*The Religion of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad*

The last great world religion to develop was that of the prophet Muhammad, Islam. Muhammad was influenced by Judaism and suborthodox forms of Christianity. He rebelled against the crude native polytheistic religions where he lived in Mecca.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is believed by Muslims that Muhammad received revelations and visions which came to him over a period of twenty-three years, including a vision from the angel Gabriel. At first, Muhammad had reservations regarding the validity of these revelations, but he gained confidence through the reassurances of his wife Khadija. Muhammad was angered by the opposition of his countrymen and fought and became victorious in establishing a following for his religion.

Christianity believes that the same Old Testament of Judaism and the New Testament are the foundation of its religion. They believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophesies of a returning Messiah and Sacrificial Passover Lamb which atoned for the sin of those who have faith. On the Contrary, Islam uses the Quran, Hadith, Torah, and Gospel as its holy books. However, Muslims believe the Torah and Gospel to be corrupt in their current form.

There has been much polemic between the Bible and the Quran ever since Islam began. Muslim Christian interreligious polemic occurred already at the very origins of Islam. The Quran itself witnesses to an ambivalent relationship, both sympathetic and agonistic, of the emergent Muslim community with the religious traditions of Christianity and Judaism.[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Apologetic Discourse and Response for Islam***

Terry Muck and Frances Adeney give a helpful example in Juan Sepulveda. In the sixteenth century, Sepulveda thought he could prepare the Indians in South America for the gospel by conquering them. He thought that his method of Subduing them would make them more prone to understand the love of Christ. However, he did not know the Indians. He didn’t learn their language and he didn’t learn their culture, he didn’t respect them as human beings. Without knowing the Indians, Sepulveda did not have the ability to love them, or therefore, show them the love of Christ.[[3]](#footnote-3) A great lesson that lay within this example is that the goal of apologetics and evangelism is never to win an argument or discussion, it is to win their soul by leading them to Christ. This is best done with the key biblical ingredient of *love*, which means knowing and caring about the other person. This essay attempts to understand our Muslim neighbors, so we can love them and, in doing so, lead them to Christ.

*The Jesus of Islam*

The question of “who Jesus is?” lands itself among the most important in an apologetic discourse with those of the Muslim faith. To the Muslim, *Isa* is the Arabic name for Jesus in the Quran. Muslims have full belief in the earthly life of Jesus through their traditions and writings within the Quran. Within Islam, Jesus is thought of as a *very great prophet*. They believe that all of the prophets, beginning with Adam and including Jesus, brought the same message from God but has since been distorted by humans.[[4]](#footnote-4) Within the Quran, Jesus is spoken of as a member of a group of prophets that includes Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Jonah, and others.[[5]](#footnote-5)[[6]](#footnote-6)

 The *Shahada* is the first of the “Five Pillars” of Islam. It says, “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.”[[7]](#footnote-7) According to the initial concept that Muslims have of Jesus as a prophet, calling Him a Deity crosses over that foundational premise in the Shahada. “There is no god but Allah” to them means the divine oneness, *tawhid*, which excludes any others, including Jesus.[[8]](#footnote-8) This served Islam’s cause in the seventh century AD, the formative years of Islam, when Arab tribes were required to put away their pagan polytheism. It is also this kind of absolute monotheism that is why Muslims today would reject what Christians believe about Jesus divinity. Yet, this is a place where evangelicals should make a stand.[[9]](#footnote-9)

*A Christian Response to Isa*

Muslims teach of Jesus as a prophet in the Quran, yet they hold strong opinions against what they perceive to be the Christian perspectives surrounding Jesus. For example, Muslims are strictly opposed to the belief that Jesus pardoned sin.[[10]](#footnote-10) They are also against the belief that Jesus is God.[[11]](#footnote-11) With both of these arguments, Muslims actually oppose the Christian beliefs about Jesus based on a principle that Christianity also holds true: God is one. We also believe this because God has taught this definitively throughout the Bible.[[12]](#footnote-12) However, we believe that Jesus is within that same God as one of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If we can share with Muslims that we do not believe Jesus to be another God, and therefore He is the one true God, their opposition to things such as Jesus’s pardon of sin and His Deity could dissipate. Also, if a Muslim, or anybody else, accepts this point, the barrier has been lifted towards discussion of the surrounding theology, bringing him one step closer to personal faith in Jesus.

