volf is one of those people. In “Allah and the Trinity”, Volf argues that the contentions that many Muslims have with the doctrine of the Trinity are simply incorrect. Volf claims that these contentions exist due to a misrepresentation of the doctrine of the Trinity by Christians who incorrectly understand the doctrine. In other words, the understanding of the Trinity that has been represented to the Muslim world does not reflect the normative Christian understanding of the Trinity. Volf asserts that Christians should share that they do not think that the Son and Holy Spirit are separate entities, or three equal gods, but that God is of one essence, with Father, Son and Holy Spirit being different expressions of that essence.⁴³

In “Guidelines in Discussion With Muslims,” Chapman urges his readers to actually enter into genuine, meaningful discussion with Muslims. It is important to remember, according to Chapman, that one can talk about more than religion when dialoguing with a Muslim. Muslims are actually real people with real interests other than reading the Qur’an and praying to Allah. Also important when dialoguing with Muslims, according to Chapman, is to remember the fact that building relationships take time. On top of that, trying to get someone to move from Islam to Christianity takes an even longer time. Overall, the things that Chapman urges are a genuine heart and patience.⁴⁴

Byron L. Haines has similar sentiments to Chapman. In “Directions for the Future,” Haines boldly claims that Christians must embrace understanding of their Muslim brothers.

⁴³ Miroslav Volf, “Allah and the Trinity” *Christian Century* 128, no. 5 (March 2011) <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ofm&AN=504523124&site=ehost-live> (accessed February 09, 2013).

⁴⁴ Colin Chapman, “Guidelines in Discussion With Muslims.” In *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*, 197-199. Downer’s Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2007.

Without understanding, there will be no way of moving forward for either party, according to Haines. Also, Haines argues for the need for a faithful witness in Muslim contexts. Haines defines *faithful* witness as a witness that allows God to be in control of the witnessing process, rather than deciding what to do based off of human wisdom.⁴⁵

In witnessing to Muslims, George Carey boldly asserts that we must be unashamedly dedicated to maintaining the divinity, supremacy and finality expressed in the person of Christ. In *God Incarnate: Meeting the Contemporary Challenges to a Classic Christian Doctrine*, Carey argues that if Christians really believe that Christ is the fullest expression of God as the Gospel accounts of the New Testament show, then this message should be affirmed and proclaimed, regardless of the offense that it brings. Speaking of Jesus, Carey states, “His ministry is as wide as creation and he comes to claim all men as his own and he demands universal acknowledgment as ‘Lord’. There can be no rivals to his Lordship.” Thus, if Christians are going to proclaim the *true* gospel, this message of Jesus as the unique and final revelation of God must be maintained.⁴⁶

Warrington and Karkkainen point out the role of the Spirit in preparing the hearts of people to receive the Gospel message. They argue that a crucial aspect of missionary activity in any people group is to recognize the activity of the Spirit in the lives of people, drawing them unto the person of Jesus. Karkkainen believes that this aspect of missionary activity is missing in many contemporary missional settings.⁴⁷ On a different note, Warrington stresses the importance of experience in Spirit-led mission, arguing that Jesus is not simply existential truth

⁴⁵ Byron L. Haines, “Directions For the Future.” In *Christians and Muslims Together: An Exploration by Presbyterians*, edited by Byron L. Haines and Frank L. Cooley, 112-23. Philadelphia: The Geneva Press, 1987.

⁴⁶ George Carey, *God Incarnate: Meeting the Contemporary Challenges to a Classic Christian Doctrine* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

⁴⁷ Veli-Matti Karkkainen, “Pentecostal Pneumatology of Religions,” in *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts* ed. Veli-Matti Karkkainen and Jurgen Moltmann (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009) 155-80.

to be grasped by the logic and reason of men, but that he is alive and is meant to be personally experienced.⁴⁸

Concerning ministry specifically to Muslims, Chawkat Moucarry, who was mentioned previously in this review, provides the model of “One God, One Humanity, One World.” By this he means that Christians and Muslims should recognize their similarities and take these as a platform for authentic dialogue between the two religions. Christians should not be pushy with their faith, he argues, but should instead be challenged by Muslims and in turn challenge Muslims to ask questions of their faith and seek truth with all of their heart and mind. Moucarry maintains that Christians should unashamedly proclaim that salvation come through Christ, but should do so in a manner of humility and in the spirit of Christ. Moucarry concludes his exhortation with a call to all who minister the gospel of Christ: “If mission is to be done in God’s *name*, then it should also be done in God’s *way*.”⁴⁹

Stan Guthrie addresses the enormous risks and rewards that go along with ministering in Muslim contexts. In *Mission in the Third Millennium*, Guthrie firstly shows his readers the great growth that has taken place over the past 20 years in Muslim contexts. Guthrie asserts that more Muslims have come to Christ in the last 20 years than in any other period in history and that there is presently a huge potential to minister in Muslim contexts. Guthrie points out that, within many Muslim contexts, followers of Muhammad, specifically youth, are beginning to ask serious questions of their faith. Guthrie argues that ministers of the Gospel in Muslim contexts should be prepared to witness in these situations, realizing that these conversations may take time to

⁴⁸ Keith Warrington, “Mission,” In *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 246-64.

⁴⁹ Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*.

come about. In the meanwhile, Guthrie thinks that Christian ministers in Muslim contexts should patiently love God and love their neighbors.⁵⁰

While Moucarry and Guthrie addressed the *attitude* in which Christians should minister to Muslims, the Caner brothers, also mentioned earlier in this review, give their readers some *specific guidelines* to be aware of in ministry to Muslims. For example, the authors lay out some specific cultural aspects that Muslims adhere to, such as greetings, hospitality and speaking with the opposite sex. Other things that the Caners point out as being important to Christian ministry to Muslims are the respect of Muslim religious practices, avoiding political arguments and explaining that all Americans are not Christians. The authors also encourage ministers of the Gospel to be patient in ministry to Muslims, realizing that most conversions do not happen quickly due to the danger inherent in converting within Muslim societies. To conclude their discourse, the Caners call Christians to (1) keep their message simple, free from theological vocabulary and “church talk” and (2) study the Bible in great depth so that those who minister will be knowledgeable about what the scriptures teach about Jesus.⁵¹

Finally, in *Christ Among Other Gods*, Erwin Lutzer tells his readers about the responsibility that believers have in proclaiming the divinity of Christ. He argues that, since Jesus is who he says his is (i.e. God), those who confess belief in Christ share a responsibility to proclaim his name throughout the earth. Lutzer exhorts his readers that Christ followers are sent purposely, dependently, joyfully, victoriously and in unity among the nations to proclaim the supremacy of Christ.⁵²

⁵⁰ Stan Guthrie, “Doors Into Islam,” In *Missions in the Third Millennium* (London: Paternoster, 2004) 212-24.

