

MUHAMMAD_(s) AND PAUL ON JESUS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO SACRED PILLARS

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Abstract

This comparative study of Islam and Christianity struggled to reveal the mutual meaningful expressions of God, the creator. The main question to which the article tried to answer is: Who is Jesus Christ for Paul and Muhammad(s)? The significance of countering to this question is being revealed much more through the contemporary issues of hate, and delusions that are influencing all believers in one God. Questioning the human nature and the Lordship of Christ looks like a barrier in dialogues between Islam and Christianity. So, as its primary purpose, Jesus, as the Lord from Paul's perspective and Isa al-Masih, the son of Maryam from Muhammad's(s) viewpoint, will be compared through different methods. Like the spiritual interpretation of Joel S. Goldsmith, in which the monotheistic presupposition (worshipping only one God), will implant the axial direction of the examination of the Bible and the Quran. Moreover, through historical criticism, the article will try to clarify the origins of faith in Pauline Christology compare to the doctrine of Tawhid from the Quran and the origin of the Quranic accounts of Christ. Also, through a feminist analysis, the essay will have a critical look at maleness of titles of God in Christianity. In this way, the historical analysis will display the urge of accepting the Quran as the Incarnated word of God for Islam and the importance of Paul as the best witness for Christ. By spiritual interpretation, the meaning of the "form" and the "face" of God in Christianity, and "face", and the "Rope" of Allah and Al-Rahman in the Quran will validate a mutual notion of divinity for all believers. Also, through the feminist approach framed in the text of the Bible and the Quran, this research will spot the sexless status of the Incarnated Christ after the resurrection, the one who is the Lord of all now, even if is being praised in the new name of Al-Rahman. Thus, in conclusion, this article will suggest mutual findings in Quranic and Biblical Christology and will be ended by spotting the incarnation of the word of God, as the best point of starting a fruitful dialogue between Islam and Christianity.

Keywords: Pauline Christology, Quranic studies, Incarnation, Interpretation, Islam-Christian dialogue.

Introduction

In the first centuries and despite the great self-sacrifice of Christ, Christianity was affected by un-orthodox attitudes that were far from the ongoing traditional Christian faith. Thus, the image of the character and purposefulness of Christ changed to a mystery hiding behind rumors and notions of heresy [1]. From a Christian perspective, humanity by ignoring the salvation of Christ, turned away from God of love, the savior. Thus, it was as if God was asking one more time; "Adam, where are you?" (Gen.3:9) [2], whereas it was not only a question to ask from Christians and Jews as the only followers of the Holy message of God, but for all offspring of Adam through a new dialogue and a new language. In this vein, the Christian culture assisted the message of the Quran in reciting the narratives related to the character of Isa, al-Masih [3]. However, the new generation of believers may ask: was the Biblical Jesus Christ, indeed the same character who about seven centuries later, Muhammad(s) recited in the Quran by the name of Isa, the son of Maryam? If he is the same character, how could people believe in a prophet of Allah as the creator or savior, and how Christians understand God by the name of Jesus Christ? Therefore, this would be the substantial question that this research will attempt to answer.

Methods

The essay seeks a more accurate Christology by employing two witnesses; Paul and Muhammad(s), according to their most reliable writings, in order to find the most concurrent ideas between Muslims and Christians and to serve as the substance of a theological reunion. Then, as the strategic goal, the article will focus on cooperation backgrounds in Pauline Christology and the Quranic accounts of 'Isa, the son of Maryam' and the barriers in the

dialogue. An alliance between religions in order to gaze at the one Creator from a wider angle of doctrinal views, without ignoring the differences between Islam and Christianity which are almost self-evident.

Thus, through a chronological order and a historical analysis, the study will look at the revelation of God who at first revealed to Christians in the human form of Jesus Christ according to the New Testament and then after centuries, to the prophet of Islam, Muhammad(s). Although in the Islamic tradition, Quran as the pure message of God is not a book made by Muhammad(s), it is impossible that he has any assert against the Quran that could be accepted by the Islamic world. Thus, this research cannot entirely rely on any other writings about the Prophet(s) for the sake of certainty. So, instead of more traditional Islamic methods, this article will look at the Quran through the Quranic lenses of analysis and employing other verses to explain each part of the message. Also, in order to avoid the limitations of historical criticism and to have a more profound gaze into the Biblical and Quranic expressions, the article will employ some approaches as parallel methods with more abilities. For example, it will apply the feminist analysis of the words and verses of the Quran and the Bible, as well as the 'Spiritual analysis' which is a method that focuses on the spiritual findings from reading between the lines. As Goldsmith says: "There is a vast difference between statements of truth and Truth itself. A statement of truth is what you declare; Truth itself is what is imparted to you from within your being. Statements of truth are read in books; Truth itself is what you discern between the lines" [4]. For example, in a spiritual interpretation, the sonship of Christ may be considered a "unique standing and intimate favor with God, and God's direct involvement in Jesus' redemptive work", instead of the expression of the nature of Christ [5].

I. PAULINE CHRISTOLOGY (PHILIPPIANS2: 5-11)

The most important reason for questioning Paul and pursuing his viewpoints is not the history of his writings or his efforts to develop the church as a public practice of Christian faith. The main reason is: "Paul was adamant, in referring to his conversion experience, that he truly had seen Jesus. He was aware, as appears in 1 Corinthians 15 that the other apostles had seen Jesus alive after his death in the 'ordinary' sequence of resurrection appearances, while he had had the same sighting of Jesus, but at a time when the others had ceased to see Him" [6]. This is one reason that Paul is a central character of the historical studies in the Christian faith, besides; he was possibly the first author in the history of Christianity [7]. So, what did he see when he was gazing at Jesus? Who is Christ for Paul before his incarnation, during his earthly life, and after his ascendance to heaven?

A. Christ before Incarnation

"5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God (μορφή), did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped."

Philippians 2:5-6 (ESV Strong's).

In 1927 Moule translated the word *morphê* as "the manifested being" instead of ostensible shape [8]. G. Fee also believes that there is no precise equivalent for translation of '*morphê*'. He believes that we need to translate this phrase and put in quotation mark as "form", which means "that which truly characterizes a given reality" [9]. However, was the "form" of God for Paul the same "reality" as John wrote in his gospel; 'the Word' (John 1:1) that he was equal to God? Thus, "form" in this verse is the internal characteristics of the essentials of holiness (because Paul puts this "form" equal to God), not an external form of being. Also, through Paul's Judeo-Christian perspective, the theme of "the image of invisible God" from Col. 1:15-16 can help to explain the significance of "form" of God before the incarnation ("He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.16 for by him all things were created..."). Because in this perspective, the "form" is not visible by herself, but "the face of God" is. Thus, in Paul's vocabulary, the "face and image" of God is very related to the "form". For example, for interpretation of Genesis 33:10, 'the image' of the 'form of God' for Jacob's physical abilities, could be the likeness of the face of God in a vision: "Jacob said, 'No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me'" (ESV Strong's). Also, in 1 Chronicles 16:11; "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always" (NIV), and in Psalm 24:6; "Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah" (ESV Strong's), Jews have been invited to look at the likeness of His face as close as Jacob did. In Exodus 33:18-23 for Moses (and Jews) 'the divine face' "shall not be visible"; however, he could see Lord's back which was the reflection of the "form of God" which was an expression of the glory that Moses could see (not necessarily in shape) only from the cleft of the rock.

In a deeper look to the historical character of Israel, she did not remain faithful to God for a long time without a reachable image originated by God, or a crafted human-made 'image of God' (even in an image of a life-giver caw). That was why in the wilderness "the glory of God appeared to Israelites in the cloud", to summon their eye witnessing to God and remaining loyal which was easier in the Lord's presence in the camp of Israel (Exod. 16:10).

In Paul's Judeo-Christian knowledge, the image of God for Israelites was the essence of their identity as the followers of Jehovah and their hope for the future of Israel. Although, fascinated by "the Image", they ignored the truth of the "form of God" who was behind the visible image of the "pillar of fire" and the "pillar of cloud" (Exod.13:21). Consequently, in Philippians 2:5 Paul invites Christians to be mindful of the one who was in the "form" of God before any revelation by an image or incarnation in a visible character.

B. Incarnated Jesus

"7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Philippians 2:7-8 (ESV Strong's).

How is it practically possible that this pre-existed "form" came into the visible world by the incarnated 'male body' of Christ? For example, as in Calvinist hermeneutics: "The form of God means here his majesty. For as a man is known by the appearance of his form, so the majesty, which shines forth in God, is his figure [10]." However, was it really about a "man" and "his form and his figure" or the glory was all because of the truth which was behind his form of a servant?

Moreover, the "form" of God emptied himself from what exactly? Paul did not say, but equality with God from the previous verses brings up the idea that Christ emptied himself from being equal with God. He gave up his authority as God and in obedience, took the form of a servant. Therefore, using the phrase "emptied himself" applies to the one who possessed the capacity of equality with God (before the incarnation) [9]. Then, the incarnated "form" of God, Jesus, was indeed the Lord and never emptied himself from his lordship. That is why whenever His will was upon something, He used the authority of the Lord, like forgiving sins (Mark 2:10b), stilling the storm (Mark4:39), the transfiguration on the mountain (Mark17:2), or even walking on water, saying it is I AM; "Εἰμι" [11]. Thus, from Paul's perspective, Jesus was the incarnated and the eternal Lord, "the perfect amen to God in the flesh" [12]. Although, the theological importance of Christ's equality with God is more connected to his lordship in the "form" of God, not the flesh and the form of a servant. Which is a very close viewpoint to the Johannian Christology of Logos and the Word of God, since the Word is from God and not created or finite:

"Logos is the creative force of God and in the gospel of John, denotes the essential Word of God, Jesus Christ, the personal wisdom and power in union with God, his minister in creation and government of the universe, the cause of all the world's life both physical and ethical, which for the procurement of man's salvation put on human nature in the person of Jesus the Messiah, the second person in the Godhead, and shone forth conspicuously from His words and deeds. -A Greek philosopher named Heraclitus first used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe. This word was well suited to John's purpose in John 1" [13].

Moreover, verse 7 asserts that Christ emptied Himself, and the most likely implication is that this was while He was on the heavenly throne. St. Paul through his Jewish background education comprehends the image of God not as a 'thinkable or feasible picture,' but as a 'shadow of the future' like a shining image of Christ; "these are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:17, ESV Strong's; Strong dictionary definition of *σκία*; a primary word; "shade" or a shadow ... an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object ...). However, the Word as the pre-existence form of Christ is not only the expression and the statement of God's presence but also carries the consciousness, wisdom, and the will of God which also echoes in the gospel of John; "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John14:9, ESV Strong's). Hence, what was the importance of the One who came in the flesh from heaven? For Paul, obedient in the human flesh includes perfect servanthood to God that is why he encourages the believers to be like the incarnated flesh of Jesus, the son of Mary. Also, in Paul's perspective "there is no tension between Jesus being the human Messiah, the representative of Israel, and the one who is sent as it were from God's side, to do and be what only God can do and be [6]." Furthermore, Paul emphasizes the pre-existence of Christ in the form of God, which has made the actions of self-humbling, crucifixion, and subsequent exaltation of Jesus, not a repeatable performance for other human beings [14]. In this standpoint, Paul uncovers the sense of similarity of Christ to the human being in some respects and dissimilarity in others, like

contrast with the sinfulness of the flesh (Rom 8:3); a “similarity that lies with his full humanity: in his incarnation he was “like” in the sense of “the same as” [9]. Thus, Jesus was a mixture of weaknesses and the powers of a human being. He was a ‘fully-human’ but not exactly like other people. Although he humbled himself down to the obedience of a usual slave, without exercising his lordship and without any human rights, the son of Mary even put his life on the cross for the sake of others and was never “the same as” the sinful human nature.

