



Say; He is God, the One! God, the eternally Besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him.

JESUS IN THE QUR'AN

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Introduction

The name of Jesus (May God's peace be upon him) is common to both Islam and Christianity. But the significance attached to it is radically different in the two religions. Muslims consider Jesus as one of the Prophets of the Almighty God, and revere him as much as other Prophets of God like Abraham, Moses or Muhammad (God's peace be on them). The Church, on the other hand, regards Jesus as the "Son of God" and worships him as such.¹

Islam respects all religions. Nevertheless, Muslims consider the view of Christendom to be a misguided one. The Qur'anic account of Jesus and his teachings differs considerably from that of the New Testament.² Some of the Chief points of difference are that, according to the Qur'an, Jesus never claimed to be God; he was not put to death on the cross, and he prophesied the coming of Muhammad, the Last Prophet.

The Birth of Jesus

Jesus was the blessed Prophet of God who was sent to return the people of Israel to the true worship of God. He was an apostle (messenger) of God, His servant and Prophet, to be held in honor in this world and in the Hereafter. He was miraculously born of the virgin Mary (peace be upon her)

1. This was not the practice of the earliest Christians. They believed that God is one and that Jesus was but a servant and apostle of God. See "The Sonship of Jesus," *Impact*, no.9, p.4. (See Appendix-Ed.)

2. However, the accounts at the "Four Gospels" differ among themselves even in the New Testament.

The Qur'an describes that God chose Mary, purified her and raised her above all other women of the world. (3: 42, 43)
 The angels brought her the glad tidings of the birth of Jesus. This is best described by the beautiful verses of the Qur'an (translated as follows):

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ

يَسْرُورًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بُعِثَ بِكَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُ ۗ إِنَّهُ السَّمِيُّ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا
 وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ۗ وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ۗ قَالَتِ رَبِّ أَنْ يَكُونَ
 لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسَّ مِنِّي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا عَضَىٰ أَمْرًا وَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ
 فَيَكُونُ ۗ وَتُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ ۗ وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ ۗ أَنِّي
 قَدْ جَعَلْتُكَ آيَةً مِّنْ رَبِّكَ ۗ أَنِّي أَنشَأْتُ لَكَ مِنَ الطَّيْرِ طَيْرًا فَأَنفُخُ فِيهِ مِنِّي فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا
 بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَابْرَأُ الْأَكْثَرَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا
 تَكْفُرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُم إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ ۗ وَمُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ
 التَّوْرَةِ ۗ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُزِرَ عَلَيْكُمْ ۗ وَجَعَلْتُكُم آيَةً مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۗ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۗ وَ
 أَطِيعُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ ۗ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُّسْتَقِيمٌ ۗ

"Behold! The angels said: O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, illustrious in this world and the Hereafter, one of the company of those nearest to God. He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and his manhood, and he is among the righteous ones. She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So (it will be). God createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, he hath only to say 'Be!' and it is. And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, and will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel, (saying): Behold! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, I fashion for you from clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by God's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper,

and I raise the dead, by God's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Behold! Herein verily is a portent for you, if ye would believe. And (I come) confirming that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to God and obey me, God is my Lord, so worship Him. That is a straight path." (3:45-51)

Concerning the birth itself the Qur'an says (19:16-34) that Mary retired from her family and went into a state of privacy (for prayer and devotion). The Holy Spirit (i.e. Gabriel) appeared to her as a man bringing the news of a son. She conceived the child miraculously and retired to a distant place. After the child was born she brought him to her people. They accused her of being unchaste. In reply, she made a sign to the infant, whereupon they said that they could not converse with an infant in the cradle! But the infant answered them as follows:

قَالَ رَبِّي عَبْدُ اللَّهِ طَهُرْتُ الْكِتَابَ وَجَعَلَنِي نَبِيًّا ۖ
 وَجَعَلَنِي مُبَارَكًا أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُ وَأَوْصَانِي بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَأَدَمْتُ حَيًّا ۖ وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَتِي ۖ وَلَمْ
 يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا شَقِيًّا ۖ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا ۖ ذَلِكَ عِيسَى ابْنُ
 مَرْيَمَ قَوْلَ الْحَقِّ الَّذِي فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ ۖ مَا كَانَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا مِنْ وَالِدَيْهِ سُبْحَانَ إِذَا قَامَ إِتْمَانًا
 سَعَوْا لَهُ لَهُ لَوْ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ۖ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ ۖ

"He spoke: Behold! I am the servant of God. He hath given me the Scripture and hath appointed me a Prophet. He hath made me blessed wheresoever I may be, and hath enjoined upon me prayer and alms-giving so long as I remain alive. And (hath made me) dutiful toward my mother, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace be on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the Day I shall be raised alive!"

