

**The People of The Book, *ahl al-kitāb*: A Comparative Theological
Exploration**

By

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Declaration

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Richard Lawrence Kimball

Summary

This thesis offers a comparative theological exploration of the challenges and opportunities presented by the Qur'ānic representation of Christianity as the People of the Book, *ahl al-kitāb*, in the Qur'ānic and commentary tradition. It examines the social, cultural and historical background; through the early Arabic Christian response; and in modern discourse for the purpose of improving of interfaith dialogue and understanding of religious plurality.

The research is divided into three parts. The first part explores the Qur'ānic understanding of the People of the Book through traditional Islamic exegesis, known as *tafsīr*, of four respected Islamic scholars whose work spans more than a thousand years. These scholars are Mujahid ibn Jabr (c. 722), Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari (d. 923), Ismail Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) and Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935). The research demonstrates a wide range of opinions regarding Christians and Christianity. What the Qur'ān has to say is highly contextual. One very interesting feature of the research addresses the question concerning the salvific merits of Christianity after the arrival of Islam, as well as what it means to be *mu'min*, a believer, and the opposite, *kāfir*, unbeliever.

Part two takes a closer look at two important themes developed in the traditional commentary. Through the application of a cluster of hermeneutical devices this thesis attempts to create a greater appreciation of the social-cultural landscape leading into the dawn of Islam. The first theme is the historical construct of the pre-Islamic period, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*, the occasion of revelation, on the Arabia Peninsula and environs. The traditional commentary suggests that this period was a time of lawlessness. Islamic culture refers to the period as *al-jāhiliyya*, the Time of Ignorance. The research presented takes a wide-angle view of the of the period by examining primary and secondary materials concerning the different social, cultural, religious, economic and political factors affecting the diachronic development of the religions of the People of the Book as it comes faces to face with nascent Islam. Understanding the context of the revelation of any verse is critical for interpreting the Qur'ān.

The second theme examines the Arabic speaking Christian response to Islam. From earliest times, the extant Christian communities in contact with Muhammad and the generations that followed rejected key Qur'ānic theological criticisms of Christian faith in the Sonship of Jesus, as the Incarnation of God, as well as the Holy Trinity, as religious excesses. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that many Christians, particularly

Arabic speaking Christians living as *dhimmīs*, or protected citizens, take issue with the Qur'ānic depiction of Christianity. The research of the post conquest period examines the nuanced social and political changes that take place in the Levant region of the Eastern Mediterranean. These changes facilitate the adoption of Islamic idiom, including use of *asmā allāh al-husnā*, the Beautiful Names of God, as an apologetic tool of religious and interfaith dialogue of the time, *kalām*, a natural progression from the use of Biblical and Greek philosophic reasoning. The scholars examined include Christian *Mutakallim* Theodore Abū Qurrah, (c. 820 CE), Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī (c. 940 CE) and Paul of Antioch (c. 1200 CE).

Part Three of this thesis explores the modern use of the term *People of the Book* by several Christian and Muslim scholars in the context of our increasingly interconnected and pluralist societies. Here the focus is on the social, political and theological implications of the concept of the People of the Book. The thesis inquires what if anything has changed over the centuries of dialogue. The Muslim scholars examined include Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Ataullah Siddiqui, Farid Esack, Tariq Ramadan and Nayla Tabbara. The Christian scholars examined include Daniel Madigan, Paolo Dall'Oglio and Fadi Daou.

The findings of the research endorse the Islamic hermeneutical science of *tafsīr* by Christians interested in understanding the Qur'ān. Without a proper understanding of how Muslims form an authoritative understanding of the Qur'ān, Christians are left in a precarious position of attempting to interpret the Qur'ān through literal and personal opinion, *ijtihād*, which could stray into the area of heretic interpretation, *bid'ah*. The science of *tafsīr* is a formal system of interpreting the Qur'ān based on tradition. However, through diligence and sound scholarship more nuanced interpretations are possible provided that the primary import of a verse is understood in its occasion of revelation, *asbāb an-nuzūl*.

Through the examination of the period of *al-jāhiliyya* and in post conquest the Arabic speaking Christian it is possible to appreciate the early Christian response to Islam, as Islam becomes a world religion. Through the engaging dialogue of *kalām*, Arabic Christian scholars employ a blending of Aristotelian reasoning theology and Islamic idiom to support their belief in the Sonship of Jesus as the Incarnation of God, and use of the term Trinity. However, the use of reasoning is different for Muslims and Christians. Whereas Christians are comfortable with reasoning to lead them to greater knowledge of God, traditionally Muslims limit the use of reasoning to strengthening their understanding of the Qur'ān and would never elevate human reason above the importance of the Qur'ān.

In contemporary times both Muslims and Christians involved in interfaith dialogue and engaged in religiously pluralistic societies, understand the traditional strengths and weaknesses of the concept of the *ahl al-kitāb* and its importance as a bridge between Muslims and Christians. In societies where religious values are receding concepts like citizenship and human rights offer an alternative means of functioning together as equal citizens, but miss the opportunity to progress together as fellow believers, each coming to understand themselves and the religious other better, as on a faith journey through life and in service to God.

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Introduction

In today's post-modern, interdependent world where Muslims and Christians are increasingly living and working side-by-side there is a greater need to understand the faith of the religious other. This is necessary in order that Muslims and Christians can appreciate the commitment each makes to serve God in a manner in which their conscience dictates, without diminution of their own faith and its role in God's universal design. Therefore it is necessary for Christians and Muslims to take steps towards each other with a view of serving God by serving humanity, not as adversaries with irreconcilable truth claims, but as fellow believers, united in faith, seeking answers to the theological questions that divide us, leaving to God those differences we cannot reconcile.¹ Through this interaction one might hope that each may learn from and be transformed by the experience and knowledge of the other.² Through this thesis, as a Christian, and as a member of the Religious Society of Friends, this author hopes to embark upon such an exploration.³

¹ John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 227-232. These statements represent three of Renard's five arguments in favour of comparative theological dialogue.

² Ulrich Winkler, "What is Comparative Theology " *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe. Between Texts and People. (Currents of Encounter. Studies on the Contact Between Christianity and other Religions, Beliefs, and Cultures)* 40(2011): 238, 240, 241. Here we are starting with the basic premise that comparative theology is more than just apologetics of our home religion, but an active spiritual process involving life experience as well as sacred texts.

³ The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is a Christian denomination, a member of the World Council of Churches and the Irish Council of Churches. Unlike most churches, Friends are non-creedal in preference for being open to quite varied narrations of developing experiences of the Spirit of God at work in the individual soul. This openness encourages Friends to listen to the truth of the "other" not as an intrusive challenge to our own beliefs, but as potentially nourishing to our search for greater Truth. Robert Barclay, *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, ed. Dean Freiday, fifth ed. (Newberg: The Barclay Press, 1998), 17-22. Ireland Yearly Meeting Committee, *Christian Experience: Being Extracts From Minutes, Advices And The Writings Of Individual Friends*, 6th ed., vol. 1 (Dublin: Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, 2007), 3, 11. Citing William Penn and a Committee of London Yearly Meeting respectively. My religious background and the position of the Quakers are not necessarily formative in this study. There are, however, references where contributions are particularly relevant.

Research Aims and Questions

The primary focus of this thesis is to examine the importance, challenges and opportunities created by the Qur'ānic representation of Christians and Christianity as *ahl al-kitāb*, People of the Book, so that Muslims and Christians may come to know each other and God better.⁴ Within the study of the Islamic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* my thesis is that its exploration through the traditional commentary (*tafsīr*), although containing profound insights, is epistemologically insufficient for understanding of Christians and Christianity as well as for comparative theological purposes.⁵ Since the traditional commentary does not adequately describe the nuanced Christian self-understanding, the study of *ahl al-kitāb* requires significant expansion into the nascent socio-cultural, historical and interreligious theological terrains. This expansion is necessary in order to more comprehensively elaborate the concept of the People of the Book and recognize the possible challenges and opportunities it contains for contemporary Muslim-Christian currents of encounter, interfaith dialogue and religious plurality.

1. The Qur'ān uniquely discusses the strengths and weaknesses of several religions offering Muslims an authoritative synopsis of the religious other. The Qur'ān discusses Christians and Christianity by a number of appellations including *al-nasārā*, the Qur'ānic name for Christians, "those who were given the book," and as part of the collective *ahl al-kitāb*, the People of the Book.⁶ Sometimes the religion and virtues of Christians are held in esteem, while on other occasions the Qur'ān portrays Christians as following false doctrines, or as people not worthy of friendship. Consequently, at face value, what the Qur'ān has to say about Christians and Christianity can appear quite contradictory and is therefore in need of much greater exploration in order to avoid facile interpretations of the text and misunderstandings.

⁴ Daria Schnipkoweit, "Response To Jeannine Hill Fletcher: Is There a Natural (Catholic) Comparative Theology?," *studies In Interreligious Dialogue* 1, no. 24 (2014): 87. Schnipkoweit, citing (Von Stosch 2012: 147), notes that there is no common definition for what constitutes comparative theology. However, the objective of New Comparative theology seeks to gain knowledge or understanding of God through comparative study of another religion with one's home religion and being open to the truth of the other, 87-90. Francis X Clooney, ed. *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2010), ix-xii. Here Fredricks outlines his four components of a comparative theological approach summarized as: a diacritical process, interreligious comparison, holistic and focused.

⁵ The hermeneutic of *tafsīr* is explained in further detail under methodology.

⁶ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3. Other variant appellations acknowledge reception of divine revelations such as, "those to whom We gave the Book," "those who were given a portion of the Book," "those who read the Book before you," "Those who follow you (referring to followers of Jesus), "Those who follow him," and on occasion, "a balanced people."

2. Through Qur'ānic exegesis, *tafsīr*, it is possible to appreciate the individual merit of any particular verse and contemplate the verse's more universal applications. According to Jane Dammen McAuliffe, a highly respected scholar of Islam, the traditional commentary suggests a pattern, a *theoretical construct* of the character of Christians and their beliefs that is authoritative for Muslims. This theoretical construct does not represent the particular beliefs of any one denomination of Christianity, but rather acts as a normative, general description of Christians.⁷ This thesis therefore seeks to understand how *tafsīr* may be employed to gain a greater understanding of how Muslims view Christians and Christianity.

Tafsīr literature discusses the fact that Muhammad came into contact with various historical Christian and Jewish communities. This thesis inquires whether or not all the People of the Book are held with equal regard. Is there an inherent expectation of friendship with one community over the other? If so, is this expectation based on creedal similarities, historical confrontations, or are there other variables at work? What opportunities for dialogue and religious plurality can be discerned from these early contacts?

Through the lens of *tafsīr* problems emerge concerning the social-cultural character makeup of pre-Islamic society and the self-understanding of Christian creedal formulations that require further investigation. Although the *tafsīr* literature provides some background information regarding the occasion of revelation, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*, of the verses of the Qur'ān, the social-cultural and historical context of the revelation of the Qur'ān is not an area that is well understood. Important aspects of the socio-cultural and historical makeup of Arabian society at the dawn of Islam that might have been familiar to the companions of the prophet and their students, the *tābi'ūn*, have long since become obscure. This period of time is frequently referred to as *al-jāhiliyya*, or the *Time of Ignorance*. Use of this term creates a colourful generalisation, a historical construct, that neglects important details concerning the religious communities encountered by Muhammad. A very important point of departure for the study of the context of Islam, are the differing narratives of the origins of Abrahamic monotheism and Christianity in the region. This thesis asks, how did monotheism arrive in Arabia and how did it spread? What are the competing social-cultural and historical interests influencing the different communities' relationship with nascent Islam?

⁷ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: an analysis of classical and modern exegesis* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). 288.

On the other hand, seminal to the discourse between Christians and Muslims is the fact that from earliest contact Christians representing different creedal formulations challenged the Qur'ānic representation of Christianity as unrepresentative of their self-understanding.⁸ Who are the Christians that are described in the Qur'ān? Are the theological admonitions therein intended as warnings to Christians of all creedal formulations against potential excesses, rather than a representation of any one community's creedal formulations? In order to address these questions this thesis explores the different Christian and Jewish communities of the People of the Book from Arabia, Abyssinia and Himyar that Muhammad came into contact with, their creedal formulations, as well as any historical and social baggage that might have impacted on their encounter with Islam. This thesis contends that this period is where the Qur'ān should first be understood before postulating interpretations into future contexts.

Another important period examined in this thesis concerns the nature of the spread of Islam across the Levant following the death of Muhammad. What effect does the conquest of Islam have on the historical sectarian strife between Jews and Christians as People of the Book in the region? What effect does the spread of Islam have on Christian communities emerging into their various creedal formulations? While the conquest of the Levant may be depicted as a negative event, is there a case for suggesting that the results of the conquest are actually more nuanced, especially as evidenced by the reaction of minority religious communities?⁹

It is during the period of conquest that the Qur'ān achieves its final rendition and the work of compiling the commentaries of Muhammad and his followers begins. During this important period Islam also comes into contact with a new audience unconnected with the occasion of revelation. This occurs while Islam spreads across the Levant, North Africa and near East by Muslims who are unlikely to have ever met Muhammad. Muslims are now totally reliant on the foundations of their developing tradition and must apply the teachings of the Qur'ān in completely new contexts. Whereas Muslims are increasingly looking to *tafsīr* for guidance, is there any evidence to suggest that Christians in post-

⁸ There are notable examples of meetings between Muhammad and Christian delegations from Najran and Abyssinia discussed in *Sīra* and Hadīth literature. See further Suleiman A Mourad, "Christians and Christianity in the Sira of Muhammad," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas, et al. (Brill, 2009), 57-71. Cf. Sidney H Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian encounters in the early Islamic period*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Aldershot: Routledge, 2002), 63-87. See also idem, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 6-45.

⁹ E Gibbon, *The History of The Decline & Fall Of The Roman Empire* (Penguin, 1994), 65.

conquest Levant are aware and responsive to the example of the communities of the People of the Book in Arabia at the birth of Islam?

3. Further, this thesis inquires how Christians living in the region of the Levant formulate their liturgical and theological response to the accusations of excess discussed in *tafsīr* literature for issues such as the Incarnation, Sonship and Trinity, as Arabic becomes the *lingua franca* of the Levant and Islam the dominant culture. Is there any evidence suggesting that Christians are responsive to Islamic criticisms, adopt the use of *tafsīr*, or Islamic phraseology in defence of their own tenets of faith against Muslim interlocutors, or to strengthen the faith of their own community? What regard is given by Christian scholars to the Qur'ān and the prophethood of Muhammad?

The conquest of the Levant takes place as scholars from both Jewish and Christian backgrounds engage in the translation of Greek literature, including Aristotelian philosophy, into their respective languages inspiring the great Graeco-Arabic translation movement.¹⁰ This thesis reflects on the effect this translation movement had on levels of cooperation across the Islamic world and the effect Greek philosophy may have had on the quality of dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Furthermore, the thesis investigates the major theological and rational arguments Christians employed to support their beliefs. Do Christians and Muslims employ Greek philosophical logic and reason to the same extent?

4. Up to this point the research focus represents events and ideas that took place several centuries ago. Yet, neither the metanarratives of Islam, nor Christianity, have succeeded in converting humanity to their respective worldviews. The world today is religiously pluralistic, more interdependent and increasingly secular. Unfortunately, more often than not Muslims and Christians are socially divided even in countries where they enjoy equal citizenship. Therefore, this thesis inquires whether, or not, the Qur'ānic understanding of the People of the Book is still relevant to interfaith dialogue and understanding of religious plurality. The categories of consequence examined here are theological, political and social. This thesis inquires whether the challenges and opportunities identified in earlier chapters configure in today's secularized societies, or have new concepts like citizenship, social democracy and human rights become more important for defining relations? Finally, this thesis explores strategies that Muslims and Christians are employing to promote greater interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the

¹⁰ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), 7-8.

Middle East that may provide valuable lessons for Muslims and Christians living in the West.

Literature Review

General Literature

While examining the use of the term People of the Book one is immediately struck by the proliferation of material dealing with interfaith relations. Time and use have not yet identified the texts that merit authoritative status. To which voice(s) in today's era of 'Sheikh Google' should people be listening? Are these the voices people are listening to?¹¹ Today there are Christians and Muslims worldwide working together at community level, in practical or 'living dialogue' sometimes without demonstrating knowledge of the term People of the Book.¹² For instance, Michael Barnes notes the importance of these encounters while describing the participants as People of Faith, "People of Faith begin by living alongside one another, learning to accept one another, learning to accept each other as neighbours, sharing the same streets, schools and shops. They start engaging each other in shared projects that express their common concern..."¹³ Then there are numerous documents like *Beyond The Dysfunctional Family: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue With Each Other and With Britain*.¹⁴ Here the common link is made with the Patriarch Abraham. Use of the term People of the Book is employed simply to distinguish how Muslims innately view Jews and Christians as part of their narrative. In contrast, however, Jews and Christians can potentially exclude the religious other from their respective narratives.¹⁵

There are Christians who use the term People of the Book outside of an interfaith context to stress their reliance on the Bible as God's unerring word; Two examples of such use are found in David Lyle Jeffrey's *People of the Book: Christian Identity* and John Barton's *Literary Culture and People of the Book, The Authority of the Bible in*

¹¹ RNW Programmeurs, "Sheikh Google Confusing Young Muslims," ed. Annica Peeters (RNW, 2010). The term 'Sheikh Google' describes information from a myriad of online sources, cf RNW, www.rnw.nl/english/article/sheikh-google-confuses-young-muslims accessed 22.1. 2015.

¹² Melanie Prideaux, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue: The Gap Between Theologians and Communities," *International Journal of Public Theology* 3, no. 2009 (2009).

¹³ Ibid.: 456. Citing Michael J. Barnes S. J., in *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, 243.

¹⁴ Tony Bayfield, Alan Race, and Ataullah Siddiqui, eds., *Beyond The Dysfunctional Family: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue With Each Other and With Britain* (London The Manor House Abrahamic Dialogue Group, 2012).

¹⁵ Ibid., 102.

Christianity.¹⁶ While other evangelical Christians refrain from use of the term People of the Book even in interfaith contexts. Patrick Sookhdeo in *Islam: The Challenge To The Church* sees Islam as an aggressive challenge to Christianity with few redeeming qualities. Although he explains aspects of Islam in society by quoting the Qur'ān and many *hadīth*, he willfully neglects to use the term People of the Book even once. Sookhdeo prefers to label all non-Muslims including Christians, Jews and Sabians as “unbelievers” or “protected people,” who are forced to abide by “demeaning regulations.”¹⁷

Fortunately, other evangelical Christians do not exhibit such a negative bias against Islam. Geisler and Saleeb in *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* adopt a more scholarly approach and quote the term People of the Book as a synonym for Jews and Christians, while defending the tenets of their Christian faith against what it sees as Islamic misrepresentations.¹⁸ Sarah Snyder takes a more circumspect view of Islam and accepts the term People of the Book as a positive accolade. Snyder seeks to promote dialogue between Muslims and Christians by drawing upon Islam's acknowledgement of Christianity as having received divine revelation.¹⁹ Mixing politics and religion, former U. S. President Jimmy Carter transforms the traditional use of the term People of the Book to include Jews, Christians and Muslims, thereby making the term synonymous with the term the *Children of Abraham*. This hybrid use of the term is applied with the best intentions to promote a sense of unity of purpose in pursuit of a lasting peace in the Middle East.²⁰

From a historical perspective Justin Meggitt examines the relationship between Quakers and Muslims in *Early Quakers and Islam: Slavery, Apocalyptic and Christian-Muslim Encounters in the Seventeenth Century*. Interestingly, Meggitt discovers an appreciation of Islam amongst Quakers. This experience matured to the point where William Penn, a leader of early Friends and founder of the state of Pennsylvania, accepted Muhammad as a prophet in the universality of the gift of prophesy found in Deuteronomy. In addition, early Quakers compared their favourable treatment as captives and as evangelicals in Muslim lands with the harsh treatment experienced under British and early

¹⁶ David Lyle Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996). & John Barton, *People of the Book: The Authority of the Bible in Christianity* (London: SPCK, Holy Trinity Church, 1988; reprint, Louisville, Kentucky).

¹⁷ Patrick Sookhdeo, *Islam: The Challenge To The Church* (Pewsey: Isaac Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Norman L Geisler, Saleeb, Abdul, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006).

¹⁹ Sarah Snyder, *New Perspectives for Evangelical Theology: Engaging with God, Scripture and the World*, ed. Tom Greggs (Oxon: Routledge, 2010).

²⁰ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Inside the Middle East* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd., 1985).

American colonial authorities, without ever expressing knowledge of the term the People of the Book.²¹

Focused Literature

There is an abundance of material from lettered scholars, social activists, as well as heads of State from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds working together on projects like *A Common Word*.²² This Muslim initiative draws upon *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* 3:64 in order to encourage Christians, as People of the Book, to meet with Muslims with a view to reaching consensus on the basic parameters of belief and to cooperate for the common good of mankind. In *Muslim And Christian Understanding: Theory And Application Of "A Common Word"* the authors explore the application of loving God and neighbour to foster cooperation on pressing issues including theological hospitality, the environment, human rights and economic development.²³

M. A. Muhibbu-Din in his excellent article *Ahl Al-Kitab and Religious Minorities in the Islamic State: Historical Context and Contemporary Challenges* picks up the story of the People of the Book with Muhammad's entry into Medina.²⁴ He explores the historical context concerning the differing treaties reached between Muhammad and the Jewish Tribes in and around Medina, as well as Christians from northern Arabia, Najran and Ethiopia. However, he does not venture deeply into the area of pre-Islamic Arabia and his sources rely heavily on Islamic *sīra* material. His thesis affirms that the *Treaty of Medina* contains the preferred conditions for coexistence with the People of the Book. Where Muslims are in the majority the People of the Book are afforded religious and political freedom based largely on their socio-cultural and historical context. He further states that the advancement of *Shari'ah* in countries undergoing Islamicization, should not be feared, or opposed by the People of the Book. Rather Muhibbu-Din further calls on Muslims and the People of the Book to work together against secularisation.

²¹ Justin J. Meggitt, *Early Quakers and Islam: Slavery, Apocalyptic and Christian-Muslim Encounters in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Ingvar Svanberg and David Westerlund, 1 ed., 59 vols., vol. 59, Studies on Inter-Religious Relations (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2013). An interesting Quaker anecdote examined by Meggitt concerns the fact that Robert Barclay's original *Apology* refers to *Hai Ebn Yokdan*, the *Self-Taught Philosopher* as proof of the Quaker method of discerning truth. Disclosed in conversation autumn 2015 ISE.

²² See further Miroslav Volf, Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Bin Talal, and Melissa Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 5-Year Anniversary Edition ed. (Amman: The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought (MABDA),2012).

²³ Waleed El-Ansary and David K Linnan, eds., *Muslim And Christian Understanding: Theory And Application Of "A Common Word"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,2010).

²⁴ M. A. Muhibbu-Din, "Ahl Al-Kitab and Religious Minorities in the Islamic State: Historical Context and Contemporary Challenges," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 20, no. 1 (2000).

In an attempt to respond to the logic put forth by Islamic militants Al-Husein N. Madhany delves into the exegesis of one of the most debated verses in the Qur'ān, *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62. This verse discusses the possible salvation of the People of the Book. Through the article *Pooh-Poohing Pluralism Ijtihāding Hadith to Build a Theology of Exclusion* Madhany explores the commentary of the verse by Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir that he argues affirms extremists' opinions.²⁵ In fact Madhany criticises the noted scholar Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) for circumventing the rules of *tafsīr* in order to make an argument that the salvation of the People of the Book is secure. Rahman's failure to follow *tafsīr*, Madhany argues, exposes the inclusivist side of Islam to ridicule and in the long run empowers extremists. Therefore Madhany points to the importance of understanding and expanding the commentary tradition so that the exchange of views in modern society remains forthright and effective.

Through *The People of the Book in the Quran*, Ismail Albayrak contrasts the presentation of the People of the Book in both the Meccan and Medinan *suwar* as well as the understanding of a selection of difficult passages in contemporary and pre-contemporary times.²⁶ He argues that early Islamic scholars neglected to consider historical context when formulating their commentaries, in preference to over reliance on previous commentaries. This oversight failed to factor into consideration that the nascent Islamic community was characteristically on very good terms with the People of the Book, unless there was a specific event that interrupted relations. He notes that there is renewed interest in the West with Qur'ānic studies. Yet, western scholarship tends to employ extraneous methodologies to their analysis of the Qur'ān that can produce incredulous results. Nevertheless, he calls for Muslims and the People of the Book to consider the importance of *ta'aruf*, coming to know each other, found in *sūrah Al-Hujrat* 49:13, as a means of progressing cooperation and interfaith dialogue.²⁷

With the stated intention of promoting coexistence between Muslim and Christians in an Irish context, Ali Shehata Abdou Selim in *The Concept of Coexistence in Islamic Primary Sources: An Analytical Examination* thoroughly extols the Islamic theological basis for coexistence with an extensive exploration of traditional Islamic teachings

²⁵ Al-Husein N. Madhany, "Pooh-Poohing Pluralism: Ijtihāding Hadith to Build a Theology of Exclusion," *The Muslim World* 98, no. 4 (2008).

²⁶ Ismail Albayrak, "The People of the Book in the Qur'an," *Islamic Studies* 47, no. 3 (2008).

²⁷ *Ibid.*: 301-320.

regarding People of the Book.²⁸ Selim offers the past examples of the prophet Joseph and the Muslim immigrants to Abyssinia to inspire Muslims today to successfully live their faith in non-Muslim countries. The place in Islam for the People of the Book as potential family and friends and allies is key to forming the basis for coexistence. Selim draws attention to the historical demarcations theologians noted between different categories of non-Muslim countries in order to show that migration can be quite nuanced. For instance, there are countries where it is possible to practice Islam freely, *dar al-Islam*, or *dar al-hiyād*, non-Muslim countries at war with Muslim countries, *dar al-harb*, countries where there is obedience to God, *dar al-ta'ah*, and lands where disbelief is widespread, *dar al-kufr*. In addition, his research also examines the theological, political and economic justifications for migration. Subsequently, As Selim explains, when it comes to migration and coexistence, context matters.²⁹

There are numerous Christian scholars from all denominations who reject the temptation to view Islam as an anathema to Christianity. These scholars choose to seek to understand Islam and search for the truth in matters disputed, thus making it easier to appreciate how the *theoretical construct* of the People of the Book is formed. Scholars such as Daniel Madigan and Andrew Rippin take up the task of explaining how Muslims view the Qur'ān and interpret their sacred texts.³⁰ There are several encyclopedia works edited by the likes of Jane Dammen McAuliffe, John L. Esposito and David Thomas that provide a reservoir of insight into the Islamic world that includes traditional and contemporary trends.³¹ Other studies are more focused. Jane Dammen McAuliffe also examines specific issues relating to Christianity by explaining the workings of the traditional commentary for select verses from the Qur'ān that discuss Christianity.³² G. H. A. Juynbol in *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith* and David Cook in his essay "Christians and Christianity in Hadith Works before 900," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History* both focus on the use of Islamic Hadith that

²⁸ Ali Shehata Abdou Selim, *The Concept of Coexistence in Islamic Primary Sources: An Analytical Examination*, first ed. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 23-25, 49-55, 82, 174, 202-204. Here Christians are often categorised as non-Muslims.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 253-265.

³⁰ Daniel Madigan, "Book," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Boston: Brill, 2001). Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretive Tradition*, Variorum Collected Studies Series: CS715 (Ashgate Variorum, 2001).

³¹ "Encyclopedia Of The Qur'an," ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001). "The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito (USA: Oxford University Press 2009). "Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 5 (1350-1500)," in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History. Volume 5 (1350-1500)*, ed. Johannes Pahlitzsch David Thomas with Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, Mark Swanson, Herman Teule, and John Tolan (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³² McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*.

contributes to Qur'ānic exegesis.³³ Michael Cuypers has also gone to great lengths to provide a structured analysis of one of the most important chapters in the Qur'ān, *sūrat al-mā'idah*, in *The Banquet; A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'ān*.³⁴

Comparative Theological Literature

From a comparative theological perspective scholars like Paul Knitter, Charles Kimball, Francis X. Clooney and Jack Renard, examine the challenges and opportunities that exist through study and reflection of the theological interface between Islam and Christianity, as well as other religions. Paul Knitter in, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* examines Christian attitudes to other faiths from a range of creedal perspectives and approaches to religious pluralism. Here the scope of study moves well beyond the confines of the People of the Book to include all world religions. Knitter examines the pioneering ideas of John Hicks' *theocentric model* before proposing retention of a more Christocentric model for Christians that allows for the truth of Christ to grow alongside the truth of other faiths.³⁵ Charles Kimball in *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations* employs *sūrah Āl- 'Imran* 3:64 to describe the degree of respect Muslims hold for Christians. He offers an interpretation of the verse that accepts that religious diversity is part of God's plan and that Muslims and the People of the Book should affirm the central truth about the oneness of God. Kimball notes that the Qur'ān's discussion of the People of the Book offers both praise and criticism for the followers of previous divine revelation, while accepting the salvific value of the religions themselves.³⁶ Similarly in *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs*, Kimball demonstrates that the term People of the Book represents a positive bridge between Christians, Jews and Muslims. He notes, "However much Jews and Christians may have distorted their revelations, they are to be considered legitimate communities deserving "protection" under Islamic authority."³⁷

The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation, edited by Francis X. Clooney, offers the thoughts of several emerging scholars in the

³³ G. H. A. Juynbol, *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith*, vol. 1, Collected Studies Series CS550 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1996). David Cook, "Christians and Christianity in Hadith Works Before 900," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas, et al. (Brill, 2009).

³⁴ Michael Cuypers, *The Banquet; A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qur'an*, ed. Rafael Luciani, trans. Michael Cuypers, First ed., vol. 1, *Rhetorica Semitica* (Colombia: Convivium Press, 2009).

³⁵ Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985).

³⁶ Charles Kimball, *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian-Muslim Relations*, Third Printing ed. (New York: Orbis, 1991), 44-48.

³⁷ idem, *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002), 186-201.

revitalized field of comparative theology. In the introduction James L. Fredericks outlines, what he sees as the immediate need for Christian theologians, in light of the deterritorialization of the religious other from within our midst, to place comparative theology at centre stage. For Fredericks and Clooney new comparative theology “entails the interpretation of the meaning and truth of one’s own faith by means of critical investigation of other faiths.”³⁸ Further comparative theology is “a faith seeking understanding” as both a fidelity to one’s own tradition while at the same time creatively embracing the other. This involves being open to the other, allowing a transformation of one’s understanding of the divine.³⁹ In *The New Comparative Theology* A. Bagus Laksana relies on the bond between Jews, Christians and Muslims through the common ancestor Abraham, rather than as People of the Book. He offers an excellent example of how one historical character interacted between the three Abrahamic religions in his account of the life of the 13th century pilgrim Ali ibn Abi Bakr al-Harawi. Al-Harawi, as Laksana describes, intentionally spent time in the lands of other traditions, thereby experiencing the hospitality of the other, as a means of gaining empathy for these peoples.⁴⁰

John Renard in *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* presents a concise overview of the history of Islam and Christianity, the development of their respective theological models and possible methodologies for engagement. Renard’s intention is to demonstrate through investigation the idea that Islam and Christianity are not as incompatible as many might think.⁴¹ Citing Küng, Renard articulates the position that there is nothing in the New Testament to bid Christians to reject Muhammad and Islam *per se*. Rather, the demands of global religious plurality necessitate dialogue and understanding of one another.⁴² In the Epilogue Renard proposes the *World Theology* model as a model for future dialogue. Renard contends that the World Theology model achieves a level of theological objectivity by refraining from measuring Islam against Christian faith claims. Through this method he believes it is possible to discern common underlying truths without denying differences, even if the destination is unclear. One of the five arguments Renard posits in support of this model is the “neglected” argument championed by his former colleague at the Jesuit-run Al-Hikma University in Baghdad and the noted scholar of Islamic theology Richard J. McCarthy. To

³⁸ Clooney, ed. *The New Comparative Theology*, ix.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-20.

⁴¹ Renard, *Islam and Christianity*, xv. Henceforth referred to as *Islam and Christianity*.

⁴² *Ibid.*, xxiii. See further Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World's Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, trans. Peter Heinegg, First ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 28. Interestingly, Sidney H. Griffith expressed a similar view in conversation during the summer of 2013.

paraphrase McCarthy, the neglected argument is simply, “it is time” for bold theological dialogue between Islam and Christianity.⁴³

Methodology, Fields and Sources

The methodology employed in this thesis relies heavily on the Islamic hermeneutical tool of *tafsīr*. The thesis employs *tafsīr* to gain an authoritative understanding of a selection of verses from the Qur’ān that discuss People of the Book.⁴⁴ The thesis then attempts to overcome two fields of inquiry where the traditional commentary is epistemologically deficient for the purposes of understanding Christians and Christianity as well as for comparative theological purposes. The thesis first expands the knowledge of *tafsīr* in the socio-cultural, historical and interreligious terrains of the pre-Islamic period, referred to as *al-jāhiliyya*. Then the thesis examines the post-conquest Arabic speaking Christian response to theological aspects of the theoretical construct of the *ahl al-kitāb*.⁴⁵ The idea of direct dialogue with the People of the Book is an important aspect of *tafsīr*. However, early Islamic scholars set an unhealthy precedent by erring on the side of caution through reliance on early *tafsīr*, rather than risk possible corruption by direct dialogue.⁴⁶ Finally the thesis engages in a contemporary comparative exploration of the use of the term *ahl al-kitāb* in order to discern whether the concept still presents challenges and opportunities for modern interfaith dialogue and religious plurality.