⁵¹ Caner and Caner, *Unveiling Islam*. 222-33.

⁵² Erwin W. Lutzer, “An Extraordinary Responsibility,” In *Christ Among Other Gods* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 195-207.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

With such a broad spectrum of opinions and ideas, attempting to discern how to move forward in Christian-Muslim relations can be difficult, to say the least. However, there seems to be a growing support of translating the message in the best way possible and then proclaiming that message through living it out. It appears that the most impactful translations do not come on paper but are written on the hearts of the faithful who love God and love their neighbors. This research will help to answer the question of how to preach the divine Son of God to a people group that completely denies even the slightest hint of divinity in Him.

Who Do You Say That I Am?: Christian Views of Jesus

“The Christian religion stands or falls with the person of Jesus Christ. Judaism could survive without Moses, Buddhism without Buddha, Islam without Mohammed; but Christianity could not survive without Christ. This is because unlike most other world religions, Christianity is the belief in a person, a genuine historical individual – but at the same time a special individual, whom the church regards as not only human, but divine. At the center of any Christian apologetic therefore must stand the person of Christ.”⁵³

William Lane Craig perfectly sums up the essence of the Christian faith with the above quote. The thing that separates the Christian faith from all other expressions of faith is its belief that God came near in the person of Jesus Christ, that there was no one like him before and there has never been anyone like him since. One aspect that those who profess faith in Christ believe to be different about Jesus is his divinity. A common title attributed to Jesus is the “Son of God.” This chapter will explore the origins of this title and its importance to the Christian faith. Firstly, this chapter will discuss what exactly the Christian Church believes about the person of Christ and how these beliefs were passed on in the history of the Church. Next, the topic of Jesus’ divine self-understanding will be discussed. While reading the gospel narratives, it can be seen that Jesus possessed an understanding of his identity as the Son of God. Therefore, in order to gain a complete understanding of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, it is necessary to examine what he has to say about himself. Finally, this chapter will examine the theological importance of the divinity of Jesus for the Christian faith.

WHAT DOES THE CHURCH BELIEVE?

In order to fully understand the development and importance of the title “Son of God” commonly attributed to Jesus, it is important to first be aware of what the orthodox Christian church believes about Jesus. So, the Christian views of the person of Jesus can be summed up as

⁵³ William Lane Craig, “The Self-Understanding of Jesus,” In *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008) 287.

follows: Jesus, born of the virgin Mary, is the second person of the Holy Trinity, fully God and fully man, of one essence with the Father. Throughout Church history, people of faith have tried to expand on aspects of this definition. There have been disagreements as to specific details of the Incarnation, but, for the most part, the definition given above is what has stood the test of time and conflict throughout Christian history.

A commonly quoted source in discussing the Incarnation of Jesus, the Nicene Creed, developed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., deals directly with the topic of the Incarnation of Christ. The creed discusses every person of the Trinity, yet the focus is on the person of Christ. Dealing with the nature of Christ, the creed states that He is:

“The Son of God, the Only-begotten begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those in earth.”⁵⁴

This statement composed by church fathers at the Council of Nicaea is all encompassing and will serve as a useful guide in beginning the discussion on the nature of Christ.

The main issue that is dealt with in the Nicene Creed is the divine essence of Jesus; that He was “consubstantial with the Father” and “begotten from the Father, that is from the same substance of the Father. This means that Jesus was not created from some other substance but that he was simply an extension of the divinity of God the Father. Theologians such as Tertullian and Augustine affirm this idea throughout church history. Tertullian, in his *Apologeticus*, uses imagery of the sun’s rays to explain the shared essence between the Father and the Son. Just as a ray from the sun can be identified as a specific entity yet is still, in

⁵⁴ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Early, Eastern and Medieval*, vol. 1 of *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 161.

essence, part of the sun, so the “Son” (Jesus) is an extension of the Father, containing all of the essence of the Father. In the words of Tertullian, “what has proceeded from God, is God and God’s Son, and both are one.”⁵⁵ Augustine holds a similar view to Tertullian, devoting a section of his *Compendium of Theology* to affirming the divine essence within Jesus. In conclusion of his section on the divine nature of Christ, Augustine asserts: “Therefore, the Word of God, which is in God...has the same existing as God, whose Word he is.,” thereby affirming the doctrine that Jesus was of the same essence of God as set forth by the Nicene Creed.⁵⁶

The other major issue that the Nicene Creed deals with is the eternal nature of Christ. This doctrine falls under the shared divine nature between the Father and Son. If the Father is eternal, and the Son is an extension of the Father, then the Son must be eternal as well.⁵⁷ This was added to the Creed to combat the teachings of Arius, who claimed that the divine nature in Christ was something that was created after the human Jesus was born.⁵⁸

The aspect of the Incarnation that is possibly the most difficult to understand and has been debated the most is the dual nature of Christ: that he was fully God *and* fully man. This aspect of the Incarnation was defended at the Council of Chalcedon in 451.⁵⁹ Augustine focuses a great deal of energy in clearly defining this aspect of the Incarnation, arguing that it was entirely necessary for Jesus to be fully human if He was to restore human nature and truly be able to relate to the human condition.⁶⁰ In other words, if Jesus were to have been fully divine without actually being fully human as well, it would have been misleading and the purposes of

⁵⁵ T. R. Glover, trans., *Apology, de spectaculis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 109.

⁵⁶ Richard J. Regan, trans., *Compendium of Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 37

⁵⁷ Regan, *Compendium of Theology*, 38.

⁵⁸ Pelikan, *Early, Eastern and Medieval*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 159.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁶⁰ Regan, *Compendium of Theology*, 151.