So, another question arises: which life did Jesus give for saving us, his life as a human or as the Son of God? Alternatively, both since they are not disjointed. Considering the oneness of God, Jesus Christ could not give up his lordship but still could give up His authority and powers of being equal with God and stopped using them through a free will. Jesus' obedience during his earthly life was ceasing him from living with the power of God, as in the Scriptures, he even died on the cross because of His own will (John10: 17-18 ESV Strong's). In this way, Christ Jesus obeyed like the son of God when he left the heavenly throne, and also, he proved his obedience since he did not sin as the son of Mary in the flesh. Therefore, Jesus's crucifixion was the ultimate stage of self-sacrifice which could discharge offspring of Adam from continues presence and effects of sin in their human flesh, while He was in the likeness of, not sin, but Adam's flesh (Rom.8:3). So, in Pauline Christology, whereas Adam ignored Holy Spirit and committed the first sin, Jesus the Lord in the likeness of Adam's humanity suffered the crucifixion as a consequence of believer's wrong ways and for the salvation of humanity which must be in both, Spirit and flesh.

In this respect, as much as the creation of the universe was the product and the image of Christ's will in his lordship, and as the one Creator, the crucifixion was an outcome and a reflection of his unconditional love in his incarnated human form. His self-sacrifice has identified as the visible evidence of mercy for all, an embodiment of the message of the coming kingdom of God onto the Earth, according to the Scriptures [15]. That is why the incarnated word of God in the form of a human body (and even a male messenger of God) has differences with the incarnated word in the formation of a (Holy) Book (e.g. like the Quran). However, the latter is not capable of being a sacrifice or the savior of its believers, even though it can possess the same authority of God. That could be a reason that crucifixion and the death of Christ from Paul's perspective were the ultimate purposes of the incarnation, nothing less than a “new life that results from Christ's resurrection” (2Cor 5:14-15 and Rom 6:4-10), [16]. So, the human form of Christ as much as his lordship was the foundation of Paul's Christology, which echoes in his writings like Col. 1:21-22, [16]. Paul and Muhammad(s), as is written in the Bible and the Quran, are absorbed to the revelatory actions of God through the creation and crucifixion of Jesus to find the answer of: is the incarnated Jesus still God?

C. Christ after Incarnation

“9Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV Strong's).

In Greek polytheism, gods were the origins of every natural phenomenon while each of them was perfect by themselves [17]. Worshipping One perfect God could bring unity into human communities due to being faithful followers of the One God and trusting His capabilities [18]. So, it is not surprising that the human mind had more acceptances toward the existence of one perfect God who was the origin of existence and every action in it, while He (or she, without sex) is perfect by Himself. Thus, in monotheistic faiths before Christ, the necessity of worshipping one adequate God with a competent, practical essence was acknowledged by Israel. However, then, who was God for Paul and who is God for contemporary Christianity?

Philippians 2:9-11 for Hurtado, is the theological climax of the whole passage. He believes that “any interpretation of this passage must not minimize the significance of verses 9-11” [14]. In verse 9, Paul introduces a holy Person matching the incarnated “form” of God, the one who is exalted, not only in his humanity but also in His lordship [19]. Therefore, God gives this character, Jesus (or Isa), a name above all names. So, what, precisely, was the “name above all names”? Ultimately, the name is the identity of the one who carries the name. So, Knowing God is impossible without knowing the Name of God. In this vein, Moule puts in here: “Wherefore also God, His God (ho theos), supremely exalted Him, in His Resurrection and Ascension, and conferred upon Him, as a gift of infinite love and approval (echarIsato), the Name which is above every name; THE NAME; unique and glorious; the Name Supreme, the I AM; to be His name now, not only as He is from eternity, the everlasting Son of the Father...” [8]. Then, is this a ‘new’ Name or not? Since the names of Jesus Christ, Jehovah, Lord, or even ‘I AM’, were not ‘new’ to the Jews, they already have them in the Old Testament and on their daily language. Hence, the verse does not indicate reusing of a name for exalted Jesus but the verb of “bestow”, is more applicable for giving a new name.

Though, as Isaiah wrote: “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other...” (Isa. 42:8-ESV). So, God did not share his glory of divinity by bestowing his name to a ‘human-heavenly’ being. Paul’s approach to this issue could not be dedicated to the ‘glory’ and holiness of a mere ‘humiliated weak body’ of a human on the cross whose name is already known as Jesus. Ultimately, the new name could not be given to a heavenly being (e.g. Jesus in his heavenly body) even very close to the spiritual level of God. Gordon Fee believes: “the risen Christ is not Yahweh himself, who is always referred to by Paul as God. Rather, the pre-existent Son of God returns by way of his resurrection to receive the honor of having bestowed on him the substitute name for God, which for Paul then becomes a title for Christ as “Lord” and this “name” is now used by Paul exclusively for Christ and never for God the Father” [20]. Nevertheless, to be more precise, “the Lord” also was not a new name. Then what was the “new Name” of God? The research proposes to go further to find this new name, but before that, one would ask: why Christians use the male labels of God the Father or Son for worshipping and knowing God?

D. Christ for Paul and Feminist Analysis

The Christian conception of Jesus Christ as God or the Son of God should not be equal to believing in the flesh or believing in the name of a human being. Because being in any flesh demands limitations, and God has no defect. Paul affirms that he does not know that Christ is still in a body or not (2Cor. 12:2), but he well knows that Christ has appeared in the third heaven and has shown himself in the presence of God on the Christians’ behalf (Heb. 9:24). Believing in godliness of Jesus as in the superior sex of male has rooted in delusions of the holiness of incarnated Jesus (even in his heavenly body) and probably focusing on the human form of Jesus instead of the hidden reality beyond the incarnated word of God. In a feminist perspective:

“Patriarchal God symbolism functions to legitimate and reinforce patriarchal social structures in family, society, and church. Language about the father in heaven who rules over the world [or Son of God as the head of church] justifies and even necessitates an order whereby the male religious leader rules over his flock, the civil ruler has domination over his subjects, the husband exercises headship over his wife. If there is an absolute heavenly patriarch, then social arrangements on earth must pivot around hierarchical rulers who of necessity must be male in order to represent him and rule in his name” [21].

However, for Paul, Jesus Christ is not a male or female after ascendant to heaven, Christ is the Lord, equal to God as it was before the incarnation (as the last parts of this article show). That is why Paul says “God bestowed on him the name that is above every name” because Christ for Paul is beyond all the materialistic delusions of this world and Lord is not male or female, but in a heavenly glory; “There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another” (1 Cor. 15:40). Also, Paul in Galatians 3:28 and to the church of Christ asserts: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (ESV Strong’s) Jesus that Saul of Tarsus encountered (Paul before conversion) [6], for Paul was not a ‘depraved Rabbi’ anymore afterwards, the one who was enemy of Jews in the eyes of Saul for a long time. One would imagine that Paul knew him as a character of forgiveness, not an ordinary human, the glorious Lord who was not seeking revenge on Paul’s hostility but helping him to find the truth. Thus, one would conclude that the exalted Jesus for Paul, was the image of love and not a male figure of Jesus.

However, about six centuries after Paul, Christianity was not faithfully standing in the same side with Paul, “By the 5th century many groups of Christians existed whose views had been condemned and who were out of communion with the wider church. Their freedom of worship and action were often restricted by the authorities of the Roman Christian empire” [22]. Followers of Christ were not together anymore, the Roman Empire was the ruler of Christianity, and the Christian faith was finding a new definition, not similar to the first century. As if humanity was waiting for God Himself (or Herself?), to rebuke their wrong ways of divergences and heresies, to forgive them and rebuild the broken relationship again; The relational God of forgiveness.

II. THE QURAN AND MUHAMMAD’S PERSPECTIVE

For Muslims, the Quran is a miracle which was voiced by Allah onto the heart of the listeners, and firstly to the heart of the prophet Muhammad(s) [23]. Muslims believe that through 23 years, the Quran was revealed to Muhammad(s) by Gabriel, the favorite angel of God. In the Islamic faith, the Quran is a holy signature from God to confirm Muhammad’s(s) position as the last messenger of Allah [24]. Moreover, the historical study of the pre-Quranic era confirms that the inhabitants of the center, north-east, and north-west of the Arabian Peninsula were Christian tribes and some of the basic notions of the Quranic settings are tightly related to this milieu [3]. According to the most

reliable resources of Islamic history, after Muhammad(s) being hired by his first wife Khadija and taking her goods to Syria before his marriage or the revelation of the Quran, he was being recognized as a prophet of God by Christian monks, especially Waraqa, Khadija's cousin [25]. The man who was the first advisor to Muhammad(s), and whose knowledge of Christianity was from his frequent travels to Syria "where he studied the Bible and even became a priest" [26]. Therefore, and most probably, the conditions of the Arab society were very operative in the context and the priorities of this new message of Allah. So, it would not be surprising if this holy book conveys Jewish and Christian teachings by way of a background knowledge. The Quran brings up familiar themes of the Bible to clarify and to discuss the ambiguities of Christianity. Therefore, most of 'the key points' of the Quranic text are in a close relationship with the Biblical narratives and teachings. For example, the narrative of Eucharist or Al-Maida in Q5:112-14 of the Quran has resonance in the book of Acts 10:9-13 [27]. However, the clarification of the Bible by itself, tells nothing to confirm or reject the Christian Scriptures by the judgment of the Quran. Therefore, the related passages of the Christian scriptures to the Quranic verses naturally have to be critical material of analyses and interpretation of the Quran.

The Quran considers Arabians as the primary recipients of this book, for whom Muhammad(s) carried the message of Allah; "And this (is) a Book We have revealed it - blessed, so follow it and fear (Allah) so that you may receive mercy. Lest you say, "Only was revealed the Book on the two groups before us, and indeed we were about their study certainly unaware."" (Q6:155-6) [28]. Also, it has been sent to end some disputes between Jews and Christians about the books of Moses, for example: Q4:46, [28] and Q41:45 [28] (Ahl-al-kitab: possessors of the books of God) [29]. Further, another vital reason for sending the Quran is fine-tuning the faith of Christians and Jews (e.g. Q10:37) [28]. A significant portion of the Quran has been focused onto the lifestyle and affairs of tenants of a city in Arabia that the Quran points at them and primarily sent them the message; the city of Mecca and those believers who were in a constant relationship with God [28].

Thus, every nation other than the people of Mecca and after the rise of Islam, need to translate and interpret the verses and the message of the Quran for themselves to obtain a beneficial interpretation from those parts of this Book which are not exclusively for seventh century's Arabs in Mecca. Except, how?

A. Sources of Hermeneutics

For most contemporary Islamic commentators, the Bible is not a reliable resource for introducing 'Jesus' or 'Isa, the son of Maryam', who is the subject of this research. On the contrary, Muslim scholars believe that the Quran nullifies the holy books before it [24]. Whereas the message of the Quran was very familiar with the current Bible which from centuries before the Quran has been collected and was very popular and most people in the world had a copy of the book for themselves: "By the early Middle Ages, the Christian Bible had been translated into nearly every language where a church had put down roots" [30].