1. *Qur’ānic Exploration: an Exercise in Islamic tafsīr*. From a comparative theological perspective, this thesis begins by exploring a selection of Qur’ānic commentaries in order to gain a sense of understanding of the authoritative Islamic position regarding Christians and Christianity.⁴⁷ The commentaries of the Qur’ān follow an

⁴³ Renard, *Islam and Christianity*, 229-232.

⁴⁴ Francis X Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep learning Across Religious Borders*, 1 ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 61. Here Clooney recommends interreligious reading of commentary as an ideal place to begin a comparative theological study.

⁴⁵ Clooney, ed. *The New Comparative Theology*. See introduction by James L Fredricks *ibid* ix-xii. Here, Fredricks outlines what he sees as four components of a comparative theological approach summarized as: a diacritical process, interreligious comparison, holistic and focused.

⁴⁶ Anol Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, And Practices*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, Textbooks Collection, USF Tampa Library Open Access Collections (Tampa: University of Southern Florida, 2012), 103-117. Michael Pickering, "Research Methods For Cultural Studies," in *Research Methods For The Arts And Humanities*, ed. Michael Pickering (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008). Pickering suggests that this form of open methodology offers the best possibility of finding new insights rather than testing existing social theories. 5-6. This approach is employed especially with regard to understanding the cultural aspects of the *al-jāhiliyya* and post conquest Levant periods.

⁴⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 8, fn. 16. McAuliffe names Charles Adams and Jacques Waardenburg, two highly respected scholars as supporting the tradition of *tafsīr* as a credible “first source” means understanding the Qur’ān and the Islamic view of other religions. See also Clooney, ed. *The New*

exegetical practice known as *tafsīr*. There are several rules governing *tafsīr* that are discussed at length in chapter one. With regard to the study of the Qur'ān the scholars examined primarily follow *al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*, commentary based on transmitted traditional sources. As such, *Al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* offers Christians a highly respected method of understanding the Qur'ān. Rashid Rida's *tafsīr* and later comments by Farid Esack offer some degree of departure from complete reliance on traditional commentary. To quite varying degrees they augment their *tafsīr* with *al-tafsīr bi-l-ra'y*, commentary that employs individual reasoning with material from the social sciences. Yet, it is noteworthy that even in this postmodern age, Esack still pragmatically attempts to locate his arguments within traditional understandings.⁴⁸ Other forms of *tafsīr* that are not investigated in this thesis include *tafsīr al-ishari*, allegorical interpretation and *ideological tafsīr* since these methods are less likely to offer a credible consensus or an authoritative basis for further investigation of the People of the Book.⁴⁹

This thesis examines the *tafsīr* of four renowned Muslims scholars across a wide spectrum of time. From the formative period it examines the *tafsīr* of Mujahid Ibn Jabr, using the modern Arabic edition.⁵⁰ From the classical period it examines Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari's, *Jami al-Bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'ān*, relying on the abridged French and English editions, as well as the English version of Ibn Kathir's *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*.⁵¹ Rashid Rida's Arabic edition of *Al-Manar*, from the General Egyptian Foundation of the Book, 1990, provides a view of the 20th century *tafsīr*.⁵²

The verses selected for examination offer a rounded view of Christians and Christianity as well as offering an opportunity for further discussion of related issues. *Sūrat al-baqarah*, (2):62 names the different religious communities of the People of the Book that the Qur'ān accepts as following divinely revealed texts. *Sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 warns Christians not to go to excess in their religion, especially in relation to the position of Jesus, the son of Mariam. *Sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 appears to affirm divine intention of

Comparative Theology, xi, Cf. Xi. Cf idem, *Comparative Theology*, 57-64. Here specifically interreligious reading of religious texts and commentary as well as providing interreligious commentary are important tools of comparative theology.

⁴⁸ Otherwise Esack could be accused of not understanding the Qur'ān and loose credibility. Cf. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Tasks and Traditions of Interpretation," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; reprint, 2008), 189-190.

⁴⁹ <http://islamicencyclopedia.org/public/index/topicDetail/id/954> accessed 22.8.16

⁵⁰ Sumia Sallabi translated the relevant verses.

⁵¹ This author considered, but rejected on grounds of authenticity, use of a text purporting to be from Ibn Abbas, *Tafsīr Ibn Abbas, Great Commentaries of the Holy Qur'an*, ed. Dr. Yousef Waleed Meri, trans. Mr. Mokrane Guezzou, 2 vols., vol. 2, *Great Tafsirs of the Qur'an* (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2008).

⁵² Abdul Haseeb translated the relevant verses from the text. Abdul Haseeb is a former editor of the *Irish Muslim*.

religious plurality. Here the Qur'ān encourages Christians and Muslims to strive in good works with people following divine revelation. The final verses examined are *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82-83. These verses encourage Muslims to expect the best from Christians.

2. *From Text to Contexts: Socio-cultural, Historical and Theological Explorations.*

Examining the socio-cultural and historical context of the pre-Islamic period attempts to enhance understanding of the communities in and around the Arabian Peninsula, relevant to the discussion of the People of the Book found in the *tafsīr* literature.⁵³ This requires the use of a cluster of hermeneutical devices and a blending of the data designed to create a circumspective or diachronic appreciation of the different social, cultural, religious, economic and political factors at work leading into the dawn of Islam.⁵⁴

The relationship with the patriarch Abraham emerges from the *tafsīr* literature as a major theme for the people of the Arab Peninsula and not just the People of the Book. In order to explore the legendary and scriptural roots of this theme further this thesis examines a variety of texts including *sīra* and *hadīth* material presented by Ling (1983) and Guillaume (2009), material from the Jewish *Rabbanan d'Aggadta*, in addition to socio-cultural and historical studies by Cohen (1987), Firestone (1990, & 2006), Ginzberg (1989), Efrati (2005) and Gil (1993 & 1999).

Another major theme is the historical construct concerning the portrayal of pre-Islamic life. In many ways it is difficult to separate the history from the legendary aspects of the time. This is a story therefore of the history, the intention of those that followed, and how they chose to remember their past.⁵⁵ Much of the romanticized version can be found in the poetry of the time. In order to gain an idea of what life was like at this time from a socio-cultural perspective this thesis examines the classic pre-Islamic poetry known as Jāhiliyya Poetry. There are a few literary approaches to studying the poetry. These are listed and discussed in the article by Jonathan A. C. Brown.⁵⁶ This study accepts the

⁵³ An example of this approach is found in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking The Historical Jesus*, 1 ed., vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 10-12.

⁵⁴ Stephen Chrisomalis, "Comparing Cultures and Comparing Processes: Diachronic Methods in Cross-Cultural Anthropology," *Cross-Cultural Research* 40(2006): 377-378. Diachronic is used here as a term employed in cross-cultural anthropology to examine a process of change. The diachronic change important here is the process that took place as monotheism developed and spread throughout the region. For examples see the Study of variations in language conducted by Alexander Magidow, "Towards a Sociohistorical Reconstruction of Pre-Islamic Arabic Dialect Diversity" (University of Texas at Austin, 2013), 38. Pickering, "Engaging With History," 193-209.

⁵⁵ Mohammed A Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam: Mind, Economy, Discourse* (Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 1999), vii-xiii. Here Bamyeh discusses the importance of keeping an open mind with regard to the intention(s) of those who compiled or preserved the material consumed by later generations.

⁵⁶ Jonathan A. C. Brown, "The Problem of Literary And Historical Sources," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (2003).

practicalities of the source and tradition critical approach.⁵⁷ This socio-cultural perspective is enhanced with a social-anthropological examination of works by Bamyeh (1999), Trimingham (1990), Kister (1980 & 1990), and from the classic work of Ibn Khaldûn (ed. 2005).

From earliest times Judaism has played an important role in the development of the Arabian Peninsula. Whether the Jews of Arabia arrived under orders to destroy the Amalekites, were fleeing Roman invasion, or settled for commercial reasons, the narrative of Judaism on the Arabian Peninsula cannot be separated from the rise of Islam. In addition, Judaism played a key role in the development of Yemen and surrounding Ethiopia. It is important therefore to examine the role of Judaism in the development of the region as a religion and as a social movement. In order to gain an understanding of the contribution Judaism played in the pre-Islamic period this thesis examines socio-historical source material by Torrey (1933), Gil (1993 & 1999), Lassner (2012), Abrahamson and Katz (1954) and Mazuz (2010). Intriguing aspects of the narrative of Judaism in the region are the expectation of a Messiah and Jewish efforts to convert the people of the Arab Peninsula to Judaism. Many studies shed light on these issues and how they may have impacted on the Jews of Hijaz. Here the works of Rabkin (2016), the Babylonian Talmud (ed. Epstein, 1971), Schochet (1991), Bokser (1993), Lecker (1997 & 1998), As-Sellabee (2005) and Shepherd (2008) add interesting insights into why the Jews of Hijaz might have been reluctant to accept the prophethood of Muhammad.

Other aspects of the culture of the Jews of the Hijaz add to their formidable contribution to the development of the region. They appear for instance to be the only community that had a formal education system, aspects of which are addressed by Lecker (1997 & 1998), Bamyeh (1999) and Margoliouth (1924). Many of the early companions of Muhammad attended school in Yathrib. They were innovative farmers and commercial traders as well as adroit negotiators. In pre-Islamic times they were masters at forging alliances and treaties for trade and protection with neighbouring tribes of various backgrounds, a skill with which they were reluctant to abandon at the dawn of Islam.

⁵⁷ Whenever possible the source and tradition critical approach is supported with collaborating historical, anthropological or sociological evidence, veering towards the critical alternative approach adopted by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993). Roger Webster, "Hijra and Dissemination of the Wahhabi Doctrine in Saudi Arabia," in *Golden Roads*, ed. Richard Netton (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993). Emrys L. Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). This thesis examines the works of three poets; A. J. Arberry's *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (1957), 'Amru Ibn Kulthûm, Imr al-Qais and Zuhair Ibn Abu Salmâ.

Christians are the religious “other” within the collective of the People of the Book to whom Jews are often compared. Although the Jāhiliyya Poetry attests to the fact that Christianity existed on the Arab Peninsula long before the birth of Islam, two other Christian communities just beyond the Hijaz also played major roles in the development of Islam. These are the Kingdoms of Abyssinia, in modern Ethiopia, and Himyar in modern Yemen. The former was a stable land and refuge for early Muslims and the latter a land plagued with a history of sectarian strife between Sabians, Jews and Christians. To gain a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between these two regions this thesis examines pertinent *hadīth* and *tafsīr* materials mentioned above. These early texts contain some of the first Christian communities’ response to theological challenges of Islam, along with materials concerning the history and theological development of the two kingdoms. Additional historical texts that will be examined here include works by Henze (2000), Sellassie (1972), Marcus (1994) and Hassan (2012). Kaplan (2009) and Crowley (1988), which explore Christological considerations, and material from Budge (2007), which explores socio-cultural interests. Moberg (1924), Bell (1925), Mourad (2009) and Korotayev (1994) provide a more specific socio-cultural overview for the region of Yemen/Himyar.

While exploring the importance, challenges and opportunities created by the Qur’ānic representation of Christians and Christianity as *People of the Book* in the post-conquest period this thesis adopts a similar multi-disciplined approach. It explores socio-cultural and historical evidence to discern if the Islamic conquest of the Levant differed in any way from previous conquests of the region due to the respect by Muslims for the People of the Book. The sources examined in this area include Bousquet (2007), Bulliet (1979), Cragg (1994), Caetani (2007), Donner (2008), Griffith (2008), Gil (1993), Hoyland, (1997), Kaegi (2007), Thomas (2003, 2006, 2017 & 2010) and Thomson (1999).

Once the Christians of the Levant adjust to Arabic as the *lingua franca* and Muslim rule this thesis asks how Christians formulate a theological response to key aspects of Christian doctrine, namely, the Incarnation, or Sonship of Jesus and the expression of God in Trinitarian form. Here, Arabic speaking Christians employ a mixture of Islamic idiom and Christian theology along with Greek philosophical reasoning in support of their creedal formulations. Texts examined from this period include Adamson (2007), Dunlop-Gibson (ed. 2003), Frank (2008), Griffith (1994, 1988, 2001, 2002, 2008, & 2012-2014), Lindberg (2007), Muir (2014), and Swanson (2005 & 2014).

On more specific terms this thesis provides a qualitative analysis of the rational and theological arguments employed in the apologetic texts of three Chalcedonian scholars who lived between the early 9th to the 13th centuries of the Abbasid dynasty (c. 749-1258 CE). It examines sources from the 9th century including *On the Trinity* by Theodore Abū Qurrah, (d. 820 CE), Griffith (2002), Lamoreaux (2005 & 2014) and Ricks (2013). Theodore Abū Qurrah was one time Bishop of Antioch and is the first Arabic Christian *mutakallim* known by name.⁵⁸ Concerning material from the 10th century, this thesis examines *Faith of the Orthodox Christian* by Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī (b. 940 CE), Spisa (2010 & 2013), Noble (2010 & 2014) and Griffith (2012). Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī was the Bishop of Gaza. He lived through the infamous reign of Abu ‘Ali Mansur Tāriq al-Hākīm and urged Christians to persevere through challenging times.⁵⁹ The final document examined in this section is the controversial *Letter to a Muslim Friend* by Paul of Antioch (c. 1200 CE), Khoury (1964, 1966 & 1969), Thomas (2001) and Griffith (2014). Paul of Antioch was for a time the Bishop of Sidon. He wrote his Letter sometime between the 3rd and 4th Crusade when Christians may still have been influenced by Pope Urban II’s vision of conquering the Holy Land.⁶⁰ This genre of comparative religious apologetic texts provide the first glimpse of a proto-comparative theology as Muslims and Christians live side by side and can be assured that the religious other is listening and reading over their shoulder.⁶¹

3. *Contemporary Re-contextualization and Refiguring.* The final area of research explores the modern use of the term People of the Book. In order to address the research aims and objectives here this thesis undertakes a textual analysis of primary and secondary materials from a variety of contemporary Muslim and Christian scholars, some of which are quite familiar with the tradition of the other. This section moves between speakers of Islam and Christianity who employ a range of approaches varying from apologetic to dialogical, to new genres of dialogue as neighbours and spiritual companions through

⁵⁸ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 90. A *mutakallim* is a person who engages in *kalām*, dialogue or debate.

⁵⁹ Néophytos Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī: Xe-XIe siècles*, ed. Mgr Néophytos Edelby and P. Kh. Samir S. J., 1 vols., vol. 1, Patrimoine Arabe Chrétien (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1984), xviii.

⁶⁰ Malcom C Barber, "The Challenge of State Building in the Twelfth Century: the Crusader States in Palestine and Syria," in *The Stenton Lecture 2008*, ed. Dr. Rebecca Rist (Reading: University of Reading, 2009).

⁶¹ Sidney H. Griffith, "Comparative Religion In The Apologetics Of The First Christian Arabic Theologians," in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period, Variorum Collected Studies Series* (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 64.

life.⁶² Questions posed here examine the theological, political and social implications of the term People of the Book.

Yusuf Qaradawi represents the traditional voice of Islam. His advice to European and Western based Muslims acts as a bridge to the past when migration to non-Muslim nations was thought to leave Muslims bereft of spiritual leadership. The texts examined here are *The Lawful And The Prohibited In Islam* and *Non Muslims in the Islamic Society* (1985). Through the voices of Ataullah Siddiqui (1997, 2010, 2012 & 2014), Tariq Ramadan (1999, 2001, 2004 & 2007) and Farid Esack (1997, 2000 & 2002) a more confident generation of western-based Muslims emerges willing to engage directly with non-Muslims, Christians and secularists alike. These scholars examine the theological, political and social challenges and opportunities presented by living in the West, seen through the prism of traditional Islamic teachings against the backdrop of changing contexts.

In contrast, this thesis examines how modern Christian scholars understand and employ the term People of the Book. Daniel A. Madigan S. J. (2001, 2007, 2008 & 2014) offers his insights into the limits of the term that, he argues, prejudice dialogue and instead offers an alternative catalyst for discussions with the term *People of the Word*. Fr. Paolo Dall'Oglio (2009) along with Fr. Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabarra (2013) offer Christian and Muslim approaches to dialogue and hospitality based on their experiences in Syria and Lebanon. Their use of the term People of the Book both draws upon traditional understandings of the Qur'ān and Biblical sources, as well as new and innovative approaches based on modern social and political needs.

4. The methodology employed in this thesis consists of a comparative theological exploration of the Islamic concept of the People of the Book. Part I attempts to state an authoritative understanding of the Islamic position based on the highly respected method of *tafsīr*. Part II seeks to expand *tafsīr* by expanding knowledge of the socio-cultural, historical and interreligious theological terrains of the pre-Islamic and post-conquest periods. The goal is not to defend the creedal positions of either Islam or Christianity against the other, but rather to advance the merits of each sincerely in order to ascertain a glimpse of the truth to which Islam and Christianity allude.⁶³ Part III engages

⁶² Schnipkoweit, "Response," 88-89. Schnipkoweit notes, citing Clooney 2010:11 that comparative theology requires moving back and forth between religious traditions in order to gain a better understanding of that tradition our own tradition and God.

⁶³ Catherine Cornille, "The Problem of Choice in Comparative Theology," in *Methods and Criteria for Comparative Theology* (Univeristy of Paderborn2014). In this presentation Cornille expounds upon the differences between comparative theology and comparative religion. The crux of the difference seems to be

contemporary Muslim and Christian scholars as they reflect on their tradition, and the tradition of the other, in our increasingly integrated and interdependent world. Here the research seeks to discern if the concept of the People of the Book is still important as a catalyst for interfaith dialogue and religious plurality, or has the concept been replaced by other modes of interaction like citizenship or human rights.

Layout of Thesis

The thread of the argument analysed in this thesis proceeds along the following lines: Chapter one explores how the Qur'ān presents Christians and Christianity as the People of the Book using the Islamic traditional commentary device of *tafsīr*. By examining four key verses from the Qur'ān, the thesis demonstrates that membership of the Islamic appellation People of the Book affords Christians the right to practice their religion within the world of Islam so long as they abide by certain rules. What Islam has to say about Christians and Christianity is quite varied and situational. The thesis asserts that it is possible to argue that the traditional *tafsīr* accepts the possibility that the People of the Book may achieve salvation without necessarily converting to Islam.⁶⁴

In the second chapter the thesis attempts to shed light on the different communities of the People of the Book that came into contact with Muhammad and nascent Islam. The thesis examines the social, cultural and historical framework of Arabian society with its settled and nomadic cultures and their contact with the surrounding competing narratives of the Persian, Byzantine and Axiom Empires. These interactions produced tensions that influenced the reception of Islam by the people of Arabia and surrounding lands based on factors other than theological merits. Therefore, what the Qur'ān has to say about Christians is dependent on a specific context. The thesis argues that Christian communities that eventually mature into recognisable creedal formulations with their own socio-historical tensions permeated pre-Islamic Arabia. Thus, what the Qur'ān has to say concerning Christian doctrine is addressed to the major denominations extant during the period of revelation and not some long-lost maverick sect.⁶⁵

whether or not one is willing to take on board the truth of the other and make it part of one's own religious experience.

⁶⁴ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 288-291.

⁶⁵ Norman Daniel, *Islam And The West: The Making of an Image*, 1997 ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1960), 100-129. Some of the fabled myths and legends concerning the origins of Islamic belief can be found here.

The third chapter investigates how Christians adapt to life, as *dhimmīs*, protected persons, under the rule of Islam and as Arabic becomes the *lingua franca*. The thesis argues that, in many ways the life of *dhimmīs* was not as negative as popular opinion might suggest.⁶⁶ Indeed for minority Christian communities, Islamic rule provided the peace of mind necessary for Christians to express their denominational identities, often using the vernacular of Islamic culture whilst in the midst of evolving patterns of Islamic religious thought. Here Arabic speaking Christians and Muslims engaged in the great Greek/Arabic translation movement. This translation movement afforded Muslims and Christians the opportunity to work together in a highly meaningful effort that inadvertently provided a neutral and effective vehicle for examining, defending and refuting faith claims of both Christianity and Islam.

In the fourth chapter this thesis demonstrates the resilience of traditional Islamic commentary as a foundation and guide for relations between Muslims and the People of the Book. By examining source material from the Islamic hermeneutical science of *tafsīr*, modern Islamic scholars continue to offer an authoritative voice in spite of the challenges of global secularization and modernization. In fact, through intertextual reading, Muslims are capable of navigating the teachings of the Qur'ān as well as the Old and New Testaments in spite of challenges posed by globalization and secularisation.

Chapter five continues the work of chapter four, however the emphasis focuses on a selection of Christian voices as well as a Christian and Muslim cooperative work. These scholars also offer insights into the limits and merits of tradition *tafsīr*, while suggesting hopeful and inclusive paradigms for greater cooperation between, People of the Book, people of faith and others who seek to promote the common good for all humanity.

Contribution and Originality

The questions posed in this thesis are questions that many others more capable than this author have considered before. Yet, the perennial questions remain unanswered. World peace has not been achieved. The theological differences that divide Islam and Christianity remain unresolved. Nevertheless, this thesis strives towards a genuine search for solutions from the unique perspective of the author. Proceeding logically from the literature review, there appears to be a need to explore the foundations of dialogue between Muslims and Christians based on a re-examination of the origins of their relationship and following

⁶⁶ For a sketch of the misrepresentation of Islam in Europe see Meggitt, *Early Quakers and Islam*, 25-33.

through the formative centuries, when Christians were a sizeable proportion of the population in the Middle East. Jane Dammen McAuliffe notes there is need for further research of the traditional commentary in order to understand what the Qur'ān has to say concerning Christians as a social and religious group.⁶⁷ This thesis attempts to do just that. Although use of the hermeneutical tool of *tafsīr* is not unfamiliar to scholars of Islam, or aspiring scholars, use of *tafsīr* by Christians as an authoritative hermeneutical tool for understanding how Muslims understand the Qur'ān is still not widespread.⁶⁸ This thesis explores how a selection of verses from the Qur'ān discuss Christianity through close textual analysis of primary and secondary *tafsīr* material from the formative, classical and modern periods including the work of Mujahid ibn Jabr, the earliest existing *tafsīr*.⁶⁹

Through the use of primary and secondary research materials, this thesis explores a key period in Islamic history much in need of further study, the pre-Islamic period known as *al-jāhiliyya*. Here the thesis investigates the different communities inhabiting Arabia and its environs, the progress of monotheism and the initial link with the other children of Abraham. In addition, it will explore the competition between Judaism and Christianity for the hearts and minds of the Arabs, as well as the competition to host the most popular place for pilgrimage. Linking a social-cultural and historical examination of the period of *al-jāhiliyya* with *tafsīr* offers a unique view of the tensions that existed apart from the arrival of Islam, as if anyone other than the monk Bahīrā expected the arrival of a prophet. Most importantly, a greater understanding of the period of *al-jāhiliyya* and the context of the revelation of the Qur'ān will contribute to the ability of scholars to engage in responsible *ijtihād*, independent reasoning, and break from uncritical limits of *taqlīd*, allegiance to tradition.⁷⁰

Another period in need of further investigation concerns the period following the death of Muhammad, when the orphaned community comes to grips with the consolidation of the Qur'ān, the development of *hadīth* and *tafsīr* as well as the conquest of the Levant. Consequently, the thesis explores the initial reaction of the People of the Book to the rule of Islam, especially with the conquest of Jerusalem and the break from the cycle of sectarian violence associated with previous conquests. The nature of the Islamic conquest allowed for quite varied interpretations of the spread of Islam. Following the conquest, the

⁶⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 2.

⁶⁸ Noted Christian scholars of Islam that employ the hermeneutical tool of *tafsīr* include, Kenneth Cragg, Daniel Madigan, David R. Vishanoff, Matthew Zahniser, and Neal Robinson.

⁶⁹ *Tafsīr Mujahid* is more frequently quoted indirectly while citing the works of later Islamic scholars. This thesis offers a direct examination of the ancient *tafsīr*.

⁷⁰ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 289.

voice of Arab-speaking Christians develops responses to aspects of the theoretical construct of the People of the Book. Here, with Muslims looking over their shoulders, Christians fostering an Islamo-Christian perspective employ a variety of hermeneutical devices to strengthen the resolve of their own community and to engage with Islam. These Christians frequently employ an understanding of the Qur'ān to defend their own beliefs, just as Muslims utilized the Bible to support their faith claims. Sidney H. Griffith identifies this genre of apologetic writings as an area in need of further research.⁷¹ This thesis examines the voice of three Arab speaking Christian scholars, including the first English translation of Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī's, *Defence of the Trinity and Incarnation*.⁷²

Finally, the thesis examines how a selection of modern Muslims and Christian scholars employ the term People of the Book. The primary research materials examined reflect the challenges and opportunities in our rapidly changing world. The thesis taps into the shift in authority taking place among Muslims born and reared in the West, more confident than previous generations, in their own ability to interpret the requirements of Islam for themselves in their own contexts. As for Christian scholars, there seems to be a growing willingness to acknowledge Islam as a divinely inspired religion and Muhammad as some sort of prophet. As part of an exploration of Muslims and Christian cooperation in the Levant this thesis explores two paradigms used to foster changes in Christian understanding of Islam and the mission of Muhammad.

The conclusions offered represent a synthesis of the use of the term 'the People of the Book' through an examination of four verse clusters in the Qur'ān that discuss Christians and Christianity, as well as a review of the pre-Islam socio-historical context of Arabia. It is hoped that this process will help Christians see how and when verses in the Qur'ān that are perceived as problematic have relevance to a particular place and time, thus encouraging closer consideration of the Qur'ān as a whole. Through an exploration of the post-conquest response to Islam from the Arab speaking Islamo-Christian tradition this thesis hopes to introduce a genre of theological discourse that merits much further attention by Christians and Muslims interested in comparative theology. An exploration of the use of the term the People of the Book by a selection of modern Muslim and Christian scholars, demonstrates the importance of traditional Islamic exegesis as a factor governing relations between Muslims and Christians. Finally, this thesis offers the author's personal

⁷¹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 1-5, 21-22.

⁷² Paolo La Spisa, *I Trattati Teologici Di Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī, Tomus 52*, trans. Paolo La Spisa, vol. 648, Tomus 52, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: In Aedibus Peeters, 2013), 31. The title long version, *wa lā mǧala radi Allah ahnā fī mahni ahtqad al-nsarī al arthksia fī wahdania al-xhalq jal isma wa n'fī ilthma al-qbiha ilī yrmwhm bha idhdadhm bghir al-hāq*.

perspective of the challenges and opportunities that exist today for interfaith dialogue and religious plurality based on an Islamic concept that acknowledges the common unity of the origins of the People of the Book and Islam. Through this process of comparative theological research, it is hoped that Muslims and Christians may come to a greater appreciation of each other's beliefs and progress towards a more fruitful dialogue in the spirit of fostering a mutual respect and harmonious coexistence.

Part I: A Critical Study of Qur'ānic Christians in Islamic *Tafsīr*

Chapter 1, *Ahl al-Kitāb: The Qur'ānic People of the Book*

“May the curse of Allah be upon those who provoke animosity and hatred among the servants of Allah in utter self interest or to please their masters.”

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Christianity through the lens of Qur'ānic traditional commentary. Christians and Christianity are discussed in the Qur'ān through the use of several appellations including the collective term, *ahl al-kitāb*, *the People of the Book*, and through the Arabic name for Christians *al-nasara*. Through the commentary of these verses certain trends become apparent. The commentaries suggest a pattern, a stereotype of Christianity that is authoritative for Muslims.¹ Some verses are noted for depicting Christians in very positive terms while others take a more nuanced view. Comments regarding the Gospel also differ substantially. While some verses extol the Gospel for predicting the arrival of Muhammad, other verses suggest the content is fraught with error. Together the commentary forms a *theoretical construct* that does not represent the particular beliefs of any one denomination of Christianity, but rather acts as a generic template for Christianity as a whole.² As a result, there is, as is to be expected, tension between the Qur'ānic image and the self-definition of Christian communities. Subsequently, Christians have occasion to challenge the Qur'ān's representation of their faith claims and by extension, the veracity of the Qur'ān, especially when the representation of Christianity is extended beyond the original context. Historically, Christian scholars have viewed the term “*ahl al-kitāb*” as both a demeaning label that equates Christianity with other religions that Christians regard as following false doctrines and a useful tool, that lends a certain degree of status to their position in Islamic society.³ Equally, the traditional commentary provides challenges and opportunities for Christians that requires fresh analysis for modern society.

The primary objective of this first chapter is to examine a selection of verses from the Qur'ān that contribute to the formation of the Qur'ānic image of Christianity as part of the collective *ahl al-kitāb*. Of seminal importance is the affirmation of the existence of the

¹ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 288. This dissertation owes a great debt of gratitude to Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *Qur'ānic Christians* for her model of analysis of the *theoretical construct* of Qur'ānic Christians.

² Ibid.

³ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 71, 160.

theoretical construct and understanding how the construct works. Once this concept is examined and understood through the traditional commentary, the second chapter will focus on the social and demographic nature of the period leading up to and including the occasion of revelation of the Qur'ān, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*. By examining this formative period it is hoped to gain a clearer insight into how the original audience understood the message of the verses in question, in their historical context.

1.2 A Brief History of the Qur'ān and the Islamic Science of *Tafsīr*

In order for Christians to appreciate what the Qur'ān has to say about them it is necessary to have some understanding of how the Qur'ān came into being and how it is revered and interpreted by Muslims. This brief synopsis of the history of the text of the Qur'ān and the development of Arabic as a written language attempts to encapsulate a very complex period of Islamic history that is an area of research in its own right. However, to begin, for Muslims the Qur'ān is God's word revealed to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel.⁴ The full contents of the Qur'ān were not completely written down during the life of Muhammad. At this time the Muslim community relied on the memorization skills of devoted followers to recite the chapters/*sūrat* that had been revealed. The oral tradition continued after the death of Muhammad in 632 CE. However, following the death of Muhammad a series of uprisings began across the peninsula known as the Wars of Apostasy, *riddah*. At the Battle of Yamamah, many of those capable of reciting the Qur'ān died and Muslims feared that parts of the Qur'ān could be lost. Therefore the process of recording and organising the Qur'ān commenced in earnest.⁵

Zaid b. Thabit (d. 665-666), one of the secretaries of Muhammad oversaw the first transcription of the oral tradition of reciting the Qur'ān, *suhuf*, in a process commissioned

⁴ Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41. M M Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 25. Critical scholarship of the text of the Qur'ān does exist, of course, for instance see Samir Khalil Samir, *The Theological Christian Influence on the Qur'an: a reflection*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, 1 ed., vol. 1, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008). Other contributors in the same edition include Claude Gilliot, "Reconsidering The Authorship of the Qur'an," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (Oxon: Routledge, 2008). And Sidney H Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The "Companions of the Cave" in Surat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition," in *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, *Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

⁵ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 14. Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 45. Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 78, 86, 88.

by the first caliph, Abu Bakr (d. 634).⁶ This process continued under the guidance of the second caliph, Umar b. al-Khattab (d. 644), with the assistance of Umar's daughter and a former wife of Muhammad, Hafsa.⁷ After a few years slight variations in the recitation developed that were dealt with by the third caliph Uthman b. Affan.⁸ Uthman established a commission headed again by Zaid b. Thabit that adjudicated over the available material and decided the definitive rendition. Copies of this rendition, *mushuf*, were distributed to the major Islamic centres along with orders to destroy all other previous copies.⁹ Uthman's Codex was written in bare consonant form in Quraysh Arabic, the dialect spoken by Muhammad, without diacritical points to distinguish consonants pronunciation marks.¹⁰ The incomplete script, *scripta defectiva*, was more of a mnemonic tool to aid the memorization, *hifaz*, of the Qur'an and to support the oral recitation, *qurra*, which has always been central to the teaching of Islam. Inevitably, minor regional variations developed in the pronunciation of the Qur'an primarily due to the lack of vowels and *tashkil*.¹¹

Abu Bakr b. Mujahid (d. 936), the noted Qur'anic reader, oversaw the final stage of the Qur'anic textual development.¹² Seven recitations that did not contradict the Uthmanic codex gained acceptance, since these recitations allowed for regional differences in the pronunciation of words. Over time these recitations, *ikhtiyar*, formed the *scripta plena* of the Qur'an. This position seems to be supported by a hadith in which Muhammad said, "the Qur'an was sent down according to seven letters (*ahruf*)."¹³ From this brief synopsis it is possible to appreciate that the Qur'an, with just one prophetic source and while possessing a continuous line of editorial scrutiny, is for Muslims a sacred unerring text. In addition, because the Qur'an's authoritative rendition remains in its original Arabic

⁶ Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 78-86.

⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 14.

⁸ Ali Muhammad As-Sallabi, *The Biography of Uthman Ibn Affan Dhun-Noorayn*, ed. Hoda Khattab, trans. Nasir Khattab, 1 ed. (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-us-Salam, 2007), 319-328.

⁹ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 15. Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 45. Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 90-91, 93, 94. Not all the variant codices were destroyed. These codices, some of which were compiled by Muhammad's closest companions like Abdallah Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Abu Musa l'Ash'ari, remained popular and are mentioned in many early commentaries on the Qur'an Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 47.

¹⁰ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 14-15. Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 47. Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 95, 135-150, 151-164.

¹¹ Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 87. Here it is reported that Muhammad taught the Qur'an to people in their variant dialects, which became a problem as the communities merged together.

¹² Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 49-50. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 16.