Detractors may point out that the word “Trinity” is not found written within the Bible and, therefore, not a biblical term at all. This is partially true, yet not sound as a theological statement. It is a coined Latin term based on “tri-unity,” so it is not a Hebrew or Greek word in the original texts.[[13]](#footnote-13) Nevertheless, it was used in the early church to encapsulate a truth that there is one God, monotheism, and God’s nature is uniquely known in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the one God, the Son is the one God, and the Spirit is the one God; but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.[[14]](#footnote-14) **More available in the article.**

1. APOLOGETIC RESPONSE: Drawing from the student's understanding of other cultures, their worldview and socio-religious practices as identified through interacting with Fisher's Living Religions, as well as theological insights and missiological strategies described in Muck's Christianity Encountering World Religions, the student will provide an apologetic response to the perceptions of Christ that are indicative of the student's chosen world religion.

*Pre-Conversion Dreams*

In recent years, there has been many reports of Muslims being exposed to Christianity through dreams and visions. In *The Role of Pre-Conversion Dreams and Visions in Islamic Contexts* by the international missionary Sam Martyn explains that evangelists and others who minister to Muslims should expect to encounter reports of dreams and visions.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is important that these Christians demonstrate openness toward understanding the phenomenon. Also, these Muslims must be guided to understand their dreams and visions in light of Scripture. Next, dreams and visions should not serve as the primary focus of ministry to Muslims over Scripture. Martyn writes, Karl Barth warns of the desire to trade a focus on Scripture with a focus on personal experience. He writes, “We may be tempted to find in this material addition of an immediate spiritual inspiration the very essence of the divine conviction. But if we are, . . . we are trying to find a something better which God might have told us, instead of looking at the supposedly less good which He has actually told us.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

*Muslims use of Bible for Prophesy of Muhammad*

Muslims use the Christian New Testament as prophecy of the arrival of Muhammad. They point to two specific verses as this proof. First, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, to be with you forever.” (John 4:16[ESV]) This word “Helper” comes from the Greek word *paraklētos,* or Paraclete.[[17]](#footnote-17) The Paraclete is claimed to be speaking of Muhammad in Islam. The Second verse that they use to point to Muhammad is, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26[ESV]).

*Apologetic Response to Muslims use of Bible for Prophesy of Muhammad*

 However, there are inherent problems with the Muslim belief that the Paraclete is referring to Muhammad. First, this statement purely lacks significant evidence. They do not have proof anywhere else in the Bible that supports this claim. To take one verse out of its context and place upon it a whole meaning that is not intrinsically supported elsewhere in the Bible is not justified. This is called *taking a verse out of context.* An important way in which theological claims from the Bible can be confidently supported or rejected is by using the rest of the Bible to measure it. Scripture *never* contradicts itself. Not only is the Muslim claim of Muhammad as the Paraclete not supported elsewhere in Scripture, accepting this claim essentially adds all other Muslim tradition including the teachings in the Quran since Muhammad is the founder of Islam. This does not work. To support their claim of Muhammad as the referenced Paraclete, they will say that, though these verses in John are accurate, all Bible verses that contradict with this claim have been corrupted by humans. The Muslims have other reasons as well for claiming the Bible to be corrupted. The Quran makes specific claims of the trustworthiness of the Bible, so therefore all contradictions in between their claims of Muhammad in the Bible that are contradicted elsewhere in the Bible are claimed to be from later corruption. We see the support for the Jewish and Christian Holy books in Quran’s Surah 7:156-157, "And I will write down my mercy for those who are righteous and give alms and who believe in our signs; who follow the apostle, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them.”[[18]](#footnote-18) Further verses such as surah 5:68, "say, o people of the book! You are not (founded) on anything until you perform the Torah and the gospel, and what was revealed to you from your Lord."[[19]](#footnote-19) Here we see the credit given to both the Torah and Gospel and a declaration that they were provided from God, which should be used to support the Bible in its entirety against attacks about legitimacy by Muslims.