A.1. Tahrif

Mostly, the Quran's commentators believe that before Muhammad(s), there was a version of the Bible which was unchanged, and the Quran only confirms that version which is not the current Bible; because the current version of the Bible has been 'refashioned' (Tahrif) [31]. If this assert is legitimate and evidenced, then it would be easy to find numerous verses of sharp and clear warnings for Muslims to be aware of the falseness of the Christian scriptures as the consequence of "Tahrif" and refashioning the Bible, before Muhammad(s)'s era, but there is not. The act of "distortion (Tahrif) of the words of Allah has traditionally been used to convince the Islamic world to believe in the falseness of the Scriptures. However, for a legitimate dialogue, more bits of evidence are needed.

Tahrif has been mentioned at least on four occasions in the Quran, for example, Q4:46 says: "Of those who are Jews, they distort the words from their places, and they say, "We hear[d] and we disobey[ed]"..." [28] or Q2:75: "...a party of them, (who used to) hear (the) words (of) Allah, then they distort it from after they understood it, ..." [28]. However, why is that some Jews or Christians could change the words of Allah, is not Allah Almighty and the most existed superior power?

In a closer look, by the Quranic validations these verses do not confirm that the text of the books before the Quran has been changed though, and more accusations, in this case, could be directly from hadith (narratives other than the Quran) and not reliable opinions of Muhammad(s) through the Quran. One of the famous canonical hadiths from Muhammad(s) through Sahih al-Bukhari is: "...O' community of Muslims, how is it that you seek wisdom from the

People of the Book? Your book brought down upon His Prophet-blessings and peace of God upon him-is the latest report about God. You read a Book that has not been distorted, but the People of the Book, as God related to you, exchanged that which God wrote [for something else], changing the book with their hands” [32]. So, in this hadith “reports” about God are different, depends on if they are new or old. However, God is not limited to time. Then, one would assay this hadith (and many others like this one) with the Quran since the Bible was the word of Allah, at least, before the Quran.

Although the Bible was a complete book in the hands of Christians and Jews, the way this book was being transferred and being taught, was preaching: “...in the world in which Islam was born, the Bible circulated orally in Arabic mainly in liturgical settings, ... such written Biblical texts as may have been available in synagogues, churches, or monasteries in this milieu were in the liturgical languages of the several communities, Hebrew or Aramaic among the Jews, and Greek or Aramaic/Syriac among the Christians” [33].

Thus, the word “Tahrif” most possibly refers to the oral misconducting of the meaning of the Biblical teachings. The issue that could be related to a specific group of Jews and Christians (even many), who through vocal expressions of the scriptures used to distort and change the message of the Bible. However, it has not necessarily changed the text of the Bible itself [32]. Conversely, the Quran upholds that God is fully capable of saving and protecting His words, no matter when or where; even Satan could not change His words: “And not We sent before you any Messenger and not a Prophet but when he recited, threw the Shaitaan [Satan] in his recitation. But Allah abolishes what throws the Shaitaan, then Allah will establish His Verses. And Allah (is) All-Knower, All-Wise” (Q22:52) [28].

Moreover, even if someone had modified the text in its inscribed, it was less likely that the modified form of a text could be conveyed to all other versions and many existed translations of the Scriptures. That is why Allah proclaims His Scriptures as protected texts and the Quran as the protector because they support each other: “And We revealed to you the Book in [the] truth, confirming what (was) before it of the Book and a guardian over it. So, judge between them by what Allah has revealed...” (Q5:48a) [28]. The Quran also mentions the weight of God’s word as the reason of keeping them unchanged: “And (has been) fulfilled (the) word (of) your Lord (in) truth and justice. No one can change His words, and He (is) the All-Hearer, the All-Knower” (Q6: 115) [28]. Besides, Q6:34 and 10:64 declare that God is capable of keeping his word safe from any alteration or distortion by humans [24]: “And surely were rejected Messengers before you, but they were patient over what they were rejected and they were harmed until came to them Our help. And no one (can) alter (the) words (of) Allah, and surely has come to you of (the) news (of) the Messengers” (Q6:34) [28]. Therefore, the hadith of Sahih al-Bukhari maybe not so valid whereas it is against several verses which have one clear message through the Quran; no one can change the word of Allah (that is why it is not “words”, but “word”, singular). Though, Allah Himself abrogates the verses of the Quran, but not without another verse to do the act of abrogation and to make the whole message clear: “None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: Knowest thou not that God Hath power over all things?” [28]. So, are there any other verse to abrogate, suggest a better word from the word of God, or reject the scriptures before the Quran? not precisely, except the same verses that apologetics usually use for proving the “Tahrif” of the Bible that was examined already.

A.2. Confirming

Condemnation of the Quran came upon the “rebel” Jews and Christians in the sixth and seventh centuries, not upon the Holy Scriptures: “Say, “O People (of) the Book! Do you resent [of] us except that we believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed before, and that most of you (are) defiantly disobedient” [28]. Also, the Quran proves the honesty of the Bible at the same time: “Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel” (Q5:47). In Q2:91, the Quran rebukes the hypocrisy of the Jews who failed in obeying their Scriptures, while the Quran asks them why then had they killed God’s prophets? [28].

Hence, Allah does not recommend another book (even the Quran herself) to be used by Muhammad(s) to judge Christians except the Bible to which he had access. In this vein and by the Quranic perspective, the followers of the Bible were accused to betray the original text of the Bible in their oral circulation of the verses, preaching and teaching, while the text of the Bible is not only trustworthy but also a necessary practical instruction for believers, whether or not accepted by Muslim critics.

In addition to all these reasons, the Quran literally confirms the Bible several times to convince its accusations to the Christian and Jewish audiences for neglecting the Bible; in six verses it says that the Quran approves “the Book which is with the Christians” (2:101, 2:89, 3:8, 2:91, 4:47, 2:41). Seven times it says that the Quran approves and authorizes the Book which was before the Quran and was accessible by the Muslims and the prophet(s) (6:92, 5:46, 2:97, 46:30, 35:31, 3:3, 3:50), and on one occasion it says that the Quran certifies the Scriptures which came earlier, and the Quran is a guardian of the ‘holy original book’, including the Bible (Q5:48) [28]. In Q2:2-4, the Quran advise its followers to have faith in the scriptures before Muhammad(s), as much as they believe in Allah’s directives. So, if the Bible has been twisted and inaccurate, and if the Quran is directly from God and it is not limited to time, then what is the use of the confirming the Bible for Arabs and today for Muslims? [28]. Alternatively, why should the Quran ask the believers to believe in the scriptures before Muhammad(s) if they are not correct, or if they do not exist at all? In Q46:12, [28] the Quran has been introduced itself as the Arabic version of the Moses’ scripture; so at least sixteen times the Quran confirms the Bible of the Muhammad’s(s) era. Thus, a Christian would think of the Quran as the message of God that has originated from God, even because it is like “an exact copy of the heavenly, uncreated original” word before it [24].

So, considering the similarity and unions of the word, why then the Quran is the last book of God (especially emphasized by the Islamic view)? The acceptable answer cannot be simply the time and occasion of descending the Quran but in the context and unity in meaning. Quran asserts that it is a reciting concentrated of the message of Allah that began from the first holy book of the history. Thus, to know and to interpret the Quran, the Biblical background knowledge as a primary perspective of the original message of God, seems to be essential. Indeed, a believer cannot look away, ignoring the Bible or the Quran if they love to know the message of God. Thus, a clear dialogue needed to trust mainly on the most trustable message which is through the verses of the Bible and the Quran as the fully confirmed words of God and views of Muhammad(s) and St. Paul.

Moreover, if the word of Allah could not remain trustable forever, then whose words can do? Hadith? Who is a better usher for believers than the word of God? If for believers, God is not enough to lead, who can lead them? Although, the main demand is not only ushering but also saving, except how? So, the next step of the research should be finding a way to have access to God. One would ask a question though; Do Muhammad(s) and Paul have a mutual tolerant about the possibility of God being accessible by the human at all?

B. Incarnation

During the history of religions, all the messengers have spoken to the sons of Adam through the words of God. Although these communications always were familiar with the human mind, sending the messages and corresponding in the form of letters and words, was not enough for God of great love: “By word we mean an event which takes place in human relationships. Changes occur. Word reveals something to man. It in some way discloses his future history to him.” [34]. (As the article will show, Allah has an obligation to reach to the creation and save them). So, the creator came closer by more revelations in various ways, while humanity was seeking the One who revealed himself through the holy message. However, to find the right path, believers in God needed to know one vital issue; How much God is different from the word of God?

In the Quranic perspective, Tawhid is the doctrine of the Oneness of God, the core idea which has grown mainly in surah 112: “Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him” [28]. The controversial impression of this verse has not only questioned the historical position of the title of “son of God” in the Christian perspective but also brought into question the Islamic theology about the nature of the Quran as the word of God. A historical argument which seeks the answer to the question of: is the Quran the eternal Word before the creation, or Allah has created this book? (Like the relationship of Christ, as the son of God, to his Father in heaven by the Christian terms).

Historically, Al-Ma'mun was the first Islamic Caliph who declared that “The Quran is created”, like the position of the rationalist (Mu'tazilite) and implied that “the Quran was a worldly object, not itself part of the divine being” [35]. The position which was respected by Shi'ism as a minority group in Islam [35]. However, if Allah has created the Quran, then at some point in time, the Quran had not been created yet, and could not be a perfect eternal manifestation and instruction from Allah [36]. Moreover, if the Quran was created then human could change it like any other objects in this world. So, in the case of rejecting the idea of the Quran as the eternal word of God, this book will not be the book of the highest authority in the Islamic faith. Moreover, the Quran is more than a worldly message which (against the Bible as Muslims believe) is voiced by Allah the eternal God. Is it possible that Allah's

voice was not alive or will not alive at a point of time? No, the Quran is a moving message. However, if it was, then how could people trust such a downgraded message limited in the created world that has initially been instruction for the seventh century? This idea can be possibly a false Islamic faith.

On the contrary, accepting the idea of the “uncreated” nature of the Quran could elevate the spiritual power of Allah through the divine revelation, above all authorities in this world [35]. So, more Muslims believe in the uncreated Quran, which is free from any human influences, meaning that the Quran added to the words and verses, has a holy nature [24]. Nevertheless, the book *Herself* declares that its message primarily has come for the Arabs in Mecca of the seventh century (Q6:92). Thus, the revelation of the Quran should include a holy nature in a consistent form and shape for communicating with an exclusive community. In this way, Quran has two natures, a heavenly nature which is not limited to time or place and an earthly nature which is limited to a time and place. However, the essence of holiness usually is not detectable for all the readers and may be accessible only to those who have faith in the eternal word of God. Whereas millions of Shi'ites Muslims do not believe in the eternality of the Quran [37]. A reality which is very similar to understanding Jesus' eternal holiness behind his humanity.