¹³ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 15-16. The extra canonical readings of the Qur'an number around fourteen. Gilliot, "The Cambridge Companion," 51. Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic text: a Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, 153. A similar story is quoted from a hadith transmitted by Muslim.

language, readers can be confident that what they are reading today is as close to the original text as any historical document.¹⁴

From the very beginning of the revelation of the Qur'ān there has been a need to explain its meaning. During the lifetime of Muhammad he was of course the undisputed authoritative source of interpretation. After his death the science of exegesis, *tafsīr*, developed rules to guide subsequent generations. In Ibn Kathir's introduction to his great work *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, he explains the process that developed in early Qur'ānic exegesis. He states that what is discussed in general terms in one place in the Qur'ān is usually discussed in more detail somewhere else in the Qur'ān.¹⁵ That is, the first step of *tafsīr* is to look to the Qur'ān for explanation of the Qur'ān. When an explanation is not readily found then the *sunnah an-nabi* may be consulted.¹⁶ The *sunnah an-nabi*, or *sunnah*, are the normative sayings and practices of the prophet Muhammad.¹⁷ The purposes of the *sunnah* are to help explain the Qur'ān and the faith of Islam. This belief is based on various verses of the Qur'ān including *sūrat an-nisa* 4:105, "Surely, We have sent down to you (O Muhammad) the Book (this Qur'ān) in truth that you might judge between men by that which Allah has shown you, so be not a pleader for the treacherous." And another *sunnah* conveys the message, "I was given the Qur'ān and its equal with it" referring to the *sunnah*.¹⁸

After the death of Muhammad the Companions (*sahabah*) became involved in the exegesis of the Qur'ān. Prior to the death of Muhammad their involvement would have been unthinkable. Jane Dammen McAuliffe quoting Subhi al-Salih sums up the reasoning in simple terms, "They would not dare explain the Qur'ān while he (Muhammad) was still among them."¹⁹ However, among the *sahabah* there were people recognised as possessing a clear understanding of the Qur'ān and *sunnah* of Muhammad. One of the greatest scholars from among the *sahabah* was Ibn Abbas. His authority is vouched safe by

¹⁴ Sidney H. Griffith, Catholic University of America, Summer 2013 supports this opinion.

¹⁵ Al Hafiz Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, ed. Shaykh Safī Ur Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, trans. Nasir Khitab Jalal Abualrub, Huda Khitab, Aqeel Walker, Dr. Muhammad Al-Jibali, Sami Ayoub, 10 vols., vol. 1, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), Vol. 1:29.

¹⁶ Juynbol, *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith*, V, 97-99, 101. Here Juynbol explains the development of the use of the term "*sunnah*" whereby there are examples of pre-Islamic usage of the term as well as examples where the term is applied to Muslim figures other than Muhammad, i.e., *sunnah* of Abu Bakr, or *sunnah* of Umar. It should be noted that Umar I, a successor to Muhammad for the leadership of the Muslim community did not mention the use of the *sunnah* of the prophet for solving disputes within the Muslim community, but rather advised reference to the *Muhajirun* (those who emigrated to Medina with Muhammad during the Hijra) and *Ansar* (the citizens of Medina that helped Muhammad and the Muhajirun).

¹⁷ Deeb Al-Khudrawi, *A Dictionary of Islamic Terms, Arabic-English*, trans. Diane Humaidh Deeb Al-Khudrawi, vol. 1 (Damascus-Beirut: Al Yamamah, 1995), 204. Juynbol, *Studies on the Origins and Uses of Islamic Hadith*, V, 98.

¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*.AVol. 1:29

¹⁹ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 17.

Muhammad in a *hadīth* (traditions of the Prophet narrated by his companions) that comes down through Al-Bukhari in Fath Al-Bari, 1:205, “O Allah teach him *fiqh* (understanding of the fundamentals of Islam) in religion and interpretation.” In support of this *hadīth* Al-Tabari reported that Ibn Mas‘ud, another famous scholar and *sahabah* of Muhammad, confirmed, “yes, Ibn Abbas is the interpreter of the Qur’ān.”²⁰

The religious science of Ilm al-Hadīth was established in the early centuries of Islam to guard the authenticity of *sunnah* and *hadīth* against the fabrication (*awda*).²¹ The use of *sunnah* and *hadīth* in exegetical work varies from scholar to scholar. Traditionally, when *sunnah* and *hadīth* are quoted they are accompanied by the relevant *isnad* (chain of transmission) to support the authenticity of the relevant *sunnah* or *hadīth*. There have been many studies concerning the authenticity of extra-scriptural sources of authority dating back to the time of Muhammad and his followers.²²

In the second century following the death of Muhammad, discrepancies in the authenticity of many *sunnah* and *hadīth* led six Persian Muslim scholars to research and validate the thousands of *sunnah* and *hadīth* extant. The product of their endeavour became known as the *al-kutub al-sittah*. The collection is highly regarded by Muslims as being an authoritative and extensive collection of *sunnah* and *hadīth*.²³ Within this collection two scholars rank supreme. These are the text of Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Bukhari (c. 869-70), with his work, *Sahih Bukhari*, and *Sahih Muslim*, the work of Muslim b. Hajjaj al-Naishapuri (c. 874-5).²⁴

According to Ibn Kathir, when one is unable to find a suitable explanation through use of the Qur’ān, the *sunnah* or from the *hadīth* of the *sahabah*, it is permissible to examine the *tafsīr* of the *tābi ‘īn*. The *tābi ‘īn* are the second generation of Islamic Scholars and students of the Companions.²⁵ One of the *tābi ‘īn*, scholars discussed at length by Ibn Kathir, and whose *tafsīr* will form part of the focus of this chapter, is Mujahid ibn Jabr. Mujahid’s quest for knowledge of the Qur’ān and its meaning is immense. He was a

²⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:30.

²¹ McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 22-23. Herbert Berg outlines the formation of *Hadith* and a history of *Hadith* criticism and defense extensively in, Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000). Here Berg describes the historical critical methodology advanced by Ignaz Goldziher to challenge the tradition of reliance on the *hadith*. The views of several other scholars are discussed who themselves oscillate between the positions expressed above.

²³ Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 361. Berg, *Early Islam*, 6, 11. The collection is also sometimes referred to as the *al-Sihah al-Sittah*, the authentic six.

²⁴ Berg, *Early Islam*, 6. Berg also includes to a lesser extent the work of Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Other contributors to the collection are Abu Dawood Sulaiman b. Ash'ath al-Sijistani (c. 888-9), Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (279/892-3), Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Nasa'i (915-16), and Ibn Majah al-Qazwini (c. 886-7).

²⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:32.

dedicated student of Ibn Abbas. So great was his knowledge of the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abbas that the renowned scholar Sufyan Ath-Thawri remarked, “If the *tafsīr* reaches you from Mujahid it is sufficient for you.”²⁶ Interpreting the Qur’ān has always been a very serious undertaking, even for devout Muslims. Western scholars would do well to keep in mind that *tafsīr* by mere personal opinion (*ra’y*) is strictly prohibited. A succinct *sunnah* traced back to the prophet Muhammad through Ibn Abbas warns, “Whoever explains the Qur’ān with his opinion or what he has no knowledge of, then let him assume his seat in the fire.”²⁷ Accordingly, the *salaf* (the righteous ancestors) would never have discussed theological issues of which they had no knowledge. The *hadīth* are replete with stories of the *salaf* going to great lengths to avoid venturing opinions that veered close to breaching this command. In one such *hadīth*, Abu Bakr, the first companion of Muhammad says, “Which land will carry me and which heaven will shade me if I said about Allah’s book that which I have no knowledge...”²⁸ Where one has no certain knowledge silence is surely the best policy. Little wonder later generations of scholars are reluctant to venture opinions where the *salaf* feared to tread. On the other hand, there is a balancing obligation on everyone to convey and explain issues relating to exegesis instructed by the Qur’ān, *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):187 “To make it known and clear to mankind and not to hide it.”²⁹ There is also a *hadīth* reflecting the seriousness of the command “Whoever is asked about knowledge that he knows but hid it will be tied with a muzzle made of fire on the day of Resurrection.”³⁰ This is not to say that there is no place for the use of rational faculties, but that the use of reason must be based on proper respect and understanding of *taqlīd* (following, or imitating a tradition) the solid foundations of the application of the means of exegesis described above.³¹ Only a few scholars have ever been trusted to offer their own independent opinions. Those who were trusted were given the title *mujtahid* (a Muslim divine of the highest degree of learning) and were allowed to give *ijtihād* (independent legal ruling).³² Whether or not the gates of *ijtihād* are closed to scholars is debated.³³

²⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1:32.

²⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1:33. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 20.

²⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:33.

²⁹ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Holy Qur’an Printing Complex, 1989), 199-200.

³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:34-35.

³¹ McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 291. It should be noted that the great Muslim theologian was very much opposed to the prevailing trend of blind obedience to *taqlīd* because of the political implications *taqlīd* came to acquire in his lifetime. See W Montgomery Watt, *The Faith And Practice of Al-Ghazali*, trans. W Montgomery Watt (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982), 19.

³² Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 71-72, 75. Abdal Hakim Murad, "Understanding The Four Madhhabs: The Facts about Ijtihad and Taqlid," in *The Muslim Academic Trust*, ed. The Muslim Academic Trust (London: The Muslim Academic Trust, 2012), 8-10.

Another tool in Ibn Kathir's arsenal of exegesis is the use of evidence in support of an opinion drawn from the above sources that are found in "Israelite" Scripture, but this scripture may not be used as evidence on its own.³⁴ There are early *sunnah* and *hadith* that caution Muslims to be very careful in their use of Israelite Scripture. The concern of Muhammad is very well depicted in a story that comes to us by Ahmad; "O! Ibn al-Khattab, are we going to play in religion? By Allah, I have come to you with a pure religion. Do not ask them about anything, for that they may say something true and you do not believe what they say or they may say something false and you believe it. By Allah, if Musa (Moses) was alive he would not have done anything but follow me."³⁵ Lukewarm support for the use of "Israelite" Scripture is given in a later hadith transmitted by Al-Bukhari in *Fath Al-Bari* 6:572, "Convey on my behalf, even if it is one *ayah* (sentence), and narrate from the Children of Israel, as there is no sin in this. And whoever intentionally lies on me, let him assume his assured seat in the Fire."³⁶ In his study of Israelite Scripture Ibn Kathir notes that there are three types of accounts and stories to be found: those that are certainly authentic because they are supported by the Qur'ān, those considered false because they are contradicted by the Qur'ān and those neither supported nor denied by the Qur'ān.³⁷

The criteria outlined above comprise the considerations employed when Muslim scholars formulate their commentary on the Qur'ān. Appreciation for this process is very helpful for Christians wishing to engage meaningfully in dialogue with Muslims.³⁸ The story concerning Muhammad and Ibn al-Khattab, and the exhortations against speculation help to illustrate the conditioned conservatism within Islam that is reluctant to engage in intertextual exploration. This conservative bias is understandable, especially if one factors into consideration the need for Islam, especially in its nascent stage, to come to grips with its own revelation. The warning of Muhammad is ever present, ...Do not ask them about anything, for that they may say something true and you do not believe what they say or they may say something false and you believe it...³⁹

³³ The issue of *ijtihād* will form part of this dissertation's theological exploration of the work of the twentieth century exegete Rashid Rida.

³⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:31.

³⁵ Rashid Rida, *Al Manar*, trans. Abdul Haseeb, 1990 ed., 7 vols., Tafsir Al-Manar (The General Egyptian Foundation of the Book, 1990), Vol. 5 & 6:341.

³⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:31.

³⁷ *Ibid.* Usually the third type does not have daily or religious significance.

³⁸ For a modern variation see, Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani, *Introduction to the Science of Tafseer of the Qur'an*, trans. Saleem Bhimji, vol. 1 (Middlesex, England: The Islamic Education Board of the Federation of KSIMC, 2006).

³⁹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:341.

On the one hand, valid as the warning may be in its proper context, out of context the same warning severely inhibits the willingness of all but a few Muslim scholars to engage with the Christian theology for fear of being out of step with mainstream Islamic thinking, i.e., of being persuaded something is true, when the Qur'ān and the traditional commentary appears to teach that it is false, or to believe something is false when the Qur'ān and the traditional commentary appears to teach that it is true. Ironically, this practice also inhibits the ability of Muslims to convey the message of Islam, which is in part, to encourage the People of the Book to re-examine the veracity of the very faith claims with which Islam takes issue, expressed in *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):19 and *sūrat al-ahqaf* (46):12. As unnerving an exercise as it possibly may be, to lay bare for scrutiny the basis for Christian faith claims cannot but help, in the end, strengthen the faith of all believers. Without a mutual appreciation and understanding of each other's text and historical development, Muslims and Christians will, by and large, speak at each other rather than to each other, in the manner intended by God in *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46 "And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except in the best way..."⁴⁰

The first step in the investigation is to attempt to accurately establish the Qur'ānic image of *ahl al-kitāb* through a close textual analysis of selected verses as interpreted and commented on by a selection of Islamic scholars whose careers span the formative period of Islamic commentary, the classical period and into modern times. These scholars are Mujahid ibn Jabir (d. 722), from the formative period, Al-Tabari (d. 923), marking the beginning of the classical period, Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) from the medieval period and Rashid Rida (d. 1935) from the early twentieth century. Through this process several important themes are examined, beginning with a brief analysis of the respective communities that comprise the People of the Book.

With the arrival of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'ān a notable change occurs in relation to the criteria of correct belief, *iman*, and those who may be considered believers, *mu'minun*.⁴¹ Naturally, the issue of belief focuses on the requirement to accept Muhammad as prophet and to follow his teachings. In addition, the commentary examines the ramifications for those who do not accept Muhammad as prophet, or follow his teachings. The commentary ranges in consideration from those who died following their faith before hearing of Muhammad, to a discussion of the various ways in which some, through perhaps attachment to their tradition, *taqlīd*, remain faithful to the ways, *sunnah*,

⁴⁰ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 1164. Below, Dall'Oglio refers to this type of dialogue as the "dialogue of the deaf."

⁴¹ Transliteration here based on Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 28.

of Jesus, *al-masih*. The importance this holds for salvation is critical and influences how Muslims interact with non-Muslims even today. Both Al-Tabari and Rashid Rida reflect on the possible ways people, who have lived otherwise virtuous lives, according to their faith, may yet hope for salvation, in spite of not following Muhammad. While considering the effect one's deeds may have on one's salvation, the exegetes introduce the important concept by which certain verses in the Qur'ān are authoritative, *muhkam*, over other verses that have been abrogated, *mansukh*. At a very early stage Christians feature in the exegesis of the Qur'ān as faithful believers whose faith has led them to accept Islam (as with the case of Salman al-Farisa), or others who have accepted Muhammad as a prophet and aided his community, as in the example of King Ashamah of Abyssinia. Still other Christians, for example Cyrus, the Patriarch of Alexandria (d. 641) and the Byzantium leader Heraclius (d.641) are invited to accept Islam and respectfully acknowledge Muhammad as a true messenger, but refrain from embracing Islam.⁴² Their examples serve as a pedagogical model for the range of responses to the call of Islam.

Central to the religion of Islam is the theme of *tawhīd*, the oneness of God. In contrast, other themes are explored as a means of defining correct and incorrect faith. The Qur'ān reprimands Christians for not understanding the true message of Jesus and for many excesses in religion, *taghlowah fi deenkum*. The concept of Trinity provides ample opportunity for criticism of Christian doctrine for committing the sin of *shirk*, associating partners with God. The Qur'ān accuses Christians of worshipping God's creations as God, as is the case for Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And yet the same verse that accuses Christians of excesses in faith affirms Jesus as the *al-masih*, the Messiah, the Christ. Further, Christians are accused of ignoring the message that Jesus and Moses promised their followers; the future arrival of Muhammad, as the Paraclete discussed in John's gospel, and the prophet from among thee, in Deuteronomy.⁴³

As a corrective, the Qur'ān is held up as Guardian over previous divine revelation, keeping safe what has been lost or misconstrued in the past. The Qur'ān asserts that every people have been sent a prophet. That every people have been given a straight path to God, that the religion of all the prophets is the same and calls all people to *islām*, to *taqwa*,

⁴² Ashamah, The King of Abyssinia, the Cyrus the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius all received invitations to Islam from Muhammad and responded kindly. However, Heraclius would later wage war. See note 221 below.

⁴³ For example see John, 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7, Deuteronomy 18:15, Unless otherwise specified all Old and New Testament quotations will be from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (Wheaton, Ill: Good News Publishers,2001). See also refutations to claims of falsification, Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (tahrīf) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130, no. 2 (2010): 189-202.

consciousness of God. The Qur'ān teaches that pure religion requires that all must come to believe in God as one, believe in the last day and fill their life with deeds that reflect their faith. Yet, as ecumenical as this might sound, all who are aware of and comprehend the message of Islam are required to accept and follow the way made clear by Muhammad. Rejection of Muhammad as prophet is akin to seeking to be led through the ignorance of our own whims and volitions. Those who do not accept Muhammad will have to answer to God for their failure in this regard. On the other hand, the Qur'ān praises those Christians, who follow the precepts of their faith before Muhammad in glowing terms as *pre-Qur'ānic Muslims*.⁴⁴ This designation belongs to the disciples of Jesus who volunteer to be his helpers and in more general terms through the example of praiseworthy monks and priests, for their diligence in faith and study and for their humble disposition.

How the Qur'ān depicts Christians and their beliefs, as understood by the traditional commentary, whether it is in criticism or in praise, forms a *theoretical construct*. The difference between the Qur'ānic construct and the self-definition can be immense at times. For example, with regard to whether or not Christians are accepted as 'believers,' the nature of Jesus, the use of the term Trinity, belief in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, to the meaning of Jesus' promised Paraclete are all areas of contention. These differences are likely to be more problematic as our communities becomes more integrated and there is greater need to work together for the common good. Theological differences can create impassés to interfaith dialogue and negative preconceptions of the 'other,' which in turn impacts on society.

The verses chosen for discussion below represent a selection of suitable verses from the Qur'ān sufficient to present a Qur'ānic image of *ahl al-kitāb*. According to the research of Jane Dammen McAuliffe there are three categories by which Christians are discussed in the Qur'ān.⁴⁵ The first is through criticism. Some of the criticism is directed against Christians directly, on other occasions the criticism is in conjunction with other communities from the People of the Book. These verses criticise Christians for stubbornly rejecting Muhammad as prophet, preferring their own misguided beliefs, *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):75 and for wishing to convert Muslims away from their faith, *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):120. In fidelity to the New Testament the Qur'ān warns Christians, as part of the People of the Book that they themselves are responsible for altering the true message of Jesus, as in *sūrah Āl-'Imrān* (3):71 and affording undue respect to their monks and priests as lords as

⁴⁴ See commentary below regarding *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82-83, *sūrah Āl-'Imrān* (3):199 and *sūrat al-qasas* (28):55.

⁴⁵ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 4.

in *sūrat at-taubah* (9):31. One *sunnah* warns, “Do not believe the People of the Book, nor reject what they say. Rather, say, ‘we believe in Allah and in what was sent down to us and that which has come down to you.’”⁴⁶

A second category identified by McAuliffe, but not touched upon in this chapter, refers to the treatment of Christians by Muslims as in the collection of the *jizyah*, tax, *sūrat at-taubah* (9):29, levied against the protected communities of the *ahl al-kitāb* in post conquest times, inter-marriage, *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):5 and respect for religious structures, *sūrat al-hajj* (22):40 The third category of verses praises Christians for their piousness and as a “balanced people” (*ummatun muqasidatun*), *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):66.⁴⁷ These verses appear to accept Christians for their sincerity and their faith, but as this exploration will show, context is everything. There are limits to acceptance and tolerance that are exemplified through the *tafsīr*. Whether a verse appears to promote acceptance and cooperation, or whether a verse warns against taking non-Muslims as friends, depends on the context of the revelation and careful study of the relevant *hadīth*. Otherwise one could very easily lose sight of the universal principle of a verse in favour of an interpretation highly dependent on a specific context.

From the more than 40 verses of the Qur'ān that discuss Christians and their beliefs the verses chosen below for examination have been selected for the following reasons. First the literal interpretation of each verse has the potential to describe a balanced view of Christians and their beliefs. Second, and most importantly, the traditional commentary of Islamic scholars bears witness to the *theoretical construct* mentioned above. The primary English translations of the text under discussion are from the Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation, endorsed by the King Fahd Holy Qur'ān Complex.⁴⁸ Slight variations with the translation may be noted when quoting from the exegete's own material. The following verses are examined; *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62, *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171, *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 and *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82.

⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:411.

⁴⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 192-200. This is in reference to the Najashi and delegation from Abyssinia who converted to Islam, or People of the Book that do not dispute with Muhammad.

⁴⁸ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*.

1.3 The Boundaries of the People of the Book: *Surat Al-Baqarah*, (2):62

Sūrat al-baqarah (2):62 is a Madinan *sūrat*.⁴⁹ This *sūrat* is one of the most influential *sūrat* in the Qur'ān, because it was revealed in Medina to the early Muslim community. According to Ibn Kathir, scholars say that the *sūrat* contains “a thousand news incidents, a thousand commands and a thousand prohibitions.”⁵⁰ Therefore the *sūrat* provides a structure for the early community, encompassing all aspects of life. At the time of its revelation the community began to suffer persecution. Several of Muhammad's followers fled to the Christian Kingdom of Abyssinia to escape from the polytheists of Mecca.⁵¹ Later, Muhammad's community sought refuge in Madina making the great migration, *hijra* in 622 CE.

Several themes are introduced through the commentary of this verse. These are: the identity of the People of the Book, the understanding of ‘belief’ in light of the arrival of Muhammad as well as the Qur'ān, the importance of living one's faith with examples of righteous deeds, and the highly debatable area of abrogation.

Preceding this *sūrat* there are three letters: *alif*, *lam*, & *mim*. These letters form part of the fourteen mysterious *muqatta`āt* letters that appear on occasion to introduce twenty-nine of the one hundred and fourteen *sūrat* found in the Qur'ān. Their significance is disputed, but according to Ibn Kathir “there is no doubt that Allah did not reveal these letters for jest and play.”⁵² The idea that the letters have some hidden meaning is supported by all our exegetes, *mufassser*, and by a few verses in the Qur'ān such as *sūrah Āl-Imran* 3:7, “We believe in it; all of it (clear and unclear verses) is from our Lord.”⁵³ The following is Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the verse,

Those who believe (in the Qur'ān), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, and who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese Du Saint Coran*, trans. Harkat Abdou, 1 ed., vol. 1, L'Exegese (Dar Al-Kotob Al-Limiyah, 2009). Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:100. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meanings of the Holy Qur'an, Complete Translation with Selected notes*, 1 ed., 1 vols., vol. 1 (Leicester The Islamic Foundation, 2003), 6.

⁵⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:101.

⁵¹ The term polytheist is used here to describe all non-monotheists living in Mecca at the time.

⁵² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:1-2.

⁵³ Abu Ja'far Muhammad B Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an*, ed. L J Cooper, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Hakim Investment Holdings (M.E.) Limited, 1987), Vol. 1:83-85, 88-89. Al-Tabari offers no less than ten possible reasons for the significance of the letters, before offering his own opine, that their meaning remains a mystery. Ibn Kathir follows roughly the same logic and conclusions as Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:102-103.

⁵⁴ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 26-27.

1.3a The Occasion of Revelation

According to tradition, the occasion of the revelation, *asbâb an-nuzûl*, of the verse, follows the first conversation that took place between Muhammad and Salman al-Farisa. The story is vividly recounted in a *hadîth* narrated by two renowned *tabi'un*, Al-Suddi and Mujahid ibn Jabr.⁵⁵ Here, Salman al-Farisa, born a Zoroastrian, describes his spiritual journey from Jundishur, in former Persia, to meeting the prophet Muhammad. He explains that one day he and his friend, the son of the King of Jundishur, were out hunting in the desert when they met a Christian monk praying alone. The monk read to them from the Gospel and explained the meaning of the verse. As a result of the encounter both men had what can only be described as a deep religious experience and each man 'submitted to God.' Soon after their return to Jundishur, Salman left his former life to join the monk and his community near the town of Mosul. While with the monks he was told of the pending arrival of a man who would be called a prophet. One of the signs by which to recognise this prophet is that he would not accept charity, but may accept gifts. Later, while travelling, Salman fell into the hands of robbers who sold him into slavery. He is bought by a woman from the tribe of Kalb who lives near the village of Yathrib (Madina). She employs Salman to tend her sheep along with another one of her servants. One day Salman hears of a man in Mecca claiming to be a prophet. Salman leaves the sheep with the other servant and sets off for Mecca to see if the stories he has heard are true. When Salman meets Muhammad he watches him for a long time before approaching him. He offers Muhammad food, and Muhammad asks him, what is this? Salman says it is charity, and so Muhammad promptly refuses. After a while Salman approaches Muhammad again with meat and bread, and again Muhammad asks, "what is this?" This time Salman says, "it is a gift." Muhammad accepts the gift and the two men sit and eat the food together. While Salman describes the monks that had told him to expect the arrival of a prophet, Muhammad declares these men are destined for the fire, *ahl al-nar*. Salman is naturally quite disturbed by this remark and proceeds to defend the virtues of his former colleagues, whom he says, "prayed and fasted and believed in you and attested to the fact that you would be sent as a prophet."⁵⁶ It is then that the verse is revealed.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibn Jabr Mujahid, *Tafsir Mujahid Ibn Jabr*, ed. Dr. Muhammad Abdul-Salam Abu Al-Neel, First ed., 1 vols., vol. 1 (Medina Nasr, Cairo, Egypt: Dar Al Fiqr, Modern Islamic Ideology, 102h), 204.

⁵⁶ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 108.

⁵⁷ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:360-364. Martin Ling, *Muhammad, His life Based on the Earliest Sources* (India: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 105-108. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, 105-106.

1.3b Belief, And Those Who Believe

Turning to the opening phrase of the verse, *those that believe*, the commentary of Mujahid explains there is a seismic shift in the nature of belief after the arrival of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'ān. Prior to Muhammad people were required to follow the dictates of their religion as well as their prophets and would be judged accordingly. However, following the arrival of Muhammad, Mujahid considers belief in the prophethood and the Qur'ān now essential for true believers.⁵⁸ Al-Tabari examines the meaning of 'belief' first in general terms then, moves to the particular. He describes in a general sense that 'belief' may include what one professes coupled with how one lives their life.⁵⁹ Moving to the phrase's particular import is the decisive challenge to the People of the Book to believe in the authentic mission of Muhammad as prophet; "...those who attest the veracity of the Messenger of God and the truth that he brought them from God. Their faith in this is their attesting its veracity..."⁶⁰ This highly conditional interpretation of the word 'believe,' *iman*, is a minimum requirement for anyone now expecting to be considered a believer. The designation of believer is highly contentious from an interfaith perspective, especially when examining attitudes and directives regarding the identity of the opposite, those who are labelled unbelievers, *khafir*.⁶¹

Ibn Kathir begins his approach to the problem of belief and disbelief by allowing one verse in the Qur'ān to explain another. He examines the context of the verse by examining the verse directly preceding the verse in question. This verse (2):61 discusses the people who will receive the most punishment on the Day of Resurrection. The verse states, "The People who will receive the most torment on the day of Resurrection are: a man who was killed by a prophet or who killed a prophet, an unjust ruler and one who mutilates. These are the people who have defied God's commands who "...transgress set limits by committing prohibited acts..." Therefore, *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 explains the opposite; those believers (*mu'min*) who need not fear. Ibn Kathir interprets the verse as indicating that those who lived in earlier times, i.e., before the prophet Muhammad, and who followed previous prophets and messengers and were righteous shall receive their reward,

⁵⁸ Mujahid, *Mujahid*, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University, 204, fn. 202.

⁵⁹ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:94-95. According to the available editions of the Tafsir of Mujahid there is very little commentary from Mujahid. Most of what is known of his commentary is found in the commentary of other *Mufasser*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1:356.

⁶¹ Interestingly, modern scholars also examine the meaning of *khafir* in chapter four of this dissertation.

ajruhum. These people need not fear what will happen in the future or grieve for what has been lost in the past.⁶²

Similarly, Rida sees the reconciliatory thrust of *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 in contrast to the condemnatory character of the preceding verse.⁶³ His explanation of the verse does not concentrate on any particular person or group, but rather, he chooses to universalise the message to encompass the weakness found in all people in general who willingly ignore the guidance of God and the limits that He sets.⁶⁴ Verse 62 offers hope for salvation to all people who turn to God and obey Him and his messengers. For Rida the thrust of the verse is such that correct belief and correct action are intrinsically linked. In an effort to further elaborate the point Rida cites the words of his teacher Muhammad Abduh,

...belief in relation to actions will be pure from whispers of infatuations and hallucinations. As a result, a believer rises with his faith to such heights where he would begin to experience the glory of the Lord. So when he raises his eyes to the highest plane, he lowers them out of awe and falls to the ground in servitude to Allah in fear and awe. And if he looks at what is in his hands, upon which Allah has bestowed upon him, he feels honoured by Allah while finding strength in what he does with whatever is under his control. He does not transgress the limits and does not stand without moving towards the purpose assigned to him until he reaches it. So he remains to be a servant of Allah, a chief of everything after Him.⁶⁵

In strictest terms, *those that believe* refer to those who say they accept and follow the prophet Muhammad. However, true belief is not as simple as that. One's life must reflect one's stated beliefs. Rida stresses that the faith acceptable to God nurtures and educates the individual, and motivates them to do what is good with their life. Belief in religion is a requisite, and one is required to believe unequivocally in Allah and the message of the prophets, so that those who fail to accept the meaning of the verse in its entirety are those who would be chastised in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):8, "And there are those people who say: we have believed in Allah and the Final Day, and they are not believers." Accordingly, the verse states, it is not their lack of correct belief in Allah and the Final Day, or Muhammad, that causes their ultimate demise, but the lack of self-control, their unwillingness to allow God to transform their lives, to the extent that their stated belief is of little merit to them.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:247.

⁶³ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 1 & 2:277.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Translation by Abdul Haseeb edited by Richard Kimball.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1 & 2:278.

1.3c Jews, Christians and Sabi'un

Examining the phrase *those who are Jews...* Al-Tabari begins the identification of the members of *ahl al-kitāb*. This is the first community to receive direct revelation from God in the form of the *Torah*. The name for Jews, *hadu* is analysed as coming from the verb *hada* meaning “they repented.”⁶⁷ Following the rational supported by Ibn Juraij, the Jews are called *yahud* because they said, “We have turned to you in repentance.”⁶⁸ Ibn Kathir while agreeing with Al-Tabari over the meaning of the word *yahud* prefers to explain the origins of the Jews from a slightly more historical perspective. He contends the Jews are followers of the Prophet *Musa* (Moses). They are a people who refer to the *Torah* for judgment and that they are called *yuhud*, which means that they sought repentance from God for their sins and were kind to one another. Another possibility offered for the origin of the name is that it comes from their ancestor *yahuda* (Judah) the eldest son of the Prophet Yaqub (Jacob).⁶⁹

As for the phrase *and those who are Christians* Al-Tabari begins with an etymological analysis of the word used for Christians in the Qur'ān, *nasara*. He further explains that *nasara* is the plural of *nasran*, and that there is also the rare feminine form of the word, *nasrana* and a rare plural form *ansar*.⁷⁰ The connection with the word *ansar* (helpers) is interesting. Accordingly, one of the reasons *nasara* is used to denote Christians is because the Christians would help, *nusra*, one another.⁷¹ This theory is supported by *sūrat an-saff* (61):14 where Jesus asks his followers, "Who will be my helpers (*ansari*) to (the work of) Allah?" and they replied, "We are Allah's helpers!" (*ansaru*). Another explanation of the term *nasara* more recognisable to western Christians posited by Al-Tabari relates to the land called Nasira, or Nazareth. This theory is supported by a hadith transmitted from Ibn Juraij. A variation of this theory that is supported by Ibn Abbas and Qatada, contends that Christians are called *nasara* because this is the name of the town that Jesus came from, making him the *nasiri* and by extension his followers *nasiriyun*. Ibn

⁶⁷ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:356-357. Idem, Vol. 1:31.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1:356. The etymological origins of the word “yahud” Judah, see Gen 29:35, differs from Strong's Concordance, [3063] 1507. Eugene H. Maly. Raymond E Brown, Joseph A. Fitzyer, and Roland E Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 2 vols. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall,1968), 30. Perhaps the origin of the variation tells more about the community of Jews known to Ibn Juraij.

⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 1:249. According to Genesis 29:35, Judah is the fourth son of Jacob and Leah.

⁷⁰ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:357.

⁷¹ Ibid. Interestingly, Rodney Stark also mentions this characteristic in, Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, Second ed. (San Franscisco: Harper Collins, 1997), 74.

Kathir by and large follows the same explanation as Al-Tabari for the origins of the name “*nasara*”⁷² As for Rida the etymology of names for Jews, or Christians is not terribly important. From a historical perspective, the Jews and Christians referred to in the verse, are those groups of people who were known by these names or titles at the time. They are people who followed prophets before Muhammad. Allah described some of them as Jews, who adopted Judaism. Similarly, the *nasara* were supporters of the Messiah, and other people simply became known as Sabians.⁷³

Tafsīr Mujahid focuses on the identity of the obscure people known as the Sabi’un. He describes them as “Those people who are between the Magi and the Jews, and have no religion.”⁷⁴ He warns that their slaughtered food is not to be eaten nor are their women eligible for marriage to Muslims.⁷⁵ In effect he is challenging their inclusion as members of *ahl al-kitāb*, the repercussions of which are still felt today. Al-Tabari begins his analysis of the Sabi’un with an etymological pursuit of the name. He defines *Sabi’un* as the plural of *sabi*; deriving from the verb *saba’a*. An interesting use of the word is given in comparison to the stars at night, “...so-and-so came suddenly (*saba’a*) upon us at such-and-such a place.” *Sabi*, the noun in general form, is the label given to a person who converts to a new religion.⁷⁶ Al-Tabari continues to examine many theories purporting to identify the origins and beliefs of the Sabi’un. He mentions two opinions offered by Mujahid pertaining to the Sabi’un mentioned above.⁷⁷ There is a third opinion narrated by Ibn Juraij who again draws upon the work of Mujahid. This narration refers to a conversation between Mujahid and another *Tabi’un*, this time, Ata ibn Abi Rabah, where the above two points are discussed and an additional point is made. This third opinion states that the Sabi’un are like the tribe of Sawad, neither like the Magians, Jews or Christians. The two *tabi’un* both report that Muhammad was called Sabi’un by the polytheists because he left his religion.⁷⁸ Other possible meanings, or identities, of the group, come in the form of a *hadīth* that originates from Qatada ibn al-Nu’man. This *hadīth*

⁷² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 1:249. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 7.