"Such was Jesus, son of Mary; (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt." (19:16-34)

The Mission of Jesus

The Qur'an says that God sent Muhammad, the Prophet, with evident signs and miracles to set mankind on the right path. Jesus was similarly one of the messengers or Prophets of God.³ This is mentioned at least four places in the Qur'an. One of them declares:

وَقَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِم بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنجِيلَ فِيهِ هُدًى وَنُورٌ ۗ وَ مَّصَدِّقًا لِّمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَهُدًى وَ مَوْعِظَةً لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ۗ ۝ وَيَحْكُمُ أَهْلَ الْإِنجِيلِ بِمَا أَنزَلْنَا فِيهِ ۗ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ يَحْكُمُ بِمَا أَنزَلْنَا اللَّهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ۝

"And we caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, confirming that which was (revealed) before him, and We bestowed on him the Gospel⁴ wherein is guidance and light, confirming that which was (revealed) before it in the Torah - a guidance and an admonition unto those who ward off (evil). Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which God hath revealed therein. Who judgeth not by that which God hath revealed; such are evil-livers." (5:46, 47)

It should be mentioned here that while Muslims believe that Jesus was given God's "Good News," they do not recognize the present "Four Gospels" as the utterances of Jesus. Even the Church agrees that the "Four Gospels" were written by four different men, but they maintain that they were divinely inspired. This idea is rejected by Muslims. It can be argued that if the four writers were divinely inspired, then why are there so many serious dis-

3. Even the New Testament confirms that Jesus was a messenger (Apostle) of God, at Hebrews 3:1: "Consider Jesus, the Apostle." The N.T. Greek word apostolos corresponds exactly with the Arabic word rasoul.

4. "Gospel." In N.T. Greek, Evangelion: "Good news." God's message in always "Good news" to the righteous. Corresponds with Arabic bushra.

crepancies and omissions in their individual accounts of the life of Jesus? Moreover, the "Four Gospels" were written some 35 to 65 years after the ministry of Jesus, and represent merely a fraction of the so-called "Gospels" written at that time, the others being rejected by the Church.

Another of Jesus' missions was to tell people about the coming of a final Prophet after him. This is mentioned clearly in the Qur'an:

وَأِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى
ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا
بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدٌ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُعْتَرِفِينَ ۝

"And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Behold! I am the Messenger of God unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One (translation of the Arabic Ahmad, one of Prophet Muhammad's names). But when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic." (61:6)

The New Testament also speaks of the coming of a "Comforter" after the ministry of Jesus.⁵ The Church interprets the promised "Comforter" as the Holy Spirit, but this view cannot be successfully maintained when the word is considered in its original context along with the meaning given by the different sects of Christendom.⁶ The Muslims, therefore, believe that this term "Comforter" of necessity refers to Muhammad (peace be upon him)! (See Qur'an 21:107, where Muhammad is called "a Mercy to all creatures.")

5. In N.T. Greek, parakletos, "one called or sent for to assist another; one present to render various beneficial service." Parakietos may also be translated as "Advocate" or "Counselor."

6. Besides, according to the N.T., the "Holy Spirit" was already present during Jesus' ministry (Matt 12:18, 28), its coming was not a future event.

The Miracles of Jesus

As mentioned earlier, Jesus performed miracles by God's will. He could heal the blind, cure the leper and bring back the dead to life. He performed miracles, even with simple things like food, causing provisions for his disciples to come miraculously from heaven. (Qur'an 5:112-115) Miraculous also were his virgin birth and his speech while an infant in the cradle.

Jesus Was Not Put to Death on the Cross

Muslims believe that Jesus was not crucified. It was the intention of his enemies to put him to death on the cross, but God saved him from their plot. The Qur'anic text bears it out thus:

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا ﴿١٥٧﴾ بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا ﴿١٥٨﴾

"And because of their saying: 'We slew the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, Allah's messenger.' They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared to unto them; and behold! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. But God took him up unto Himself. God is ever Mighty, Wise." (4:157, 158)

Jesus Was Not the Son of God

The Church maintains that Jesus was the "Only-begotten Son" of God, and also God Himself, since the doctrine of the Trinity considers God as the Son, as the Father and as the "Holy Ghost"

all at the same time!⁷ Catholics further emphasize the divinity of Mary as the "Mother of God." Islam rejects all these concepts in tow.