So, while the Prophet(s) spoke the first verses of the Quran in his aeon, he could fathom the holiness or the reflection of divine essence of the message of the Quran. It is true that the Quran was a revelation of the word in his heart (Q94:1), by which God was changing the hearts of believers and was working through new Muslim communities (by recreating the communities). In a biblical view those revelations could be incarnated divine being through the verses; they were the holy words and not made up by God only for reading and listening. Was the Quran in the Islamic view, a revelation of the Holy Spirit of God which had become accessible in the form of the 'Arabic language', which technically was a new-born language in its time as a vocal message, or not? [27]. It is possible for the followers of the Quran to believe so. Therefore, it is also possible for the Quran to be eternal and incarnated through Muhammad(s)'s vocalizations.

Hence, to know the real character of God and to see if Allah is capable of having a revelation by using the incarnated word, believers may look back toward the way that the truth behind the verses of the Quran originated as the holy words of God from heaven. (in the spiritual view, even only one word)

B.1. The Origin of the Quran

As the Quran reveals Gabriel, the angel, has a significant role in the descendant of the Quran [28]. Also, most of the scholars agreed that the Quran at the first step, was revealed by him [24], [38]. But the secret point is: who was the sender of the verses to the heart of Muhammad(s)? Was He (or She) only the angel, a holy person, or Allah, the one who has the leading voice in the Quran? According to Q97:1-3, the Quran was being disclosed and descended to the heart of Muhammad(s) in one night; “Indeed, We revealed it in (the) Night (of) Power (laylat-al ghadr). The night which is better than a thousand months” [28]. Except how? It is possible that the Quran has revealed to the messenger in two separate phases; in the first phase by Gabriel, in the cave of Hira where Muhammad(s) was being introduced to the word of Allah. Within the next 23 years, he also received instructions and teachings to convey onto his existing listeners. In the second phase, the words were inspired through a revelation as a ‘whole concept’ of the Quran, to the heart of Muhammad(s) in the “Night of Power” (laylat-al ghadr) (Q97:1) [28]. This message was sent seeing the knowledge and condition of its listeners. However, the message of the Quran was a revelation of the “Mother of the Book” in Q43:4.

“And indeed, it (is) in (the) Mother (of) the Book with Us, surely exalted, full of wisdom” [28].

So, who is the sender of the Quran? Firstly, he was all-wise and all-knower:

كَلِمَ عَلِيمَ

“And indeed, you surely, receive the Quran from [near] the All-Wise, the All-Knower” (Q27:6) [28].

In a textual study, there are two nouns and one adjective in this verse: “ladun” (from near); genitive noun, “Hakimin” (All-Wise); genitive masculine singular indefinite noun, and “Alimin” (All-Knower); genitive masculine singular indefinite adjective (Q27:6) [39]. The verse articulates that the Quran was influenced by someone whose identification would come after the word ‘min’ (from), to answer the question of: ‘from whom?’, “min ‘ladun’ ...”.

The noun *ladun* (near) tells that the “Wise” is close and ‘near’, in attributives, level of authority, and spiritual similarities, to God (the same level of God or the “form” of God in Pauline Christology).

Secondly, one thing in this verse is well-defined; the sender of the Quran truly knows everything and should be referred to as God. While, if there is nothing like a divine person or like God, what is the meaning of “*ladun*” [40] and who or what is ‘near to God’? for using “near” one would need two things, and what is the second thing. Another god?! Alternatively, maybe, the Wisdom of God, is the Wisdom capable of sending the message of God? The Quran articulates that the wills of God will be done through the Word: “(The) Originator (of) the heavens and the earth! And when He decrees a matter, [so] only He says to it “Be,” and it becomes.” (Q2:117) [28]. So, who could have sent all the Quran in one night? (Q97:1) [28]. As a helpful clue, surah ‘the Star’ (Q53:1-11) is informing the listeners about the particular way of the revelation of the Quran:

“By the star when it goes down, not has strayed your companion and not has he erred, And not he speaks from the desire. Not it (is) except a revelation revealed, has taught him the (one) mighty (in) power, Possessor of soundness. And he rose, while he (was) in the horizon - the highest. Then he approached and came down and was (at) a distance (of) two bows-(lengths) or nearer. So, he revealed to His slave what he revealed. Not lied the heart what it saw” [28].

The first verses of the surah explain the mechanism of revealing the Quran to Muhammad(s). Although, in verses 9 & 10, the one who came down from the highest and approached Muhammad(s), has revealed the Quran to His slave. However, respectfully, whose slave is Muhammad(s)? Not God, the one who is in the highest place? So, is Gabriel at the same level as God in the highest? Surely Muhammad(s) was not Gabriel’s slave. Then from the Islamic side of the dialogue, considering the concept of the “*ummi l-kit bi ladayn*”, “Mother of the Book with Us (God)”, who is the “exalted and full of wisdom”? Is he an Angel, a messenger, or God Himself? If the verses are pointing at God, is it possible for God to come down? Considering the eternal, holiness nature of the Quran as an incarnated word, and if one believes in an eternal Quran which is a revelation of Allah, is this book a manifestation of God’s nature in a relational and interactive form? So, the mystery here is: God is gracious enough to make a relationship with believers who called upon him, even by coming lower than His divine spiritual realm. So, how does God prepare a way of relationship with believers? Considering that “it is impossible to grasp or to contain the essence of God through the human intellect”[41], the Quran also asserts (Q6:103): “(Can) not grasp Him the visions but He (can) grasp (all) the vision, and He (is) the All-Subtle, the All-Aware”[28].

B.2. Is It Possible?

In the contemporary Islamic faith, grasping Allah like a holy Person who embodies a divine character, is against the first premise of monotheist. Allah is beyond the reach of the human mind. In other words, any revelation in a visible form is impossible for Allah [42]. Although the Quranic verse of Q6:103 does not reject that if Allah’s will come upon a revelation through an understandable device, human being can comprehend Allah by their intelligence and mind. For example, the Quran was with God before any creation which has come for human being to enlighten their mind and help their faith: “This (is) enlightenment for mankind and guidance and mercy for a people who are certain” (Q45:20) [28]. Thus, for Muslims revelation through the Quran, and Christians revelation through the person of Christ, can be the way that they find God without the vision of the worldly eyes.

From the Christian side of dialogue also, God is invisible. For example, in John1:18 & 10, the sinful human nature could not comprehend the light that God sent to this world. In the same way that the Quran in Islamic faith has been with God before the creation, Logos as the word and in the “form” of God has been with God before the creation. Although, Christians worship God by the titles of “son of God” or “Heavenly Father”, they believe simply in the one truth and essence of God, which is without rival. Besides, the Bible never advised worshipping the “son of Mary”. Thus, after seven centuries of ascending Christ to heaven, Christians would not be annoyed if the Quran reminds them that “the son of Maryam” was only a messenger and should not be worshipped.

B.3. The Face of God

The idea of ‘God, who became flesh’, remains beyond the red borders of the Islamic faith, even by a deep and spiritual perspective of Sufism (which has focused on a more mystical belief system), and by tracing the essence of God in all creation. Sufism answers to this idea: “The focus in Islam is not how Allah manifested himself to his creatures; rather it is God’s nature and his essence in all things that are captured in living, in things known and unknown, in the temporal realm and the world beyond our understanding” [43]. Also, the Quran settling the presence

of Allah in the creation, asserts that His presence is meaningful only for the believers who look for 'His face' (vajhahu). However, the Quran going further than Sufism asserts that believers also can seek a relationship with Lord even without the presence of the Prophet(s): "Send not away those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His face. In naught art thou accountable for them, and in naught are they accountable for thee, that thou shouldst turn them away, and thus be (one) of the unjust" (Q6:52) [44]. However, what is the meaning of "face" that the Quran uses? In another verse it says: "And who (is) better (in) religion than (one) who submits his face to Allah and he (is) a good-doer and follows (the) religion (of) Ibrahim (the) upright? And Allah took Ibrahim (as) a friend" (Q4:125) [28].

Explaining the act of submitting one's face to Allah is an excellent example of spiritual interpretation through which, one would read between the lines. This submission reminds the hearer of 'giving in obedience', 'submitting one's life', or 'leaving belonging to seek God's will'. The submission also can be applied to the spiritual, ethical, mental, and all the expressions of the human essence. Besides, there is another meaning for 'the Face': "And for Allah (is) the east and the west, so wherever you turn [so] there (is the) face (of) Allah. Indeed, Allah (is) All-Encompassing, All-Knowing" (Q2:115) [28]. Further, by way of the Sufism views, the face of God is the East and the West and all the things that we can understand from everywhere. So, the Face of Allah in the Quran, and by this interpretation, must be the comprehensible part of God's essence, which has reflected in the divine revelation through the creation. Therefore, when the Quran discourses "returning to the face of Allah" (kullu shayin h likun ill wajhahu ... wa-ilayhi tur'ja na) in Q28: 88, [28] the "face" is a full expression of the essence of Allah, which is eternal and never could be perished. It also can explain the purpose of the act of returning to Allah in other verses like Q2:156; "Those who, when strikes them a misfortune, they say, "Indeed, we belong to Allah and indeed we towards Him will return." A theme, which has been repeatedly mentioned in other verses by some phrases like Ilayna (toward us), or ilayn r ji na in Q21:93, and; il rabbihim r ji na in Q23:60 which means returning toward their God. So, in human comprehension capacity and in this concept, Allah is not a different being from the "face" of Allah. They are one except the "face" is accessible.

Therefore, (and by empowering the Pauline Christology) the "face of God" in the Quran, should be the first expression of God in His creation and not the creation itself, which is not the creator (Subhan Allah). However, the expression of God, also can be the Creator of everything. The image of the divine being is comparable with the reflection of one's face in the water. Moreover, as the Quran mentions, all the creation will return to the One, who at the beginning and before all creation, had been revealed.

B.4. The Word

The word, as a way of communication through the Christian and Islamic Scriptures, builds up and develops the religious communities and nations, respecting the divine purposes and the will of God through the holy books:

"For Muslims, the Word of God made the Quran is still with them to this day. They have ready access to it, resting on the top of their bookshelves out of respect for its elevated and sacramental position. Muslims in fact sacramentally interact with the Quran, and thus with the Word of God, through reading, reciting, and listening to it on a regular basis. The performance of dhikr (remembrance) with the Quran is a fundamental aspect of not only Sufi practices but also of the general Muslim population. The message of the Quran, being at the same time historical (available in this world) and transcendent (part of another world), is infinite, for "if the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent." (Q18:109) As such, the message will always be complex and ever understood in a new and different way. In the same way that the Christ is both pre-eternal and trans temporal, but at one point historically part of this world, the Quran is a metaphysical document of the same nature" [45].

Thus, Allah through the word may express His will in creating all the material and spiritual realms (although God may not be precisely the Word); Though His "word" never moves from the status of the truth and the just will of God: "And (has been) fulfilled (the) word (of) your Lord (in) truth and justice. No one can change His words, and He (is) the All-Hearer, the All-Knower" (Q6:115) [28]. Also, words from the Quran's perspective carry the messages in variable levels of spirituality, and the outcome of these messages can be detectable as the good and evil of this world (Q9:40) [28]. Like the "word of profanity" in Q9:74, or the "word of piety" in Q48:26, which are messages related to the various levels of virtuousness.