God in the Incarnation would not have been accomplished. Hence, it is the belief of the Christian Church that the person of Christ consisted of two natures that existed in one person.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Now that the views of the Church concerning the Incarnation have been laid out, it is important to discuss where these views came from and how they have been defended in order to gain a deeper appreciation for the role that these views play in the Christian faith.

The idea of the Incarnation is first presented, not in the Gospel narratives as some would suppose, but in the Old Testament writings and Jewish culture. D.A. Carson points out in his book *Jesus the Son of God* that the idea of divine sonship was not foreign to the Jewish culture surrounding the Old Testament but actually quite a common idea. Carson makes several references to passages in the Psalms, Prophets and Torah that contain language of divine sonship.⁶¹ Perhaps the clearest picture of the Incarnation in the Old Testament comes in the ninth chapter of Isaiah, where in verse six, the prophet proclaims “For to us a child is born...and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*”

While the idea of the Incarnation may have existed prior to the composition of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the disciples were the first ones to attach these ideas to the person of Jesus. The gospels, which deserve our full trust as historically accurate eyewitness testimony, clearly present Jesus as the long-awaited, divine Messiah that Israel has been waiting for.⁶² Scholars such as Murray J. Harris argue that the Gospel writers were very intentional in their portrayal of Jesus as the Incarnation of God. Harris points to 29 specific references in the gospel

⁶¹ D.A. Carson, “Son of God as a Christological Title,” in *Jesus the Son of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012) 28-34.

⁶² Richard Bauckham, “From the Historical Jesus to the Jesus of Testimony,” In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: the Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 1-12.

of John alone that use the Greek word *Theos* (meaning God) in reference to Jesus.⁶³ In other words, the writers of the Gospels not only thought that Jesus was God, but also that it was important to make it very clear to all who would hear the message that Jesus was the Incarnation of God.

The views presented by those who had walked closest with Jesus while he was on Earth were defended throughout the ages by people whose lives had been changed by encountering God through the work of Jesus. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Council of Nicaea sought to defend the Incarnation from Arianism early in the 4th century, not willing to allow the beliefs that they had been persecuted heavily for to be polluted by taking away from the divine nature of Jesus.⁶⁴ The divine nature of Christ was further defended and confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon in the 5th century.⁶⁵

Scholars such as St. Augustine and Maccovius continued to defend the message of the Incarnation as extremely important to the Christian faith. During the Medieval period, St. Augustine was instrumental in ensuring that the Incarnation remained at the forefront of Christian thought and theology, writing extensively in *Compendium of Theology* about the Incarnation.⁶⁶ In the same way, Johannes Maccovius was instrumental in defending the doctrine of the Incarnation during the Reformation Period.⁶⁷

The battle for the Incarnation continues to rage in contemporary society, and people like Millard Erickson continue to argue for its relevancy and importance. In *The Word Became*

⁶³ Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2008).

⁶⁴ Pelikan, *Early, Eastern and Medieval*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 159.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁶⁶ Regan, *Compendium of Theology*, 149-77.

⁶⁷ Michael D. Bell, "Machovius (1588-1644) on the Son of God as $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ " *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1 (April 2011). <http://search.ebscohost.com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=79970563&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 10, 2013).

Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology, Erickson lays out contemporary arguments against the Incarnation and exhorts the Christian community to be open to dialogue about the doctrine without compromising on important aspects of the doctrine.⁶⁸

So, it is abundantly clear that the doctrine of the Incarnation has been and continues to be of great importance to followers of Christ.

JESUS' DIVINE SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Some scholars, such as John Dominic Crossan and Robert Funk, would read the above section and claim that the Jesus presented by the Gospels and defended by the early church was a Jesus that was dreamt up in the minds of the disciples. Crossan and Funk would argue that Jesus never actually made any divine claims.⁶⁹ However, having already established in the previous section that the Gospels can be considered a trustworthy historical reference, it can be concluded that the sayings and teachings of Jesus presented in the Gospels most likely came from Jesus himself. What, then, does Jesus have to say about himself?

William Lane Craig, in his book *Reasonable Faith* addresses this issue directly. Dr. Craig begins by arguing that the only way that the Christian doctrine of Jesus as divine would make sense was if Jesus had presented himself as divine to his disciples. Craig asserts: “Those who deny that Jesus made any personal claims implying divinity face the very severe problem of explaining how it is that the worship of Jesus as Lord and God came about at all in the early church.”⁷⁰ Craig goes on to point out that seeing a fellow countryman as one worthy of being called Lord and God was incredibly inconsistent with the monotheistic culture in which

⁶⁸ Millard Erickson, “The Logic of the Incarnation,” In *The Word Became Flesh: A Contemporary Incarnational Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 531-76.

⁶⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

⁷⁰ William Lane Craig, “The Self-Understanding of Jesus,” In *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 300.

Christianity was formed, thus strengthening the argument that Jesus did in fact make personal claims of divinity.⁷¹

It is clear then, that Jesus must have made personal claims or statements regarding his divine nature. One of the ways in which Jesus described his uniquely divine relationship was with the title “Son of God.” Jesus demonstrates that he is God’s unique Son in a variety of ways. For example, in the parable of the wicked tenants (Mark 12: 1-9), Jesus portrays himself as the son of the landowner, who is clearly presented as God the Father in this parable.⁷² While the use of parables requires some interpretation, Jesus also made explicit claims about his divinity. In Matthew 11:27, Jesus boldly asserts “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”⁷³ These statements straight from the mouth of Jesus make extremely clear what he thought about his divine status.

Jesus’ actions also provide significant proof for his divine self-knowledge. Bauer points out that Jesus not only believed himself to be divine, but acted as if he was.⁷⁴ The way that Jesus interpreted the Torah points to his knowledge of his greater authority. It was unheard of that a Jewish man would speak with the type of authority that Jesus did when teaching the Torah, yet Jesus continually spoke from the Torah as one having authority over the teachings within.⁷⁵

Also, on several occasions, Jesus claimed that he had the ability to forgive sins, which was a

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 310-11.

⁷³ Ibid., 311.

⁷⁴ D.R. Bauer, “Son of God,” In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 770.