First of all, Muslims maintain that the virgin birth of Jesus without a father was not any more supernatural than the creation of Adam without a father or mother. The Qur'an says:

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٥٩﴾

"Behold! The likeness of Jesus before God is the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him, "Be!" and he was." (3:59)

Refuting the idea that Jesus was the "Son of God." Qur'an declares:

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عُزَيْرٌ ابْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهَوْنَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ فَتَكْفِهِمُ اللَّهُ أَيُّ يُؤَكِّدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

"And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of God. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. God, (Himself) opposes them. How perverse are they!" (9:30)

7. The N.T. verse on which this ignorant doctrine rests, 1 John 5:7 ("The Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one"), has long been exposed as spurious, an unauthorized addition to the Greek text of the New Testament. The N.T. refers many times to Jesus as "God's servant" (see Matt. 12:18, Acts 2:13, 26 for example); how then could he be God's servant and God at the same time? As Qur'an says: "And they say: God Most Gracious has begotten offspring. Glory to Him! They are but servants raised to honor." (21:26)

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the fact that Jesus was a human being.⁸ The Qur'an maintains:

مَا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ
 كَانَا يَأْكُلِنَ الطَّعَامَ أَنْظَرِكَيْفَ نُبَيِّنُ لَهُمُ الْآيَاتِ نَوْمًا أَنْظَرِكَيْفَ يُؤْفِكُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

"The Messiah, son of Mary, was no other than a messenger (apostle), messengers (the like of whom) had passed away before him. And his mother was a saintly woman. And they both used to eat (earthly) food. See how they are turned away!" (5:75)

The Qur'an condemns the Trinity dogma at several places (e.g. 4:171), and says that Jesus never claimed divinity,⁹ and that he would assert on the Day of Judgment that he always taught the worship of One, Almighty God. This is described in the following verses from the Qur'an:

وَلَاذَقَالَ اللَّهُ لِيَعْنِي ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ أَنْتَ قُلْتُ لِلنَّاسِ
 اتَّخَذُوا مِنِّي وَارْتَمَى الْهَيْبِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِشَيْءٍ إِنْ
 كُنْتُ قُلْتُهَا فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنْ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٥٨﴾ مَا قُلْتُ لَهُمْ
 إِلَّا مَا أَمَرْتَنِي بِهِ أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مِمَّا دَمُنْتُمْ فِيهِمْ قُلْتُ أَنْتَ لَيْسَ لِي
 كُنْتُ أَنْتَ الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٥٩﴾

8. The same is emphasized by the expression in the N.T. "Son of Man" with reference to Jesus. Jesus was not literally the son of any man, since he had a virgin birth, but the expression means "human being."

9. Compare what even the N.T. admits: "Jesus ... did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped." (Revised Standard Version, Phillipians 2:6) "He did not think to snatch at equality with God." (Same, New English Bible.)

"And when God saith (namely, unto Jesus on the Day of Judgment): O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods beside God? He saith: (God) be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then Thou knowest it. Thou knewest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy mind. Behold, Thou, only Thou art the Knower of Things Hidden. I speak unto them only that which Thou commandest me, (saying): Worship God, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when Thou tookest me Thou wast the Watcher over them. Thou art Witness over all things."
(5:116, 117)

Contradictory Statements in the Gospels Concerning Jesus's Divinity

According to the verses quoted above, Muslims believe that Jesus not only will disavow any claim to divinity, but he will also assert that he never preached such a doctrine to his disciples when he was with them. Fortunately, the narrative of Jesus as reported in the "Four Gospels," though considered unauthentic for the greater part by Muslims, still contains sufficient evidence to support this belief. The following few selected verses from the New Testament clearly show that Jesus does not claim divinity or identity with God:

(Jesus says):

"I do nothing of myself." (John 8:28)

"My Father is greater than I." (John 14:2)

"The Lord our God is one Lord." (Mark 17:29)

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

(Matt. 27:46)

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." (Mark 13:32)

It is also written of Jesus:

"Behold my servant, whom I have chosen," (Matt. 12: 18) "

"God . . . glorified His servant, Jesus." (Acts 3:13)

"Thy holy servant Jesus whom Thou didst anoint as
Messiah." (Acts 4:27)

(It might be noted that the N.T. Greek word here for "servant" is *pais* or *paida*, which corresponds to the Arabic *ghulam*: "boy, son, servant, attendant." Further, the term "Father" as used by Jesus corresponds more closely to the Arabic term *Rabb*, i.e., one who nourishes and sustains, so that in Jesus' doctrine God is "Father" (Nourisher and Sustainer) of all men.)