Moreover, another aspect of the word of God is God's promises that can be fulfilled through real events of history (Q7:137) [28]. However, Allah's words are not like the words of humans, and He never talks to people, like another

person does. So, Allah appropriately speaks to humans merely by conducting or sending the message or the words to one's heart, by speaking from behind a veil that can be a physical barrier, and by sending a messenger to speak the message of God (Q42:51) [28]. However, the best way of communication that is possible for God only, is bestowing the message in a 'perfect form' beyond the time and without changes. Though, this form of message needed to be an available device for human being. Thus, the incarnation is the only way that the word of God can be accessible. In this method of messaging, the perfect being of Spirit of God comes and remains with the word of God, which is the message, instead of creating a message which can be manipulated and cannot be as perfect as God is. However, how can God bestow the "word" to remain with human, except by giving "flesh" to the eternal word?

B.5. The Rope of Allah

Another metaphor that the Quran has used for picturing the communication device is the 'Rope of Allah'. This metaphor was useful to clarify the truth behind the human form of Christ for Christians as the first listeners of the Quran. It looks like for the Quran, "Logos" could not be necessarily the only allegory for the "form" of God incarnated in the form of a servant, as it is in the Quranic account of bestowing the word from Allah to Maryam.

The Quran commands the followers that they have to come together around a 'rope' which will guide the ones who submitted to God: "And hold firmly to (the) rope (of) Allah all together and (do) not be divided. And remember (the) Favour (of) Allah on you when you were enemies then He made friendship between your hearts then you became by His Favour brothers..." (Q3:103) [28]. So, what is 'the rope' of Allah? If this rope is from Allah, how do the believers ensure that this way is accessible by human abilities? The Quran has another explanation which is helpful here (Q3:112); "... struck on them the humiliation wherever they are found except with a rope from Allah and a rope from the people. ..." So, this essential leading connection, the "rope", does not only connect and belong to Allah, but it is also a rope of human beings; a rope that does exist among the community of believers and which keep people safe from the wrath of God. In this verse, the Rope has two ends linked in two natures, divine and human. In the Islamic faith, this Rope can be known as the Quran, which is the word of God [46]. As the same as Christ for Christians, who claimed that he is the way toward God: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (ESV Strong's).

Then, so far, the research can assert that Allah is accessible by the ways that Allah knows. However, is it possible that Isa represents Allah in the world more than any other one?

B.6. The Creator

From the Islamic perspective and in case of accepting the infinity of the Quran's godly nature as the word of God (mentioned in the earlier parts), one would compare Isa al-Masih with the 'Quran' as 'two forms' of God's incarnated word. Christians believe that Isa was incarnated and a revelation of the word of God who had already been gifted to Jews six centuries earlier than the Quran, rather than a merely created messenger. Thus, the ideas of 'the word of God in the heart of Muhammad(s)' and 'the word of God in the body of Mary' are similar. Axel Takács have planted more cognitive researches in this area in his fascinating Quran studies [47].

Moreover, Isa al-Masih has portrayed the word and the spirit of God in a new-born body by reading of Q4:171 in "Imam Mufti" and "the Quran's Arabic Corpus" websites:

"إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْفَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ"

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| "Inna ma: | the only truth is [48] |
| al-maseehu ibnu Maryam: | the Messiah, son of Mary, |
| rasul-Allahi: | is the messenger of Allah, |
| wa kalimatuhu: | and his word, |
| Alqaha ilaa maryama: | which He bestowed to Mary, |

wa Rooh-hunn: and a spirit,
minhu: proceeding from Him" [49].

In addition to his real position as a human and a messenger, the son of Maryam is a word of God who was bestowed or conveyed onto her, not created, and he was a spirit who was proceeded from God, not created by God [28]. Also, in another verse, the Spirit which has been breathed into Maryam was not a created spirit but the Spirit of the Creator: "And Maryam, (the) daughter (of) Imran who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into it [her] of Our spirit... فَفَخَنَّا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا ...And she believed (in the) Words (of) her Lord and His books, and she was of the devoutly obedient." (Q66:12) [28]. The first question of this verse should be, who is the personal cause of this sentence? If the Quran is the direct voice of Allah to human, then who is the one that breathed the "Our spirit" "into it"? Much more important question; is "Our spirit" still "holy" or not holy? If it was holy, then the Islamic side of the dialogue is not against the Christian side in this argument, because they both believe in the Holy Spirit who was proceeded from God. Though, everything belongs to God, so if the verse says that the spirit is "Our" spirit, should not be surprising. This unique Spirit was "breathed from God" not created like the spirit of angels and other living things. Besides another critical question comes after: where exactly is now, the "Our Spirit" that had been breathed into Maryam? Has it vanished without doing something? Where is this divine being of "Our Spirit"?

Furthermore, Isa, the son of Maryam was not the succeeding of a sexual relationship and human instinct between a man and a woman like all other human and animals; In his formation, there was not any trace of human will or pleasure (I assume both sides of dialogue believe so). So, he should be a different being. Also, why Allah did not merely say to him "Be" and he was there? What was the reason for proceeding the Spirit of God to Maryam and why bestowing the word of God to her, instead of creating? Just by the same way that Allah says He will create the human flesh of Isa in the body of Maryam; "She said, "My Lord how is [it] for me a boy, and (has) not touch(ed) me any man?" He said, "Thus Allah creates what He wills. When He decrees a matter then only He says to it, "Be," and it becomes" (Q3:47) [28]. So, Allah created "a boy" in her body, who in his tissues and cells had the same cellular components (unlike other human being who had two sets of cellular elements from mother and father). But bestowed His word and breathed from "Our Spirit" into it. Thus, is the Quran notifying its hearer of Isa, the son of Maryam with one human nature, or Isa with more than one nature?

In the same way, Allah did not create the Quran in "the night of Power" by merely saying "Be" to a complete book, asking the prophet to read and copy that book for others, but bestowed the Quran to the Prophet(s). Is it possible that the Quran and Isa, were two forms of the incarnated holy word of God? Incarnated Creator in the form of an alive and moving servant for serving humanity in building a relationship between the Creator and creation.

B.6.1. Objection

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental apologetical objection from the Islamic side; if Isa had been incarnated, why the Quran asserts that Isa is like Adam? "The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be". And he was." (Q3:59, Yusuf Ali translation 1985) [28]? This verse frequently has been used to emphasize the human nature of Jesus Christ by defending the idea of the "created Jesus" [50]. So, to have a proper spiritual interpretation of this verse, one would have a look at the whole third surah of Ali-Imran. This method of interpretation is like finding more than one dote, to draw a straight line between two dotes and is essential for following the whole spiritual situation of the verse.

Given the composition and meaning of the verses, scholars may pay attention to the central plot of the birth of Isa, which appears in about the middle part of the surah three. According to the first law of interpretation of Lund, this composition of evocative subjects can be categorized through the "concentric composition":

"The centre is always the turning point. The centre may consist of one, two, three or even four lines. We can leave the number of lines to one side. The important thing is the role of the centre as a turning point. The F ti a is a perfect illustration of this law. The centre ('It is You whom we adore, and it is You whom we implore') makes the transition between the first piece, which is a prayer of adoration of God under some of His most beautiful names, and the third piece, which is a prayer of petition to be guided in the right path and not along the path off those who have gone astray" [51]. So, how could this central concept devote to the reading of Q3:59?

The third surah of the Quran is about the father of Maryam, mother of Jesus, and starts with explanations about blasphemy or Kufr towards God and His deeds. Kufr as a verb is the act of covering the truth that Allah has revealed or denied the truth of Allah [52]. The surah continues with some elucidations about believing in God and revealing the reality of Islam as the way of surrender to God, which is goodwill against the act of blasphemy. In the next part of this surah, the Quran recites a history through which Allah chooses the messengers from Adam to Imran, the father of Maryam. Emphasizing on the way by which God creates everything using the word Be, Allah selects Maryam and gives the good news of the birth of Isa, in Q3:47. Then, the first-middle part of this passage describes the position of Isa, the son of Maryam, by mentioning his miracles like creating a clay bird and breathing out to give life to the unliving statue, as well as giving life to the dead people with the permission of Allah in Q3:49: "...Indeed, I [surely] [I] (have) come (to) you with a sign from your Lord that I design for you from [the] clay like the form (of) the bird, then I breath into it and it becomes a bird by (the) permission (of) Allah" [28]. In the next part after Q3:64, this surah investigates the meaning of kufr by the Christians and Jews of the time and continues by condemning their illusions of confusing Isa in flesh (as a messenger) with the godliness of word and spirit of God, while showing the way of salvation by grasping the rope of God (Q3:103). Finally, in the last part, the heresies of Christians and Jews from the Quran's viewpoint is being argued, whereas at the end of the surah, the Quran convinces the listeners and make them aware of the consequences of blasphemy and the benefits of believing in the message of God as one message for all the prophets, the way of submission to God which in the Quranic vocabulary is translated to "Islam".

So, if the goal of analyzing of the surah is finding Isa and his value from the Quranic perspective, then the central message can be delivered in Q3:55, in which the background information supports the legitimacy of Maryam in her pedigree as the significance of Isa's origin in flesh. The speaker of verses is emphatic to the hearers for following Jesus as a sample; "When Allah said "O Isa! Indeed, I (will) take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve[d], and I will make those who follow[ed] you superior (to) those who disbelieve[d] (KFR) on (the) Day (of) [the] Resurrection. Then to Me (is) your return and I will judge between you about what you were [in it] differing" [28].

This verse principally corresponds to the prominent issue of covering God's will in bringing up something higher than a male body of Isa and the superiority of a truth beyond the superficial male figure of Isa, during his earthly life which can be explained by the importance of (KFR) in related verses. It is interesting though that the adverb of 'will' as it is in the parenthesis is not originally a part of the text and may not reject that Isa died, but in this setting Allah is speaking to Isa and reminding him a point of time that he was still living in this world. Allah builds up Isa's spiritual level by raising him towards "Allah's self" (not rising in physical aspects but giving him the ultimate spiritual level), which also in Christian context could have far more meanings. In fact, raising Isa towards Allah, implies his superiority in Allah's categorization compares to the other messengers. Furthermore, in the next sentence; whoever follows Isa, also has superiority over those who cover the truth beyond the human form of him and do not believe in Him (obviously not believing or disbelieving in Isa as a flesh and created human, KFR implies to divine beings only);

وَجَاعِلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ

"...and I will make those who follow[ed] you superior (to) those who disbelieve[d] until (the) Day (of) [the] Resurrection...."

Besides, what was the superiority of those who followed Jesus? Followers of Jesus believe that their superiority is the gift of living with God and being in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the word of God, the truth beyond the flesh of Isa, son of Maryam. Accordingly, the superiority of believers comes by following Jesus at any time after Christ, even in the time of Islam and in the modern world. A higher status of spiritual powers such as abandoned of love and patience and honesty, that Jesus promised to his followers and they also were, and will be, his spiritual witnesses (Act1:8).

Hence, considering Lund's law in background, in Q3:55, the Quran mentions Isa's spiritual superiority by pointing at his highest place near Allah. However, if Isa was a created herald and only a human body, then how is it that superiority is given to people for following an ordinary human? Continuing the interpretation of Q3:59 [28] and considering the spiritual position of Isa during the creation of a bird, one may compare Q3: 49 and 59 by tracing and analyzing the likeness of the act of creating related to Adam and Isa while Isa is being pictured 'near' to Allah (from Q3:55); "Indeed, (the) likeness (of) Isa near Allah (is) like (the) likeness (of) Adam. He created him from dust, then He said to him, "Be," and he was." The verse is another way of saying this verse of the Bible: "Genesis 2:7 (ESV

Strong's) then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature". Then, "the Lord God formed" a new creature, a man. Thus, the act of "forming something" for God is not equal to the act of creation which is needed to be complete by "breathing into it". The Quran in here is provoking the imagination of the listeners to think about the especial creation of Adam by dust. This formation of Adam from dust before "breathing into it", is very similar to the formation of the body of Isa in the body of Maryam (Q3:47): "... My Lord how is [it] for me a boy, and (has) not touch(ed) me any man?....". The speaker of the Quran helps the listeners to imagine the creation of Adam from the book of Genesis and the one who has come alongside with the third surah of the Quran to this point, can pay attention to one critical aspect of this likeliness: 'creation for the first time'.