⁷⁵ Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 320.

power reserved for God alone in Jewish society. The fact that he exercised this privilege so freely is evidence of his divine self-knowledge.⁷⁶

The above paragraphs make it abundantly clear that Jesus had a strong sense of both his identity and his mission on earth. Jesus knew that he was God and professed to be God. This was the tradition passed on by the disciples. The historical development of the idea of Jesus as divine, then, begins with the very words and actions of Jesus himself, not in the overly creative minds of the disciples. The disciples simply retold of what they had seen and heard.

THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS' DIVINITY

As shown above, the confession of Jesus as the divine Son of God has stood at the very center of the Christian faith since its conception in the first century. Now that it is clear that the divinity of Jesus is of utmost importance to the Christian faith, the question must be answered as to *why* this doctrine is so important. In other words, what are the theological implications of Jesus' divinity on the Christian faith?

The first, and arguably most influential aspect of the importance of the Incarnation is the act of the atonement. Christian doctrine holds that Jesus Christ was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of man in order to redeem humanity to right relationship with God. But what does Christ's divinity have to do with this act? Anselm provides an answer in his *Cur Deus Homo* (lit. Why the God-man?). In this work, Anselm lays out the following syllogism: (1) Man owes God a great debt because of sin, (2) Man deserves to pay this debt, (3) Man is unable to pay this debt, yet the debt needs to be paid. (4) Therefore, God became a man in order to pay the debt that man could not pay.⁷⁷ With this in mind, it is evident that the doctrine of the Incarnation is so important to the Christian Church because it is seen as the means by which humanity achieves

⁷⁶ Ibid., 322.

⁷⁷ Fordham University. Medieval Sourcebook: Cur Deus Homo? <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-curdeus.asp> (accessed on Feb 1, 2014)

salvation. Had God not become a man and taken on the debt of humanity, humankind would still be subject to sin and suffering. Donald Fairbairn argues that the doctrine of the Incarnation played such a huge role in the lives of the Church fathers of the 5th century for precisely this reason: that they believed the doctrine to be essential to their salvation.⁷⁸

Another reason that the Incarnation is so important for the Christian faith is that the act of God becoming a man shows that God is in solidarity with his Creation, that he is not totally removed from the struggles of his people but rather near to them in every way. Richard Swinburne affirms this idea in *Was Jesus God?*, affirming that a major purpose of the Incarnation was for God's solidarity with human suffering to be made complete. By becoming a man and having human emotions provided God with experiential knowledge of human suffering, thus making God able to relate to suffering in every single way: as a participant in suffering and not just the Redeemer from suffering.⁷⁹ Augustine argues that, by doing this, God "showed the immensity of his love for human beings, so that they as a result would now be subject to God by the desire of love, not the fear of death."⁸⁰ So, it is by the Incarnation that human beings can know the fullness of God's love for them and solidarity with their suffering.

Lastly, the Incarnation is of great importance to the Christian faith because God provided human beings with an example for how to live a holy life in the person of Jesus. Christ represented the fullest expression of what it means to be human. Therefore, human beings should follow his example.⁸¹ Augustine asserts that Christians can count on Christ's example as a perfect one because, in that Christians believe that everything that the man who claimed to be the

⁷⁸ Donald Fairbairn, "The One Person Who is Jesus Christ: The Patristic Perspective," In *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology* ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 80-113.

⁷⁹ Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 39-52.

⁸⁰ Regan, *Compendium of Theology*, 151.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

Son of God taught was true and perfect, it can be concluded that all of this man's actions were perfect as well. Therefore, anyone seeking to live a morally good life can follow the example provided in the person of Jesus.⁸²

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God has been the focal point of Christianity since its inception. No matter where Christian communities pop up around the world, the confession that Jesus is Lord stands as the foundation for Christian life. The doctrine of the Incarnation was taught by Jesus, passed on by the disciples, and remains to be of utmost importance to everyone who would claim to follow Christ. Without Jesus, Christianity would not be able to exist. It is by his work that humanity is saved, is able to know God's love, and is given an example of how to live holy lives unto God. Wherever Christians are asked what they believe about Jesus, may their only response be like that of Peter: "Surely He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!"

⁸² Ibid.

No God But Allah: Jesus in Islam

One of the central claims of Islam is that the religion is derived from the faith of Abraham, that it is the fullest expression of radical monotheism. This faith, Muslims believe, began with Abraham. The faith was then refined by other prophets, and finds fullest expression in the revelation given to Muhammad, who is considered by Muslims to be the final Prophet of God. Interestingly, Jesus falls into the collection of prophets who is considered to have been a voice of Allah for Islam. Yet the Jesus presented in the Qur'an (the sacred text of Islam) is considerably different from the Jesus of the Gospels.

SOME BACKGROUND

Before beginning the discussion, it is necessary to explain the background and basic beliefs of Islam.

The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in the city of Mecca during the late 6th century. Mecca was the religious hub of the polytheistic paganism, the standard religious model of the day in the Arabian Peninsula.⁸³ After being orphaned very soon after his birth, the young Muhammad went to live with his grandfather, who was involved in the upkeep of the *Ka'bah*, the central monument to paganism in the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad grew up to become a merchant, traveling all around the Arabian Peninsula peddling his goods, experiencing different cultures and religions, being introduced to monotheism by his encounters with Christian and Jewish communities throughout his travels.⁸⁴

Upon returning home, Muhammad married his first wife, Khadijah, the owner of the merchant business that he was a part of. After marrying Khadijah, it was no longer necessary for

⁸³ William G. Baker, *Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East* (Dallas: Brown Books, 2003) 96-7.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

Muhammad to travel and work, so he spent his time in the caves of the desert surrounding Mecca. It was during this time that Muhammad felt as though he received a revelation from God through dreams and visions about monotheism and a commissioning to spread this message to the pagans of Mecca.⁸⁵ After seeking counsel from his cousin, Muhammad began to preach his new, radical message in Mecca.