⁷³ Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 1 & 2:278. The identity of the Sabians is very complex. Part of the problem with identifying this eclectic group is due to the fact that there appear to have been two distinct historic groups with practically the same name, one in the south of Arabia, Hadhramot, another in the north east near Taima. Confusion follows these people even today, especially as to whether those who claim to be Sabian are truly the descendents of these historical communities and should they be afforded protection as People of the Book.

⁷⁴ ibn Jabr Abu al-Hajjaj al-Makhzumi Mujahid, *Tafsīr Mujahid*, ed. Abd al Rhman Tahir al-Surati, trans. Sumia Bel Haj, sponsored by Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Khalif Ibn Hamad Al Thani ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (Islamabad, Pakistan: Islamic Research Center, Islamabad, 1976), 77.

⁷⁵ Mujahid, *Mujahid, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University*, 204.

⁷⁶ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:357.

⁷⁷ Ibid. idem, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:31-32.

⁷⁸ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:358.

discusses their worship of angels and that they pray facing the direction of Mecca. A *hadīth* narrated by Al-Hasan Al-Basri adds that they prayed five times a day. Muhammad wanted to exempt them from the *jizya* (poll tax) until he was informed that the Sabi'un worshipped angels.⁷⁹ In a *hadīth* narrated by Ibn Zaid, Muhammad postulates that the Sabi'un are a people from Mesopotamia, near Mosul. In general terms the Sabi'un profess, there is no god, but God. However, they do not accept Muhammad as prophet, nor do they have any scripture or other prophets. The final opinion suggested by Al-Tabari comes from a *hadīth* narrated by Al-Suddi and simply confirms "Others said that they were a religious group among the people of the scripture."⁸⁰

Like Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir finds the Sabi'un difficult to define. His own opinion is in line with the description based on the thoughts of Mujahid, "The Sabians are between the *Majus* (Zoroastrian), the Jews and the Christians. They do not have a specific religion." Nor are they Polytheists. They lived according to their *fitrah* (instinctual nature). For this reason Ibn Kathir goes on to say, some idolaters used to describe converts to Islam as *sabi*, meaning that they have abandoned all other religions on earth.⁸¹ Other opinions considered by Ibn Kathir relate that the Sabians did not possess any particular message, nor did they have their own prophet. He reports that the Sabians were a sect from the *ahl al-kitāb* who read from the *Zabur* (psalms).⁸² Rida's understanding of the Sabians is slightly different. He posits the idea that the Sabians may well have been an offshoot of Christianity. He suggests this possibility because of the practices they have held in common with mainstream Christianity; namely that Sabians worshiped on Sundays, practiced Baptism and Confession. He notes as well that they practice a number of innovations in their religious practices that regrettably have little or nothing to do with their original prophetic tradition.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid. This is an interesting example where the Muslim community was able to inform and influence the decision of Muhammad in matters of interpretation.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:250.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 1 & 2:280. Here he is referring to the inappropriate attention paid to celestial bodies.

1.3d The Requisites of Salvation

The next phrase from the verse under discussion is, *Whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness...* This phrase is explained by Al-Tabari as defining the basic tenet of belief common to and requisite of those who may be confident that they will be rewarded by God, “*their wage awaits them with their Lord.*” Unfortunately, the inclusive air of this phrase is soon tempered by the exclusivist terms of the commentary. Al-Tabari posits the question to himself, where is the completion of God’s words, “Surely they that believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians?” His answer is slightly rhetorical and introduces a condition; “whoso believes in God and the Last Day, their wage awaits them with their Lord.”⁸⁴ This condition develops whereby there would appear to be a subset from among the Jews, the Christians and the Sabi’un who are saved rather than their entire respective communities.

In his developing argument Al-Tabari looks at the grammatical issue arising from the apparent lack of agreement between the variations of the word ‘believe’ found in the first phrase “they that believe” and “whoso believes” The problem arises as to “how can those who believe come to believe?”⁸⁵ The word examined in the first instance is *āmana*, found in “they that believe.” This word is compared with *āmanū*, employed in the phrase “Believe’ in Muhammad and what he brought.”⁸⁶ For Ibn Abbas and many others, the grammatical issue suggests there is a definite necessity for the People of the Book to come to believe in Muhammad. In fact Ibn Abbas as well as Ibn Kathir hold that the entire verse with its inclusive language is abrogated, *mansukh*, by *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):85. This verse states, “whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers.” On the other hand Al-Tabari examines the possibility that the verse is *muhkam*, meaning firmly established and therefore not abrogated by *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):85.⁸⁷ This possibility leads to a more subtle distinction, that people who remain faithful to their religion, without any change must come to believe and accept Muhammad as prophet (without becoming his follower). Then “whoever among them comes to believe in Muhammad, in what he brought and in the Last Day, and

⁸⁴ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:359.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol. 1:364. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 119. The legend of Ibn Abbas as scholar and close companion to the prophet is discussed in countless sources. One shining acknowledgement of the respect he obtained was the title, “Scholar to the Nations.” For more information see Khaalad Muhammad Khaalid, *Men Around the Messenger*, ed. Aelfwine Acelas Mischler, trans. Sheikh Muhammad Mustapha Gemeiah Al Azhar Administration (El-Mansoura: Dar Al-Manarah, 2003), 443-450.

works righteousness, and does not alter or change so that he dies in his 'faith' the reward for his deeds and his wage awaits him with his Lord, as He has described."⁸⁸ The phrase *and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they sorrow* is interpreted to refer to the judgment of the Last Day. Jews, Christians and Sabi'un who come to believe in Muhammad will not be concerned with judgment of the Last Day when they see the reward that God has prepared for them.⁸⁹

Al-Tabari, while reflecting on the various opinions offered above, summarises the opinion of Mujahid, who maintains that after the revelation of the verse, Muhammad added, "Whosoever dies in the religion of Jesus and dies in submission to God before he hears of me is in a good 'position,' but whosoever hears of me today and does not believe in me is doomed."⁹⁰ In his closing remarks he concludes "...God has not specified the wage of righteous action together with faith for some of His creatures rather than others, and the statement in his words 'whoso believes in God and the Last Day' applies to everyone he mentioned at the beginning of the verse."⁹¹ Al-Tabari's commentary thus establishes a precedent that opens the way for Muslims to accept the faith of the People of the Book as potentially salvific, as long as the role of Muhammad is accepted as authentic.⁹² No doubt this conditional acceptance remains a challenge for many Muslims and Christians.⁹³

Ibn Kathir maintains a much more exclusivist line of argument. For him the inclusivist language of the verse is conditioned and abrogated to the point where the language offers little consolation to the People of the Book. Ibn Kathir demonstrates his understanding of the requisites of salvation by employing verses from *sūrah Āl-ʿImrān* (3):85, mentioned above, as well as *sūrat yunus* (10):62 and *sūrat fussilat* (41):30 that promise those who say, "our lord is Allah (alone)" have no need to fear death for they shall receive glad tidings of Paradise...⁹⁴ In addition he draws support from a *hadīth* attributed to Ibn Abbas that emphasizes the importance of accepting Muhammad as prophet "...Allah does not accept any deed or work from anyone, unless it conforms to the Law of Muhammad, that is, after Allah sent Muhammad. Before that, every person who followed the guidance of his own

⁸⁸ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:359.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1:360.

⁹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1:364.

⁹¹ Ibid., Vol. 1:359, 364.

⁹² Samir Khalil Samir, "Le Commentaire de Tabari sur Coran 2/62 et la question du salut des non-musulmans," *Annali: Istituto Orientale de Napoli* 40, no. 30 (1980): 586. This important point is emphasised by Samir, noting the break with traditional commentary.

⁹³ Rashid Rida examines this idea of acceptance of the prophethood in greater detail in *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48.

⁹⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 1:248.

Prophet was on the correct path, following the correct guidance and was saved.”⁹⁵ For Ibn Kathir then, to be a true believer after the arrival of Muhammad necessitates belief in Muhammad as prophet. He states his position clearly that Allah sent the prophet to all mankind, as the last and final prophet and messenger. All mankind are required to believe in him, obey him, and refrain from what he prohibited; “those who do this are true believers.”⁹⁶

After engaging in lengthy exposition of the *taqlīd*, traditional commentary of the verse Rida seems most willing to engage in *ijtihād*, and offer his own opinion, quoting from *sūrat an-nisa* (4):123-124 in support of his argument concerning who is saved,

Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book (can prevail): whoever works evil will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, besides Allah, any protector or helper. If any do deeds of righteousness, be they male or female, and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.⁹⁷

It would appear, according to Rida, that personal responsibility and one’s response to God strongly affects whether or not one enters Paradise rather than what he describes as “superficial religiosity.” God alone decides who will enter Paradise and who will not. He warns Muslims not to be complacent with outward signs of faith, thinking that because they say they believe in Allah and the Last Day they will enter Paradise.⁹⁸ He asserts that God will judge all according to one principle and that The People of the Book will receive the reward Allah has promised them if they have lived their lives according to their divine precepts.⁹⁹ In defence of his position Rida examines three general categories of people discussed by Imam Ghazali: The first category offered are people like the American Indians. It is not thought they ever received a pure divine message. Therefore these people are thought to be safe from condemnation. The second category describes those who received, or came across the message of Muhammad, but might have been too stubborn or arrogant to consider its import. These people it is said, will certainly have to account for their disbelief. Then there are those who receive the message in an incomplete or distorted form, they like the American Indians, could not be condemned for not accepting Islam. Another category added by Rida, includes people who have been socially conditioned from an early age to reject Muhammad and Islam. These people would be pardoned because the

⁹⁵ Ibid., Vol. 1:249.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Vol. 1:250.

⁹⁷ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 1 & 2:278. Translation of An-Nisa (4):123-124 by Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

⁹⁸ Ibid., Vol. 1 & 2:279-280.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Vol. 1 & 2:278, af. 277.

erroneous information they received influenced their ability to appreciate the message objectively.¹⁰⁰ In today's world this could cover a large percentage of non-Muslims. In summary of his own position on the verse Rida says, "Correct faith is the one that is the top controller of the heart and the will that further controls the limbs during actions. When the worldly desires challenge this control, then this person tries to beat it in the tussle. 'Indeed, those who fear their Lord, when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember (Him) and at once they have insight.'"¹⁰¹

1.4 Commit no Excesses in Your Religion, *Sūrat an-Nisa* (4):171

Sūrat an-nisa (4):171 is a Madinah *sūrat*.¹⁰² The verse presents ample opportunities for the discussion of a wide range of important themes contrasting Islam and Christianity. Through analysis of this verse the exegetes examine the nature of Jesus, the concept of Trinity, the relationship between Jesus, his mother, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. The People of the Book are encouraged to believe in the messages of the previous prophets including belief in the Paraclete, interpreted by Muslims as referring to Muhammad. How these topics are discussed varies within certain limits, as does the willingness of the exegetes to engage with extra-Qur'ānic materials that help illuminate the discussion. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the verse is,

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say Of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary Was (no more than) A Messenger of Allah, And His Word, Which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding From Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not "three": desist: It will be better for you: For Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. Enough Is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.¹⁰³

Tafsīr Mujahid does not discuss *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 directly. It could be that the specific themes referred to in the verse were matters of common knowledge during his lifetime and therefore did not merit discussion. Alternatively, his specific comments, if they ever existed, may have become lost with the passage of time. In any case the preceding verses, 157-160, do offer some indications of his reflections on the subjects discussed. These verses discuss what the Qur'ān describes as the apparent crucifixion of Jesus, *shubah*

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1 & 2:280-281.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Vol. 1 & 2:281. Citing *sūrat al-araf* (7):201.

¹⁰² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 2:367.

¹⁰³ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 271-272.

lahum. They confirm the status of Jesus as Messiah and messenger of God. Mujahid then continues to defend the honour of Mary against allegations made by the Jews concerning the nature of the conception of Jesus. His ending comments say that God promises the People of the Book that, “all will come to believe in Jesus before they die.”¹⁰⁴

Al-Tabari begins his commentary by considering the phrase, *O People of the Book! Commit no excess in your religion*. In his commentary, he singles out Christians as being the subject of the verse. In the phrase, *nor say of Allah aught but the truth*, his focus narrows to one of the Christological titles of Jesus as the ‘Son of God.’ This he asserts is a false statement. Interpreting the title literally, Al-Tabari bases his argument on the Qur’ānic retort, that God does not produce offspring.¹⁰⁵

Ibn Kathir begins by stating that Allah forbids the “People of Scriptures” (another Qur’ānic appellation for the People of the Book), from going to extremes in their religion. This serious error is one that he declares Christians are especially prone to and he therefore devotes a great deal of attention to this community and their religious beliefs. In support of his position he employs several *tafsīr* techniques. First, the Qur’ān is used to help interpret the Qur’ān, then he quotes several *hadīth* before making very interesting use of the writings of a particular Christian cleric. The excesses that Ibn Kathir challenges include the nature of Jesus, like the previous exegetes, and extend to the credence given by Christians to the disciples of Jesus and Church leaders. He says,

...The Christians exaggerated over Isa until they elevated him above the grade that Allah gave him. They elevated him from the rank of prophethood to being a god, whom they worshipped just as they worshipped Allah. They exaggerated even more in the case of those who they claim were his followers, claiming that they were inspired, thus following every word they uttered whether true or false, be it guidance or misguidance, truth or lies...¹⁰⁶

In this regard the credence Christians place on the words of the followers of Jesus and Jews place on the words of their rabbis, is considered by Ibn Kathir as the motivational force behind *sūrat at-tauba* (9):31, “They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah...” In the next phrase, *nor say of Allah except the truth*, he reiterates the basic tenets of *tawhīd* whereby Allah is “glorified, praised and honoured in His might” without partners. This is in defence of Christian claims, as understood from the verse, of

¹⁰⁴ Mujahid, *Mujahid, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University*, 296.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289. According to Abd al Rahman Tahir al-Surati, Mujahid Ibn Jabir does not provide any commentary of the verse in question.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:55.

Jesus being His son and “Maryam his wife.”¹⁰⁷ Ibn Kathir interprets the faith claims and the reprimanding words of the Qur’ān as truth versus lie, as if the faith claims of Christians could not possibly be the product of sincere misinterpretation of the words of Jesus, as received, or the words of the prophets of the Torah.¹⁰⁸ In response to the alleged inappropriate praise Christians bestow upon Jesus, Muhammad warns his followers of not making the same mistake with him. In a *hadīth* narrated by Imam Ahmad, through Ibn Abbas, Umar recalls Muhammad as informing his followers of the appropriate description of his relationship to Allah and warning them not to exaggerate “Do not unduly praise me like the Christians exaggerated over Isa, son of Maryam. Verily, I am a servant, so say, ‘Allah’s Servant and His Messenger.’”¹⁰⁹ A form of counter compensation at least in part, influences the exaggerations of Christians, over reaction to Jewish disbelief in Jesus as Messiah.¹¹⁰ However he insists that Christian claims concerning Jesus and his message are illogical. He states the true message of Jesus is consistent with Jewish respect for monotheism. Accordingly, Jesus taught the Children of Israel to worship one God, to be conscious of God in their lives, and refrain from giving preference to earthly pleasures over the values of God’s Kingdom. In addition, Rida introduces the concept that Jesus taught his disciples to wait for arrival of ‘the comforter,’ the final prophet who will stand over his teachings and set people on the right path.¹¹¹ More will be said about this subject below.

1.4a Jesus the Messiah

With the phrase, *Christ Jesus, the son of Mary was (no more than) A Messenger of Allah*, Al-Tabari touches upon the Qur’ānic significance of Jesus commonly neglected by Christians. The Qur’ān affirms Jesus as *al-masih*, the Messiah, the Christ, and the ‘good news.’¹¹² The significance of this statement is of seminal importance. Analysis of the term *al-masih* or the role of the Messiah, through the Qur’ān produces some interesting questions. In Judeo-Christian tradition there are at least five recognized uses of the term

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., Vol. 3:56.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Vol. 3:55.

¹¹⁰ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:67-68.

¹¹¹ Ibid. A sketch of the etymology and development of the concept of Muhammad as ‘the Comforter’ described in John are found in *Jesus in the Qur’ān*; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003; reprint, 1995, 1996, 2003), 96-100.

¹¹² Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289.

messiah, from the Hebrew *mashiach*, that range from the ordination of priests starting with Aaron, an honour bestowed on the gentile ruler, Cyrus of Persia, the anointing of kings and prophets, and finally to the eschatological Messiah.¹¹³ There is of course little agreement between Jews and Christians on either the person, or role of the Messiah, and although the Qur'ān agrees with Christians by affirming Jesus as *al-masih*, there are significant differences in respective expectations as well.

The use of the definite article in the Qur'ān stresses the uniqueness of Jesus as, *the Messiah*. In this light the term, *son of Mary*, acts as both a corrective to the Christian title 'Son of God' and as a positive affirmation of the unique birth of Jesus and the uniqueness of Mary. The phrase, *is only the messenger of God*, contributes to the description of the Messiah as well as to set boundaries for the role of the Qur'ānic Messiah. Various translations either translate the word *rasul* as "the" messenger of Allah or "a" messenger of Allah.¹¹⁴ The use of the definitive article is interesting since all three Abrahamic religions agree that there have been many messengers of God. Suffice it to say then, the use of the definitive with *rasul* in some way contributes to the uniqueness of Jesus as God's messenger and Messiah without detracting from the mission of God's other messengers. Al-Tabari describes the suggestion that the Messiah is the begotten "Son of God," as simply erroneous.¹¹⁵

On the other hand, the accusation often heard from some Christian commentators that Islam reject Jesus, or that in Islam, Jesus is just another prophet could not be further from the truth.¹¹⁶ The differences between the Qur'ānic Jesus and the Jesus of Christianity are much subtler. Christians often neglect the fact that the Qur'ānic rejection of Christian claims of the divinity of Jesus, in no way implies that Jesus is not the Christ. The Qur'ān affirms that Jesus is authentically sent by God to be a blessing to mankind.¹¹⁷ The title

¹¹³ Richard L Kimball, "An Exploration of the Concept of Messiah Through Judaism, Christianity and Islam," (St. Andrews: St. Mary's College, School of Divinity, University of St. Andrews, 2008).

¹¹⁴ For comparisons see the English translations of the Qur'ān by Yusuf Ali, and Mohsin Kahn. The use of *tashkil* in the Qur'ān developed over several generations as the recitation of the Qur'ān progressed from oral tradition to its authorized final written form. Therefore, there are some slight variations between texts, primarily due to dialectal concerns between authorized texts. For further information see William Montgomery Watt in *The Cambridge History of Islam*.

¹¹⁵ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289.

¹¹⁶ In this genre there is a wide spectrum ranging from Pastor Terry Jones, *to the many Christian apologetic works that include more scholarly endeavour such as* Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, Second ed. (Grand Rapids Baker Books, 1993; reprint, 2002, 2006), 233.

¹¹⁷ From the very beginning of Islam, a common reaction from Christians is to consider its teachings false and reject the prophethood of Muhammad starting with the delegation from Najran. In the post conquest period some early denouncements come from Doctrina Jacobi, and John Moschus, *Pratum Spirituale*, citing Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and John of Damascus, *Fountain of Knowledge* in Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on*

“Messiah” is reserved for Jesus, his birth is unique, comparable only to Adam, the miracles and teachings are all affirmed, and none can consider themselves a Muslim unless they accept Jesus as the Christ.¹¹⁸ The Qur’ān states the position of the Messiah in relation to an omnipotent God, one who is not in need of auxiliaries and therefore the Qur’ān rejects the idea of begotten, physical sonship, or divinity.

In fact, the phrase the Qur’ān emphatically states Jesus is, *His word, which He bestowed on Mary and a spirit proceeding from Him*. For Al-Tabari Jesus is thus “a spirit” from God, given unto, or bestowed upon Mary from Gabriel.¹¹⁹ Ibn Kathir’s focus is concerned with Jesus as ‘the word’ bestowed upon Maryam, or if he is the product of ‘a word’. He explains “*Jibril* (Gabriel) blew the life of Isa into Maryam by Allah’s leave, and Isa came into existence as a result. This incident was in place of the normal conception between man and woman that results in children.”¹²⁰ According to the logic of the statement, and in terms close to what Al-Tabari writes, Ibn Kathir states that Jesus is called a spirit (*ruh*) and a word created by Allah, because Jesus is the product of the word ‘Be’ that God uttered and sent with Jibril (Gabriel). Jesus is accordingly, a word created by God, ‘a creation’ of God, and not the creating word of God.¹²¹ In support of this argument Ibn Kathir cites from *sūrat al-mā’idah* and a couple of *hadīth* to demonstrate that Jesus is one of God’s messengers, a servant of God, favoured (with signs and miracles), and a creation of God’s. The nature of Jesus is compared to Adam, because he was created by God’s command, “Be.”¹²² In a *hadīth* that comes down through Al-Bukhari (Fath Al-Bari 6:547) Muhammad explains the acceptable bounds of belief concerning the nature of Jesus and religious faith in general:

If anyone testifies that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah alone Who has no partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger, and that Isa is Allah’s servant and Messenger and His Word which He bestowed on Maryam and a spirit created by Him, and that Paradise is true and Hell is true, then Allah will admit him into Paradise with the deeds which he performed.¹²³

Early Islam, vol. 13, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 57, 63, 485-489.

¹¹⁸ See *sūrat n-nisa* (4):171, *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):48, 59 & *sūrah Maryam* (19):16-34, *sūrat az-zukhruf* (43):59. 63-64.

¹¹⁹ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289.

¹²⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:56.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., Vol. 3:57-58.

¹²³ Ibid., Vol. 3:58.

Rida's examination of the 'word' employed to create Jesus is similar in manner to the other commentators. His particular interest focuses on the use of the word 'spirit' *ruh*. He begins his examination of the characteristics of the spirit found in the Qur'ān. He points out that the spirit of God, in the form of the Angel Gabriel, creates, guides and strengthens Jesus, as for example in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):253; *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):111; *al-anbiya* (21):91 and *as-sajdah* (32):8-9. There are, however, many uses of the word 'spirit' in the Qur'ān. He states that the sending of the 'spirit' is not unique to Jesus, as is demonstrated in *sūrat ash-shura* 42:52 and *an-nahl* 16:2, "...thus We revealed to you an inspiration (same word used as spirit) by Our command" and "He sends down an 'inspiration' by his command on whoever He pleases."¹²⁴

Rida further demonstrates through the examination of several passages from the New Testaments several ways in which God sends his spirit. These examples demonstrate that Jesus does not uniquely receive strengthening by the Spirit. Therefore, receiving the Spirit should not be used as an argument for equating Jesus with God. He examines the nativity story found in the first chapter of Luke describing how the Holy Spirit (the angel Gabriel) not only appears to Mary, but also to Elizabeth, John and Zakaria. Further to the point, the same words are used to describe how the Holy Spirit strengthens Jesus' disciples, even Judas. Therefore, Rida surmises that it does not make sense to say something that is a creation, or strengthened by God through the Holy Spirit, or that is sent by God, could be His equal.¹²⁵

1.4b Believe in His Messengers

The next phrase discussed is ...*So believe in Allah and His Messengers*. Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir consider this phrase simply states where faith should be directed; meaning believe God is one, alone without son, or wife, and believe in His messengers. *Jesus* is God's servant and messenger.¹²⁶ Allowing one verse of the Qur'ān to help interpret another, Ibn Kathir looks specifically at *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):75 "*al-Masih* (Isa), son of Maryam, was no more than a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before him. His mother Maryam was a woman of truth, they both ate food." This phrase reiterates the above point by identifying Jesus as one in a line of Messengers sent by God. Hence, Jesus

¹²⁴ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:69.

¹²⁵ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*. Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:70. Matthew 1:18 is also quoted.

¹²⁶ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:59.

is a human being called upon by God to be a messenger like one of the many messengers before him.¹²⁷ Rida pays particular attention to the Gospel of John. Here he observes inferences to the Spirit of God that have special significance for both Muslims and Christians. Rida examines the promises made by Jesus to send the comforter, the Spirit of Truth. For instance, John 15:26 reads, “The comforter that I will send you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth, that is with the Father will proceed, he will bear witness to me.” In John 16:7, 13-14, Jesus explains the necessity for his leaving and details the continuity of purpose of God by sending the Comforter/Paraclete after Jesus. The possible meanings of this phrase are explored in great detail. He rejects the idea that proceeding from the Father should be interpreted, as Christians do, that the Spirit is a division of God, and therefore evidence of the Trinity. Rather Rida sees this comforter as pointing to the prophet Muhammad who, “...because he does not speak on his own, but will utter what he hears, and he will inform you of what is to come. And he will bring honour to me because it is from me that he will take and he will inform you.”¹²⁸ The word identified as referring to Muhammad in John’s Gospel is *menahhemana* in Aramaic, *paráklētos* in Greek. It is commonly translated into English as counsellor, life-giver, comforter, spirit of truth, or advocate. In Arabic, the word is *ahmad*, a variation on the name and meaning of Muhammad.¹²⁹ Rida notes that there are discrepancies with various translations, interpretations and synonyms of the meaning of *menahhemana* and Paraclete, but for Muslims the use of the word is a clear indication of the coming of the prophet Muhammad, not only because of the similarities of his name, but also because of the message that he brought to humankind. Perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Rida, follows the deductive logic of ‘what comes from God is God,’ to infer that Christians should then take up belief

¹²⁷ The statement regarding food is very interesting and not one discussed by the exegete. Perhaps the statement is in refutation of some obscure docetic tendency.

¹²⁸ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:70-71.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 6:70. Parrinder, *Jesus*, 99. For some reason modern Arabic Bibles including the Arabic New Testament, Trinitarian Bible Society and the Coptic, Arabic Van Dyke translate the word as *ilmahzi*. George M. Lamsa translates the word as ‘comforter’ in John 16:7, and ‘Spirit of truth’ in 16:13 in his translation of the Aramaic of the Peshitta. *Holy Bible, From the Ancient Eastern Text*, trans. George M. Lamsa, vol. 1 (New York: Harper One, 1933), 1075-1076. Besides the Gospel of John, Rashid Rida also mentions the Gospel of Barnabas as describing the coming of the prophet Muhammad. In the Gospel of Barnabas the word used is the ‘Splendor.’ Lonsdale Ragg and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, ed. M. A. Yousseff (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2010), 16, Verse 17. In verses 96-97 the paraclete is discussed further and named as ‘Mohammed,’ pg105-106; A Hebrew word associated with paraclete is *Manaem*, Samir Khalil Samir challenges the Islamic linking of the Syriac *menahhemana* and Greek *parakletos* (consoler) with the Greek *periklytos* (praised). Khalil Samir Samir, *111 Questions on Islam, on Islam and the West*, ed. Wafik Nasry, trans. Claudia Castellani, 2008 ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 191.

in a “quadrity,” rather than the Trinity. Since as he explains, this comforter, is not the same as the Holy Spirit, but is something new from God.¹³⁰

1.4c Trinity & *Tawhīd*

The next subject examined is the concept of Trinity. Al-Tabari opens his remarks on the phrase, *Say not “three”*: *desist, it will be better for you*; with a synopsis of the inconsistencies he sees, especially with the idea that Jesus could be a god.

Among Christians, there is the reigning doctrine that Jesus is a god, that he is one of the three gods who are called the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. What is astonishing, in addition to their belief that Jesus would be a god, is that they believe that Jesus ate, drank, slept, and that he had been crucified, whereas these characteristics are those of humans. Moreover, they also recognize that he was formed in the belly of his mother Mary.¹³¹

Al-Tabari’s commentary neglects, as do all the exegetes, a central theme in the Christian understanding of the nature of Jesus by ignoring the fact that the humanity of Jesus is an integral component of Christian belief. His synopsis of the doctrine of the Trinity omits the insistence by Christians of *tawhīd*, the oneness of God. Criticism of the concept of the Trinity is a central theme of Islam and there are several verses of the Qur’ān where this is expressed. *Shirk*, (the association of any partners with God) is strictly forbidden in Islam.¹³² Al-Tabari chides those who use the term saying, “Cease telling the lie, which is in fact association (polytheism), that will be better for you than divine punishment.”¹³³ The Qur’ān and Al-Tabari’s assessment, leave no margin of tolerance. The Qur’ān is unequivocal with its distaste for any allusion to associating partners with God. Yet, the use of the term Trinity, whether it is appropriate or not, it is certainly not a lie. There is no intention to deceive. Rather the word chosen is intended to name an experience, a felt sense of the authenticity and connectedness between the Creator, the Messiah, and the Spirit that touches all creation.

¹³⁰ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:70-71. A similar line of logic is queried by Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East* (London: Mowbary, 1994), 79, 91.

¹³¹ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289. In the chapter concerning the Christian response to Islam the contrast between the various Qur’ānic and Christian descriptions of the nature of the relationship between the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit will be examined more closely.

¹³² Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 217.

¹³³ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:289.

Continuing with the theme of *tawhīd* through the phrase, *Allah is a single God*, Al-Tabari says, “The adored God is rather only one God, who has neither offspring nor parent.”¹³⁴ Coupled with the next phrase, *glory be to him: (far Exalted is He) above having a son*, Al-Tabari repeats the phrase for emphasis, “Far above is He from having a son!”¹³⁵ He further explains the phrase as exemplifying the omnipotence of God as creator. Contrasting then the place of the Qur’ānic Messiah there is the phrase, “With Him belongs what is in the skies and on earth.”¹³⁶ Once again rejecting any notion of the Messiah being co-creator our exegete expounds the greatness of God as the creator, and the place of the Messiah, Jesus as one of his creations, “that there is in the skies and on the earth, angels, humans and other creatures belong to Him; how could the Messiah be his son, while he belongs to the whole as one of the creatures of God?”¹³⁷ The closing phrase of the verse captures the trajectory of the argument succinctly, “God is enough of a protector!” Al-Tabari’s commentary paraphrases the statement adding that, God is enough for worshipers as governor, and provider.¹³⁸

Ibn Kathir takes a slightly different view of the Trinity by linking the mother of Jesus with the concept of Trinity. He offers his assessment of the verse. “...Do not elevate *Isa* and his mother to be gods with Allah. Allah is far holier than what they attribute to Him.”¹³⁹ Using the Qur’ān to help explain the meaning of the statement, Ibn Kathir refers to two verses from *sūrat al-mā’idah*. In *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):73, it says, those who say, “Allah is the third of three” are disbelievers.¹⁴⁰ Further, in (5):116 Allah asks Jesus “O *Isa*, the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, ‘Take me and my mother for two gods beside Allah?’” Jesus responds “Glory to thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in thine.”¹⁴¹ He explains that it never even crossed the mind of Jesus to ask people to worship him and his mother.¹⁴² In his defence Jesus adds, “...Never did I say to them ought except what you (Allah) did command me to say.”¹⁴³ His association of Mary with the Trinity picks up on a very interesting Qur’ānic theme that may come as some surprise to many Christians. Simply put, there are no Christians that

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. Here quoting from *sūrat t al-jathiya* (45):13, as will Ibn Kathir and Rashid Rida.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:59.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 326-327.

¹⁴² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:304-305.

¹⁴³ Ibid., Vol. 3:305.

consider Mary part of the Trinity. Yet, in the interest of accuracy, it has to be said that there used to be. Historically, a Christian sect called Collyridians did in fact worship Mary as a god.¹⁴⁴

Ibn Kathir demonstrating his awareness of Christian creedal variations briefly discusses the origins of three major Christian denominations. In pursuit of this aim he paraphrases the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria, Sa'id bin Batriq's assessment of the Council of Nicea convened during the reign of the Emperor Constantine. Accordingly, Constantine, seeing the Council divided over the formation of doctrine, strategically chose to support the sect with the most supporters over all the other groups. This sect thrived, "churches were built and doctrines were taught to young children, who were baptized on this creed..."¹⁴⁵ In time dissenting voices broke away from the Western Church, or the Melkite Church, and went on to be called the Jacobites and Nestorians. He says, "These three sects agreed that Isa was divine, but disputed regarding the manner in which Isa's divinity was related to his humanity; were they in unity or did Allah incarnate in Isa! All three of these sects accuse each other of heresy."¹⁴⁶ For this reason Ibn Kathir remarks rather comically, "...if ten Christians meet, you would end up with eleven sects!"¹⁴⁷

Rida offers a brief history of the Trinity that he sees as an ancient pagan theme found in many cultures. Stepping beyond the normal bounds of *tafsīr*, Rida traces pre-Christian examples of Trinitarian ideologies through the works of several western historians and anthropologists like Thomas Maurice, George Stanley Faber, Thomas William Doane, John Fiske, and others. Rida examines the beliefs of Hindus, Buddhists, Ancient Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, Zoroastrians even Northern European folklore. His review presents some uncanny similarities between pagan religious beliefs and creedal formulas enshrining Christian Trinitarianism.¹⁴⁸ Noteworthy from the commentary is the narrative that reportedly takes place between a Thulius, a Pharaoh and an Egyptian priest where

¹⁴⁴ Spencer J Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs In Pre-Islamic Times*, Arab Background Series (Beirut: Libraire Du Liban, 1990), 68. (See E. Gibbon, *The History of The Decline & Fall Of The Roman Empire*, 1994, Penguin Books, p. 177).