These expressions, among others, confirm to a great extent the Islamic notion of Jesus, namely that he was a true servant and a messenger of God, and one of His humble creatures.

Christians and the Divinity of Jesus

Since the 4th century, Christian doctrine has been that Jesus is God, the second member of a "Trinity," and Catholics also believe in the divinity of Mary. However, from time to time there have arisen "heretics" in the Christian Church who refuted the doctrine of Jesus' divinity. For instance, Sale mentions that long before Prophet Muhammad was born, certain sects of Christians - the Corinthians, the Basilidians and the Carpocratians - believed that Jesus was not crucified, but one of his followers, looking very much like him, was put on the cross. The Corinthians and Basilidians in addition asserted that Jesus was a mere man. The early Christians who did not accept Jesus as God were harshly suppressed by the Church hierarchy. Chadwick cites several instances of individuals who were burned alive for not accepting this doctrine. The last incident of this kind took place as recently as 1612 in England. At the present time Christian sects such as the Unitarians, Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses reject the doctrines of divinity of Jesus and Trinity.

Conclusion

To reiterate, the Qur'an asserts in the clearest terms that Jesus was a true servant and messenger (apostle) of God. Muslims hold Jesus in the highest reverence. He was the produce of a virgin birth; he was endowed with the power to perform many miracles, and he was sent to preach the true worship of God and to announce the coming of Prophet Muhammad after him.

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APPENDIX

THE SONSHIP OF JESUS*

Sulaiman Shahid Mufassir**

"What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? "1 A faithful generation replied, according to the Messianic expectation of the times, "David's". Today, a faithless 'rock' generation parodies: "Jesus Christ - who are you"2 and returns no answer.

After centuries of dogmatic decree that Jesus was the Son of God, modern Christendom is sure no longer just who he was. Since a large segment of the so-called Christian world believes practically that "God is dead," where does that leave Jesus? Jews and Muslims have held throughout history that Jesus could not have been the Son of God. But, whereas Judaism does not accept the mission of Jesus, Islam accords him the exalted position of prophet of God to his people. Nevertheless, this question of sonship stands as a barrier between Christians and Muslims, being the cause for each labelling the other infidel: Christians because only an unbeliever would deny Christ's sonship; Muslims because only an unbeliever would associate anything with the One God. The Christian charges "Antichrist," the Muslim, "mushrik".

Yet, if we examine the New Testament and what scholars consider most likely the true sayings of Jesus, we are surprised. Despite centuries of Christian tradition and theology, when we look into the source book of Christianity, the gulf

* Reprinted froth Impact International.

** The writer, now a Muslim was born into the Baptist religion and remained Christian for 27 years, including 5 years as an ordained minister. The Translation of the Qur'an used is (basically) that of A. Yusuf Ali.

1. Matthew 22:41 as rendered by the King James Version of 1611. The literal Greek says: "What is your opinion of the Anointed One? Whose son is he? They replied to him: 'David's.'

2. Line from the "rock opera" Jesus Christ, Superstar.

between Christian belief and Muslim belief shortens considerably. For one thing, we find in the mouth of Jesus the Shema' of Israel³ which corresponds with the first part of the Kalimah⁴ of Islam and of Surah Ikhlas⁵: "Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord."⁶ Jesus himself confirmed the monotheistic creed of the nation from which he sprang: God is One. Since God is One, it follows logically, as the Qur'an inquires, that "How can He have a son when He hath no consort?"⁷

Christianity admits of no female God-principle, but imputes the sonship of Jesus to the virgin birth. Islam recognizes the virgin birth but points out the obvious: this makes Jesus the Son of Mary, not the "Son of God". In fact, whenever Jesus is mentioned as a son in the Qur'an it is always Isa-Ibn Maryam. The Church makes him "Son of God" either because it contends that God took on flesh and was born from Mary's womb as a man, or that God sent one of His angels (the Logos, or first created being) into Mary's womb to be born as a man. The first idea is repugnant to reason. If, as the Bible says,⁸ human sight cannot bear to look upon the glory of God, how can human flesh bear to have this Glory, or the God of Glory wrapped up in it? The second thought does not confer literal sonship, but calls for a special form of creation.