B.6.2. Creation for the First Time: Q3:59

The analytical textual points which help to the interpretation of Q3:59, now can be listed as such:

1. By an accurate translation of the phrase "...the likeness of Jesus (Inda) Allah," the accusative location adverb of 'Inda' has many meanings, including at, by, with, near, on, upon, in view of, according to, and not necessarily limited to, "before" or "with", as it is in Yusuf Ali's translation of 1985 [39]. This adverb reminds the hearer of the position of Isa in a spiritual level of authority and power close to Allah, while Allah was creating Adam from dust for the first time. The act of 'Creating for the first time' can also be interpreted to creating a person without any alteration of another gender and the likeness to the unique, sexless God. Moreover, the article already mentioned that Isa in the Quran is a higher character and in the spiritual level of Allah, which also is understandable through the composition of all the surah three.

2. There is no punctuation in general in classical Arabic. So, in this verse, there is no full stop sign after the word 'Adam', most of the translators have agreed to place a full stop there following their theological approach, and not because the sentence has finished indeed. (The likeness of 'Isa in Allah's sight is the same as Adam.) So, another translation of this verse is possible by removing the full stop after the word of 'Adam' which revives the link between 'Adam' and the next word by a vowel called fat-ha (Adam-a...) [53]:

... آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ...

The Adam who (God) created from dust...

So, in this case, analysis of the translation can be: "...the image of Isa 'near' Allah is as the image of [an action, or creation of] Adam, the one who (Allah) created from dust...and Allah completed this creation by the word of "Be".

3. The similarity of the act of creation by "Isa near Allah"; has been mentioned here by focusing on "Adam who created from dust". Allah with Isa near to Him created Adam, and Isa with Allah near to him created the 'clay bird' (from the earlier verse of Q3:49 which was also mentioned in Q5:110). However, in both cases, the Spirit of life has been breathed out into the shaped inanimate objects of 'dust' (another element of the likeness of the two subjects of creation; Adam and the clay Bird). The similar act of creation that required a godly authority, a divine agent to breathe into the objects which in both cases works by "He said" or "Qala", and the operator agent of creation is "Be" or "Kun".

In the Quran, this is the way that Allah fulfils His love in creation, Allah complete the work of creation and make it beautiful and perfect by the word "Be": "Only Our Word to a thing when We intend it (is) that We say to it, "Be" and it is. (Q16:40) "Only His Command when He intends a thing that He says to it, "Be," and it is." (Q36:82) [28].

Therefore, between Allah and creation, there is only one thing; the Word. So, as a divine agent, the Word might be higher than the creation as it is not a created thing but the creator of things since without "Be", nothing will be created by Allah. Then, if the Word wanted to get closer to creation, cannot be created, He has to be "Incarnated", even in the form of a 'created' body.

So, the primary purpose of the verse is raising "Isa near Allah" to the level of creator, especially when the listeners are prepared by the earlier verses like: "When Allah said "O Isa! Indeed, I (will) take you and raise you to Myself ..." (Myself, not Ourselves!). Thus, the message of the verse compared to other verses is about the raising of Isa closer to Allah in the spiritual level, and not to hold him on equal grounds with all the creation.

4. The spiritual interpretation of the whole verse Q3:59 can suggest that analysis of the verse is very dependent on knowing surah three as a whole. So, the culmination of the surah is the highest status of "Isa near Allah", whereas his body is a 'first- time' creature like the body of Adam, his real image which proves his presence near Allah, is a reflection of his authority of operating agent (as the word of Allah), in the whole creation including making Adam and son of Maryam. This similarity of the act of creation for the first time by Allah and Isa, can build up the structure of all the surah in a spiritual and meaningful map in harmony with the message of the Quran as a whole.

Therefore, this verse tells the listeners that Isa is not merely a creature, because he is not only a body. In the Quran, Isa is an amazing human body and a first-time creature, but also, he is the word and the spirit of Allah. Moreover, creation by Allah and the crucial role of Isa in this surah, explains the metaphors through which Allah informs the listeners of His power, skills, and authority on giving life to creation through the word and the spirit of life. Moreover, in Q3:59, Isa is not a body only, neither for Allah nor for those who believe in him.

In this way, the Creator made all the creation by the word of "Be", but what arose after creation? Human being destroyed creation by errors and accepting the evil powers of this world. Thus, the misery of humanity motivated the Creator to save creation.

C. The Savior

The Quran never rejected the necessity of the existence of a savior, or the weakness of human against sinful flesh, but asserts that saving the believers is an obligation upon God, not any creature: "Then We will save Our Messengers and those who believe. Thus, (it is) an obligation upon Us (that) We save the believers" (Q10:103 also in Q21:88, Q66:11, Q26:169). In this verse, the argument of the necessity of having a savior is not directly related to the original sin of Adam for being saved (as it is in Christian faith: "original sin is the state of alienation from God into which all humans are born. Historically, original sin was connected to the discussion about the manner in which Adam's sin affects all humans, such as through the transmission of Adam's fallen nature or through God's imputation (crediting) of Adam's sin") [54].

However, Allah, as the ultimate protector, cannot ignore the demands of being saved (even if the humans are neglectful of their own need). Therefore, the argument of the necessity of having a savior between Islam and Christianity, goes back to defining the one who saves, both believe that the savior is God, but the argument goes back to "who is God"?

Reading the Quran's verses related to Christ, one question that may hit the Christian's mind would be: what is the meaning of al-Masih, for Muslims? Why has the Quran used this title and never directly explains it? Also, why has this title been used only for specifying Isa, the son of Maryam and not any other prophets?[55]. In Arabic: "'Masih" (as a word) can mean "very anointed" or "most anointed" both of which would express "a very high degree of the quality which their subject possesses" or even "anointing one" which would express "an act which is done with frequency ... by their subject" [56]. Because of the extent of the anointing, it follows logically that the anointed one, "Masih", has the responsibility and the right to anoint others, making him also an 'anointer'" [55].

On the other hand, the Quran in Q2:87, and 5:110 declares that the Holy Spirit empowers Isa, al-Masih, which makes him capable of doing many miracles. So, why? As the Quran mentioned, Isa is the word and spirit of Allah, but what was the reason for His presence in the world? Why Allah bestowed "the Word" onto Maryam? Then why the son of Maryam was al-Masih? Was Jesus indeed, the savior in the eyes of the Quran? For learning the truth, the Quran has some clues for researchers. The most critical example has come in Q7:157:

"Those who follow the Messenger-Prophet, the Ummi, whom they find written down with them in the Taurat and the Injeel (who) enjoins them good and forbids them evil, and makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful to them impure things, and removes from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them; so (as for) those who believe in him and honor him and help him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him, these it is that are the successful"(Shakir translation) [28].

(Taurat: Torah, The Mosaic scriptures. Injeel: The good news of the New Testament).

The verse has come in a series of rebuking and advising Jews. So, the act of “removing the burden and shackles” refers to the salvation of Israel, which was intended to be done by the savior-prophet. So, who is this Quranic savior? A Jew, a Rabbi, or the Prophet Muhammad(s)?

The foremost controversial word in this verse is *al-umiya* (the *Ummi*) [57], which mostly has been translated as ‘unlettered’ and ‘gentile’. Although, naming Muhammad(s) as an unlettered prophet is not sincere for the new Muslim generations [58]. He was a trade man and could not be unlettered. Also, the modern Islamic commentators, rejecting the assumption of “unlettered prophet” claim that Muhammad(s) was a non-Jewish and then a gentile, so he was the *al-umiya* prophet in this verse. Thus, the second meaning was more applicable to him; “the gentile prophet”.

The problem of this idea though, is that the translators obtained the subsidiary meaning of this word, which refers to nations other than Israel, whereas the Quran has utilized the same word, in a plural form of “*Ummiun*”, to refer to some of the Israelites in Q2:78: “And among them (are) unlettered ones [*Ummiun*], (who) do not know the book except wishful thinking and not they (do anything) except guess” [28], which means the word *al-umiya* in the Quranic vocabulary does not necessarily refer to a non-Jewish position. Besides, considering the location of the verse in the middle of the accusations and rebuking the rebellious Jews, the direct recipient of the order to telling the truth in the next verse of Q7:158, is Muhammad(s) himself: “Say, “O mankind! Indeed, I am (the) Messenger (of) Allah to you all, the One for Whom (is the) dominion (of) the heavens and the earth. (There is) no god except Him, He gives life and causes death. So, believe in Allah and His Messenger, *Ummi* [the] Prophet the one who believes in Allah and His Words, and follow so that you may (be) guided” [28]. Allah directly commands Muhammad(s) to order Jews (mainly) to obey Allah and the *al-umiya* prophet from the last verse. So, Muhammad(s) has been sent to preach to the people to follow the ‘*al-umiya* prophet’ who primarily has been defined as the savior of Israel. So, why Allah did not guide him to ask people “follow me” as Jesus had asked the Israelites and his followers? In the Quranic view, all the messengers of Allah have been sent to be obeyed by religious people (Q4:64).

Through an alternative possible interpretation, the prophet(s) in this verse is advising the hearers to obey him in following Allah and the ‘*al-umiya* prophet’. The reason for this possibility comes from some facts:

1. Isa al-Masih was mentioned for Jews and Christians in their books, but Muhammad(s) was not mentioned in the Mosaic scriptures, nor the New Testament. The claim is not convincing enough that Moses in the Old Testament is referring to Muhammad(s): The Lord your God will raise for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers, it is to him you shall listen.” Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV Strong’s). “... A prophet like me from among you...”: So, to be a prophet like Moses, the one who will come needed to be their leader and bring them out of slavery. However, this prophet should be among Jews, and they already knew him. Who can believe that the prophet Muhammad(s) was the leader of Jews, and they already knew him? Thus, the verse refers to a Jew prophet that cannot be Muhammad(s).

2. In the New Testament, the Prophet(s) was not cited, especially as the ‘Praised One’ as in another contemporary Islamic claim. Also, Q61:6 does not refer to the Prophet(s): “And when said Isa, son (of) Maryam, “O Children of Israel! Indeed, I am (the) Messenger of Allah to you, confirming that which (was) before me of the Taurat and bringer of glad (of) a Messenger to come after me, whose name (will be) Ahmad” But when he came to them with clear proofs, they said, “This (is) a magic clear.” (Q61:6) [28]. The reason in this case related to the position of the Prophet Muhammad(s) in the Quran.