NO GOD BUT ALLAH

The central doctrine of Islam can be summed up in the following statement in the Qur'an: "Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and (so do) the angels and those of knowledge – (that He is) maintaining (creation) in justice. There is no deity except Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise."⁸⁶ It is this verse that informs the Muslim confession of faith, the shahada, which states that "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of God." This creed is to be recited by believers in prayers and is the way that one becomes a Muslim.⁸⁷

This doctrine is given further expression in Surah 112 of the Qur'an, *Surah al-Ikhlās* (Sincerity) that says:

*"Say: He is the one God:
God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All That Exists.
He begets not, and neither is He begotten;
and there is nothing that could be compared with Him."*

Hans Kung further explains this theological idea by saying "the negative side of the positive confession of faith is the polemical repudiation of *shirk*, the 'association' of any being with God."⁸⁸ Kung goes on to point out that associating anything or any being with God is, for Muslims, the worst form of unbelief and is "the only sin that excludes a person from the Muslim

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Qur'an 3:18

⁸⁷ Tanya Gulevich, "Essential Beliefs and Practices," In *Understanding Islam and Muslim Traditions* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, 2004) 35.

⁸⁸ Hans Kung, *Islam: Past, Present and Future* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 81.

community.”⁸⁹ It is this message of radical oneness of God that forms the foundation for all of Islam. A proper understanding of this doctrine will help to explain why Muslims feel the way that they do about the typical Christian understanding of the divinity of Jesus.

JESUS

Up until this point, Islamic theology sounds nearly identical to the Judeo-Christian values of monotheism. Why, then, are there so many apparent differences? As pointed out by a large group of Muslim scholars in their letter to Pope Benedict XVI, the main differences lie not in the way that Christianity views God the Father, but in the exalting of Jesus to a divine position.⁹⁰ Interestingly, the Qur’an has much to say about Jesus, honoring him highly as one of the messengers of God and even at times as God’s “messiah.”⁹¹ With that being said, there are many differences between the Jesus viewed by Muslims in the Qur’an and the Jesus of the Christian faith presented in the Bible.

WHO ISLAM SAYS JESUS WAS

As mentioned above, the Qur’an is not silent about the person of Jesus, mentioning the name of Jesus at least 18 times.⁹² Jesus is, however, often spoken of in ways that contradict the Bible and Christian tradition. What, then, does the Qur’an have to say about Jesus?

Many readers will be surprised to learn that one of the first things that the Qur’an affirms about Jesus is that he was born of a virgin named Mary. Sura 19, entitled *Sura Maryam*, recounts Muhammad’s version of the virgin birth narrative. This version is similar to the narrative found in the Gospels, yet some minor differences exist between the two. Some Muslim

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ An Open Letter of 38 Muslim Scholars to H.H. Pope Benedict XVI. *A Common Word Between Us and You*. Amman, 2007. The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought. *A Common Word*. Amman: RISSC, 2012

⁹¹ Brannon M. Wheeler, “Jesus,” in *Prophets in the Quran* (London: Continuum, 2002) 297-320.

⁹² Qur’an 2:87, 3:45-55, 3:59, 4:156-159, 4:163, 4:171-172, 5:17, 5:46, 5:72, 5:75, 5:78, 5:110-118, 19:19-37, 23:50, 43:57-64, 57:27, 61:6, 61:14

scholars argue that Mary became pregnant by the Angel Gabriel blowing on her through an opening in her clothing. When he breathed, the breath entered Mary's chest and she became pregnant.⁹³ Regardless of the method of impregnation, the message of the Qur'anic version of Jesus' birth narrative ends with the idea that the purpose of Jesus being born of a virgin was to provide the people of Israel with a sign that Allah is capable of anything; that "He (Allah) creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it 'Be,' and it is."⁹⁴

The virgin birth is not the only similarity between the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and the Jesus of Muhammad's Qur'an. The Qur'an also recounts a few stories of Jesus performing miracles in front of his disciples, also to point to Allah's greatness. Possibly the most notable of these stories recounted are Jesus' spreading of a table from heaven for his disciples and the instance when he walked on water.⁹⁵ Colin Chapman points out that, while some of the stories of Jesus' miracles align with the narratives of the New Testament, there are also a significant number that appear to have their origin in unorthodox, extra-biblical, sometimes heretical, sources from the Gnostic, Nestorian and Monophysite traditions.⁹⁶

The largest role of Jesus in the Qur'an is that of a prophet. Muslims revere Jesus as one of the prophets who preceded Muhammad and carried the testimony of the oneness of God to whichever people group they were sent to. Jesus is grouped among other important figures from the Old Testament such as Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Jonah, Solomon and David, all seen as prophets of Allah. It is believed by many Muslims that Jesus was sent to the Hebrew people to explain the true meaning of the Torah to them and to point them to the straight path towards Allah.⁹⁷ Also

⁹³ Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 300.

⁹⁴ Qur'an 3:47

⁹⁵ Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 310.

⁹⁶ Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2007) 257.

⁹⁷ Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 306.

important to the Muslim understanding of the prophetic ministry of Jesus is the idea that one purpose of Jesus' ministry to the Hebrew people was to announce the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. Sura 61 records Jesus as saying that he was sent by Allah to confirm the Law, which came before him, and to "bring glad tidings" of the Messenger who was to come after him.⁹⁸

Interestingly, many Muslims believe that Jesus will return on the Day of Judgment along with Muhammad to execute the judgment of God upon humanity. These ideas are not found directly in any Qur'anic text, but rather in a number of *hadith*, or extra-Qur'anic collections of sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad. Jesus' role in the Day of Judgment is mostly consistent throughout the *hadith*: He will descend with Muhammad, break all the crosses, destroy anyone who is not a part of Islam, and kill all the pigs in the world.⁹⁹

Lastly, Colin Chapman points out an important aspect of the Muslim view of Jesus, arguing that "While Jesus is not divine in any sense, he is unique among the prophets of God and is given titles such as 'Word' and 'Spirit' which are not given to any other human beings."¹⁰⁰ The Qur'an and Muslims recognize that Jesus was exalted above the status of normal humanity and that he was a unique prophet. This does not, however, provide reason for exalting Jesus to a position of divinity and worship.

WHO ISLAM SAYS JESUS WASN'T

While the Qur'an has relatively little to say about who Jesus actually was, the teachings of Muhammad devote a large amount of energy to making it clear who Jesus *wasn't*. Out of the

⁹⁸ Peter Cotterell and Peter G. Riddell, *Islam in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 75.

⁹⁹ Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur'an*, 317.

¹⁰⁰ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 253.