The Quran’s support of both the Torah and the Gospel creates a need for consensus among the three Holy books. Without such harmony, the Quran should be said to be intrinsically flawed based on its clear support of each book. The fact that the Bible has many verses which conflict with the Quran is the reason that Muslims claim the Bible is in error.[[20]](#footnote-20) Interpreting what the Quran says about the Bible is controversial. There are a few texts from the Quran that Muslims use to teach that the Bible has been changed, but closer evaluation reveals these verses are ironically stating that Jews and Christians have abandoned their teachings for falsehoods- not that the words of their Scriptures have themselves been corrupted.[[21]](#footnote-21) Another Evidence against corruption indicated by Muslims includes that it does not clearly mention Mohammad nor accord with the doctrines laid out in the Quran.[[22]](#footnote-22) The claims of corruption in the Bible are further revealed as flawed by looking to Quranic verses that imply the Jews and Christians still had their holy texts at the time of Muhammad, and they could follow a straight path by reading them.[[23]](#footnote-23) What most Muslims envision when they say the Bible has been corrupted are wholesale omissions or insertions by ruling powers.[[24]](#footnote-24) This type of corruption simply never happened nor could have happened. Consider for example the creation of 1 Peter. The distribution and copying process of the book would have included Peter writing the letter and sending it to recipient churches, these churches would make copies and send them to additional churches, and so on. There is no possible way that any ruling power would have been able to confiscate all the Bibles in circulation and alter them. There was no ruling power over the Christians until at least four hundred years after the death of Jesus, and by then there would have been thousands of copies of these books. Muhammed himself did not recognize such corruption of the texts and the many manuscripts that are in existence today further support the messages of our modern Bible, which remains the same as the original.[[25]](#footnote-25) In fact, among Muhammed’s teachings he speaks favorably of the Christians having nothing to fear, as he writes in surah 5 verse 69, “Those who believe, and the Jews, and the Sabians, and the Christians—whoever believes in God and the Last Day, and does what is right—they have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve.”[[26]](#footnote-26) In *The Study Quran* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the commentary for this verse explains that this “represents one of the most important Quranic affirmations of the potential of those outside the Muslim community to achieve salvation.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

For the Christian looking to form an apologetic response to this evidence of the specific instances of favor given by the Quranic texts to the Jews, Christians, and their corresponding Holy Bible, a valuable apologetic hermeneutic can be gained. In surahs 7:156-157 and 5:69, we see the Quran pointing Muslims to the Torah and Gospel to seek truth, in particular, prophecy of their prophet Muhammed. Whether or not this prophesy exists in the Torah and Gospel, which it doesn’t, is not of importance in developing both a preliminary apologetic and an opportunity for debate or evangelical discussion. A greater point for these is in showing these sympathies at the Muslim’s revered holy book has towards Christians, Jews, the Bible, and Jesus which may lead to interest in further dialogue. If both the Muslims Quran and their prophet Muhammed show such confidence in the Bible and Jesus, the Muslim proponents may be open to them as well.

Within the same realm of conflict between Muslims and the Jesus known by Christians in the Bible is Jesus ability to atone for or pardon sins. Since Muslims deny Jesus’ deity, they claim this is blasphemy, because only God can do these things. Muslims also believe that Jesus did not die but was taken by God and will return to earth to die near the end of time.

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2. F V Greifenhagen, “Scripture Wars: Contemporary Polemical Discourses of Bible versus Quran on the Internet,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1–2 (May 2010): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1558/cis.v6i1-2.23>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Terry C. Muck and Frances S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Boston: Pearson, 2017), 386. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Supporting verses in the Quran include 4:160; 33:7; 42:13. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gregory A. Barker, *Jesus in the Worlds Faiths: Leading Thinkers from Five Religions Reflect on His Meaning* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2008), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Steven W Ladd, “*A Recommendation to American Evangelicals: Focus on the Trinity as an Alternative to Arguments about ‘Islamic Terrorism,*’” n.d., 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In their rejection of Christian views of Jesus, Muslims point to verses such as, “But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mark 2:10[ESV]) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Boston: Pearson, 2017), 386. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See Deuteronomy 4:6, known as the *Shema*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Steven W Ladd, “*A Recommendation to American Evangelicals: Focus on the Trinity as an Alternative to Arguments about ‘Islamic Terrorism,*’” n.d., 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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23. Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ḥusain Naṣr, *The Study Quran: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (New York, NY: HarperOne, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)