The sender of the Quran has mentioned Muhammad(s)’s name, only on four occasions (and the authors under the Prophet’s(s) supervision has written down in the pages of the Quran) and in none of these occasions was he the subject of praising [59]. In another consideration, it is not possible that the Prophet(s) mentioned himself as the one who is praised by the Quran [32]. Moreover, “...And if not (for the) Grace of Allah upon you and His Mercy, not (would) have been pure among you anyone ever...” (Q24:21) [28]. (Respectfully it should not be offensive for Muslim friends because this verse is Muhammad’s(s) position in the dialogue as well as the Quran). So, the Prophet(s) knows that his purity (and every good thing for him and any human) is from God who is the Praised one. Accordingly, he was too humble to know and to preach himself as the Praised one.

3. Muhammad(s) was humble enough to tell the writers of the Quran to write down in Allah’s written book that he is a messenger like many other messengers of God not the savior [70]. That is why Allah asks Muhammad(s): “Then can you cause to hear the deaf or guide the blind and (one) who is in an error clear?” (Q43:40). Also, “Say: I am no new thing among the messengers (of Allah), nor know I what will be done with me or with you. I do but

follow that which is inspired in me, and I am but a plain warner" (Q46:9) [28]. Although Muhammad(s) is the beloved one of Allah, he never claimed to be more than a warner and bearer good news (in this case) for Christians and Jews and not the one who removed the burdens indeed: "O People of the Book! Now hath come unto you, making (things) clear unto you, Our Apostle, after the break in (the series of) our apostles, lest ye should say: "There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner (from evil)": But now hath come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner (from evil). And God hath power over all things." (Q5:19 Yusuf Ali, 1938) Also: "Say, "I have no power for myself (to) benefit and no (power to) harm, except what Allah wills. And if I would know (of) the unseen, surely, I could have multiplied of the good and not (could) have touched me the evil. I am not except a warner and a bearer of good tidings to a people who believe."" (Q7:188) [28].

4. The Arabic word of Umm means Mother and the word al-umiya, more realistically, is to be translated as 'related to mother', or 'Maternal' [60]. Through a better translation of contemporary translators, Bilal Muhammad translates: "Those who follow the messenger, the Prophet of mother wit, who they find mentioned in their own scriptures, in the Torah and the gospel..." (Q7:157) [28]. Although, he has not still taken the main point of the word "Umm", it is interesting that this translator has not changed the translation of "mother" completely. He used this word to put an intimate meaning into the text (Mother wit: having a common sense). Thus, the meaning of the "al-umiya Prophet" in the Quranic views, most likely, is a maternal prophet, the one who was prophesizing from the first day of his birth and could be a prophet 'originated from Mother' without a male interfering with being born: "When Allah said, "O Isa, son (of) Maryam! Remember My Favor upon you and upon your mother when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, you spoke (to) the people in the cradle and (in) maturity" (Q5:110) [28].

Isa was the only one who the Old Testament (including Torah) has written and promised to come, and the New Testament wrote his teachings and advice to Jews as a teacher to enjoin all good and forbid them evil. "...And confirming that which (was) before me of the Taurat, and so that I make lawful for you some (of) that which was forbidden to you." (Q3:50) [28]. Moreover, he was "a Messenger to (the) Children (of) Israel" (Q3:49) [28]. In the Quran Isa is a different messenger since he is the al-Masih, the anointed one by the Spirit of Allah (Our Spirit); a divine being that was proceeded from God and could be the "light" to whom this verse is referring. His mother was the only woman in the Quran who was chosen by Allah over the women of this world and the world after: "And when said the Angels, "O Maryam! Indeed, Allah (has) chosen you and purified you and chosen you over (the) women (of) the worlds."" (Q3:42) [28]. He is the one who could "remove from them their burden and the shackles which were upon them". Because Moses did it for them in the earthly exodus from Egypt and Isa could do the same for them in a new form of the exodus from following the Mosaic Law without knowledge. So, they could find their freedom by following their new prophet and teacher as they knew him as "Rabbi Jesus".

Still, the message of the Quran and what Muhammad(s) cares, is surrender to Allah's commands through all the envoys. Thus, for Allah there is no difference between those who are in submission to their Lord: "Say, "We have believed in Allah and what (is) revealed to us and what was revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and the descendants, and what was given (to) Musa and Isa and what was given (to) the Prophets from their Lord. Not we make distinction between any of them. And we to Him (are) submissive" (Q2:136) [28]. So, Isa's lordship on earth and his company with the Spirit of God, does not make him a different messenger for Allah, because as a messenger, he has the same universal message (although the first motivation of incarnation of Christ was to be known like other human beings in order to ease a relationship with God). In the Quranic perspective, believers to God are meant to follow the instructions of the only God, not believing in a human form, no matter the Herald is a man or a woman, Arab or Jew.

Hence, considering confirmations and supportive position of the Quran toward the Bible and the incarnated Jesus before the crucifixion, the character of Isa, al-Masih for Muhammad(s) is not very unlike to the Pauline Christology. Although after delivering the message, there is a vast difference between the one who saves and the one who needed to be saved. So, what the Quran says about the way by which the Lord saves through the act of self-sacrifice?

D. Crucifixion

"And for their saying, "Indeed, we killed the Messiah, Isa, son (of) Maryam, (the) Messenger (of) Allah." And not they killed him and not they crucified him, but it was made to appear (so) to them. And indeed, those who differ in it (are) surely in doubt about it. Not for them about it [of] (any) knowledge except (the) following (of) assumption. And not they killed him, certainly." (Q4:157) [28].

About ten years ago through an impressive work of research, Todd Lawson published a book to clarify the analysis of Q4:157. In the first chapter of his book and before a fascinating historical criticism of different translations and interpretations of this verse, Lawson wrote; "...the Quran itself is neutral on the subject of the historicity of the crucifixion and may indeed be read to affirm it" [61]. However, why should the Quran deteriorate or ignore all the reasons and the primary purpose of Christ's self-sacrifice for the way of salvation after all the confirmations for exalting Isa and authorizing the Bible? Although this research confirms Lawson's opinion, the Quran also seems to be supportive and affirming the event of the crucifixion of Isa, the son of Maryam, even historically.

So, to grasping the aim of this verse, the Middle Eastern listener through picturing the informative expression of the words, "shubbiha lahum" (which means "was made to appear (so) to them") [62], take this expression to be an indication of similarity between two things which are known to the speaker, one of which is confused with another. For example, if a silly boy put his hands on a big car which is starting to run, and push it forward while he asserts that "he" is the one who is running the car forward, this is only words on his mouth, he do not know what he says and also do nothing by pushing the car (shubbiha lahu). However, the car still is running. If the car was not running, he could not say so. Thus, if there were not any known agent to do the act of crucifying Christ, then the Jews would never have confused themselves with the one who was the real doer, the achiever of the act of crucifixion. In other words, in the Quranic picture of this verse at the first part, the Jews must have been standing right in the panorama of the crucifixion and watching Jesus was crucified, but by their wrong grasp had recognized 'themselves' as the achiever of murdering Isa and sending Him on the cross. The verse confirms that the act of crucifixion has happened indeed, while it was only a 'say from their mouth' (Wa qawli him), that "we killed" (inna qatalna), but they did not.

In religion study aspect, like as in the case of the existence a savior which passed by, in this case the difference between Islam and Christianity goes back to having faith in the Spirit of Allah ("Our Spirit"), which was proceeded to Maryam and was with Jesus when he was living on the earth, or not having faith. If Muslims acknowledged the Spirit of God with Jesus the son of Maryam, they would accept that nobody was innocent, living with God, and appropriate to be "the great sacrifice" ("And We ransomed him with a sacrifice great," Q37:107) [28] except Isa. Moreover, who had the 'will', authority, and motivation of being crucified except Isa. Also, they would believe that nobody had the authority of crucifying Isa, except Allah.

According to John10:17, Jesus 'lay down his life that He may take it up again', since in John's perspective (like Paul's understanding) Jesus was not only flesh and a human body, Jesus was a person with the holy Spirit of God. Besides, the Jews were not permitted to put anyone to death; then they had no power or authority for crucifying Isa as John 18:31 confirms. That is why the verse says 'they' (the Jews) did not kill Isa and in Q3:55 Allah asserts that He made Isa die: "When Allah said "O Isa! Indeed, I (will) take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve[d],..." However, where is Isa al-Masih now?

III. OUR LORD IN HEAVEN

The Biblical notion of Trinity developed enough to alter the dominant Jewish monotheistic faith to the Christian faith among the South Arabians in the seventh century. Christianity evolved by employing the three different images and picturing the three functional persons in one 'single essence of God'. From those figures, one name was often used by Jews and Christians as God: the name of Rahmanan, who was the "Lord of the Heaven (and Earth)": "The occurrences of rahmana in the Aramaic Bible in Ex 34:6, Ps 111:4, and 2Chr 30:9, where it is used in place of Hebrew rahum, correspond to the use of mrahmana, mrahman and rahmtan in the Pshitta" (Pshitta: the standard version of the Bible in the Syriac tradition) [63].

As an archaeological piece of evidence, one engraving written by Abraha, the Ethiopian Christian king of Yemen, began with: "with the help of Rahmanan and his Christ and the Holy Spirit" [63]. In Abraha's considerations, Rahmanan was an expression of the divine character of the Heavenly Father. In the Jewish understanding, this name was considered as YHWH God, the One who was not different from Christ for Paul [14]. So, when the Quran re-uses the name of al-Rahman, it makes more supportive motivations for the monotheistic young minds of the Arabians (at least in the South Arabian regions) to worship the character of God the Creator, "the Lord of Heavens and Earth" [64]. However, The Quran calls on God most often by the name of Allah, which in Arabic is "the personal name of the One true God [65]. In the same vein, the names that the Quran uses for calling God, had origins in the minds and souls of the first Arab listeners, one probable reason for Christians and Muslims to be very sociable with each other

for about two more centuries after the rise of Islam [66]. Hence, the invitation of the Quran to believe in Allah was, naturally, not a summon for accepting a new religion or believing in a 'New' God. The Quran did not invent another god for Her listeners; She only specified a personal (but familiar) name to point at one invisible God in heaven (Allah), avoiding any confusion for believers with many visible earthly Arabic idols. However, who was the character of Rahmanan for Arabs in that time and who is Rahmanan for contemporary believers? How correct is the way in which, Abrahah knew this character?

A. Al-Rahman is relational

The Quran introduces God of forgiveness by the name of "Al-Rahman", a name that can be found at the beginning of (almost) all the surahs of the Quran. Al-Rahman (the Most Gracious) in Q20:109 embodies a character of a just and divine judge who listens, chooses, and grants permission. However, because of the historical male-superior views and the necessity of transferring an accurate meaning to the first listeners in that culture, the Quran has mentioned this character and name of God by way of a male person;

"(On) that Day not will benefit the intercession except (to) whom has given permission [to him] the Most Gracious, and He has accepted for him a word" [28].