¹⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:60.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3:60-61.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3:60.

¹⁴⁸ Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:73-78. Focusing on just the references to T.W. Doane's work provides ample evidence of similarities between ancient Egyptian and Greek philosophy and the Christian concept of *Logos* and Trinity. To take one example, Doane quotes from James Bonwick, *Egyptian Beliefs in Modern Thought*, "...most astonishing development from the old religion of Egypt was in relation to the *logos*, or divine word, by whom all things were made, and who, though from God was God." Thomas William Doane, *Bible Myths and Parallels in Other Religions: Being a Comparison of the Old and New Testament Myths and Miracles with those of Heathen Nations of Antiquity Considering also their Origin and Meaning*, ed. J. W. Bouton, 4th ed. (New York: The Truth Seeking Company, 1882), 372-375.

Thulius asks if there is anyone greater than he. The priest replies, “Yes. There is one greater than everything and that is Allah before everything. Then there is the ‘word,’ and with them the ‘holy spirit.’ And all these three are one in nature and they are one in person, and from them is the eternal power...”¹⁴⁹ Rida surmises that the revelation of the creative word of God and the spirit of God gradually gave way to the anthropomorphism of his attributes, whereby the attributes of God could themselves become personified, as co-equals to their creator. Rida points out that this is a contradiction to the truth revealed in the Qur’ān.

Turning his attention to a European context Rida examines Greek and Roman influences affecting Christianity. He posits that Aristotle and Plato would have been well aware of the Egyptian concept of the ‘word.’¹⁵⁰ He refers to two books, *Early European Populations* and *The Development of Religious Thought*, where he notes the prevalence of conceptualising god in threes.¹⁵¹ This pre-disposition is considered by Rida to have entered Christianity through the influence of the Saint Paul and Emperor Constantine.¹⁵² He goes on to remind Christians that Jesus said that he “... did not come to abrogate the Law of Moses, but he came to complete it. But Paul has abrogated it stone by stone, and brick by brick...”¹⁵³ To this he says “*Cease it will be better for you.*” The Trinity, he says, is an illogical claim and an innovation in the teachings of Abraham and the prophets made without any evidence that can be supported by scripture.¹⁵⁴ Displaying knowledge of the Gospel, Rida, in line with the rules of the science of *tafsīr*, cites a selection of verses that reinforce the monotheistic teachings of Jesus that represent Jesus as an entirely human Messiah. He quotes from John 17:3, “Eternal life is to know you, and you are the only true God, alone, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”¹⁵⁵ In addition he examines the apocryphal gospel of Barnabas, which he reports formed part of the collection of approved books until 325 CE. In Barnabas, Jesus is reported to say, “...there was a beginning for me, and there will be an end for me. And I do not even have the ability to create even a

¹⁴⁹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:74-75. Here Rashid Rida is quoting from Doane, Thomas, William. 1882. *Bible Myths and Their Parallels in Other Religions*, 373.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., Vol. 6:75. For a brief history of the concept of the ‘word’ from the Old Testament through Heraclitus, Aristobulus, Philo of Alexander, to John’s Gospel see; Kimball, “An Exploration,” 40-45.

¹⁵¹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:76.

¹⁵² Ibid., Vol. 6:75-76.

¹⁵³ Ibid., Vol. 6:77.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Vol. 6:72-73, 78. Similar accusations of making *peshar* arguments are put forward by Jewish Scholars regarding Christian claims of the Messiahship of Jesus, see Kimball, “An Exploration,” 27.

¹⁵⁵ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:78.

fly.”¹⁵⁶ In his criticism of the title “son of God” he denounces the idea that God would have a son in the literal sense of the word. Following the familiar logic of past exegetes, he quotes the Qur’ān, “*far be it from His glory that He should have a son*” since this would imply that God had a wife, and Jesus was their begotten son. Yet, in an interesting departure from the other exegetes he accepts the possible use of the term as a metaphor; using the example of David and others who were servants of God.¹⁵⁷ This use would of course necessitate a complete renunciation of any godlike attributes being associated with the son. “*To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth.*”¹⁵⁸ As Rida explains, “everything that has a brain and has knowledge is proud to be a servant of His.”¹⁵⁹ “Therefore all that exists belongs to God...They are His creations, His servants whether they are angels, or prophets, born with or without a mother and father. All are in need of His generosity. *Enough Is Allah as a Disposer of affairs.*”¹⁶⁰

1.5 To Each of You an Open Way, *Sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48.

Sūrat al-mā'idah is a Madinan *sūrat*.¹⁶¹ It is considered by many to be the most important chapter in the Qur’ān. The 4th verse is thought to be the last verse revealed to Muhammad before his death, making *sūrat al-mā'idah* the last completed chapter of the Qur’ān.¹⁶² In a *hadīth* that comes from Jubayr bin Nufayr, Aisha the daughter of Abu Bakr and the wife of Muhammad said, “O Jubayr! Do you memorise *al-mā'idah*?” Jubayr bin Nufayr answered “yes.” And Aishah said, “It was the last *sūrat* to be revealed. Therefore, whatever permissible matters you find in it, then consider them permissible. And whatever impermissible matters you find in it, then consider them impermissible.”¹⁶³ This verse therefore is immensely influential in debates concerning the theme of abrogation, *mansukh*.

The verse ostensibly demonstrates the trajectory of God’s revelation beginning with the *Torah* continuing on to the Bible and culminating with the Qur’ān, that is guardian *al-*

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Vol. 6:78-79. It should be noted that these exact words are not found in the verses stated in the Lonsdale and Laura Ragg’s translation of the Gospel of Barnabas, published by Islamic Book Service, edition 2001, reprint 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Looking ahead to the third chapter it is very interesting to note Rida’s association of Aristotelian influence on Christianity and his willingness to find an acceptable application for the term begotten as other than the literal meaning.

¹⁵⁸ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 6:72, 78.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Vol. 6:72.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:71.

¹⁶² The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*. The last verse of the Qur’ān to be revealed is contained in *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):4 “this day I have perfected for you your religion.” The last full *sūrat* to be revealed is An-Nasr. 272. 2024.

¹⁶³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:71.

muhaymin, over God's revelation. Through the ensuing discussion of the trajectory of revelation, the verse indelibly links the People of the Book to the 'Community of the Believers' (*ummat al-mu'minin*) of Islam. An uncritical reading of the verse suggests a sense of religious *détente*, where the People of the Book and the People of the Qur'ān should let their lives speak for them through their respective tradition; leaving to God, whom we all serve, to sort out our differences. In fact, part of this verse is probably one of the most oft quoted phrases by proponents of interfaith dialogue. Yet, the traditional commentary of the verse clearly demonstrates how far an uncritical reading may stray from the established understanding and by default, epitomizes the necessity for comparative theology. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the verse follows,

To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety; so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.¹⁶⁴

1.5a Muhayminam, Guarding in Safety

Mujahid's commentary is brief. He confirms a central theme of the Qur'ān as guardian over the sacred books and providing a divine law revealed to Muhammad for all to follow.¹⁶⁵ Similarly Al-Tabari begins his commentary with the phrase *to thee we sent the scripture in truth*. The scripture in question is identified as the Qur'ān and the recipient is Muhammad. He reiterates that the message of the Qur'ān is clear and without doubt. The purpose of the text is writ plain by the phrases *confirming the scriptures that came before it and guarding it in safety*. He conveys that the Qur'ān confirms the truth of the scriptures that preceded it, guarding what has truthfully been revealed, while challenging and correcting what is false.¹⁶⁶ He supports his opinion by quoting the teaching of Ibn Abbas that Jewish and Christian scholars have altered the true message of the People of the Book. Therefore "the Qur'ān is the guardian of the Torah and the Gospel, judge between them by

¹⁶⁴ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 300-301.

¹⁶⁵ Mujahid, *Mujahid, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University*, 310. This is very similar to the opinion of the Torah and Gospel offered in the commentary of the previous verse.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:316.

what God has revealed.”¹⁶⁷ This means that what has come before the Qur’ān is subject to the Qur’ān and Muhammad is repeatedly warned to judge by the revelation given to him and not to be distracted by “...their vain desires.”¹⁶⁸

Ibn Kathir’s explanation of the verse in question is clustered together with the preceding verses 40-47. These state that God has dominion over all the earth. He punishes and forgives whom he wills. God consoles and warns Muhammad that there are those who would prefer to follow any lie than to follow the truth. These people reject not only what is given to Muhammad, but also what was revealed in the past to them in the form of the Torah, “the plain command of God.”¹⁶⁹ The law of retribution is found in verse (5):45. However, it may come as a surprise that the verse endorses the teachings of Jesus concerning forgiveness, “...But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it shall be for him an expiation.”¹⁷⁰ Continuing in the same trajectory, verse (5):46 attests that God sent Jesus, the son of Mary, and gave him the Gospel. The Qur’ān says of the Gospel, “therein was guidance and light and confirmation of the Torah that had come before it, a guidance and an admonition for those who have *taqwa*.” Verse (5):47 further states “Let the People of the *Injil* judge by what Allah hath revealed therein,” repeating a similar proviso given to the followers of the Torah, “And whosoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed, such are the rebellious.” Ibn Kathir contends that the verses imply that if they were to accept the teachings of the Torah and the Gospel then they would have to accept all teachings that are in these books, including the predictions that point to the coming of Muhammad and the commands to believe in him.¹⁷¹

With the above context of the verse in mind *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):48 becomes clearer. Ibn Kathir interprets the first phrase *to thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety*, to mean that the Qur’ān confirms the Torah and the Gospel that were sent before it and guards these teachings.¹⁷² Ibn Kathir

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 298. *Sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):44. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:185. The last sentence is believed by Ibn Kathir to have been recorded by Imam Ahmad that Ibn Abbas said God sent this *phrase* down in reference to two warring Jewish tribes that during the time of *al-jāhiliyya* did not honour equally the wounds they inflicted on each other in accordance to the laws of retribution, (*diyyah*).

¹⁷⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:192. The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 198. Cf. fn. 754 and 754. In a *Sunnah* that comes down to us by Ubadah bin As-Samit and recorded by Imam Ahmad (Ahmad 5:13) Muhammad says, “Any man who suffers a wound on his body and forfeits his right to retaliation as a way of charity, then Allah will pardon him that which is similar to what he forfeited.”

¹⁷¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:194. Some verses that are thought to allude to the coming of Muhammad are found in Deuteronomy 18:15; 18:18, John 16:7-8; Acts 3:17-24.

¹⁷² Ibid., Vol. 3:195-196.

explains that the previous scripture foretell of the coming of the Qur’ān through God’s servant and Messenger Muhammad. Those who understood the scriptures were strengthened in faith and kept Allah’s commands, as confirmed by *sūrat al-isra*, (17):107.¹⁷³ Ibn Kathir further expands the meaning of verse (5):48 to confirm the preeminence of the Qur’ān *vis-à-vis* all other Scriptures. One word, *muhayminam*, is extensively examined and presented as affirming the position of the Qur’ān. There are slight varying interpretations of the word. Ibn Kathir, who draws upon the commentary of Al-Tabari for support, discusses these variations at some length. Ibn Kathir records that Ibn Abbas, based on the narrations of Sufyan Ath Thawri, Abu Ishaq and At-Tamimi, considered the word *muhayminam* to mean, “entrusted over” (Al-Tabari 10:378). While Ali bin Abi Talhah believed Ibn Abbas taught the word means “The trustworthy,” implying that the Qur’ān is trustworthy over all preceding Divine Books. This opinion is also held by several reliable sources including Mujahid, Qatadah, As-Suddi, and Ibn Zayd (Al-Tabari 10:379; 10:377-380). Ibn Jarir, similarly, taught that the use of the word *muhayminam* implies “The Qur’ān is trustworthy over the Books that preceded it. Therefore, whatever in these previous Books conforms to the Qur’ān is true, and whatever disagrees with the Qur’ān is false.”¹⁷⁴

Rida’s understanding of the verse is the closest to a literal interpretation. Central to his understanding is his appreciation for cultural diversity and interpretation of the legal prohibitions and commands. This enlightened view endorses a plurality of interpretations of *shari’ah*, as methods of guidance for society while strongly endorsing the established universal truths of religion, the oneness of God, the need to submit to his will, the necessity to have one’s life reflect one’s values and to believe in the Last Day. These he argues are the basis of religion common to all the prophets and held in common with the People of the Book.¹⁷⁵ Similarly to the other *mufasser*, Rida states that the Qur’ān confirms the teachings of the past prophets that have been lost, or misconstrued over the years. For this reason, God revealed the Qur’ān to Muhammad, acknowledging the Qur’ān as the trustworthy guardian, *al-muhaymin*, of revelation that is to be preferred to the Torah and Injil. The meaning of the word *al-muhaymin* is explored by comparing the definition of the word championed by Ibn Abbas, and other noted scholars whose collective opinion oscillates between “the guardian” as in trustworthy, witness, or shielding.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ibid., Vol. 3:196.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Vol. 3:197.

¹⁷⁵ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:339.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Vol. 5 & 6:340.

1.5b Abrogation of the Verses

The point being made by Rida is that the Qur'ān represents perfection in religion and that the People of the Book have lost much of their authentic message, rendering their opinions completely untrustworthy.¹⁷⁷ A *hadīth* preserved by Jabir and narrated by Ahmad Al-Bazaar vividly expresses Muhammad's opinion of the unreliability of the Torah.¹⁷⁸ The companion Omar copied a book of the Torah into Arabic and came to read it to Muhammad. As he started reading the prophet's face changed, so that one of the *ansar* (helpers) interrupted Omar and Muhammad said, "Do not ask the People of the Book anything, they are a nation who have gone astray. And you can (have a choice), deny the truth or accept falsehood. By Allah, if Moses was amongst you, he would not have a choice except to follow me."¹⁷⁹ This implies therefore that the veracity of the Torah and apparently the Gospel, have been so badly compromised that even to take advice from the People of the Book in matters of faith leaves a person likely to deny something that is true or to accept a false teaching. According to the traditional commentary, the only testimony from the Torah and Gospel that can be trusted is that which affirms the Qur'ān.¹⁸⁰

The next phrase discussed is, *So, judge between them by what Allah has revealed*. Ibn Kathir interprets this phrase based on the commentary of Al-Tabari to be a counsel to Muhammad to rule by the revelation of the Qur'ān.¹⁸¹ Rida shares this assessment without reference to earlier commentary.¹⁸² Interestingly, Ibn Kathir reports on the authority of the companion Ibn Abi Hatim, that Ibn Abbas said, that Muhammad initially had the choice to either judge affairs by the Qur'ān or to let non-Muslims decide their own affairs according to their own traditions. However, these arrangements were abrogated with the further revelation, *and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you*.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., Vol. 5 & 6:341.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ It is worth noting that this statement is the basis of one of the rules of *tafsīr*, whereby the Torah and *Injil* are only consulted to back up what is in the Qur'ān, rather than as evidence in their own right.

¹⁸¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 3:197-198.

¹⁸² Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 5 & 6:341.

¹⁸³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 3:195-198. Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manār*, Vol. 5 & 6:341.

1.5c Many Roads lead to God

Having asserted the supremacy of the Qur'ān over the Torah and *Injil* the next phrase under discussion re-affirms the authenticity of the revelation given to the People of the Book and that given to Muslims, *To each of among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way.*" Al-Tabari's commentary differentiates between religion and law. He says that the religion before Allah does not change, but the message from the prophets differed in detail, for each community, "A clear path to follow."¹⁸⁴ The following phrase acknowledges God's intent to have diversity amongst peoples, *if Allah so willed; He would have made you a single people. But His plan is to test you in what He has given you,* meaning that all communities will be judged according to their actions and belief in order to establish those who are obedient from those who are rebellious.¹⁸⁵ Ibn Kathir believes that each community was given a clear path to God. People should strive to do God's will, "...following His Laws that abrogated the laws that came before it. And believing in His Book, the Qur'ān, which is the Final Book that He revealed."¹⁸⁶ Surprisingly, Ibn Kathir notes that Ad-Dahhak considered the phrase, *So strive as in a race in good deeds* to be directed only to Muslims, and not a challenge to all people.¹⁸⁷

Rida develops this phrase much further. He accepts that there has been a progression of revelation culminating in the Qur'ān, each abrogating the tenets of the former. However, he then examines the philosophy behind revelation and law. He states that the purpose of revelation and laws are to purify and improve the lives of those who follow them and that *shari'ah* differs with changing contexts "...based upon the conditions of the community and the readiness of the people." He further explains *dīn*, religion. Rida identifies the main precepts of religion common to all the messengers. These are the oneness of God, the need to submit one's will to God, and performing righteous deeds. He then introduces the term *ihsān*, a beautiful word meaning the constant striving for perfection, minimizing pain and conflict.¹⁸⁸ As part of his examination of the phrase, Rida looks at the *tafsīr* of Qatadah. Qatadah describes the Torah, the *Injil* and the Qur'ān as *shari'ah*; they respectively are ways or traditions, *sunnah*. God will judge between those who obey Him from those who do not. The *shari'ah* are practical laws that differ from one

¹⁸⁴ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:316-317.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:199.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol. 3:200.

¹⁸⁸ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:342. This definition is based on the definition given in the translators notes and Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 96.

tradition to the other, they may be interpreted through a judicial system. Religion on the other hand, is not changeable. This idea of the religion not changing is supported by *sūrat ash shura* (42):13, “He has ordained for you of religion what He enjoined upon Noah and that which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad] and what we enjoined upon Abraham and Moses and Jesus, to establish the religion and not be divided.”¹⁸⁹ Having given the impression that *shari’ah* is somewhat relative, Rida further comments on the phrase by restating that the Laws found in the Qur’ān are for all people and for all times, because they have been given to the last prophet. The laws that came before had a time and a place of relevance, but are no longer practical. He uses as an example the rigidity of the Torah in worship and the impracticality of the Christian call to bow before every ruler, no matter how corrupt, and every enemy. Rather, Islamic laws are necessary for the stability of society and for the development of humanity making *ijtihād*, here translated as ‘reason’, obligatory.¹⁹⁰ He compares the differences in methods as being those appropriate to a people’s maturity and material capabilities. God will test each according to what they have been given, meaning their religion, legal codes and methods. And he emphatically states that the purpose of religion is to motivate all people, not just Muslims, as seen with the commentary of Ibn Kathir, to initiate righteousness and strive towards achieving this goal.

The last phrase is, *the return of you all is to Allah; then He that will inform you about that in which you used to differ*. For Al-Tabari the phrase describes the Day of Judgment when we will all stand before God and be judged according to our actions. On this day God will divide the righteous from those who have been mistaken.¹⁹¹ Similarly for Ibn Kathir the phrase is a reminder to all people that our final destination is to God. God will set the record straight concerning issues that are disputed. He will reward the sincere and punish the disbelieving for their rebelliousness. For Rida the same sentiments apply. However, there is a much more universal concentration on striving to do the beautiful and making laws that help in this regard, rather than making laws that are the cause of enmity.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:342.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5 & 6:347.

¹⁹¹ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:317.

¹⁹² Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:347.

1.5d The Curse of *Taqlīd*

If one were to stop here then the theme from the first half of the verse would appear to imply that Islam is the pure religion, but that Judaism and Christianity, for all their faults, are still valid roads to God and salvation. Jews and Christians were given ‘a way’ that they may live according to God’s precepts and to compete with other communities, to see who could do better. However, the succeeding verses amplify the critical connotations found in verse 48 concerning dialogue with Christians and Jews. The commentary shows that Islam is the true way and that Christians and Jews have compromised the authentic message that they have received.

A brief glimpse at the commentary from the scholars reveals an apparently insurmountable obstacle, a wholly unedifying caricature of the Qur’ānic construct of the People of the Book. For Al-Tabari the message of the above verses is quite clear. Christians and Jews are the enemies of believers.¹⁹³ The abridged edition of his *tafsir* lacks any historical context that could somehow mitigate the severity of the proclamation. Ibn Kathir and Rida shed some light on the context. They pick up on the theme that there are Jews who wish to “turn” Muhammad and the nascent community away from the revelation of the Qur’ān and its teachings. In an interesting *hadīth* transmitted by Ibn Abbas, and recorded by Muhammad bin Ishaq, Ibn Kathir describes the occasion of the revelation of *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):49. Here four members of the Jewish community in Medina, Ka’b bin Asad, Ibn Saluba, Abdullah bin Surya and Shas bin Qays, conspired together to attempt to misguide Muhammad concerning “his” religion. They went to Muhammad and said, “O Muhammad! You know that we are the scholars, noblemen and chiefs of the Jews. If we follow you, the Jews will follow suit and will not contradict us. But there is enmity between us and some of our people, so we will refer to you for judgment in this matter, and you should rule in our favour against them and we will believe in you.”¹⁹⁴ Muhammad did not accept their request, and in turn he received the revelation, *And so judge between them by what Allah has revealed and follow not their vain desires, but beware of them lest they turn you far away from some of that which Allah has sent down to you... sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):49. Ibn Kathir, Al-Tabari and Ibn Abi Hatim maintain that the revelation concerning the above *hadīth* concludes with *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):50, *Do they then seek the judgment*

¹⁹³ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:317-318.

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:201. Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:347. Here the Jewish leaders are described as rabbis.

of (the days of) ignorance (*jāhiliyya*)? And who is better in judgment than Allah for a people who have firm faith?¹⁹⁵

Ibn Kathir explains the meaning of the verse as God criticising those who choose to ignore His guidance, preferring their own ignorant misguidance and lustful contrivances.¹⁹⁶ This explanation is important for several reasons. In simple terms the word “*jāhiliyya*” means ignorance. It is translated by Ibn Kathir in verse (5):50, to represent a period of time before the Prophethood of Muhammad, “Do they then seek the judgment of (the days of) ignorance?” Describing the time before Muhammad as the time of ignorance insinuates that those who followed the teachings given by God, namely the Torah and Gospel in previous times were also following their own opinions, desires and lusts so to speak. Yet, the Qur’ān uses the word “*jāhiliyya*” to refer to the perennial problem of people who choose to ignore God’s revelation or choose to abide by some parts of Divine Law while ignoring others. Ibn Kathir seems quite willing to accept Al-Tabari’s assessment of non-Muslims, “...Whoever does this, he is a disbeliever who deserves to be fought against, until he reverts to Allah’s and His Messenger’s decisions, so that no law, minor or major, is referred to except by His Law.”¹⁹⁷

Looking just a little further ahead to verse 51, it says, “O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors...” It would appear therefore that Muslims are prohibited from taking Jews and Christians, as friends. The *tafsīr* of Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir certainly tend to lean in this direction, seeing Jews and Christians as potential enemies of the true community of believers.¹⁹⁸ However, the *tafsīr* of Rida examines the context specifying to whom the prohibition applies and when. In this regard he examines various *hadīth*, some that suggest a blanket prohibition, as well as the evidence that suggests that the prophet Muhammad did not practice such a prohibition himself, nor did he intend such a universal interpretation. Muhammad made many treaties with Christian and Jewish tribes. Some were honoured and some were broken. For example, the Bani Awf were a Jewish tribe from Medina that enjoyed amicable relations with Muhammad, as did the Bani al-Haritha, Sa’dah, Jasm, Aws and Tha’laba.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 3:202.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Mujahid, *Mujahid*, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University, 310. Mujahid seems to imply that the choice of rejecting guidance, *Jāhiliyya* refers to the Jewish community.

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 3:202. This author has an issue with the evolution of the concept of *jāhiliyya* from its first meaning, “ignorance” to the meaning that developed in time to refer to the “period of ignorance.” This issue will be further discussed in later chapters.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:218. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-Azīm*, Vol. 3:203-206.

¹⁹⁹ Rida, *Tafsīr Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:350. For further information on other tribes see Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

Therefore the *sunnah* of Muhammad shows a distinction between the enemies of Islam and those with whom friendships are accepted and encouraged.

In fact, Muhammad classed non-believers in three categories. There were those as mentioned above, who had benign relations with the Muslims and did not obstruct the mission of the prophet or his community in any way. Then there were those who fought openly against Muhammad, and lastly there were those who tried to remain neutral in order to see how events would unfold. Rida reports, some of these tribes secretly wanted Muhammad and Islam to succeed while others wished he would fail.²⁰⁰ Accordingly the verse has both a general and a specific context to explain the harshness of the words. Muhammad made peace with the three other Jewish tribes of Medina, the Bani Qaynuqa, Bani an-Nadr and the Bani Quraydah.²⁰¹ Each in turn reneged on their agreement and fought aggressively against him. At this time there were individual Muslims who had personal agreements with these tribes.²⁰² These Muslims needed to choose to whom they would remain loyal, to the Jews in this instance, or to Muhammad. For instance, Abdullah bin Ubay bin Salool had a treaty with the Bani Qaynuqa tribe, which he chose over loyalty to Muhammad. Ubadah ibn As-Samit, from the Bani Awf bin al-Khazraj tribe, also had an agreement with the Bani Qaynuqa, but he renounced all his former allegiances and said, “My loyalty is on the side of Allah, His messenger and the believers. And I move towards Allah and His messenger from the oath I had with these *Kuffars* and from supporting them.”²⁰³ Those who refused to declare wholeheartedly with Muhammad, but kept their contacts up with Jewish and Christian friends to the potential detriment of the Muslim community were called the hypocrites. They tended to keep their options open so they too were included in the context of the verse. In Rida’s opinion the prohibition against contact has to do with aiding and abetting anyone who was fighting against the prophet and the Muslim community and has nothing to do with religion *per se*.²⁰⁴ In fact Rida refers to *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (23):7-9, to demonstrate the opposite,

Perhaps God will put, between you and those to whom you have been enemies among them, affection. And God is competent, and God is Forgiving and Merciful. God does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes— from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, God loves those who act justly. God only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you

²⁰⁰ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:350.

²⁰¹ Ali Muhammad As-Sallaabee, *The Noble Life of the Prophet, Peace be upon him*, trans. Faisal Shafeeq, 1 ed., 3 vols. (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam, 2005), 1366-1368. Provides some background to the story.

²⁰² Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:350-351.

²⁰³ Ibid. Vol. 5. & 6. 351. Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:318. Here the intention is to expose Abdallah ibn Salool and the other ‘hypocrites.’

²⁰⁴ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 5 & 6:352.

from your homes and aid in your expulsion [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrong doers.²⁰⁵

1.6 Nearest in Love to the Believers Wilt Thou Find, *Sūrat al-mā'idah*, (5):82-83

This final cluster of verses under discussion, *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82-83 explore the varying Qur'ānic stereotypical responses to Islam to be expected by both Christians and Jews.²⁰⁶ On the one hand these verses appear to offer the potential for a spiritual *rapprochement* between Christians and Muslims and on the other hand there is the seeming irreconcilable animosity to be expected from Jews. The commentary stereotypically reinforces images of the Qur'ānic construct of Christians in general by examining specific nuanced themes. Included in this cluster of themes are the pre-Qur'ānic Muslims, and the differences between those who continue in their submission to God to accept Muhammad as prophet and those who do not. However, as straightforward as the verses appear, there are subtle differences between the exegetes leading to differences between an uncritical understanding and one based on close textual analysis. Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation of the verses is as follows,

Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians" Because amongst these are men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. (82) And when they listen to the revelation received by the messenger thou will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth: They pray: "Our Lord!" We believe, write us down among the witnesses." (83)²⁰⁷

1.6a Destined for Enmity

Mujahid reserves his comments for the identification of the Christians concerned stemming from the occasion of the revelation of the verse and for monasticism. Both these themes will be dealt with more thoroughly below. The opening phrase *Strongest among men in*

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Vol. 5 & 6:353-354. This teaching is in contrast with the teachings of Zamakhshari, al-Baydawi and others who would go as far as to say that a Muslim should not even see the fires of Christians and Jews used for cooking.

²⁰⁶ Here, Jews and Christians are the People of the Book using the narrow sense of the term.

²⁰⁷ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 313.

enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans offers quite a disparaging assessment of the potential for relations between Muslims and Jews. The phrase is explained by Al-Tabari as generalising the arrogance and stubborn nature of the Jews as well as idol worshippers.²⁰⁸ Ibn Kathir offers little attempt to soften the impact of the literal reading. He affirms that the phrase describes the Jews because their disbelief “is that of rebellion, defiance, opposing truth, belittling of other people, and degrading the scholars.”²⁰⁹ He goes on to call God’s continued curse upon them until the Day of Resurrection for killing many of their prophets, for inciting the polytheists to hatred of Muhammad, and for allegedly trying to poison Muhammad.²¹⁰ Rida largely agrees with this assessment. However, he qualifies his remarks by insisting that the experience of the community of believers is a generalisation from the context of the period of revelation and not necessarily true for individual cases or for all times. In fact, he notes that theologically Muslims and Jews are very similar, but the worldly interests of the Jews motivated them to rebel against Muhammad. In support of his argument he cites historical examples where Jewish reaction to Islam was quite positive, for instance, following the conquest of Syria, the Holy Land and in Andalusia.²¹¹ However, having valiantly demonstrated how the reaction of the Jews within the Hijaz should be contextualised, he proceeds to qualify his comments by citing that in those countries the advent of Islam served their interest, as they felt oppressed by the Christian regimes. He further states, “Indeed, they did not really change their habits and did not leave what was their character of plotting, and that is they do not do anything except for a benefit.”²¹²

1.6b Christians as Believers

In contrast, the appraisal of Christians is far more optimistic, *and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say: "We are Christians:" because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world (qissisin (priests) and ruhban (monks), and they are not arrogant.* An uncritical understanding of the verse may lead one to universalise this glowing assessment of the relationship between Muslims and Christians. However, this high honour is conditional and represents an excellent example of the *theoretical construct* referred to by McAuliffe in *Qur’anic*

²⁰⁸ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:331.

²⁰⁹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:246.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 7 & 8:6-7.

²¹² Ibid., Vol. 7 & 8:7.

Christians.²¹³ The conditions of praise are apparent when the possible occasion of the revelation is examined.

Mujahid relates that the verse refers to the delegation from Abyssinia who came with Jafar and his companions after they sought refuge from persecution from the pagans of Mecca.²¹⁴ Al-Tabari, based on a *hadīth* from Ibn Abbas, describes this possible occasion in greater detail,

This divine matter was revealed about the Christians from Abyssinia, who had been dispatched to Medina by their king the Najashi. When the Qur’ān was recited to the envoys, their eyes filled with tears, they recognized truth and believed. That is indicated in the continuation of the revelation: and that they are without arrogance. When they hear what has been revealed to the envoy, you see their eyes water, so much they recognize truth there, at the point of saying: “Our Master, we believe. Include us among the witnesses.” (5):83.²¹⁵

Here is a clear example of Qur’ānic praise for Christians who convert to Islam. Members of the Christian delegation were able to recognise the truth when they heard it, because they were not arrogant and as a result they were open to the truth that they recognised and converted to Islam. For Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir the conversion of the delegation from Abyssinia to Islam represent only one of the possible occasions to which the verse could refer. For instance, Al-Tabari in a *hadīth* transmitted by Ibn al-Nu'man Qatadah considers that the verse could have been any group of Christians. He says “They were followers of the religion of *Isa*, son of *Maryam*, who when they saw Muslims and heard the Qur’ān, they became Muslims without hesitation.”²¹⁶ Ata bin Abi Rabah, a student of Ibn Abbas, identifies the group in question as the Abyssinians who embraced Islam after Muslims migrated there and lived amongst them. Al-Tabari keeps the identity of the people concerned vague and says that it could be applied to anyone who fits the description, whether they are from Abyssinia or not.²¹⁷ The reaction of these Christians is therefore held up as the normative example of good Christians. In his own opinion, Ibn Kathir relates that the phrase, *and you will find the nearest in love to the believers those who say: ‘We are Christians’* to refer in very general terms to those, “who follow the religion of the Messiah and the teachings of the *Injil*,” offering perhaps his personal admiration for the teachings of the Gospel. In support of this opinion he quotes from *sūrat al-hadid* (57):27

²¹³ McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 288.

²¹⁴ Mujahid, *Tafsir Mujahid*, 202. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 285-292.

²¹⁵ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:331. Translated into English by this author. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:245.

²¹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:245. Quoting Al-Tabari 10:501. Ibn Kathir mentions other verses that offer similar assessments, Cf. 246-248, Qur’ān (3):199. (28):52-53, 55; (57):27.

²¹⁷ Ibid. McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians*, 205-206.