19 references to Jesus in the Qur'an, 15 are negative statements about Jesus' identity (i.e. Jesus was not...).¹⁰¹

Firstly, it is important to point out that Muslims do not believe that the Jesus presented in the Christian Gospels is an accurate representation of the Jesus that actually walked the earth. Instead, the majority of Muslims claim that Paul and the other Apostles, to advance their wicked idea that Jesus was divine, manipulated the Gospels and even the Torah. Therefore, Muslims believe that the sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are not the sayings or teachings of Jesus at all, but the teachings of Paul and the other Apostles. The purpose of the Qur'an, then, is to restore the proper image of Jesus that was marred by the Christian Gospels.¹⁰²

The most common reference to Jesus in the Qur'an is that he is not the Son of God. It is considered to be one of the highest forms of blasphemy to imply that Allah would have a "son". This is because Muslims believe that calling Jesus the "son" of Allah implies that God interacted sexually with a member of his Creation.¹⁰³ In the 4th Surah of the Qur'an, Muhammad condemns those who profess that Jesus was the Son of God, saying: "People of the Book (Christians), do not exaggerate in your religion...Glory to him that he is above having a son."¹⁰⁴ To Muslims, saying that God would take a son would make one guilty of *shirk* (association), making Jesus an associate of God.¹⁰⁵

In order to explain why Muslims so vehemently deny that Jesus could be the "Son of God," Chawkat Moucarray reaches back to the foundations of Islam. Moucarray points out that Mecca was home to rampant paganism. In this pagan society, it was not uncommon to believe

¹⁰¹ Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur'an*, 311-13.

¹⁰² Peter Kreeft, "On Jesus and Muhammad," In *Between Allah and Jesus* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2010) 47-49.

¹⁰³ Rick Brown, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. "A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible." *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28 (Fall 2011): 121-5.

¹⁰⁴ Qur'an 4:171.

¹⁰⁵ Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *Unveiling Islam* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002) 205.

that the gods would come down to earth and procreate with humans. Moucarry asserts that “it is against this background – the intense struggle against Arab polytheism – that we must understand the criticisms that were aimed at the Christians, for Christian beliefs too were seen as a kind of associationism.”¹⁰⁶

The Qur’an also comments that Jesus was not part of any sort of “Trinity” or “Godhead”. In Surah 5:73, Muhammad asserts: “They have certainly disbelieved who say ‘Allah is the third of three.’ And there is no god except Allah.” Interestingly, the Trinity that is spoken of in the Qur’an does not refer to the typical Christian Trinitarian model of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Instead, Muslims think that Christians include Allah, Jesus and Mary in the Trinity.¹⁰⁷ Regardless of who Muslims believe to be members of the Christian Trinity, the Muslim doctrine of the radical oneness of God can be seen clearly in these verses. To the Muslim, the idea of the Trinity implies that there is separation in God or that there are three gods who cooperate to rule the universe, which does not have any place in a proper understanding of the Lord of the Universe.¹⁰⁸

Along with the theme of elevating Jesus to a position of equality with God in the Trinity, the Qur’an denies any sense of divinity in Jesus at all, saying: “They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allah is Christ, the son of Mary...”¹⁰⁹ It is considered blasphemy to elevate Jesus, a prophet, to the same level as God.¹¹⁰ To Muslims, Jesus is nothing more than a prophet and a good teacher, sent to predict the coming of the Prophet Muhammad and to remind Israel to worship Allah and Allah alone.¹¹¹ Muslims point to the fact that Jesus ate food as one of the best

¹⁰⁶ Chawkat Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 185.

¹⁰⁷ Qur’an 5:116

¹⁰⁸ Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, 185-186.

¹⁰⁹ Qur’an 5:17

¹¹⁰ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 252.

¹¹¹ Qur’an 5:116-118

proofs that he was not divine. Since God is not in need of anything, and Jesus needed sustenance, Jesus must clearly not be God.¹¹² In response to Christian arguments that Jesus himself claimed to be divine, most Muslims argue that the Gospels have been falsified, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. If, however, a Muslim does concede to the authenticity of the Christian Gospels, the argument then changes to the idea that Jesus' statements of divinity were meant to be taken as metaphor, not as literal statements.¹¹³

Finally, Muslims deny that Jesus died on the cross. Views of what happened range anywhere from the idea that Jesus hid while one of his companions died in his place to the idea that Allah made someone to appear as if they were Jesus and that it was this person that hung on the cross rather than Jesus. While differing opinions exist about the exact happenings on the cross, it is a commonly held belief that Jesus was raised up to Allah without dying.¹¹⁴ Surah 4 claims: "They did not kill him, for certain. Rather, Allah raised him to himself."¹¹⁵ The Muslim treatment of the crucifixion merits greater discussion, as it points to a significant theological difference between Muslims and Christians concerning the purpose of Jesus' ministry.

SIN, ATONEMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN ISLAM

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the primary reasons that Christians give for the Incarnation is the work of salvation on the cross. Yet, Muslims consistently dismiss the death of Jesus on the cross despite significant historical evidence in support of its occurrence. What, then are the differences between the Christian and Muslim doctrines surrounding the work of the cross?

¹¹² Qur'an 5:75

¹¹³ Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, 206.

¹¹⁴ Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 220.

¹¹⁵ Qur'an 4:157-158

Christians claim that the cross was needed because man owed a great debt to God because of the sin of humanity, which deeply offended the perfection of God.¹¹⁶ This is the first position of disagreement between Christians and Muslims regarding the necessity of the cross for human salvation. The Christian view of sin is that all humans have been alienated from the Creator by *original sin*, what Moucarry calls a “bias towards evil.”¹¹⁷ On the other hand, “Islam teaches that our sins cannot offend our Creator, who stands too far above us to be directly concerned by our disobedience.”¹¹⁸ It is clear then, why Muslims do not see any need for a payment or atonement for sin. If Allah remains unaffected by the sins of humanity, why would there need to be a reckoning? Instead, in Islam, Allah judges and forgives the sins of humanity as he wills, not because he is owed something by humanity.¹¹⁹