In a feminist perspective, al-Rahman as a divine Person has no gender, in a better view, God and any other heavenly creation by the Quran have no gender at all (Q43:16,19). One clear message of the theology of the Quran is clearing the notion of believing in God plus gender (Q112). Thus, using male pronouns for Al-Rahman does not change this fact. He has no gender but the character of intercessor, a Helper:

"He said, "My Lord! judge in truth. And our Lord (is) the Most Gracious, the One Whose help is sought against what you attribute." (Q21:112) [28], and even a refuge place for all, without being a male God (even for Mary mother of Jesus) (Q19:13) [28]. Admitting the spiritual level of this character, was like receiving the image of Jesus by believers in God without any elements of maleness in 'His' incarnated heavenly body (like what the Christian theology appreciates by the same level of spirituality for Christ on the right hand of the Father in heaven). The character who was known for Christians before the Quran as the "Lord of the Heavens and the Earth" by the name of Rahmanan, reappeared in the Quran as; the "Lord (of) the heavens and the earth and whatever (is) between both of them, the Most Gracious, not they have power from Him (to) address": "(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all between, (God) Most Gracious: None shall have power to argue with Him" (Q78:37 Yusuf Ali original translation) [28]. "The Most Gracious" is the character in whose presence the angels and spiritual beings will stand, and no one will speak without His permission:

"(The) Day will stand the Spirit and the Angels (in) rows, not they will speak except (one) who permits [for] him the Most Gracious, and he (will) say (what is) correct" (Q78:38) [28].

Because Al-Rahman is the All-Knower and except for the one who has a covenant with Him, there is not any intercession or forgiveness of sins: "Not they will have the power (of) the intercession except (he) who has taken from the Most Gracious a covenant" (Q19:87) [28]. Moreover, to confess ones' faith to the covenant (ahd) with the King or the Caliph, one would have to accept the conditions and make a contract which also needed to be confirmed by a handclasp:

"In the Quranic bay'a we have a ritual that combines ancient Arabian ideas of covenant before a patron deity, confirmed by a handclasp, with genetically related ideas about covenant found in late antique Christianity" [67]. However, is it possible to have a covenant with the Creator without a "two-sided" personal relationship and handclasp with God? Who knows? Although believers can ask this divine ruler their questions, because the "Most Merciful" always has a relationship with them and the great Wisdom to answer them in a way that they could realize;

"The One Who created the heavens and the earth and whatever (is) between them in six periods, then He established Himself over the Throne - the Most Gracious, so ask Him (as He is) All-Aware" (Q25:59) [28]. Though, even if we believe that only the messenger had this relationship, how would one ask a question from Al-Rahman if He (or She, without sex) was not respected as a Person with a free will? So, is God a person and possessed a "self" (like in this verse; "Himself") or just a divine being without personal traits? Do the names of God stand for His actions and responsibilities and will and desire, as they represent God's "self" and they all belong to God "Himself"?

Returning to the eternal, Holy nature of the Quran, was the revelation of the Quran in the form of words and letters, still the word of God that was with God before the creation? Does the Quran have a personality and makes a relationship with the listeners as a spiritual speaker, or is it a book only to read like other books? So, is it “alive”? Do people love the Quran and can feel the love of having a spiritual relationship with the Quran? Is the Creator the one who speaks to the human’s heart through the Quran? Without a personal relationship between human and the creator, there is no hope for believers for reaching to the destiny.

Quran as the incarnated word of God, tells the hearers: “And they say, “Has taken the Most Gracious a son” (Q19:88) [28]. So, there is no rival for Al-Rahman. Also, it means the Quran itself is not a rival for God, just the incarnated word of God to serve God Almighty. Although, the Merciful and the Most Gracious is a comprehensible and accessible person full of Mercy and the divine love, this relational divine being came down to visit His messenger (surah the Star) to incarnate His Holy word in surahs and verses, since there is no way to be merciful, without having a relationship with the creation [68].

Therefore, to be a faithful believer, and as the importance of having confidence in God, every Christian and Muslim needs to find the accessible character of God to have a covenant (bay’a). Except with whom?

B. He Has Got a Name

Names of God can be titles for the human mind to worship God, and they work in the heart of believers and worshipers. When worshipping God is the case, it seems God is listening, and it is not a very important matter if the believer is Christian or Muslim while they all need the Creator and they all call God’s name in their language and faith. However, if there were no face, or perspective, or revelation of God’s character, humankind never needed God’s names. So, again, the question is; do these names stand for detectable and practical persons or only refer to some traits of one person? What if one believes in both? For example, Allah, Al-Rahman, Al-Rahim. Is it possible that the names of God designed for the human mind and language to represent separate Characters and actions (like believing in Trinity), while in the spiritual language and the reality out of this world, they are naming the One essence from different angles (again, like believing in Trinity!)? In the other words, as for the human mind, names imply persons, and because of the One essence, the names refer to the traits of the same Person of God. Conversely, accepting another name for God is not equal to accepting another personality, it can be believing in the “personality traits of the one and only God” [69]. Thus, ‘The Most Gracious’ is possible to be an incarnated character as much as possible to be only a trait for Allah. She (or He, without sex) can be the same as Allah, and they would not be two gods, and this One God, Allah, must be worshipped equally: “Say, “Invoke Allah or invoke the Most Gracious. By whatever (name) you invoke, to Him (belongs) the Most Beautiful Names...” (Q17:110) [28].

C. He Will Comes in Power

So, the One who rules in the heaven eternally and always, from the Quran’s perspective is al-Rahman, who is not different from Allah. Through the Quranic eschatological perspective, the one who will come back to finish the history of the creation of this world is Allah Himself. Although, the role of Al-Rahman in the last day as the Judge of all is vital since everything goes to this character: “Not all who (are) in the heavens and the earth but (will) come (to) the Most Gracious (as) a slave”. “Verily, He has enumerated them and counted them, a counting”, “all of them (will) come (to) Him (on the) Day (of) the Resurrection alone” (Q19:93-95) [28]. One would not forget that these verses are coming from the Speaker of the Quran, who is Allah. Also, verses Q18:110 and Q41:54 confirm that people will meet their Lord on the last day. In Q29:5 the Quran says that those who have hope in the coming of Allah will meet Him. However, how?

“Wait they for naught else than that Allah should come unto them in the shadows of the clouds with the angels? Then the case would be already judged. All cases go back to Allah (for judgment)” (Q2: 210; Pickthall translation) [28].

This verse confirms Jesus’ prophecies in Mat. 26:64 “...you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven...”. So, does the Son of Man in his heavenly body at the right hand of Power illustrate Allah, or Al-Rahman, who will come to judge? Here would be different answers, but one thing is obvious: the original owner of “being” will come Himself (without sex) soon to judge, not any created being. Thus, there is no way to escape from the hands of the Creator, not through the Bible, nor the Quran, another reason for having an urgent dialogue!

Conclusion

This research was based on pieces of evidence of the first Pauline letters to the last proclamations about Christ from the Quran and Muhammad's(s) viewpoints. The historical study confirms the possibility of the effects of Christianity of the seventh century on the Quranic Christology. The context of the Quran restates some of the Biblical themes in the Arabic language and cultural perspectives. However, concerning the character of Jesus in the Bible and comparing him to Isa al-Masih from the Quran, the first troubling argument is the legitimacy of these holy books. Obtaining a form of harmony and finding comprehensible mutual theological viewpoints between the Bible and the Quran is a very hard task for dialogue between Islam and Christianity. The problem which is due to accepting the legitimacy of these books and some confusions in the meaning of their message because of the different cultural and historical origins of the Bible and the Quran.

According to Philippians 2:5-11, Paul worships Jesus Christ only as of the Lord, not in the flesh. Jesus for Paul was in the "form" of God at the same spiritual level and is the incarnated word of God and the reflection of the Creator in designing everything. He is the incarnated Lord who took the form of a servant while establishing his Lordship, and after the incarnation as the exalted Lord at the same spiritual level of authority in the "form" of God. Paul's Jewish monotheism supports his Christology; he believes in Jesus as believing in Yahweh in the flesh. Jesus on earth was a historical character and a messenger of the coming kingdom of God who was a human but not like other human beings; He was God incarnated to human flesh. Jesus after the resurrection and ascension to heaven is "the Lord" in heaven, and Pauline Christology does not reject the "new substitute Name" of God, a name that is not necessarily against the Quranic accounts of Al-Rahman.

The Quran is a holy book for Muslims which is partly a collection of instructions focusing on a limited era of the Arabian Peninsula as the earthly nature of the word and being a sample for Muslims, but as the heavenly nature of the word of God, it mostly delivers issues related to understanding the Bible which were disputed in the early Islamic world. Consequently, Muhammad's(s) perspectives can be read from the Quran, which for this research was the most reliable resource of his writings. However, Muslim scholars and interpreters hardly believe in the Bible as a resource of analysis for the Quran. The clear message of Allah through the Quran authorizes the scriptures before the Quran. Thus, knowing Jesus Christ from, without seeing the Biblical explanations about him, which includes the Pauline Christology, cannot be a perfect work in a dialogue.

Furthermore, in a spiritual interpretation knowing the image of God before the incarnation is possible by focusing on the concept of the 'Face of God' (vajha-hu) from the Quran, and the "form" or image of God in Pauline Christology. Likewise, finding a character who has the authority more than anyone, was possible by looking at the acts of God in Paul's and Muhammad(s)'s languages in accounts of incarnation, creation and saving the existence.

As hope for more dialogue and mutual understandings between religions, to believe in the 'incarnated word of God' had influenced religious faith of Islam and Christianity. In the Islamic side, having faith in the oneness of Allah and the authority of the word of Allah by considering the doctrine of Tawhid, is a traditional belief and does not reject the existence of the 'incarnated Word' as a heavenly, alive, and relational being in human form, as well as believing in the incarnated Quran. Likewise, in Christianity believing in the eternal Word, who can be revealed in a visible form to humankind, does not reject the faith and believe in the incarnated word of God in the form of a holy book. So, following the steps in which the Quran was delivered to Muhammad(s), it is possible that Muslim scholars locate some indications through which they may spot the Lord in the Quran. The one who supposed to be an interceded between God and human and can be the origin of the message of the Quran. A divine being who might have been introduced as Al-Rahman.

In feminist approaches to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his heavenly Father, using the entitlements of "Son" and "Father", and any other male referral to the divine being was a cultural priority at the first place in Christianity and is not for the human to decide to demolish their usage in worshipping God. However, believers may have faith in God and continuation of His (or Her, without sex) guidance through Holy Spirit, either by sending down the Quran for Muslims or relationship with God for all those who have received the Spirit of Lord Jesus. Thus, only by God's message, it would be appropriate to change the philosophy and direction of worship from glorifying a gender to exalting one, sexless God. Although male titles have been well-meaning indicators and a part of religious and civilizations' history, they have been used only for nursing a better comprehension of the analogy of the relationship between God and humanity. However, they are not destined to be used against the social justice by closing the doors for today's discipleship, educations or leadership of women in any shape of confessing believer's faith in religious

rituals or activities. Therefore, in case of accepting the Quran as another message of God, it would be comprehensible that the One who has influenced the Scriptures before the Quran, was clearing the analogy of the father-son relationship through a new perspective.

Eventually, through a Biblical perspective towards the Quran and vice versa, the one who has the authority for the day of judgment is God. As this research has suggested, the second coming of Christ in a visible form at the right hand of Power is not against the Quranic idea of "Allah shall come to meet the creation", although through a different language.

Thus, there are many mutual ideas that were in the attention of Paul and Muhammad(s) and their followers used to live with each other for at least two hundred years after rising Islam. The author suggests that Islam and Christianity are two different readings from one message. The message that both sides have lost significant parts of it by rejecting each other's perspective for hundreds of years and today they look like enemies to one another, unfortunately. Therefore, to going back to the peace and civilized, symbiosis life like the first two centuries of Islam, theologians are responsible for looking at the Quran and the Bible by fresh eyes.

Today is the consequence of yesterday's opinions, if tomorrow needed to be different; the judgements must be changed today!

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