“And We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him (Jesus), compassion, mercy, and monasticism...” without mentioning that the end of the phrase describes monasticism as something Christians invented themselves.²¹⁸ Further Ibn Kathir says that in the religion of the Messiah fighting is prohibited, while citing a verse similar to Matthew chapter 5, “He who strikes you on the right cheek, then turn the left cheek for him.”²¹⁹ Ibn Kathir says that Christians generally are more tolerant of Islam and Muslims, “because of the mercy and kindness that their hearts acquired through part of the Messiah’s religion.”²²⁰ Rida’s commentary seeks to identify those to whom the phrase might include. First, he believes it is addressed to Muhammad. The second audience in most general terms would be everyone. “The people” represent multiple possibilities; they are the Jews, polytheists and the Christians of Abyssinia, at the time of revelation. Moving to a more general meaning of the phrase, he opines that the meaning extends to every nation and to all generations.²²¹

1.6c Invitations to Islam

Further to the point, Rida examines the particular response to letters of invitations to Islam sent by Muhammad to some kings and leaders surrounding the Hijaz. He summarises the response from Christians as favourable, irrespective of whether they accepted Islam, or not. In particular he examines the cases of Heraclius, the Christian Emperor; Cyrus, the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria; Jaifar bin al-Jalandi, the king of Oman, and his brother Abd. The reception of these leaders to the invitation was courteous and attentive. Eventually Jaifar bin al-Jalandi and his brother both convert to Islam. According to Rida, Heraclius and Cyrus did not convert, but neither did they reject Muhammad and his message. With these examples Rida re-introduces some common themes concerning the continuity of true religion found in Islam and the prophethood of Muhammad as foretold by the previous prophets. What keeps otherwise faithful people from accepting Islam, he maintains, has more to do with worldly concerns rather than disbelief. Their reasons for remaining Christian are in keeping with the possible acceptable reasons given in his examination of the *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48. These reasons vary from loss of power, not

²¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:246. In an interesting footnote Mujahid stresses that Monasticism was not something ordained by God, While stressing that monasticism is not sinful, he points out that God has given us the means to enjoy life in a proper way, and this is the way of Islam, Mujahid, *Mujahid, Dr. M. Abdul-Salam, Kuwait University*, 313-314.

²¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:246.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 7 & 8:4.

properly understanding the message of Islam and a ‘false’ sense of loyalty to the *taqlīd* of their own religion. Cyrus for instance upon receiving Hatib bin Abi Balta’ah, the messenger from the prophet replies, “we have a religion that we will not abandon except for something better.”²²² In response Hatib explains that the message from Muhammad is the perfection of the religion of the Messiah. “...The good news that Moses gave about Jesus is like the good news that Jesus gave regarding Muhammad. And our invitation to you is to the Qur’ān, just as you invite the people of the Torah to the *Injil*. Every prophet has a nation that he was sent to, and it is your duty to obey him. We do not ask you to refrain from the religion of the Messiah, but we ask you to follow it.”²²³ Cyrus responds, “I have looked into the affairs of this Prophet, and I have found that he does not command that which is disliked, and does not prevent that which is desirable. I also did not find him to be a misguided magician, or a lying soothsayer. And I have found out that he carries the signs of prophethood when he made hidden apparent, and telling that which people whisper...”²²⁴ As a sign of friendship Cyrus gave Muhammad many gifts including two slave girls. Mariah, a Christian, became his wife and bore his son, Ibrahim.²²⁵

1.6d Learned and Sincere

For Al-Tabari the phrase, *because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world qissisin (priests) and ruhban (monks), and they are not arrogant*, implies that from among the Christians there are priests, and those who practice monastic life. These Christians are humble and recognise the truth.²²⁶ He posits two interesting theories regarding the identity of the priests and monks in question. The first is based on a *hadīth* that comes from Ibn Abbas that proposes that they are Jesus’ disciples. This theory describes them as submitting to God, *al-islam*. They are sailors, *nawati*; Jesus called them to follow him, *da’ahum ila al-islam*. The second theory, based on *hadīth* that come from Abu Salih al-Misri and Sa’id b. Jubayr, places the identity of the priests and monks within the context of the verse, with the delegation from Abyssinia.²²⁷ These scholars, who he describes as “people of a religion” (*ahl dinin*) are credited for instilling into their communities the values of the teachings of Jesus and thus making Christians

²²² Ibid., Vol. 7 & 8:4-5.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid., Vol. 7 & 8:5.

²²⁵ Ling, *Muhammad*, 277, 286, 315, 277.

²²⁶ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:331.

²²⁷ McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 218.

more receptive to Islam.²²⁸ For Ibn Kathir, priests and monks exemplify that among the Christians are men who are humble, seek knowledge, truth and fairness.²²⁹ This phrase is taken in conjunction with verse 5:83 *And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth.* For Al-Tabari the phrase implies that when the delegation heard the Qur’ān recited they recognised that it is God’s truth, and their eyes could be seen to fill with tears.²³⁰ For Ibn Kathir the phrase refers to “the good news that they have about the advent of Muhammad.’ In light of the truth they have found the Christians respond as the verse concludes, “*they pray: ‘Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses.’*” In support of this opinion Ibn Kathir discusses two very important verses that explain and affirm the positive disposition of Christians towards Islam, *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):199, which he translates as, “And there are, certainly, among the People of the Scripture, those who believe in Allah and in which has been revealed to you, and in that which has been revealed to them, humble themselves before Allah.” This verse alludes to the Qur’ānic theme of the continued sequential nature of revelation and the fidelity of the Christians who continue in faith to enter Islam. The other verse is *sūrat al-qasas* (28):52-55, which brings into play the concept of Christians as pre-Qur’ānic Muslims; Abdul Yusuf Ali translates the verses,

Those to whom We sent the Book before this, they do believe in this (Revelation); (52) and when it is recited to them, they say, “We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord: Indeed we have been Muslims (Bowling to Allah’s Will) from before this. (53) Twice they were given their reward, for that they have persevered, that they avert evil with good, and that they spend (in charity) out of what We have given them. (54) And when they hear vain talk, they turn away there from and say: “To us our deeds, and to you yours; Peace be to you: we seek not the ignorant.”²³¹

It is often forgotten that the Arabic language pre-dates Islam by more than 1,500 years.²³² Therefore the terms used to describe a person who submits their will to God, i.e., a ‘*Muslim*’ or is called to follow God, ‘*da’ahum ila al-islam*’ could have been used in the period of *jāhiliyya*, to name a person of faith. The use of the phrase is quite complimentary and should not be forgotten as a phrase that potentially includes a faithful Christian even if only in rare usage. In fact, this author has heard this verse and similar phrases quoted by Palestinian Christians to their Muslim brothers and sisters, usually followed by, “...You

²²⁸ Ibid., 218-219.

²²⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 3:247.

²³⁰ Al-Tabari, *L’Exegese d’ Al-Tabari*, Vol. 1:331-332.

²³¹ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 1135-1136.

²³² Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 8-10.

have your Islam and I have mine.”²³³ In the following chapters the use of Islamacised Arabic terms will be examined in greater detail. In any case Christians who do satisfy the above description and enter Islam are praised in the Qur’ān for their perseverance and fidelity.

Rida agrees with the other exegetes extending the praise for respect for the truth to priests, monks and to Christians in general.²³⁴ He observes that there are good and bad people in both religions. The character of the Jews is contrasted to the Christians with a quick examination of the historical factors affecting their disposition; that the problem with the Jews originates with their enslavement in Egypt and the command of God to keep separate from the pagans once the Jews entered the Holy Land. At first this separation from other peoples was necessary. He argues that if the Jews had mingled with pagans their monotheistic religion would have been overcome by the pagan practices. However, what started out as a means of training a nation, eventually led to a nationalisation of *tawhid*. This practice eventually produced some undesirable attributes like arrogance, superficial religiosity, and excesses in materialism and rituals, things that Jesus came to reform. Following in the sequence of divine revelation, God sent Muhammad as the Paraclete, “the spirit of truth” who would guide humanity in all that is good for the body and the soul. The people of faith, including priests and monks, who accepted and propagated the teachings of Jesus, whether they were from Jewish backgrounds or not, were closer in affection and belief to Islam, even with their concept of Trinity. They were therefore, more predisposed because of the teachings of Christ to accept the truth of Islam when it was presented to them.²³⁵ Rejecting the notion that the concept of the Trinity, as a form of polytheism, might in some way negatively affect the relationship between Muslims and Christians; Rida remarks that the concept of Trinity is a very complicated concept introduced into Christianity “when it was not even understood and comprehended...” and ironically, probably facilitated people’s conversion to Islam.²³⁶

The general common theme of the character of believers is traced through history in order to demonstrate its continued veracity and to acknowledge missed opportunities. Rida briefly examines some of the reason for the historical aggression between Christians and Muslims. Reflecting on the crusades, the rise of the Ottoman Empire, and extending into modern times he sees the aggression as a product of worldly ambitions, misconceptions

²³³ Cf. *Surat al-Kafirun* (109).

²³⁴ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 7 & 8:7-11.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7 & 8:7-8.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7 & 8:7-11. McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, 231.

and racism for which both sides have been guilty. Turning to Muslims, Rida condemns the Muslims of his time for their weakness in the practice of following the Qur'ān and for tolerating corrupt governments and politicians. He further condemns the backwardness of their educational systems and social developments that have made a mockery of Islam in contrast to western Christian countries that have modernised. If it were not for these factors he argues, whereby Muslim countries would be as developed as western countries, economically, socially and politically; the friendliness between Christians and Muslims would be even greater, as would conversion to Islam. He ends his assessment of the causes of strife aptly with a curse on the *provocateurs* that might cause any strife between Muslims and Christians, "May the curse of Allah be upon those who provoke animosity and hatred among the servants of Allah in utter self interest or to please their masters."²³⁷

Rida contends that Christians who are not arrogant, or not filled with haughtiness, when they hear the message of the Qur'ān and contemplate its meaning, they are more likely to recognise it as Gods truth and accept Islam. They may respond, as did the delegation from Abyssinia, "*Our Lord! We believe; write us down among the witnesses.*" Being witness in this case infers membership of the community of Muhammad, having previously followed the teachings of Jesus. This includes Jesus' teachings concerning the Paraclete. Rida then narrates from Ibn Abbas, that the witnesses are those referred to in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):143, "And thus we have made you a medium (just) nation that you may be bearers of witness to the people and the prophet may be a bearer of witness to you."²³⁸

1.7 Conclusions

This chapter employs the hermeneutical method of traditional commentary, *tafsīr*, to examine the commentary of four Islamic scholars concerning a selection of verses from the Qur'ān that discuss Christians and Christianity. A close textual analysis of the commentary portrays the following *theoretical construct*. *Sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 defines the communities of the People of the Book. The commentary discusses the issue of correct belief. At stake is whether or not *whosoever believes* could encompass those who do not accept Muhammad as prophet. For Mujahid, Christians who do not follow from belief in Jesus to belief in Muhammad are no longer true believers; they will be doomed in the next

²³⁷ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 7 & 8:10.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7 & 8:11-12.

life. Al-Tabari considers correct belief implies belief in Muhammad, but maintains that the promises of the phrase, *and no fear shall come to them, neither shall they sorrow*, for *whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness*, remains established, *muhkam*. This suggests the possibility of salvation for all who believe in God and who live their lives according to their beliefs, need not fear the Last Day. Ibn Kathir on the other hand, contends that the verse is *mansukh*, abrogated, by *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):85, citing a *hadīth* from Ibn Abbas that states that no deed is acceptable to God unless it conforms to the laws of Muhammad. Rida, however, like Al-Tabari, considers the value of deeds, letting one’s life speak, are far more important than membership of a particular religion, or superficial religiosity. He contemplates the possible reasons why a person who submits to God, (i.e., *islām*) might fall short of following the prophet Muhammad. These reasons vary from never having been exposed to Muhammad, to not having sufficient information to make an informed choice, to being preconditioned by one’s own tradition, so as to be unreceptive to the message of Muhammad. These people, according to Rida, are possible exceptions to the necessity of accepting Muhammad as prophet and entering Islam.

Therefore, although both Al-Tabari and Rida acknowledge the importance of accepting the prophethood of Muhammad, they do not exclude those who remain in their faith from God’s salvation. On this issue Rida eloquently reminds his fellow Muslims of the words from *sūrat an-nisa* (4): 123-124, “Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book...If any do deeds of righteousness...and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.” It is critically important to note that wholesale denigration of the People of the Book for not following Muhammad neglects the specific historical context of verse, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*. In other words, knowing the context of difficult verses can help uncover the universal lesson from the specific context.

The idea of following the evolution of belief through successive revelations from all the prophets to Muhammad is central to the *theoretical construct* outlined by McAuliffe. There is strong evidence to maintain that even from the classical period of exegesis, and arguably from the formative period as well, there is an element of inclusive salvation reserved for Christians as well as for others. What remains pivotal however, is the need for those who do not follow Muhammad, to refrain from being antagonistic to his message and community. This is not unlike the necessity for those who do not accept Jesus to refrain from rejecting the one who sent him, as in Luke 9:50 or Mark 3:28-29. What is clear from the debate is the need to understand the area of abrogation and context. The context of the

revelation of a verse is where the verse is soundly understood. To generalise, or universalise on the specific meaning of a verse is an act of interpretation that can be challenged by alternative interpretations. The context of *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 concerned the Salman al-Farisa and his former Christian colleagues. His example of steadfastness to following the sequence of revelation forms part of the normative example of Qur'ānic Christians. The necessity of accepting Muhammad as an authentic prophet of God appears not unreasonable if indeed Muhammad was the man he claimed to be. Yet not every person is afforded the honour of the company of a prophet in order to ascertain his character and authenticity. Is this requirement that much different from Christians expecting the Jews in the time of Jesus, or after, to recognise his messiahship? It behoves Christians then to consider what it is they reject about Muhammad while remaining within their own *taqlīd*.

The commentary for *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 criticises Christian excesses in religion. Here the main issue concerns *tawhīd*, the oneness of God. Christians are accused of elevating Jesus and his mother to be gods, rather than servants of God. The verse does not mention any particular denomination or community specifically. Therefore, the criticism acts as a corrective to the *theoretical construct* of Christians in general. The appellation of “Son of God” is discussed at length and is roundly denounced as *shirk*, association of partners with God. The nature of the Qur'ānic Jesus as Messiah is presented and discussed. He is a creation of God, through the word of God, and strengthened through God's Spirit. This is not viewed in itself as an exclusive event, since the Spirit of God is active in the world and strengthens others. Examples of God sending His Spirit to others are examined through verses of the Qur'ān and Gospel. Here again the *menahhemana*/Paraclete is mentioned as another form of God's creation that God sent to strengthen people's faith. Ibn Kathir reflects that Jesus taught strict *tawhid* in keeping with Judaic tradition. He sites *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):166 for support. In this verse Jesus squarely denies instructing anyone to worship him or his mother. Ibn Kathir mentions with great respect that Jesus taught people to worship God alone, to be conscious of God in all aspects of their life, *taqwa*, and to renounce the pleasures of this world. In *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 the blame for the error in Christian dogma falls squarely on the followers of Jesus, the monks and priests, who Ibn Kathir says Christians follow as lords, citing *sūrat at-tauba* (9):31. Ironically, in another context it is the priests and monks from Abyssinia that are singled out for praise for their recognition of Muhammad as a prophet. Rida in his commentary embarks upon a study of the concept of Trinity found in ancient cultures. The gist of his argument is that the sin of

shirk is something societies are prone to adopt and often feed upon each other's mythologies, anthropomorphising the concept of father, son and spirit to be a divine triune entity. Therefore, as he sees it, Christians have only slipped into the oft-repeated folly of distorting the truth of their revelation by associating partners with God. Moreover, Rida curiously mentions the possibility that this exaggeration may be the result of over compensating for the refusal of most Jews to accept Jesus and/or the result of translating the Semitic concept of Messiah to a predominantly gentile world.

Sūrat al-mā'idah (5):48 appears at first glance to acknowledge that the People of the Book received divine revelation as part of a sequence of revelation. Each community is to persist in faith and practice, consciousness of God, to see who can better serve God. However, the commentary presents quite a different picture. Here the key to the opening phrase is the term *muhayminam*, meaning to guard over. The Qur'ān is presented as guardian over all previous revelations, keeping what is true in safety from alteration. Therefore not all the texts are equal, the Qur'ān is superior to the Torah and Gospel because the divine truth given to these communities has been lost or distorted. The occasion of revelation instructs Muhammad to remain steadfast to the revelation that has been given to him in judgment with certain Jews of Medina that seek to use his office in a dispute with their own people. For his services they would offer their conversion. Further the commentary differentiates between the way to God, meaning the different prescriptions of life for each community, or *shari'ah*, which may differ slightly from one culture to another and true religion, which does not change from one prophet to the next. The laws of Muhammad are presented as being the best laws for living a good life and governing society, replacing the laws of Jesus and other prophets before him. True religion is simple, belief in one God, the need to submit one's life to God, and to ever strive to let one's life reflect one's belief with righteous deeds, thus ever striving for perfection in faith and practice, *ihsan*. This is the same religion that was enjoined upon all the prophets. The final phrase from the verse reflects the omnipotence of God; in the end, God will judge all our differences.

However, the commentary goes further to reinforce the idea that the way, *shari'ah*, revealed to Muhammad is the best way. The choice is God's guidance or the return to the days of *jāhiliyya*, i.e., ignorance. Through Muhammad, God has perfected religion. Muslims are warned not to take Jews and Christians as friends lest they are tempted away from the correct path. Yet, the commentary also reveals that the context of this very harsh statement is specific to Muslims who prevaricated, as it were, between their previous

allegiances and Muhammad. They are referred to as the hypocrites. Muhammad never practiced a ban on relations with Christians or Jews. In fact, *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):7-9 explains that it is God's will that people of all faiths experience reconciliation and friendship even between those who were once enemies.

Sūrat al-mā'idah 5:82-83 gets to the heart of the image of the *theoretical construct* of praiseworthy Christians. Here in strongest terms Christians are described as the nearest to Muslims. The reasons have to do with the values of Jesus' message that predispose Christians to humility and mercy. This verse praises priests and monks. These are the Christians who from a scholarly perspective are able to recognise the truth of the Qur'ān, referring to the teachings of Jesus that relate to the *menahhemana*/Paraclete. The most plausible specific example of such Christians is that of the delegation from Abyssinia, although in general terms the verse could apply to all Christians who respond in kind. Christians who convert to Islam, or as Hatib bin Abi Balta'ah would say, continue to follow in the religion of Jesus by accepting Muhammad as the *menahhemana* are praised and promised a double reward for their steadfast perseverance in faith. Pre-Qur'ānic Christians are praised for following Jesus and described as pre-Qur'ānic Muslims for responding to Jesus' call to Islam. Those who do not convert to Islam in the time of Muhammad are understandably not praised, but neither are they condemned. The examples of the Cyrus the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Emperor Heraclius are retained as examples of otherwise respectable Christians, who accept the authentic mission of Muhammad, yet, who for whatever reason, do not follow Muhammad. The reasons expressed generally have more to do with earthly interests or inappropriate fidelity to *taqlīd*, to the ways of their own communities, rather than theological concerns.

The above review of the commentary forms the *theoretical construct* that McAuliffe has coined Qur'ānic Christians. These Christians reflect a *theoretical construct* in that their particular beliefs and character are defined by the Qur'ān through the commentary tradition rather than in consultation with any historical community, or individuals known to the commentators. In her conclusion McAuliffe surmises that after the advent of Muhammad the only true Christians, and therefore praiseworthy Christians, are those that accepted Muhammad as a prophet or would have if they had the chance. Christians who do

not accept Muhammad are no longer true Christians, because their practice of the religion of Jesus has been distorted to the extent that they do not recognise, or accept, Muhammad as the Paraclete.

To a greater extent, the findings of this chapter concur with those of McAuliffe. It is a true and valid assessment of the commentary that acceptance or rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad emphatically changes the requisites of belief for the individual. This is especially true during the period of revelation of the Qur'ān. However, although the traditional commentary of the verses examined praise Christians who follow the religion of Jesus into Islam, the opposite is not the case. The verses that criticise Christians for failure to follow Muhammad fall short of condemnation. Examination of the commentary of these verses reflect a consistent affirmation of the intention of the individual, irrespective of their outward religion, to be ultimately judged by the lives they lead. As noted above the religion before Allah remains simple and unchanged. From the Classical period Al-Tabari asserts that, "...God has not specified the wage of righteous action together with faith for some of His creatures rather than others..." Rida goes to great lengths to try and understand what might prevent a person from recognising Muhammad as the final prophet. In the cases where Christians convert to Islam, it is as a result of hearing the recitation of the Qur'ān accompanied by dialogue with Muhammad, or one of his envoys, who was able to convince the Christians that Muhammad was indeed the subject of the promises made by Jesus in Gospel. Certainly this personification of the Paraclete must have been a very interesting development for those Christians that considered the Paraclete a spiritual gift. For those Christians who do not recognise Muhammad as the Paraclete there is no less goodwill, no less a willingness to see Christians as potential allies and a people more likely to be open to the teachings of Islam than the other members of the People of the Book.

The issues McAuliffe raises concerning the difference between Christian self-definition and the *theoretical construct* of Christians and Christianity, evident through the commentary of the Qur'ān are issues sure to influence interfaith relations for each new generation. The prospect of developing understanding of each other's faith requires continued exposure and meaningful dialogue based on an understanding of tradition as well as an appreciation of the spiritual journey all people share. Muslims are fortunate to have such an extensive and authoritative base from which to begin in the form of the traditional commentary of the Qur'ān. This author advocates that the best way forward for interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians is for Christians to become aware of

how the traditional commentary works, while suggesting that the changing contexts may merit modification of the traditional guidance.

In the next chapter this thesis examines the communities extant in the region surrounding the Arab peninsula during the time of *al-jāhiliyya* with the intention of gaining deeper insight into the context of the Qur'ān and how this influenced the Qur'ānic image of Christians. Employing a cluster of hermeneutical tools the communities of the People of the Book are explored. As far as it proves possible, theological issues touched upon in this chapter, such as the differences in the understanding of the nature of the Jesus, expectations of the Paraclete, or expectations of a coming prophet will be contrasted and compared. Non-theological influences will also be considered, including possible political or cultural allegiances that might affect a community's predisposition to accept Muhammad, as prophet, or as the new leader of the Quraysh. In addition, further questions are asked as to how might the centuries old war between the Byzantium and Persian Empires have facilitated the diversity of beliefs from amongst the Christian communities, or even the nature of the spread of Islam after the death of Muhammad. All these variables influenced the reception of Muhammad and may help shed light on the context of his prophethood. By becoming more aware of the tensions between the communities of the Arab peninsula during the period of *al-jāhiliyya* it may be possible to throw greater light on the meaning of specific verses and the universal principles to be applied in subsequent generations after the death of Muhammad, when the *ummat al-mu'minin* needed to interpret the Qur'ān in fresh contexts.

Part II: Challenging the Constructs: Expanding *Tafsīr* of the Qur'ānic People of the Book

Part two of this thesis attempts to shed light on two important constructs emerging from the examination of the People of the Book, the hermeneutic *tafsīr*. The first concerns the social and historical environment of the context of the Qur'ān and its importance as a factor influencing *tafsīr*, while the second concerns the Christian response to theological representations of Christian doctrines. Through this inquiry, it is hoped that both Muslims and Christians will be encouraged to appreciate what the Qur'ān and Gospel have to say regarding the oneness of God, and God's relationship with His word. Through this examination it is hoped certain challenges and opportunities for more fruitful dialogue and cooperation will emerge.

Chapter 2. Beyond *Al-jāhiliyya*: The Social and Historical Context of the People of the Book in Pre-Islamic Arabia *“utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum”*

2.1. Introduction

In Islamic culture the name given to the period of time on the Arab peninsula prior to the arrival of Islam is *al-jāhiliyya*.¹ The term is loosely translated as the *Time of Ignorance*. Tradition has it that this was a barbaric period in matters of social conduct and faith.² This period is frequently contrasted with the seminal shift in the relationship between man and God, with the inlibration of His word in the form of the Qur'ān and the prophethood of Muhammad. Some might argue that here humanity once again faced the choice between *islām*, submission to God's guidance, and negotiating matters of faith and conduct based on the misguided norms of flawed beliefs. Yet, as the Qur'ān mentions, and as discussed in the previous chapter, God has always offered His guidance to His creation, beginning with Adam and spoken through all the prophets, even on the Arab peninsula. Those who followed God's guidance could be found in the communities of the People of the Book and in the lives of individuals who through the exercise of reason and conscience also lived

¹ Muhammad bin 'Abdil-Wahhaab, *An Explanation of Aspects of the Days of Ignorance*, trans. Isma'eel Alarcon (New York: Sanatech Printers, 2005), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 13-22. Here 'Abdil-Wahhaab specifies that the term Days of Ignorance includes matters concerning the conduct of the People of the Book, non-People of the Book, and or non-acceptance of the message of Muhammad; Tarif Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classic Period*, ed. David Morgan, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1, 7, & 11.

righteous lives. So questions beg, what qualifies as *al-jāhiliyya*? What is the difference between submission to God's will during *al-jāhiliyya* and submission to God's will after the arrival of Islam?

More specifically, is Qur'ānic criticism of the People of the Book based solely on faith and creed, which varied significantly between various communities extant on the peninsula, or is there an element of particularity at work that determines whether a community, or individual, might be predisposed, or not, to congenial coexistence with Muhammad and his community?³ Due to the importance of these questions it is unfortunate that there is a lack of primary sources left behind by pre-Islamic Arab communities. An examination of the period identifies two main Arab/Islamic sources of information. One interesting genre of information comes from the poetry left behind by nomadic Arabs. This is referred to as the *jāhiliyya poetry*.⁴ Then there is the vast repository of Islamic literary material found in the *sīra*, *hadīth* and *tafsīr* collections that are based on verses of the Qur'ān mentioning *al-jāhiliyya*.⁵ These sources, although quite suitable for pedagogical, or homiletic purposes, fall short of answering key social and anthropological questions about the people and time in a broader sense that might contribute to a greater understanding of the varied relationship between Muhammad's nascent community and the communities they encountered.⁶ Fortunately, the image we have of the period is enhanced by information supplied by other external societies, Abyssinian; through legend as with the *Kebra Nagast*; through the extra-canonical Jewish *Rabbanan d'Aggadta* stories, as well as some material from the social sciences. Since the period is critically important for Muslims, Christians and Jews in gaining an understanding of the context of the Qur'ān, the period of *al-jāhiliyya* necessitates closer analysis.

This chapter seeks to contribute to the reconstruction of a more holistic image of the *al-jāhiliyya* period by examining the genres of material discussed above from both Islamic and non-Islamic sources. The communities extant at this time are important to the future development of Islamic culture, as they set precedents for interaction for the generations that follow, even to the present day. In more specific terms the principal communities concerned are the Christians and Jews extant on the Arab peninsula during the time of

³ Darren M. Slade, "Arabia Haeresium Ferax (Arabia Bearer of Heresies)," *American Theological Inquiry (online)* 7, no. 1 Jan 15 (2014): 43-53. This article offers a brief overview of the dissonant Christian communities existing in Arabia at the time of Muhammad.

⁴ Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classic Period*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1-39.

⁶ This research draws upon the tools of anthropology such as the study of relevant social historical and archeological studies, folklore, religious and theological discourse in an attempt to gain a more holistic image of the communities concerned in the time of *al-jāhiliyya*.

revelation, in particular the Jews of the Hijaz, Medina and to a lesser extent Himyar as well as Christians from Abyssinia and Najrān.

Before beginning an examination of the period in question it is worth examining the term *al-jāhiliyya* to see just how it is employed in an Islamic sense. *Jāhl* is the root of the word *jāhiliyya*. In an Islamic theological sense the term *jāhl* represents a lack of knowledge or rejection of God's guidance.⁷ Derivatives of the term appear numerous in the Qur'ān translated into English as *ignorant*, *ignorantly*, *ignorance*, *ignore* and even as *foolish*.⁸ The term *al-jāhiliyya* appears only four times in the Qur'ān.⁹ In each instance the use of the term suggests a slightly nuanced meaning that is explained by the context of the verse. In *sūrah Āl-'Imrān* (3):154 the context that suggests the term implies a wavering faith or doubt in God and his prophet.¹⁰ In *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):50 the phrase refers to more self-serving use of interpreting Jewish traditions in favour of one group of Jews over another.¹¹ In *sūrat al-ahzab* (33):33 the term refers to immodest displays of wealth by women and instructs the wives of Muhammad to conduct themselves modestly and dutifully in their faith.¹² The last use of the term in the Qur'ān is in *sūrat al-fath* (48):26, here the believers are given the gift of *sākinah*, calmness, in face of a heated discourse with non-believers and those who preferred the ways of the days of ignorance.¹³ One noteworthy historical use of the term worth mentioning involves Abu l'Hakam, who ignominiously gained the title Abu Jāhl, *the father of ignorance*, for his vociferous opposition to Muhammad and for his persecution of defenceless Muslims in the early Meccan period.¹⁴

⁷ Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 76-77. The term is defined with slightly more secular nuances in Dr. Rohi Baalbaki, "Al-Mawrid," in *A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary* (Beirut: Dar El-Ilm Lilmalayin, 2007), 409 & 437. Examining *Jāhl* from a different perspective offers some clarity. Possible antonyms for *Jāhl* are *islām*, *submission to God*, *ilm* knowledge, or *hilm*, moral reasonableness, or self-control. From a Christian perspective, it is interesting to ponder what Thomas Aquinas intended with his discussion of *invincible ignorance* (*ignorantia invincibilis*), whether or not he intended his definition as a response to Islam in his *Summa Theologica* ST Book 1, Question 13 and 31. These questions defend the concept of the Trinity. According to David B. Burrell, C. S. C. Aquinas in *Summa Contra Gentiles* contrasts the proof of the veracity of Christianity based on the strength of miracles with the accusations of Islam spreading by the dual lures of promises of carnal pleasures and the force of arms; accusations roundly discredited today.

⁸ M H Shakir, "Concordance of the Qur'ān: Extracted from the M. H. Shakir Translation of the Qur'ān," in *Concordance of the Qur'ān: Extracted from the M. H. Shakir Translation of the Qur'ān* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc., 2005), 586-587.

⁹ See Qur'ān, (3):154 ignorance or lack of faith in God, (5):50 *islām*, (33):33 Immodesty, lacking modesty, or female worldliness, temptress as in the Time of Ignorance and (48):26 *hilm*.

¹⁰ Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, 200-202.

¹¹ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, 5 & 6:302. Here Rashid Rida discusses how the Qur'ān is guardian over previous scripture. The specific context of the verse is identified and discussed in, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 3:202.

¹² Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, 3:30-31.

¹³ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys In Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1990), 5, n21.

¹⁴ Ling, *Muhammad*, 58.

The use of the term *al-jāhiliyya* in the Qur'ān suggests that the initial audience is familiar with pre-Islamic culture. Consequently, people are offered the choice of living by God's guidance, the way of *islām* and thus becoming a person who submits to God, a *muslimūm*. However, the universal import of the term makes defining the boundaries of *al-jāhiliyya*, either in time or place, an elusive task, due to the many nuanced meanings and applications of the phrase. For instance, since pagan Arabs are named does this imply monotheist Arabs are possibly exempt from accusations of rejecting God's guidance? Alternatively, is living in the light of *islām* conditional to a perennial personal choice? As mentioned in chapter one, Islamic scholars use the term in the generic sense to name the time and spiritual condition of the Arabs prior to the arrival of the prophet as well as in its specific Qur'ānic context in *tafsīr* literature.¹⁵ The exegesis of Al-Tabari and Rashid Rida suggest that there is a possibility of living a righteous life, living *islām*, but failing for matters of conscience, albeit prejudiced, or misinformed, from an Islamic perspective, to accept the religion of Islam and requisite belief in the prophethood of Muhammad. In modern times some Islamic schools and social movements equate the gross failings in society, both in Western, as well as in Islamic countries analogous to a return to *al-jāhiliyya*.¹⁶ For example Muhammad bin 'Abdil-Wahhaab is as critical with Islamic leaders as he is with non-Muslims, or even those who seek greater cooperation between believers of different faiths. Sayyid Qutb, for his part, prefers to focus on the image of complete separation between Muslim Society and all other influences in order to achieve a more utopian Islamic Society, ostensibly as in the days of yore.¹⁷

The problem with the association of *al-jāhiliyya* of the pre-Islamic period with modern society, or any other period of time, is that very few people (if any) truly

¹⁵ Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 76. Alternatively, *al-jāhiliyya* could simply denote the time of anarchy prior to the arrival of Muhammad. Cf. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. Xii. Khalidi reasons that *al-jāhiliyya* refers to "a historical era as much as a warped state of mind, the 'original sin' of Qur'ānic man." Cf. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classic Period*, 11-13.

¹⁶ Bassam Tibi, "The Worldview of Sunni Arab Fundamentalists: Attitudes Towards Modern Science and Technology," in *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*, ed. R. Scott Appleby Martin E. Marty, *The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 91. The point is made that the root of many Islamic reformist movements, consider modern society as weakening of the message of the authentic beliefs and practices of the first three generations of Muslims, the pious ancestors. In addition to a return to traditional values there is an accompanying increased degree of intolerance for innovations within Islam and for the People of the Book as representing forms of unbelief. Although there are significant differences between various movements each generally draws upon similar sources of inspiration such as Ibn Taymiyya, Muhammad Abd al-Wahab, Muhammad Abdu, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sayyid Qutb (Milestones), Hasan al-Banna, Maulana Maududi, or Rashid Rida. Cf Richard Gauvain, "Salafism in modern Egypt: Panacea or Pest?," *Political Theology* 11, no. 6 (2010). Yunus Dumbé & Abdulkader Tayob, "Salafis in Cape Town in Search of Purity, Certainty and Social Impact," *Die Welt des Islams* 51(2011).

¹⁷ Here the works of Muhammad bin 'Abdil-Wahhaab and Sayyid Qutb come to mind. See 'Abdil-Wahhaab, *An Explanation of Aspects of the Days of Ignorance*, 13, 285, 303-304. Cf. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestone*, SIME (USA2005), 6-11.

understand pre-Islamic Arabian culture well enough to make a fair comparison. Therefore, this author contends that the concept of *al-jāhiliyya* runs the risk of misinterpretation by theologians, or by social-political movements, who might oversimplify the concept and undervalue the state of spiritual growth on the Arab peninsula prior to Muhammad. Therefore, just as the theoretical construct of the People of the Book obscures paths to interfaith dialogue, so too, the resulting theoretical construct of *al-jāhiliyya* risks obscuring the subtle nuances that are possibly found in the context of the revelation of verses for the people discussed therein.¹⁸ Lack of clear understanding of *al-jāhiliyya* threatens interfaith dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and People of the Book. For, how can a contribution to dialogue be valued when one of the contributors is considered to wilfully reject God's guidance as is the case with the pedagogical works of Sayyid Qutb and 'Abdil-Wahhaab noted above?