Just as the Muslim and Christian concepts of sin are significantly different, the concept of righteousness is radically different between the two religions. To recap, Christians believe that righteousness comes from the work of Jesus on the cross, in which Christ atoned for the sins of humanity, clearing the debt between humanity and God.¹²⁰ In contrast, the Muslim view asserts a more mathematical approach to righteousness. Because people are born without sin, only those who go through life with a positive balance of good works will be deemed righteous. The Caner brothers explain this concept further by asserting that “In Islam sin is not paid for, it is weighed on a balance scale. Islam has no understanding that a truly holy and just God cannot simply measure the sin and throw it aside without any punishment.”¹²¹ While Christians profess that the cross is the only means by which humanity can be freed from their sin, “Islam knows no idea of

¹¹⁶Fordham University. Medieval Sourcebook: Cur Deus Homo? <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-curdeus.asp> (accessed on Feb 1, 2014)

¹¹⁷ Moucarry, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, 97.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹²¹ Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 150.

a 'redemption,' since human beings are not imprisoned in an inherited sin; in principle they can fulfill the will of God by 'right guidance.'"¹²²

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It can be seen that the Muslim view of Jesus is radically different than the Christian view of Jesus. While there are some agreements between the Qur'an and the Bible, the differences truly make a significant difference. The Qur'an contradicts the Bible on every important point concerning the nature of Christ or the reason for his ministry on the earth. How then, should Christians seeking to share their faith with Muslims go about speaking of Jesus? The next chapter will discuss this question in depth.

¹²² Kung, *Islam: Past, Present, and Future*, 498.

Moving Forward

*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is **no other name** under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” -Acts 4:12*

The previous chapters have shown two extremely different views of the person of Jesus. In the first chapter, it was shown that the view of Jesus as the Incarnation of the Word of God is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. The second chapter then presented some serious objections of the Islamic faith to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. With these objections in mind, the question must be asked: How should Christians go about ministering about Christ amidst a people that deny even the slightest hint of divinity in Him?

TRANSLATING “SON OF GOD”

As mentioned previously, one of the main points of contention between the Christian understanding of Jesus and the Islamic understanding of Jesus is the reference to Jesus as the “Son of God.” Bauer argues that this is “the most significant Christological title in the New Testament.”¹²³ With the importance of this Christological title in mind, it can be concluded that accurately translating the phrase “Son of God” in scripture translations for Muslims is vitally important. There are two main schools of thought in translating this title: (1) Those who argue that familial language should be replaced in scripture translations for Muslims, and (2) those who argue for a literal, word-for-word translation.

Firstly, some scholars, such as Rick Brown, believe that familial language should be replaced in Bible translations in Muslim contexts. The reason for this, according to Brown, is that familial language conjures up sexual imagery in the minds of many Muslims. In other words, Brown believes that whenever a Muslim hears that Jesus is the “Son of God,” they think

¹²³ D.R. Bauer, “Son of God,” In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* ed. Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 769-75.

that the Gospels are trying to teach that God and Mary had a physical interaction, by which Mary became pregnant. In this case, Brown believes that finding an alternate translation would be the most beneficial way to reach Muslims.¹²⁴ Colin Hansen is another scholar who claims that translations that refrain from using familial language are better for Muslim people groups. In fact, Hansen argues that word-for-word translations have made no significant advances in ministry to Muslims and have only resulted in further alienation of Christian communities. Hansen points to the increased dialogue that has resulted from translations that take a more liberal approach as evidence of the effectiveness of liberal translations.¹²⁵

While these liberal translations may have produced significant “results,” there are also significant issues that must be taken into account when removing “Son of God” from Bible translations. First among these issues is the fact that the title of “Son of God” is not a term that stands alone in the Biblical text. D.A. Carson points out that the Christological title is developed throughout all of scripture.¹²⁶ So, to remove references to the “Son of God” does not simply remove an unconnected aspect of New Testament scripture. The general statement of the Assemblies of God on this issue goes even further to show that removing familial terms for the sake of reaching Muslims compromises such doctrines as adoption into the family of God, receiving the Holy Spirit and gaining eternal life.¹²⁷

Next, replacing familial terms in Bible translations for Muslims leaves Christians appearing arrogant, for a number of reasons. First, replacing familial language from the Biblical text “presupposes that the text of the Bible does not provide sufficient context for a person to

¹²⁴ Rick Brown, Leith Gray and Andrea Gray. “A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible.” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 28 (Fall 2011): 121-5.

¹²⁵ Colin Hansen, “The Son and The Crescent,” *Christianity Today* (February 2011) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/soncrescent.html> (accessed November 12, 2013)

¹²⁶ D.A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).

¹²⁷ Ben Aker et al., “The Necessity for Retaining Father and Son Terminology In Scripture Translation for Muslims” <http://www.fatherson.ag.org/download/paper.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2014).

understand the meaning of Father and Son terminology within its pages.”¹²⁸ As mentioned previously, the term “Son of God” is developed throughout all of scripture, even in the Old Testament. To assume that this title is incomprehensible is to show a lack of faith in the words of the Bible. Next, replacing familial language “implies that Muslims are intellectually inferior people who cannot understand language in its context.”¹²⁹ Understanding Jesus as the “Son of God” may be a difficult task, yet it is far from impossible. To assume that a certain people group is incapable of grasping such concepts is arrogant, to say the least. Finally, removing these references leaves Christians seeming arrogant before God because “it ignores the role of God the Holy Spirit to give proper understanding of Scripture.”¹³⁰ The Holy Spirit is the revealer of truth, and to remove such a foundational truth because of its difficulty to understand displays a lack of trust for the revealing work of the Spirit.

Along with philosophical and theological implications involved with replacing divine familial language from the Bible, there are several practical missiological implications connected to the replacement of such terms. Firstly, some missiologists argue that removing such terms makes Christians appear to be dishonest and deceitful and damages the reputation of the Word of God being corrupted by Christians. Also, replacing divine familial language sends a message of approval to the incorrect thoughts that Jesus was not the Son of God.¹³¹ Carson points out that the “converts” that result from these new methods in translation are essentially separated from thousands of years of “the history of confessionalism of the universal church.”¹³² In other words, to separate the body of Christ over a “simple” translation of such an important theological idea is

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, 108.

to totally distance this new group from the theme and driving force of the Christian Church, which is the confession that Jesus, the Son of God, is Lord.