The vital point, however, is that the biblical expression "Son of God" cannot be said to have ever come, authentically, from the lips of Jesus himself. According to Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible⁹: "Whether Jesus used it of Himself is doubtful." It is found in the New Testament most frequently on the lips of others. And this is mentioned in the Qur'an as merely following in the customs of the pagans, notably the Greeks and Romans of the time, whose gods

3. In Hebrew, "Shema' Yisrael Adonai Elohenu, Adonoi Ehod."
Deuteronomy 6:4 in the Torah.

4. La ilaha ill' Allah

5. Qulhu wal lAllahu 'Ahad.

6 Mark 12:29, New Testament.

7. The Qur'an An'am 6:100.

8 Exodus 33:20 (Torah): "There shall no man see Me, and live."

9 Revised edition, 1963. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, p. 143.

had sons. "The Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; in this they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say."¹⁰ Even if Jesus had occasionally used such or similar a title, "Semitic idiom must be borne in mind . . . In various (Bible) passages Israel is referred to as 'God's son,' and in others the righteous are thus described . . . So a 'son of God' is a man, or even a people, who reflect the character of God." (Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible, p. 143).

Contrasted with the non-use or limited use of the title "Son of God" by Jesus himself, we find him using the expression "Son of Man" many times in the New Testament. What does this phrase mean? In the first place, an expression like this automatically negates any literal interpretation of "Son of God." It emphasizes that Jesus thought of himself as a man only. Further, scholars determine that Jesus' usage of this term was meant to be reminiscent of that of the prophet Ezekiel, i.e., "a prophet"¹¹ or messenger of God. "Son of Man" is consistent with the Qur'an's statement¹² that "Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle of God, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him."

This Qur'anic passage confirms some of the most precious truths of unadulterated Christianity: (1) Jesus is Christ, (2) he is "Son of Man," i.e. a prophet/messenger of God, (3) he is the product of a special act of creation, the virgin birth ("His Word") and a "spirit proceeding from Him," one of blessed mission. At the same time, this passage affirms that none of these facts makes Jesus the "Son of God" in the sense of an incarnation of God, as it concludes: "So believe in God and His apostles. Say not 'Trinity', desist; it

10. The Qur'an, Taubah 9:30.

11. Hastings, op. cit., 142

12. The Qur'an, Nisa 4:171

will be better for you, for God is One God. Glory be to Him; far exalted is He above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heaven and on earth. "¹³

If the title "Son of God" has any validity, Semitic usage would never have allowed for the literal sense, even though such an expression would be interpreted literally in the Hellenistic world of Jesus' later followers. No doubt here is where the confusion arose. But if Jesus or his earliest disciples said "Son of God" they could have meant only servant of God. For example, in Matthew 12:18 and Acts 3:13, we find that some Bible versions read "Son" with reference to Jesus while others translate "servant." This is because the New Testament Greek words used in these passages (*pais* and *paida*) mean "boy" or "son" in the sense of a servant, attendant or minister.¹⁴ The Qur'an puts it clearly: "And they say: 'God Most Gracious has begotten offspring. Glory to Him.' They are but servants raised to honor." Both Qur'an and Bible agree that son (s) of God can mean only servant (s) of God. No physical sonship or incarnation was intended in the Semitic usage of the earliest Christians. But when Christians became predominantly Gentile, of Roman and Greek background, the Semitic meanings of "Son of God" were lost, and pagan- Hellenistic meanings took their place. This is why the Church, from the 4th century onward, had raging, controversies over the nature of Christ. What was obvious to the earliest Christians became lost and distorted to later converts. They began to interpret sonship literally according to their pantheistic upbringings, thus overriding the basic monotheistic imperative of Jesus' teachings.

There is ground for closer relations between Christians and Muslims because, essentially, Muslims believe the same things about Christ as did the earliest Christians. It is only the unfortunate encrustations of old pagan mythology that divide them.

13. The Qur'an, Nisa 4: 171

14. A Greek-English Lexicon by The Rev. Thomas S. Green, B. A., Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd., London (n. date), p. 134.

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