From these quite varied views, what can be said about the boundaries between belief and disbelief of those who do not convert to the religion of Islam, yet practice *islām*? The former case might be true for those Christians, or Jews, who met Muhammad, accepted that he was an authentic servant of God, but remained within their tradition, as well as those who may never have met Muhammad or been aware of his teachings.¹⁹ Further to the point, in discourse with this genre of pre-Islamic society a more soul-searching dialogue surely took place. Questions like these underscore the importance of understanding how the term *al-jāhiliyya* may have applied at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān, in order to understand how the less nuanced use of the term today may present an obstacle to meaningful interfaith dialogue and coexistence.

This chapter attempts to address the lack of background information surrounding the *ahl al-kitāb* provided by the exegetes in chapter one. It is hoped that this enlightened view will facilitate the theory of this author that the message of Islam in its criticisms of the People of the Book is more dependent on the specific context of the revelation, the *asbāb an-nuzūl* than is generally accepted. The implications of this theory are that the Islamic criticisms of Christianity are less reliable beyond the context of revelation. This is especially true, and becomes a problem, after the death of Muhammad, as the followers of

¹⁸ The idea here is that of the *sociology of consciousness*, how well do future generations truly understand the authentic mission or intention of Muhammad vs an inevitable element of interpretation in light of one's own context and interests. For instance, 'Abdil-Wahhaab's use of *ahl al-jāhiliyya* infers a universal rejection of divine revelation for both non-believers and the People of the Book at the time of Muhammad and as an ever-present danger to Muslims. See note 16 for page references.

¹⁹ Here the status of people accepted by Islam to have been Muslims before Muhammad and those who through no fault of their own were ignorant of the true message of Muhammad and therefore did not convert to Islam as discussed by Al-Tabari and Rashid Rida and in chapter 1.

Muhammad struggle to interpret and apply his teachings in new and changing contexts of time and place. Further to the point, unless the specific context is adequately understood, it is not possible to employ the methodological discourse of *tafsīr* properly, leaving the interpretation of the Qur'ān with its timeless import, impregnable and obscure to Christian/Islamic dialogue today.²⁰

2.2 The Children of Abraham in Arabia

In an attempt to understand the particular Abrahamic culture of Arabia it is worth stepping back to try and comprehend how monotheism may first have arrived there. To begin, when most western people think about the Jews of antiquity they are likely to imagine the Jews of the Old Testament, a people perfectly content to live in Eretz Yisrael, the very land that God promised to Abraham and to Moses. Similarly, a westerner may have paid scant attention to the fate of Ishmael and his descendents, nor to the promises made to Abraham and Hagar on Ishmael's behalf. What of the fate of the other children of Abraham's wife Hagar, not to mention the children of his concubines? The descendents of all these people slip conveniently away from the common image of Abraham. Then there are the 'other' peoples of the region, the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Horites and Amalkites who often fought the Children of Israel and were subject to the *ban* in reprisal.²¹ Perhaps a brief examination of Biblical sources and the corpus of material left behind by the *Rabbanan d'Aggadta* may provide clues as to how, in a theological if not a historical sense, the religion of Abraham came to Arabia and what social perspective this may have inspired.

All Nations will be Blessed

From the outset of revelation, the fates of the lives of the children of Abraham seem intertwined. In Genesis the future patriarch of the Arabs, Ishmael, is born to Abraham and

²⁰ Understanding the specific context of the verses of the Qur'an forms the basis of *tafsīr*. For further clarification see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 1:30. Subhani, *Introduction to Tafseer*, 21-23. The quality of the dialogue is adversely affected by the lack by either Christian or Muslim interlocutors, if one, or the other, is reliant in any way on inaccurate stereotypes, or theoretical constructs. Since the contribution would merely be a rehash of stale predictable arguments, without progressing understanding.

²¹ The *ban* is the Hebrew term used for offering the sacrifice of one's enemies as tribute to God. Here one is required to slaughter men women, children livestock and crops. The direction is given by Moses to annihilate the Amalekites for their sin of attacking the Children of Israel while they were weak and wandering the desert. The term is applied by some to Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza as Israel's modern Amalekites. It is also said that the Israelites were so aggrieved to learn that the soldiers spared some of the Amalekites that the soldiers were not allowed to enter the Promised Land and returned instead to the land of the Amalekites. Hagai Mazuz, "Massacre in Medina " *Segula: The Jewish Journal Through History*, no. 3 (2010). See also Jack Cohen, *The Reunion of Isaac and Ishmael* (New York: Mosaic Press, 1987), 30.

Hagar.²² When he reaches the age of thirteen he is circumcised on the same day as Abraham, as a sign of the everlasting covenant between Abraham and God, along with all the other males from Abraham's household.²³ Abraham and Hagar are assured that God will bless Ishmael, despite the blessings bestowed upon Sarah's son Isaac. Indeed, after Ishmael and his mother are sent away to wander in the desert of Paran, the angel of the Lord repeats God's promise that Ishmael will be the father of a great nation.²⁴

The Bible does not mention any further contact between Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael during the life of Abraham. Picking up the trail requires an examination of Jewish *Rabbanan d'Aggadta* material as well as Islamic sources.²⁵ These sources contain stories where Abraham visits Ishmael, the continued bond between Ishmael and Abraham, as well as the future reconciliation between Isaac and Ishmael. One of the most romantic stories seldom recounted is the story of how Abraham is reunited with Hagar. Accordingly, Isaac, after the death of Sarah, recognised the grief of his father and set off to find Hagar, the other love of his father. By now Hagar is recognised by Abraham and his family for her righteousness. Hagar never relinquished her marriage vow to Abraham in spite of their separation and keeps her faith in the one God. She joyfully accepts Isaac's invitation and returns with him. Reunited, Hagar, is given a new name, Keturah, meaning "incense" referring to the manner in which her repentance, *teshuvah*, was accepted for her pride over Sarah.²⁶ Reunited, Keturah bore Abraham six more sons as well as a daughter.²⁷

²² Hagar is the gift of the Egyptian King to Sarah. Muhammed Ibn Ismael Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Abdul Malik Mujahid, trans. Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), Vol. 4, Book 60, ¶3348, ¶3359. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends Of The Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, 6th ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Of America, 1909), 223, fn. 274, 237. Here, drawing upon the Targum Yerushalmi, Hagar is discussed not only as a gift to Sarah from Pharaoh, but also his own daughter. idem, "The Legends of the Jews," in *The Legends of the Jews*, ed. Boaz Cohen (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7:199. Here Hagar is identified as Keturah, the woman Abraham marries after the death of Sarah. Ginzberg, *Jewish Legends*, 1:298. In the *Pseudo-Jonathan* Hagar/Keturah is both the daughter of Pharaoh and granddaughter of Babylonian king Nimrod. Florentino Garcia Martinez, "Hagar In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan," in *Abraham, The Nations, And The Hagarites*, ed M. Goodman; G. H. Van Kooten; J. Van Ruiten. (Brill, 2011).

²³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. Genesis 16,

²⁴ Ibid. Genesis 21. D S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites Prior to the Rise of Islam*, The Schweich Lectures 1921 (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), 12. Here Margoliouth suggests that the legend of Abraham in Arabia is not as old as association in the pre-Islamic period suggests.

²⁵ The *Rabbanan d'Aggadta* are stories or legends employed by the Rabbinic Jews of the Diaspora for homiletic purposes. Torah and copious servings of the moral imagination blend to fill in the blanks, as it were, between the outlines provided by the canonical texts and the needs of the teacher. With the recitation of these stories the character of the individuals of Biblical times are embellished. In later times Islamic material may even be used, whereby dialogues and anecdotal incidents further endear the audience to the characters in question. This is especially true with the Jewish versions of the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac as well as the pre-maternal relationship between Sarah and Hagar. See Ginzberg, *Jewish Legends*, 237-244. Concerning Hagar and Sarah and the birth of Ishmael, Cf. 263-266 where Ishmael is sent away and 266-269 where Abraham visits Ishmael. Cf. Cohen, *Reunion*, 167-169.

²⁶ Rabbi Binyamin Efrati, "Sh'ma B'ni" *A Treasury of Stories and Lessons from the Weekly Parashah*, ed. C. D. Sklar, trans. Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Iskovitz, 2005 ed. (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2005), 25-26. Here

Another very important legend relates to the building of the temple in Mecca referred to as the Ka'bah and mentioned in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):125 & 127.²⁸ Muslim scholars identify this temple as the temple referred to in Psalms 84.²⁹ Here again we see the example of the bond between Ishmael and Abraham where the faith of Abraham is passed on to his beloved son and for the generations that follow. The importance of this legend is that it provides a common place for pilgrimage for the descendants of Ishmael as well as later generations of Jews. If mention of the site in Psalms is authentic then Mecca was indeed a place well known to Jewish travelers with a solid link to their own tradition.³⁰ There is a story recounted by Ibn Ishaq that goes back to the pre-Islamic period. This story mentions how the Jews used to worship at the Ka'bah in Mecca. As the story goes, the King of Yemen, Tibān As'ad Abū Karib, a proselyte to Judaism, intended to destroy the temple, because he learned that the people there were engaged in idol worship. Two rabbis from Yathrib, who explained the origins of the temple, dissuaded him. These two rabbis were the sons of Isrā'il b. ishāq b. Ibrāhīm otherwise known as, the friend of al-Rahmān. They travelled with Abū Karib to Yemen and helped bring Judaism to his Himyarite Kingdom.³¹ More will be said of this incident below.

Continuing in Genesis 25, Abraham nearing death, sends the children of Hagar/Keturah, and their children away to the east country with gifts.³² Some of the tribes

citing (Parash 25:1). Cf. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/keturah-midrash-and-aggadah> accessed 2 May 2016.

²⁷ Ginzberg, *Jewish Legends*, 290-293, 298. This is the name of the tribe of Jethro, the Father-in-law of Moses. This will be discussed further below. See also Binyamin Efrati, "Sh'ma B'ni...": *A Treasury of Stories and Lessons from the Weekly Parashah* (New York: Feldheim Publishers, 2005), 25-26. This is based on Flavius Josephus, "Judean Antiquities 1-4," in *Flavius Josephus Translation And Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2000), 1, 95, 238. Cf. Genesis 25 for a discussion of Keturah as the wife of Abraham.

²⁸ See *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):127, *sūrah Āl-'Imrān* (3):96-97 & *sūrat al-hajj* (22):26. Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 4, Book 60, ¶3364 & 3365, 3355-3359. Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islām* (New York: New York University Press & Bloch Publishing Company, 1954), xxv, 101-103. Vera B Moreen, "ISH[H]MA'ILYAT: A Judeo-Persian Account Of The Building Of The Ka'Ba," in *Judaism And Islam Boundaries, Communication And Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, ed. John L. Hayes Benjamin H. Hary, Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill's Series In Jewish Studies, 2000), 185-199. Here Vera B. Moreen analyses the work of Mawlana Shahin-I Shirazi, the 14th century Judeo-Persian poet who makes laconic use of Biblical and Midrash themes with Qur'ānic and post Qur'ānic material in order to embellish the story of the building of the Ka'bah by Ishmael and Abraham.

²⁹ This presumption is the source of great debate. Part of the problem stems from possible alternative locations for the place name "Baka Valley" as suggested by 2 Samuel 5:23 & 24, 1 Chronicles 14:14 & 15 which places Baka near the valley of Rephaim, close to Jerusalem.

³⁰ Ling, *Muhammad*, 4. Here Ling is citing Ibn Ishaq. To date this author has not found a Jewish source that recognises Mecca as the location of the temple described in Psalms 84. In fact this author has not yet found a Jewish source that admits that Jews ever prayed at the Ka'bah.

³¹ Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad, A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, trans. Alfred Guillaume, 22 ed. (Karachi: Aameena Saiyid, Oxford University Press, 2009; reprint, 1967), 7-10.

³² Ginzberg, *Jewish Legends*, 298-299.

and towns of Arabia bear their names.³³ When Abraham dies his sons Ishmael and Isaac bury him with his wife Sarah in the field purchased from the Ephron in the cave of Machpelah in present day Hebron.³⁴ The names of the descendants of Ishmael are peppered throughout the Old Testament. In Genesis 37 the Ishmaelites purchase Joseph from his brothers and sell him into slavery in Egypt. Later after generations of servitude, Moses marries a daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian.³⁵ The tribe of Midian is descendent of Abraham and Keturah.³⁶ Moses first confides in his father-in-Law the calling he received from God. Jethro reacts by celebrating the event with a sacrifice in honour of God's might. Later in Exodus 18, Jethro advises Moses to establish a council to help him judge the affairs of the people.³⁷ In Isaiah a few of the other children of Abraham are mentioned including Kedar, 42:9-13. The prophet of Kedar is thought by Muslim sources to refer to Muhammad just as the descendants of Ishmael mentioned in Genesis 25:12-18 are considered the ancestors of the Prophet.

2.3 Pre-Islamic Poetry as a backdrop to Pre-Islamic Culture

Coexisting on the Arabian Peninsula were two distinct forms of culture, two modes of living that were by and large mutually beneficial.³⁸ These were the ways of the Bedouin, *badawah*, and of the sedentary life of the town or village, *hadarah*. These two distinct *moyen de vivre* allowed for the development of two sets of horizons. On the one hand there is the cyclical life of the Bedouins based on an ephemeral sense of time as a natural phenomenon, *dahr*.³⁹ Here the future held little promise other than a repetition of the past. Time lay ahead, always over the horizon, just as the next halting site. Neither did the Bedouins have any great need for a god to account to, or an afterlife to worry about. All of the individual's needs were contained and shared within the fate of the tribe. In this

³³ Peoples such as the Nebaioth and Kedar (from whom Muhammad traces his ancestry), towns such as Dedan, Teyma were Jewish towns in pre-Islamic Arabia.

³⁴ This tomb serves as both a Mosque and Synagogue, for a time the Greek Orthodox Church also used the building. Through a shaft in the floor both Jewish and Muslim worshippers can gaze upon the tomb of Abraham from their respective halves of the building. A red devotional light lights Abraham's tomb.

³⁵ Another name for Jethro is Shu'ayb. Jethro is regarded as a pre-Islamic Muslim. Cf. Moshe Gil, "The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib," in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. F. E. Peters, *The Formation of The Classical Islamic World* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999).

³⁶ Chronicles 1:29-33.

³⁷ Brown, Fitzzyer, and Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 49-50, 55-56.

³⁸ Ling, *Muhammad*, 23-25. As part of the culture, families from large towns would often pay to have their babies reared by Bedouin tribes until the child was well into its childhood. This gave a child a sense of connectedness to the desert and one of the Bedouin tribes. It gave the child an early education into a moral life and better language, since the Bedouins were renown for their poetic Arabic. The nomad life was also healthier. Diseases frequently afflicted towns, even Mecca. The Quraysh Halimah from the tribe of Bani ibn Bakr reared Muhammad for eight years. Cf As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 1:83-85.

³⁹ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*. 67; Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classic Period*, 3.

environment an outcast was a dead man.⁴⁰ The rich pre-Islamic Arab culture of the Bedouin survives in the poetry. On the other hand, the sedentary life of the *hadarah* was more dependent on the influence of conditions beyond the control of any individual or tribe. The creation of surplus value from crops and trade possibly encouraged the *hadarah* to develop more formal social structures.⁴¹

The *Mu‘allaqat*, or the Seven Classic Pre-Islamic Odes, represents the lore and values of their day.⁴² In each poem, *qashīda*, the poet tells one side of a narrative in an entertaining way. Often the poem is the only record of the events discussed. It is worth remembering that the poetry is not a historical record, but rather as the participants, both poet and collector, choose to remember. What survives was collected during the reign of Mu‘awiya, the second Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty (680 CE.).⁴³ There are a few literary approaches to studying the poetry. These are listed and discussed in the article by Jonathan A. C. Brown.⁴⁴ This study accepts the practicalities of the Source and Tradition Critical Approach.⁴⁵ For reasons of brevity this study surveys the works collected by A. J. Arberry of ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum, Imr al-Qais’ and Zuhair Abu Salmā.

2.3a ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum

The life and poetry of ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum, from the Christian tribe of Banū Taghlib, epitomises the precarious lifestyle of the pre-Islamic times.⁴⁶ Perhaps most surprising is the claim by Arberry that the sentiments expressed in the following tale would not be out of

⁴⁰ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 67, 96. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 309. Trimmingham considers Bedouin fidelity to any god or religion, even Christianity, no more than a form of insurance policy.

⁴¹ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*. 30, Economic stability allowed for greater political and social development in Mecca and to a lesser extent in Medina that was lacking in the Bedouin life. Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 1, Bollington Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005; reprint, 1969), 91-93. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 310. Settled life allowed for greater appreciation of God and religion. Therefore, Christianity set down stronger roots within settled communities.

⁴² Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 89. This collection is the most agreed upon collection of a possible 12 odes. Cf M. J. Kister, "The Seven Odes," in *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*, ed. M. J. Kister, *Variorum Collected Studies Series; C S 123* (London: Variorum, 1980), 35-36.

⁴³ Cf Kister, "Studies in Jāhiliyya," 34.

⁴⁴ Brown, "Literary And Historical Sources."

⁴⁵ When possible collaborating historical, anthropological or sociological evidence will be added to accounts, veering towards the Critical Alternative Approach adopted by Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak*. Webster, "Hijra and Dissemination of the Wahhabi Doctrine in Saudi Arabia." Peters, *The Bedouin of Cyrenaica*.

⁴⁶ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 174. He was probably a Monophysite, or Jacobite, since his tribe was influenced by the missionary work of Bishop Ahūdemmeḥ.

place in modern times.⁴⁷ Here there is a description of the life of a man born to be the leader of his community. Depicted in his *qashīda* is a portrayal of the beauty and horror of Bedouin life in pre-Islamic times. There are colourful portrayals of hedonism, loyalty to family and tribe, but also infanticide, intertribal warfare with obligation of mutual defense and honour killings.

The story of ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum begins with the realization that he might never have been born if his mother did not have a lucky escape from the practice of female infanticide. It is reported that her father, Muhalhil Ibn Rabī‘a decided to dispose of the new born child as soon as he heard his wife gave birth to a girl.⁴⁸ Fortunately, the child’s mother, Hind, begged a servant to hide the baby. That night Muhalhil dreamt he heard a voice that chanted:

How many a youth of promise,
How many a goodly chieftain,
What armoury of glory lurks in Muhalhil’s daughter’s womb!⁴⁹

Startled by the dream Muhalhil immediately rose and sought his infant daughter’s whereabouts. At first his wife Hind pretended that the child had been killed as he intended. It was only when Hind sensed his remorse and realized that her husband wished the child no harm that she told him the truth. He then commanded the child be nurtured on the finest foods. The child was given the name Lailā and she grew to be a princess. Years later Lailā wed Kulthūm Ibn Malīk. When Lailā in turn was pregnant her husband dreamed he heard a voice say:

What a son shall be yours, Lailā!
Impetuous as a roaring lion,
Sprung of Jusham’s fertile loins
No lie is this that I am telling.⁵⁰

When Lailā’s son ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm was one year old Lailā also dreamt that she heard a voice exclaim his virtues.

Mother of ‘Amr, I promise you
A glorious son of noble stock,
Braver than a maned lion,

⁴⁷ A. J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes: The First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1957), 201.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 188.; The practice of infanticide is a prime example of one of the significant changes ushered into Arabic culture by Islam and one that the nominal acceptance of Christianity by the Banū Taghlib was unable to thwart. See *sūrat at-takwīr* (81):1-14.

⁴⁹ Ibid; Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*..

⁵⁰ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 189.

Strong to smite and strenuous,
People's leader at fifteen.⁵¹

So it was, 'Amru Ibn Kulthūm seemed destined for a great life. His poetry preserves the culture of his people as well as his own achievements. It is reported that he lived to an exceedingly great age of 150. He lived long enough to observe the rise of Islam and to eventually embrace it.⁵² As leader of the Banū Taghlib he led his people against the Banū Bakr ibn Wā'il over the latter's refusal to allow the Banū Taghlib access to water.⁵³ Water rights were denied seemingly due to past grievances between the tribes. As a result, 70 men died of thirst. In retaliation, the Banū Taghlib prepared for war, while the Banū Bakr prepared to receive them. Before the first battle cry, as the tribes stood face-to-face in the heavy silence there was time to reflect on the fact that their last feud lasted some 40 years and cost many lives.⁵⁴ Perhaps the gravity of the situation sobered their lust for *ijara*, history does not say. Legend tells us that the leaders of the Banū Taghlib and the Banū Bakr opted for mediation. They chose the neighbouring King 'Amr Ibn Hind of al-Hira.⁵⁵

Restoration of the peace was chillingly simple. King 'Amr Ibn Hind required that the Banū Bakr provide 70 men from noble stock as escrow for the lives of the 70 men from the Banū Taghlib. One person from each tribe would plead the merits of their tribe's case. If 'Amr Ibn Hind judged the Banū Taghlib to be in the right then the men would be handed over to pay with their lives. If the king found in favour of the Banū Bakr the men would be set free.⁵⁶ Thus agreed, the battle of the odes began. 'Amru Ibn Kalthum naturally agreed to represent the defense of the Banū Taghlib. The Banū Bakr's King al-Harīth begrudgingly agreed to speak on behalf of his tribe.

Al-Harīth was a leper and detested the fact that he was required to stand behind seven veils to address King 'Amr Ibn Hind and that his footprints would later be sprinkled

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 190-192. Arberry, citing Fr. Louis (Rizqallāh) Cheikhō, places his death around the year 600 CE.

⁵³ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 173. This Battle may have taken place circa 480 CE.

⁵⁴ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 187, 189. Al-Muhalhil led the Banū Taghlib at this time. The war was over the murder and reprisal of tribal members and involved the value of the people killed, apropos the value of others. For instance, the chieftain al-Hārith joined the feud when his son, who had been sent as a mediator, was killed for the death of the shoe-latchet of Kulaib by al-Muhalhil. Al-Hārith's son's death would have been acceptable if the person avenged were from noble birth.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 67-68. Arberry reports that 'Amr Ibn Hind was the son of Hind, a Christian princess from the Ghassan or possibly the Kinda tribe. She describes herself as the mother of the servant of God and the daughter of the servant of God. In spite of this 'Amr Ibn Hind is remembered as a ruthless and cruel ruler. He killed the young poet Tarafa, 'Amr Ibn al-'Abd, having issued a letter of recommendation that became known as the letter of al-Mutalammis, carrying one's own death warrant.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 193.

with water as soon as he left the company of ‘Amr Ibn Hind.⁵⁷ Yet, none of his subjects could deliver the defense that he composed to his satisfaction.

All accounts credit al-Harīth with a remarkable performance. As al-Harīth delivered his defense the separating veils were set aside one by one and the footprints of al-Harīth were allowed to remain. In fact, ‘Amr Ibn Hind was so moved that the king allowed al-Harīth’s to take food from his own bowl. Then King ‘Amr Ibn Hind instructed that anyone reciting al-Harīth’s ode in the future must first perform ablutions out of respect. As a sign of good faith King ‘Amr Ibn Hind gave al-Harīth the forlocks of the 70 men.

That said, it was now the turn of ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm to make his case on behalf of his tribe. In the ode the young leader arrogantly reminded the king of the Banū Taghlib’s exploits and warned against judging *his* community too harshly.⁵⁸ In fact the ode merely cautioned King ‘Amr Ibn Hind not to make his people their enemy with a rash decision, hardly the tact required to win friends let alone influence a king.⁵⁹ Here is an extract:

...With what purpose in view, ‘Amr Ibn Hind,
Should we be underlings to your chosen princelet?
Threaten us, then, and menace us; but gently!
When, pray, were we your mother’s domestics?
...When any boys of our’s reaches his weaning
the tyrants fall down before him prostrating.
We have filled the land till it’s too straight for us,
And we are filling the sea’s black with our vessels.
So let no man act foolishly against us,
Or we will exceed the folly of the foolhardiest.⁶⁰

The sequence of events that followed is unclear. Arberry reports that there are two explanations regarding the inspiration of the poem and the fate of King ‘Amr Ibn Hind.⁶¹ One issue is universally accepted. That is ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm beheaded King ‘Amr Ibn Hind following an incident in which King ‘Amr Ibn Hind’s mother, Queen Hind, insisted that ‘Amr Ibn Kulthūm’s mother Lailā serve her, by passing some food at a banquet. In one version, ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm mother was dining in a separate room with ‘Amr Ibn Hind’s mother when she yelled for help. Fearing the worst ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm reacted by

⁵⁷ Why seven veils, why the sprinkling of water? This author is not sure whether the formality served as protection against leprosy or to conform to some protocol before a King. The veils probably bear no relation to the dance of the seven veils, unless a dance formed part of an intermission performance.

⁵⁸ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 182.

⁵⁹ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 204-209.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 204-209.

⁶¹ Ibid., 185-187.

grasping King ‘Amr Ibn Hind’s own sword and dispatched his head, then broke into ode over the corpse.⁶²

2.3b Imr al-Qais’

Hunduj Ibn Hujr Ibn al-Hārith, son of King Imr al-Qais from the Christian Kinda tribe is another major pre-Islamic poet. He is more commonly known as Imr al-Qais’, the Wandering King.⁶³ His choice of occupations, not to mention the risqué nature of his poetry, did not sit well with his family, who banished him from the tribe, making him a *sa’luk*, or outcast.⁶⁴ By all accounts he led a very exciting life. He is noted for his sexual conquests and bohemian lifestyle, which one would find difficult to match, especially one imagines, in Arabia after the dawn of Islam. His life epitomizes the pre-Islamic virtue of belonging to a tribe, and in his case, the contrast, a life of an outcast. The style of his poetry is very traditional in comparison to ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm. He begins his poem by calling his companions to halt at a location that spurns a memory of times past and of course, for Imr al-Qais’, the memory of a lover, Unaiza. Her memory sends him off into verse. Of all the *al-jāhiliyya* poets Imr al-Qais’ earned the dubious distinction of having composed the most lurid poetry ever recited in Arabic.⁶⁵

Halt, friends both! Let us weep, recalling a love and a lodging
By the rim of the twisted sands between Ed-Dakhool and Haumal,
Toodih and El-Mikrat, whose trace is not yet effaced
for all the spinning of the south winds and the northern blasts;
there, all about its yards, and away in the dry hallows
you may see the dung of antelopes spattered like peppercorns,
Upon the morn of separation, the day they loaded to part,
by the tribe’s acacias it was like I was splitting a colocynth;
there my companions halted their beasts awhile over me
saying, ‘Don’t perish of sorrow; restrain yourself decently!’

⁶² The alternative version places the banquet sometime after the battle of the odes, on an occasion when King ‘Amr Ibn Hind conspired to orchestrate a situation where Lailā would unwittingly perform some act of subservience for Queen Hind. In either case King ‘Amr Ibn Hind seriously underestimated the audacity of ‘Amru Ibn Kulthūm.

⁶³ Richard Bell, *The Origin Of Islam In Its Christian Environment; The Gunning Lectures, Edinburgh University, 1925*, ed. Jon Ralph Willis, Second ed., vol. 10, Islam And The Muslim World (Edinburgh & London: Frank Cass And Company Limited by arrangement with Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1925; reprint, 1968), 43. The use and abuse of alcohol by Christians in *al-jāhiliyya* times is ridiculed in later as the only thing they learned about Christianity.

⁶⁴ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 187, 193-185.

⁶⁵ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 35.

Yet the true and only cure of my grief is tears outpoured:
What is there left to lean on where the trace is obliterated?

...Oh yes, many a fine day I've dallied with the white ladies
and especially I call to mind a day at Dāra Juljul,
and the day I slaughtered for the virgins my riding-beast
(and oh, how marvelous was the dividing of its loaded saddle),
and the virgins went tossing its hacked flesh about
and the frilly fat like fringes of twisted silk.
Yes, and the day I entered the litter where Unaiza was
And she cried, 'Out on you! Will you make me walk on my feet?'
She was saying, while the canopy swayed with the pair of us,
'There now, you've hocked my camel, Imr al-Qais'.
Down with you!
But I said, 'Ride on, and slacken the beast's reins,
And oh, don't drive me away from your refreshing fruit

"...Many the pregnant woman like you, aye, and the nursing mother
I've night-visited, and made her forget her amuleted one-year-old;
Whenever he whimpered behind her, she turned to him
With half her body, her other half unshifted under me."⁶⁶

The story of Imr al-Qais' begins in the 5th century when the Kinda tribe, under the tutelage of the king of Yemen, attempted to establish a new social order, based on a monarchy, to compensate for the increasing prominence of raids, *ghazw*, between tribes. This was during the reign of his grandfather who once ruled al-Hira, expelling al-Mundhir III from the Lakhmid kingdom. Al-Mundhir III was the client of the Sassanian King Qubādh.⁶⁷ As the story goes, his grandfather was soon driven out by Anūshīrwan and massacred by the succeeding al-Mundhir along with 50 members of his family. Consequently, the affairs of the Banū Asad passed to Imr's father. This tribe killed him in his sleep setting off a long chain of retribution killings that would cost many lives including Imr al-Qais himself and the son of the Jewish poet, Samau'āl, whose fidelity to Imr al-Qais is the origins of the phrase, *as faithful as Samau'āl*.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 61-66. There are many other exploits recorded, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

⁶⁷ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 169. A little information concerning al-Mundhir's political connections is given here.

⁶⁸ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 39. While Imr al-Qais is away Samau'āl makes a promise to Imr Al-Qais to safeguard 5 coats of mail. When Imr Al-Qais's enemies descend upon Samau'āl's fortress demanding the goods after capturing one of Samau'āl's sons, Samau'āl tells the besiegers that he would never hand over what has been entrusted to him. For his fidelity to his friend al-Hārith ibn Zālim kills Samau'āl's son.

Here is a brief sketch of the ordeal. When the Imr al-Qais learned of the circumstances of his father's death he was playing backgammon with a friend. For a time he continued to play, insisting that he did not want to spoil his companion's turn. Then he said, "He left me to rot when I was a boy, and now I am a man he's loaded me with his blood."⁶⁹ Legend has it that he continued to drink and revel for seven days, then vowed not to eat flesh nor drink wine again, nor anoint himself, neither touch a woman, until he had avenged his father. He swore to kill one hundred of the Banū Asad, and shear the forelocks of another hundred.⁷⁰

For a time Imr al-Qais pursued his vow with a vengeance, until his companions judged he achieved the measure of his vow.⁷¹ Once the *asab al-tha'r* had been exceeded his companions left him. The return of a kingdom did not merit the continuance of the campaign, not even from amongst his family. Thus, Imr al-Qais sought the help of the Byzantines to restore the monarchical experiment.⁷² By this time his enemies regrouped. Bolstered by support of King al-Mundhir from the Lakhmid Kingdom, they set out to track down the now isolated Imr al-Qais. He fled from one tribe to another until he reached Samau'al ben Ādiyā, a Jewish Arab living in Taima.⁷³

From the safety of the castle of Samau'al, Imr al-Qais planned his counter attack. With a letter of reference from Samau'al to al-Hārith, the leader of the Ghassan and Byzantium phylarch of Syria and enemy of al-Mundhir, Imr al-Qais set forth to enlist the aid of the Emperor Justinian. Events progressed as planned. Imr al-Qais succeeded in convincing al-Hārith and Emperor Justinian that his campaign was in their mutual interests. What happened next is not clear. Imr al-Qais may have been promised an army; another theory is that he was appointed Governor of Palestine, but something caused the Emperor to have second thoughts. One explanation suggests Imr al-Qais may have captured more than the heart of the Emperor's daughter, and true to form, celebrated the deed in verse. We will never know. Justinian, without giving anything away, sent Imr al-Qais a gold embroidered mantle along with a letter wishing him well and requested to be kept informed of his progress. However, no one would have expected the robe to be laced

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 36, 37.

⁷¹ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*. 51. Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 37.

⁷² Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*. 52. Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 37.

⁷³ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 38.

with a poison. As soon as Imr al-Qais put on the robe he broke out in sores that covered his whole body and caused an agonizing death.⁷⁴

2.3c Zuhair Ibn Abu Salmā

Zuhair Ibn Abu Salmā is the third and final poet to be examined in this chapter. Arberrry refers to Zuhair as the Moralizer. According to Mumayiz, he was born c. 520 C. E. in al-Hajer, south of modern day Riyadh.⁷⁵ His father died when he was a boy. His love of poetry was nurtured by his stepfather ‘Aws b. Hajar (d. 620). Caliph Omar b. al-Khattab referred to Zuhair as “the poet of poets” and said that he never praised anyone without merit.⁷⁶ Many of the phrases he coined live on in Arab culture as proverbs, some form part of school curricula.⁷⁷ For example, “After a crass life, the old could not with wisdom glow, but youth, after a crass phase, may to wisdom glow.”⁷⁸ Arberrry notes that Zuhair struggled with his verse preferring to write using ordinary everyday language, rather than burden his audiences with convoluted oration.⁷⁹ Unlike other *al-jāhiliyya* poets he abstained from the excesses of life, preferring to draw the attention of his audience to thoughts of conducting one’s life in pursuit of wisdom in preparation for the final Day of Judgment before God.⁸⁰ In fact one of the outstanding features of Zuhair’s poetry concerns not the praise of his own feats, or moral conduct, but rather his praise for these qualities in others.⁸¹

The religion of Zuhair is a bit of a mystery. It is not certain whether he converted to Islam or not.⁸² Fr. Lewis Cheikho believes he may have been a Christian, although Carl Brockleman contends that he remained a pagan. The verse below denotes clear evidence that Zuhair’s personal religious views were far advanced from traditional pagan lore.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 38-39. Ibrahim Mumayiz, "Imru' Al-Qays And Byzantium," *Journal of Arabic Literature* XXXVI, no. 2 (2005): 151. Alternatively, Mumayiz believes Imr al-Qais simply contracted Bubonic plague.