Providing an accurate translation of this title that will appropriately convey the divinity of Jesus is of great importance. However, simply creating a word that can be used in Scripture translations will not solve the issue of misunderstanding. D.A. Carson asserts:

“This is not a mere translational matter. No language, no culture, means by “Son” what Jesus means in John 5 – yet “Son” is the category Jesus uses, even though nothing in English, or Urdu, or Arabic prepares us for a Son of God whose relationship with the Father is anything like what the text describes.”¹³³

Robertson McQuilkin expands further on this idea that translation alone is not meant to be the final word. McQuilkin argues that translation cannot be complete without actually living out the translation amongst the people.¹³⁴

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIP

When engaging in ministry with Muslims, Christians should be aware that relationships are the best tool available to reach this people group. This rule of relationships can actually be applied to every form of witnessing, but it is especially important in ministry to Muslims. Those who have lived and ministered in Muslim contexts would argue that ministry among Muslims is not quick and easy, but takes time and commitment to people.¹³⁵ Relationship is so important in Muslim cultures for a number of reasons. Firstly, most Muslim cultures are highly relationship driven. Muslims recognize family relationships and remember disagreements amongst groups

¹³³ Carson, *Jesus the Son of God*, 103.

¹³⁴ Robertson J. McQuilkin, “Exegeting the Audience” *Trinity Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 199-207.

¹³⁵ Emir Fethi Caner and Ergun Mehmet Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider’s Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 222-233.

for several generations, regardless of whether or not they were personally offended.¹³⁶ This makes Christian ministry exceedingly challenging, as Christians and Muslims do not have the prettiest history together.¹³⁷

Also important for Christians to recognize in ministry to Muslims is the cost of conversion for a follower of Islam to become a Christian. Because of the focus on group identity in Muslim cultures, anything that goes against the identity of the group is considered to be the highest form of insult.¹³⁸ Therefore, a Muslim who wishes to become a Christian is not simply professing faith in Christ, but also somewhat renouncing their family, their religion, and the Muslim community as a whole.¹³⁹ Christian ministers must take this into account and be patient in Muslim contexts.

BE INFORMED

One of the largest critiques of Christians by Muslims is that they are ignorant of what they believe and what the Bible actually says.¹⁴⁰ Christians, therefore, should take seriously the call of the Apostle Peter when he says to “Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”¹⁴¹ By understanding Christian doctrines such as the Atonement, the Incarnation and the Trinity, Christian ministers will be able to effectively answer the questions of seeking Muslims. Not only should Christians be aware of Christian beliefs and doctrines, but they should also be somewhat knowledgeable in Muslim beliefs and doctrines. This is beneficial on a number of levels. First, it allows Christians to be aware of questions that are being asked of their faith and

¹³⁶ William G. Baker, *Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East* (Dallas: Brown Books, 2003) 9-12.

¹³⁷ Frank L. Cooley and Byron L. Haines, *Christians and Muslims Together* (Philadelphia: Geneva Press, 1987) 26-40.

¹³⁸ Baker, *Arabs, Islam, and the Middle East*, 13.

¹³⁹ Caner and Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 222-233.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁴¹ 1 Peter 3:15

allows them to examine their faith in order to defend that faith. Second, being aware of Muslim beliefs and doctrines shows interest in the culture of another. This interest is vitally important because it shows respect and love for another, which is necessary in ministering the Gospel.¹⁴²

THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT

Finally, Christian ministers of the Gospel to Muslims should not forget the role of the Holy Spirit in missions. The Spirit brings boldness and empowers people to witness, and is therefore vitally important in Christian ministry.¹⁴³ Not only that, but the Spirit is responsible for preparing hearts to receive the message of the Gospel. Without the work of the Spirit, people would not be drawn to the beauty and glory of Jesus.¹⁴⁴ The Spirit plays a critical role in enabling people to experience of the person of Jesus, who is, in fact, a person meant to be experienced, not simply a noble idea to be grasped.¹⁴⁵

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In the boldness of the Holy Spirit, then, Christians should proclaim the divinity and Lordship of Jesus Christ. If Jesus is who He says He is, His identity should not be compromised in the slightest. It is the responsibility of those who have professed faith in Him to proclaim his Lordship. Christians have been sent joyfully and victoriously into the world with this commission to make Christ known as Lord of all.¹⁴⁶ As George Carey argues: “His ministry is as wide as creation and he comes to claim all men as his own and he demands universal

¹⁴² Chawkat Moucarry, *The Prophet and The Messiah*, 290.

¹⁴³ Keith Warrington, “Mission,” In *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 246-64.

¹⁴⁴ Veli-Matti Karkainen, “Pentecostal Pneumatology of Religions,” in *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts* ed. Veli-Matti Karkainen and Jurgen Moltmann (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009) 155-80.

¹⁴⁵ Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*, 253.

¹⁴⁶ Erwin W. Lutzer, “An Extraordinary Responsibility,” In *Christ Among Other Gods* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 195-207.

acknowledgment as ‘Lord’. There can be no rivals to his Lordship.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, Jesus is Lord and there is no other. This has been the central confession of the Christian faith since the beginning and should continue to be the message to the world today.

¹⁴⁷ George Carey, *God Incarnate: Meeting the Contemporary Challenges to a Classic Christian Doctrine* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

Final Thoughts

The conversation of faith is in a constant state of transition. This thesis has been an attempt to enter into the current dialogue regarding one aspect of faith, namely the divinity of Jesus and its importance to the Christian faith. Through the discussion in the previous chapters, it can be clearly seen that the divine nature of Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to the Christian faith. The Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ stands as the foundation for several other aspects of the Christian faith. Most notable among these aspects that have their root in the Incarnation are the experience of the love of God, the example of Jesus, the atonement and forgiveness of sins.

Islam rejects the divinity of Jesus and, with that rejection, brings into question many other Christian beliefs. The question must then be asked as to how Christians should navigate their faith in Jesus in the context of dialogue with Muslims. While this thesis has been an attempt at answering that question, it must be recognized that the words of the previous chapters are by no means authoritative. Continued research is needed in regards to Christology, both within the Christian Church and within Islamic communities. Continued exploration into Biblical translation and missiology would also enhance the findings of this thesis.

So much more remains to be said about the issues discussed within this thesis. What is certain, however, is that Christians and Muslims alike should continue the discussion of Jesus' divinity with an attitude of humility and respect. It is in this manner and this manner alone that dialogue between Christians and Muslims will bear any progress.

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