⁷⁵ Ibrahim Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry in Pre-Islamic Arabia*, ed. Ahmed Allaithy & Abied Alsulaiman, trans. Arabic Translators International (Antwerp-Apeldoorn: Garant, 2010), 155.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 164.

⁷⁹ Arberrry, *The Seven Odes*, 98.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 98-99.

⁸¹ Ibid., 90. Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 155.

⁸² Arberrry, *The Seven Odes*, 98-99. Arberrry, citing R. A. Nicholson; Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 155-156. Both Arberrry and Mumayiz relate that the paths of Muhammad and Zuhair did cross. Muhammad, on seeing Zuhair rather strangely shouted, “O God, preserve me from his demon.” This reflects a tradition that held that poets were inspired by jinn. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 3:1796. Cf. Ling, *Muhammad*, 316. Claim Zuhair did convert to Islam in the company of Muhammad.

Do not conceal from Allah whatever is in your breast
Hoping it may be hidden; Allah knows whatever is concealed
And either it's postponed, and put in a book, and stored away
For the Day of Reckoning, or it's hastened, and banished betimes.⁸³

The context of the *mu'allaqa* of Zuhair takes place in the aftermath of a friendly horse race between the chieftain of the 'Abs, 'Qays ibn Zuhayr and the chieftain of the Dhubyān, Hudhayfa b. Badr for a prize of one hundred camels. In the middle of a thrilling race some men from the Dhubyān, drove Dāhis, the horse belonging to 'Qays ibn Zuhayr off course, allowing Ghabrá, the mare belonging to Hudhayfa b. Badr to win. Naturally enough the 'Abs declared victory, but the Dhubyān refused to pay even a single camel. From here events progress from bad to worse as 'Qays slew a brother of Hudhayfa, setting in train a war that would last "40" years.⁸⁴

The legend of the events that led to the peace is a highly entertaining story that shows that behind every great man is a great woman, or women, even in *al-jāhiliyya* times.⁸⁵ The catalyst to the peace is a vain discussion between the soon to be peacemakers, Al-Hārith son of 'Auf ibn Abū Hāritha and his cousin Khārija ibn Sinān. One day al-Hārith asked his cousin, "What do you think, is there anyone in the world who would refuse me if I asked his daughter's hand in marriage?" To which Khārija replied, "Yes, 'Aus ibn Hāritha ibn La'm of the tribe of Taiy."⁸⁶ So, as if in a boyish dare, the two rode off on their camels in the direction of 'Aus ibn Hāritha ibn La'm to settle their wager. When they met 'Aus ibn al-Hāritha, they greeted him in the customary fashion exchanging pleasantries. Eventually, 'Aus inquired as to the occasion of the visit. Al-Hārith replied risibly, "I've come to look for a wife." Al-Hārith's manner offended the proud father. 'Aus told al-Hārith, "You've called at the wrong address," turned and walked away.⁸⁷

When 'Aus's wife learned the nature and identity of the visitors she became very annoyed and demanded 'Aus go back out and persuade al-Hārith to return. She exclaimed, "Well, don't you want to marry off your daughters?" And "...if you won't marry any of them to the Lord of the Arabs, who will you marry them to?" 'Aus, his honour now at stake, complained, but his wife would hear none of it. She told 'Aus exactly what to say

⁸³ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 98.

⁸⁴ Ibid. It is thought the war spanned 568-608 CE. However, "40" may well have been a colloquial expression for a long time. 90-91.

⁸⁵ Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 155.

⁸⁶ Arberry, *The Seven Odes*, 91-92.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

and sent him off to coax al-Hārith back.⁸⁸ When ‘Aus caught up with al-Hārith he explained that the question of marriage to one of his daughters caught him off guard and that if he returned he would get what he came for.⁸⁹

At that ‘Aus informed each daughter individually of the nature of al-Hārith’s visit; one by one offers of marriage were made. The first daughter declined the invitation citing that she wasn’t very pretty. She confessed to an awkward character and that since al-Hārith was not kin, he might eventually get bored and divorce her. The second daughter considered the offer, but declined citing that she was a bit of a fool with no accomplishments. She was afraid that after a while al-Hārith might also divorce her, leaving her in an awful mess. To each daughter ‘Aus gave a blessing then asked for the youngest daughter Buhaisa to be sent in.

Buhaisa considered the offer, not knowing what her sisters had said, only that they refused. She then reasoned, “Well, I’m the pretty one. I’m accomplished, I’ve a lofty character and a most distinguished father,” with a smile. “If he divorces me, God will never be good to him again.”⁹⁰ ‘Aus blessed Buhaisa and give al-Hārith the good news. Buhaisa’s mother prepared the bridal trousseau and Buhaisa was prepared for the wedding.

A tent was pitched close to Buhaisa’s home and Aus invited al-Hārith to make his abode there. In due course Buhaisa entered as his new bride. However, just as al-Hārith advanced to consummate the marriage Buhaisa cried, “stop that! What, here in front of my father and brothers? That’s utterly impossible.”

So, there was little option but for al-Hārith and his cousin and Buhaisa to bid farewell and set off for the lands of al-Hārith. On route al-Hārith signaled for Khārīja ibn Sinān to continue on as he and his pretty, accomplished, new bride veered off the beaten track to make camp.⁹¹

Yet, the pair soon caught up with the cousin who looked rather questioningly at al-Hārith and asked, “Finished?” To which al-Hārith replied, “No, by God. She said to me, ‘what, would you treat me like a slave girl out of the market, or a woman taken in battle? No, first you must kill the camels and slaughter the sheep and invite all the Arabs, and do all that should be done for the likes of me.’” The cousin smiled approvingly and said to al-Hārith, “Ah, I see she’s a girl of spirit and good sense, I’ve high hopes she’ll be a wife who’ll bear you fine sons, *inshallah*.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., 92-93.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

⁹² Ibid. *Inshallah* is a beautiful word with many applications. It means God willing.

The trio returned to al-Hārith's country and a great feast was prepared. Al-Hārith entered the boudoir, but soon reemerged. "Finished?" inquired the cousin. "No" cried al-Hārith. "What happened this time?" Inquired the cousin. Al-Hārith pleaded, "I went to her, desiring her mightily. You see, we have made ready the flocks. Then Buhaisa said, 'I was told you are a man of honour. I don't see much sign of it in you.' How is that?" Al-Hārith pleaded. Buhaisa replied, "Why, how is it you find time to go about marrying women, while the Arabs are busy killing each other?" To which al-Hārith responded zealously, "Then what do you want me to do?" Buhaisa said, "Go out and make peace between those people, then return to your family, and you shant miss anything this time."⁹³

"Ay" said the cousin, "I see she's a girl of spirit and good sense. She's spoken well."⁹⁴ With that al-Hārith and his trusted cousin, Khārija ibn Sinān, set off to face the warring factions. After a great effort, many trials and tribulations, a peace was brokered. Al-Hārith and Khārija ibn Sinān collected the blood-dues of 3,000 camels; and in spite of one serious infringement, the peace set. Al-Hārith returned to Buhaisa. True to her word, Buhaisa bore him several sons and daughters and Al-Hārith's name and deeds live with us to this day.⁹⁵ Below is a sample of Zuhair's *mu'allaqa* immortalizing the search for peace and reconciliation.

...I swore by the house which men circumambulated, men of Quraysh and Jurhum who built it.
 In truth, worthy you will be praised for what you've assailed, in ease and in hardship, steadfast
 you've well prevailed.
 You stopped the Abs-Dhubyān war which both could have doomed, and all those slain whom
 "Mansham" had perfumed.
 You said: A possible lasting peace we all could see, with money, and good deeds, from war we
 could be free.
 By so doing you have done yourselves so much good. From the sin of serving blood ties, well
 away you stood.
 In all the glories of "Ma'aad" greatest you have seemed, for he who win's in glory's treasure,
 great will he be deemed.
 Through such pedigree camels, wounds are fully healed. For use as stars by those who no
 crime did yield.
 Those who the blood money assesses for the war dead, have not bloodletting cupful of blood
 had shed.
 For another tribe's use, one tribe these foals have paid, though not a cup of blood had they
 payment made.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

To the allies, from me, this one message convey, to Dhubyán: will you faithful to the sworn peace stay?

Do not hide from God what is in your breast concealed. For whatever is concealed, to God his will revealed.

What you conceal, the charge against you God will defer, till Judgment Day, or, you'll now his vengeance incur.

War is what you've known of it, and tasted it well, not what idle, baseless chatter of it would tell.

Should you wage war, what's the loathsome and vile is what you'd wage. Kindle it, and out of control

it'll wildly rage...⁹⁶

The pre-Islamic poetry examined provides a glimpse into the context in which the mission of Muhammad operated. The challenges the culture of the day presented are immense. Examples of infanticide, honour killings, *asab al-tha'r*, raids, *ghazw*, sexual promiscuity and the abuse of alcohol are all addressed. In contrast, at each stage there are tales of inspiration, where individuals emerge as heroes, who challenge the prevailing ignorance. These are found in the grandparents of 'Amru ibn Kalthum who refrain from murdering a daughter at birth, who in time becomes the mother of one of *al-jāhiliyya*'s greatest poets. Then there is the fidelity of Samau'āl and the heavy price he paid for keeping his word. Still the poetry of Zuhair provides the greatest example of selfless heroism in the exemplary actions of Al-Hārith and Khārija ibn Sinān inspired, by his wife Buhaisa, the daughter of Aus. In this particular *mu'allaqa* the madness of war, revenge duty and the opposite, the expiation of blood debt are praised through the actions of those not directly involved in the war. In this environment, the idea that Muhammad succeeded in his own lifetime to provide a solid foundation from which Islam would venture forth to the ends of the earth, is a testimony to the faith he inspired.

2.4 The Jews of the Hijaz

There are many plausible theories that attempt to explain the origins of Judaism on the Arabian Peninsula. Attempting to provide a definitive answer to the question is probably not possible since it is far more likely that there is an element of truth behind several

⁹⁶ Mumayiz, *Society, Religion and Poetry*, 159-160. The verses above are from lines 16-29. Mumayiz explains in his commentary that not only did al-Hārith and his cousin Khārija collect the blood-dues, they actually donated the 3,000 camels to the tribe that loss the most lives. This way neither tribe loss face, since al-Hārith's tribe did not take any part in the war. The efforts of al-Hārith and Khārija ran against the grain of blood-ties. Here Zuhair identifies blind obedience to blood-ties an actual sin. Cf. fn. 19, 23 & 24.

theories. As a result the answer to the question is much more likely to be a case of ‘yes, and’ rather than the consequence of any one particular event. The safest explanation is to accept that some form of limited migration to Arabia by Jews began in Biblical times, i.e., in the time of the prophets and continued for centuries as an alternative to migration within Byzantine or Persian Empires.⁹⁷ One theory, posits that Moses or Samuel sent a contingent of Soldiers, on God’s order, to slaughter the Amalekites. After conducting a ruthless campaign against the people and property of the Amalekites the soldiers fail to kill the King’s son. For this act of mercy they were forbidden to enter the Promised Land. Now exiled, these soldiers simply returned to the land that they had lain waste and remained in loose contact with their kin in Judea and Samaria.⁹⁸ Another theory posits that thousands of Jews fled to Arabia after the fall of the First Temple.⁹⁹ In fact the Talmud speaks of some 80,000 rabbis fleeing to join other Jews in the Hijaz.¹⁰⁰ Similarly there may have been scores of refugees seeking shelter in Arabia after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, following four messianic misadventures starting with the Bar Kokhba revolt 132–136 CE, as a consequence of the Mar Zutra revolt in Mahoza, Persia, 502 CE, the aftermath following the failed Jewish uprising in Yemen led by Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās’s in 518 CE, or as late as the collapse of Persian/Jewish control of Jerusalem in 614 CE, with Exilarch Nehemiah ben Hushiel as governor.¹⁰¹ However, both Jewish and Islamic sources acknowledge the

⁹⁷ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 206-212. Jacob Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities*, First ed. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 131. Here Lassner recounts of the archeological evidence found by D. S. Rice in the 1950’s in the Hauran region of Syria describing a trading route suggesting that the Jews were in Yathrib as far back as 605-562 BCE, in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar. Cf. Ben Abrahamson and Joseph Katz, "The Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614CE compared with Islamic conquest of 638CE: Its Messianic nature and the role of the Jewish Exilarch," *Alsadiqin: the Committee for Historical Research in Islam and Judaism Copyright* (1954): 13.

⁹⁸ Mazuz, "Massacre in Medina ". This point is discussed further in note 12. There are several incidents recounting of battles between the Israelites and the Amalekites where the Israelites are instructed to “devout to destruction the people and possessions of the Amalekites, see further Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25; 1Samual 15; 1 Chronicles 4:42-43. Sadly, modern Zionists have replaced the Amalekites with Palestinians, as Biblical archrivals; see further the works of Nur Masalha, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Tzion Ishbezari, and Rabbi Moshe Ben-Tzion Ishbezari. Although the Old Testament version of the above narrative is difficult to trace back to Moses, it is interesting to note that the Medinan historian Ibn Zabāla records the incident as the part of the Jewish origins in Medina, see further Harry Munt, "Writing the History of an Arabian Holy City: Ibn Zabāla and the First Local History of Medina " *Arabica*, no. 59 (2012): 20. Ibn Zabala (d.199/876) is considered the author of the first history of Medina, *ahbār al-Madina*. This important work is lost. However, it continues to be cited in the later historical works; including the first extant history of Medina written by Umar b. Sabba, *Ta’rīh al-Madīna l-munawwara*; and over 600 times by the largest extant work by Nūr al-Din Abu l’Hasan ‘Ali b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Samudī (d.911/1506), in his *Wafa’ al-wafā’ bi ahbār dār al-mustafā*.

⁹⁹ Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, 132.

¹⁰⁰ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 206, Cf. n215.

¹⁰¹ Matthew V. Novenson, "Why Does R. Akiba Acclaim Bar Kokhba as Messiah?," *Journal of the Study of Judaism*, no. 40 (2009): 559-560, 564. Roi Porat; Hanan Eshel; Amos Frumkin, "Finds From The Bar kokhba Revolt, From Two Caves At En Gedi," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 139, no. 1 (2007): 48-49. Isaiah M. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe James H. Charlesworth, vol. 21, *Journal For The Study Of The Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Supplement Series, 1997), 64-72. See especially 70. Interestingly there is never any mention of a contingent

presence of Jews from southeastern Palestine throughout the Hijaz from the earliest times and Islamic sources credit Jews as the original inhabitants of Yathrib.¹⁰² Therefore Jews of Arabia may well have considered themselves both native to the land and to a lesser degree, *resident aliens*, since the major narratives explaining their origins contain an element of tragedy.

Yet, as plausible as these explanations may seem, there are many scholars who contend that the Jews of the Hijaz were anything but real Jews. This opinion does not reject the idea that at least some of those that identified themselves as Jews were birthright Jews, but rather suggests that because the culture was thoroughly integrated with the rest of the Arab culture that many of those claiming to be Jewish may simply have been proselytes. This status implies that many claiming to be Jews adopted Jewish traditions, but were not birthright Jews.¹⁰³ Nua for instance, makes the case that almost all of the “Jews” mentioned in the *sīra* have Arab names, but looked to the Jews of Himyar for spiritual guidance.¹⁰⁴ D.S. Margoliouth considered the Jews of Hijaz as emerging from the growing monotheist, or *rahmānist*, religious identity rather than from ethnic stock.¹⁰⁵ Offering an alternative analysis, Torrey and Hirshberg propose the opinion that the majority of the tribes professed the Jewish faith as legitimate.¹⁰⁶ Similarly Arab Muslim sources accept the *bona fides* of the self-definition of those claiming to be Jews without equivocation.

2.4a Economy, Education & Developed Community

The Jews of the Hijaz were quite an advanced community in many regards. They were aware of their context as recipients of God’s word in the form of the Torah.¹⁰⁷ Bamyeh argues that this would have given the Jews of the Hijaz a unique worldview largely absent from nomadic people who saw life more as a re-occurring cycle.¹⁰⁸ For the Jews there is

of men from Medina joining the Persian/Jewish campaign to take Jerusalem from the Romans. Hans Kung, *Islam: Past Present And Future*, trans. John Bowden, 1 ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007), 32.

¹⁰² Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 203-204.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 209. Citing Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis d. Poesie d. alten Araber*, Hanover 1864, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 209. François Nau, *Les Arabes chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VIIe au VIIIe siècle* vol. 1, Cahiers de la société Asiatique (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1933), 113-114.

¹⁰⁵ Margoliouth, *Relations*, 69-71.

¹⁰⁶ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 209, fn 219. Cf. Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, The Hilda Stich Stroock Lectures (New York: Bloch Publishing Co. , 1933), 8-27.

¹⁰⁷ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 209. Citing H. Lammens, *Les Arabes chrétiens*, Paris 1933, 113.

¹⁰⁸ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 26, 30, 62-63, 67. This point is extrapolated from the text.

the narrative of God's chosen people written and analysed through the passage of time. For the Bedouin, as expressed through the poetry of Imr al-Qais, there is a sense of helplessness, where the person perceives life devoid of purpose, a future that holds nothing, but the eventuality of death.¹⁰⁹

Jewish communities largely inhabited most of the agricultural land of the Hijra. These towns and villages include those found along the caravan trail, leading north included Yathrib (Medina), Uhud, Khaibar, al-Hijr, Tayma, Tabuk, up to Ma'an and the southern regions of Palestine.¹¹⁰ Although many of these towns held annual market-fairs it is not known if these fairs had their own set months of the year for pilgrims, as did Sana'a, Mecca, Ukaz or Duma.¹¹¹ In spite of this they had, as did other settled communities, the ability to diversify their means of livelihood between trade, agriculture, crafts or even plunder, *ghazw*, if deemed necessary.¹¹²

The Jews of the Hijra were among the first to use irrigation and therefore had an advantage over other communities reliant on seasonal rains.¹¹³ Dates were one of the major food crops. Their ability to create a surplus through their agricultural and trading endeavours assisted in the advancement of their communities. This gave them a great advantage over their Bedouin neighbours who relied primarily on herding.¹¹⁴ For this reason they attracted migrant labour that often chose to remain within the region. Even the people of Mecca who were the guardians of the Ka'bah were reliant on others for their staple food sources.¹¹⁵ This agricultural surplus aided the transition from purely agriculture economy to a mixed economy offering services and trade.

Since the second century Jews have been obliged to educate their sons.¹¹⁶ There is evidence that some form of formal education system existed in Medina during *al-jāhiliyya*. For instance, Caliph Uthman was criticised for choosing Zaid Ibn Thābit, one of Muhammad's secretaries, as the scribe of the Qur'ān, because, as Abdullah b. Mas'ud said, "I was reading the Qur'ān while Zaid was still a boy with two sidelocks of hair playing

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 62-63.

¹¹⁰ David Nicolle, *Historical Atlas Of The Islamic World*, ed. Warren Lapworth, 1 vols., vol. 1 (London: Mercury Books, 2004), 22-32.

¹¹¹ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 11-12.

¹¹² Ibid., 17, 30.

¹¹³ Ibid., 19, 153. These fortified agricultural communities were often Jewish communities, i.e., Medina, & Khaibar.

¹¹⁴ Werner Caskel, "The Bedouinization of Arabia," in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. F. E. Peters, *The Formation of The Classical Islamic World* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 34.

¹¹⁵ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 5.

¹¹⁶ Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, "From Farmers to Merchants, Conversions and Diaspora: Human Capital and Jewish History," *Journal of the European Economic Association* 5, no. 5 (2007): 16.

amongst the Jewish children in the literacy (Torah) school.”¹¹⁷ Ironically, Mas’ud may have attended the same school, as did seven of the twelve tribal leaders that took part in the Great Aqaba.¹¹⁸ Some of the Jewish converts to Islam such as Abdullah ibn Salaam were highly regarded as scholars by the Jews of Medina, at least until they converted to Islam.¹¹⁹ If Bamyeh is correct, the broadening of the economic base of society coupled with education encouraged a spiritual awareness and social development unparalleled by their nomadic neighbours.¹²⁰

Interestingly, none of the aforementioned opinions express any merit in the possible evangelical nature or ‘universal mission’ the Jews of the Diaspora may have felt for the Arabs with whom they came in contact.¹²¹ Lecker for instance suggests that the Banū Māsika teachers in the Torah School would have encouraged the Arab children to convert to Judaism.¹²² If anything the challenge to the purity of the Jewishness of the Jews of the Hijaz could be viewed positively, as evidence of the willingness of Arabs in pre-Islamic times to convert to the Jewish faith. Gil, citing the work of Suhaylī, draws attention to the fact that Arab women used to vow to bring their children up Jewish, *tahawwadathu*, if they survived.¹²³ Further, citing Samhūdī, Gil posits that several other Bedouin tribes in Medina, including the B. Harīth b. Ka’b of the Ghassān and Judhām also accepted Judaism.¹²⁴ In a sense then, questions surrounding the purity of the Jews of Hijaz is evidence that to a large degree the birthright Jews in the region are at least in part, victims of their own success in spreading the message of monotheism, making alliances through marriages, as well as challenging the underlying polytheist culture around them.¹²⁵ Perhaps because of the mystique of their origins the pre-Islamic Jews of the Hijaz are one of the most fascinating and influential communities to feature in the life of Muhammad, the Qur’ān and the formation of Islam. Like the Jews of Himyar, the Jews of the Hijaz were

¹¹⁷ The education system in pre-Islamic Medina is an area well worth further research, see further Michael Lecker, "Zayd B Thābit: “A Jew with two Sidelocks ”Judaism And Literacy In Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 56, no. No.4 (1997).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.: 271.

¹¹⁹ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:819-820. Lecker, "Zayd B Thābit: “A Jew with two Sidelocks ”Judaism And Literacy In Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," 262, 269. Evidence supports the idea that there may well have been other literate Jewish converts including Ka’b al-Ahbār, Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān and possibly Mu’adh b. Jabal.

¹²⁰ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 67.

¹²¹ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib." Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat From Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism*, ed. Brenda Conroy, trans. Fred A. Reed (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 2006), 128-129. Citing Leibowitz.

¹²² Lecker, "Zayd B Thābit: “A Jew with two Sidelocks ”Judaism And Literacy In Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," 259.

¹²³ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 210.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Lecker, "Zayd B Thābit: “A Jew with two Sidelocks ”Judaism And Literacy In Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," 271.

fiercely independent.¹²⁶ They appear to have avoided becoming a client of either the Byzantine or Persian Empires.¹²⁷ Thus the evidence seems to support the image of the Jews of the Hijaz as a people highly developed and respected by their peers.

2.4b Demographic Change and Expectations of a Messiah

With the arrival of the Aws and Khazraj from the Himyar in the 5th century the non-Jewish inhabitants of Medina increased their influence over the city. The demographic change increased tensions in the region leading to poor relations between individuals and tribes.¹²⁸ For this reason the Jews of Median taunted the Aws and Khazraj with the threat that they would soon regain control of Medina. It is noted that the Jews threatened their neighbours saying, “A prophet is now about to be sent. We will follow him and we will slay you as ‘Ād and Iram were slain.”¹²⁹ This boast reveals a lot about the outlook of the Jews of Medina and the Hijaz. At the time this statement was made the Babylonian Talmud was nearing completion. In the Talmud there are clear invocations to focus on study and against adding to the defeat of Bar Kosiba. In fact, the thrust of Rabbinic Judaism was opposed to waiting for a prophet. Instead the emphasis was on following the Torah.¹³⁰ Yet these Jews threatened their adversaries with the intervention of a prophet. So, what kind of prophet would 7th century Jews of the Diaspora be waiting for? If they followed the Talmud, that is to say they were Rabbinic Jews, they would have been conscious of living in post-prophetic times. Is it possible they were waiting for more than a prophet? Perhaps they expected the **שילה**, *Shiloh*, or “the one to whom it belongs,” as in, **עד כי יבא שילה** “until the *Messiah* to whom the kingdom belongs comes.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ Jews of Yemen allowed themselves to be pawns in the rivalries between the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires. Nicolle, *Historical Atlas*, 30-31. There was a tradition of intermarriage between families of Mecca and Median, leading some to consider it possible that these arrangements slowly introduced Judaism into the region. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 297-298. At least with the reign of Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās Judaism in Himyar attempted to remain independent.

¹²⁷ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 205, n207. This supports the idea that the Jews of Medina on behalf of the Persians may have collected a poll tax. However, this theory is weak since there is no physical evidence of a Garrison or Persian presence in the Hijaz and no further references to the opinion other than the mention of ibn Salubā, a Persian personality was in Medina when Muhammad made the *hijra* in 622 CE. Also, throughout all their troubles with the rise of Islam and even the tribes from the south of Arabia, support from Persia is never mentioned.

¹²⁸ Ling, *Muhammad*, 108. Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, 132-135. Cf. Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 154.

¹²⁹ Ling, *Muhammad*, 105. Citing Heinrich Ferdinand Wüstenfeld translation of Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad, 287. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 93.

¹³⁰ B. M. Bokser, "Messianism, The Exodus Pattern, And Early Rabbinic Judaism," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 239-258.

¹³¹ Michael B. Shepherd, "Targums, The New Testament, And Biblical Theology of the Messiah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51/1, no. March 2008 (2008): 54. Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the*

The concept of waiting for God to send His prophet and the opposite, of Jews appointing, or following a prophet/messiah are discussed in the Babylonian Talmud.¹³² In general terms, liberation from exile is God's gift and Jews should not try to force the hand of God. Rabbinical Jews interpret the dispersion, *galut*, as fitting into God's universal plan of salvation, to be followed in due course, by God's beckoning. Through their redemption, will follow the gathering of the Nation and *Aliyá*, and return to the Promised Land. In order to preserve the remnants of Judaism following the destruction of the second Temple, rabbinic sages devised three oaths to counter any future preemptive military campaign to retake the Holy Land.¹³³ The consequence of falsely stirring the passions of expectations of this entity is a curse of damnation, whereby the guilty are forever ostracised from their community.¹³⁴ Perhaps because of the failure of previous rebellions against the Romans and the disastrous consequences this held for Judaism in general, it is very probable that the Jews of the Hijaz and Median, if they held any heightened expectation of a prophet, would be somewhat ostracised by other Jewish communities, especially those in Baghdad, a major centre of Judaism in the Rabbinic times of the Diaspora.¹³⁵ Yet, prior to Muhammad's migration to Medina the expressed interest of members of the Aws and Khazrajites in allying themselves with Muhammad, at the first Aqaba, was in order to ensure that if Muhammad was indeed the prophet that the Jews of Medina anticipated, that they would be on the right side of any ensuing conflict. Perhaps the theological interpretation of scripture taught in their school system encouraged the expectation of a prophet that influenced the literate tribal leaders at the Great Aqaba. This is especially true

Abode of Islam, 140. David Mendel Harduf, *Rabbinic Exegesis of Biblical Names and Narratives (In The Talmud And Midrash)*, Second ed. (Willowdale: Beit Ra'if Publishing, 2002), 46. Ling, *Muhammad*. Interestingly the Monk Nestor describes Muhammad as the Shiloh, 34. Katz, "The Persian conquest of Jerusalem," 20-21. It would appear the Messianic debate was very much part of the rationale behind the decision to capture Jerusalem in CE 614.

¹³² An excellent thorough brief discussion of the subject is found in Jacob Immanuel Schochet, *Mashiach: The Principles of Mashich and the Messianic Era in Jewish Law and Tradition* (New York: S. I. E. , 1991), 13-57. "Babylonian Talmud: Kethuboth," in *Hebrew-English Edition Of The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. B.A. Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein, PHD., D. Lit. (London: Soncino Press, 1971), 111a.

¹³³ Cf. Reuven Firestone, "Holy War in Modern Judaism? "Mitzvah War" and the Problem of the "Three Vows"," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 74, no. No. 4, (2006): 964-971.

¹³⁴ Cf. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 35. Novenson, "Why Does R. Akiba Acclaim Bar Kokhba as Messiah?," 9, 10, 14. Frumkin, "Finds From The Bar kokhba Revolt, From Two Caves At En Gedi," 35-53. Also Rabkin, *A Threat From Within*. Rabin discusses further the origins and development of the *Messianic Caution* from the earliest Rabbinic sources, 71-81. Firestone, "Holy War in Modern Judaism? "Mitzvah War" and the Problem of the "Three Vows"." The penalty for not waiting for God is described as, the flesh of the Jews to be consumed like that of gazelles or hinds of the field, 961, as confirmed in "Babylonian Talmud," 111a.

¹³⁵ Rabkin, *A Threat From Within*, 6, 15, 195. The concept of cooperation with the Nations, setting an example to the gentiles by devotion to the Torah and waiting for the Messiah are central tenets of Judaism up until the secularly led Zionist movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. Could ostracism explain why there is no mention of contact between the Jews of Medina and the Exilarch Nehemiah ben Hushiel and his occupation of Jerusalem?

if the acceptance of Muhammad meant that the adherents saw themselves as submitting to God rather than to a rival tribe.¹³⁶

Now, it is one thing to threaten your neighbours with the imminent arrival of the *Shiloh*, the Messiah, or some ruler of divine origin, and quite another for this entity to live an 11 camel-day ride to the south. The implications of the arrival of the promised deliverer **שילה** are momentous to say the least. The responsibility of the leaders of Medina to endorse, or not, the claims of a non-Jewish King, a Messiah who will "...rule over all the children of humanity," should not be underestimated.¹³⁷ The endorsement of a false *Shiloh* would surely be a disaster for Medina, with implications for all the Jews living in the region.

It is impossible to say to what degree the Jews of Medina allowed this idea of the imminent arrival of a prophet to influence their reception of Muhammad. The fact that the Jews lived with a heightened expectation is further evidenced by the existence and presentation of a letter to Muhammad by Abu Ayyūb (Khalid b. Zayd), an *ansār* from the Khazraj in whose house Muhammad stayed when he first arrived in Medina.¹³⁸ This letter belonged to the Tubba, the king of the descendants of the Qahtān, also known as the Saba', a people discussed in *sūrat saba'* 34:15-19 and *sūrat l-dukhān* 44:37.¹³⁹ Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad gives some indication as to the contents of the letter. Here the two rabbi's that accompanied Tibān As'ad Abū Karib to Yemen persuaded the Tubba' not to destroy Yathrib after a man from Yathrib killed his son. In their explanation, they describe a future prophet (named Ahmad) coming from the tribe of Quraysh who will come to settle in Yathrib as a refuge, *muhāgar*, and whose reign will last till the end of time.¹⁴⁰

For this reason, perhaps Ibn Ubayy, the king in waiting, was willing to step aside to give Muhammad a chance to prove himself.¹⁴¹ One could only imagine the mixed

¹³⁶ Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 152-154.

¹³⁷ Shepherd, "TARGUMS," 54.

¹³⁸ Gil, "Jews of Yathrib," 211. Citing Samhūdī, I. 189. cf Kister, IOS ii (1972) 233; Ling, *Muhammad*, 124. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*. He may have been a distant relative of the prophet Vol. 1. 632; Lecker, "Zayd B Thābit: "A Jew with two Sidelocks "Judaism And Literacy In Pre-Islamic Medina (Yathrib)," 270. He was also literate and a scribe of Muhammad.

¹³⁹ Ibn Kathir tells us that the Tubba refers to an ancient people, possible descendents of Noah's son Shem. They once tried to attack Medina over the death of the King's son. However, they eventually came to mutually satisfactory terms to the extent that the Tubba adopted Judaism and brought it to Yemen. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 8:74-80 & 686-689.

¹⁴⁰ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 7. Munt, "The First Local History of Medina," 22. Here he is citing al-Samudī *Wafā'* III, 378-9.

¹⁴¹ Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, 139. Bamyeh, *The Social Origins of Islam*, 200-201. See further Michael Lecker, *Muhammad at Medina: A Geographical Approach* as well as Kister work on the subject note 44 Ch. 7. Ling, *Muhammad*, 108, 129. Here Ibn Ubayy is mentioned as a leader of the Khazraj.

emotions experienced by Ibn Ubayy. Not only may he have felt the disappointment of not becoming the leader of Medina, which must have been heartbreaking on a personal level, but as a leader of his community he may well have felt a sense of responsibility to discern the acceptance, or rejection, of a prophet. He needed to weigh Muhammad's growing popularity against his willingness to embark on what appeared to be foolhardy military campaigns against Medina's former allies and to cast aside traditional allegiances based on blood bonds in favour of the *ummat al-mu'minin*, community of believers. One can imagine that Ibn Ubayy was searching for affirmation, or not, that Muhammad was indeed the prophet his fellow Jews were expecting. He was becoming increasingly anxious that the Jews of the Hijaz and Medina were in danger of falling once again for a false prophet, whose defeat would shatter the stability of the Jewish community in Arabia; just as the 6th century defeat of Yūsuf Dhū Nuwās's failed to curtail the spread of Christianity to the south and the fall of Exilarch Nehemiah ben Hushiel, which brought an end to Jewish/Persian control of Jerusalem just three years before.¹⁴²

2.4c Muhammad's relationship with the Jews of Medina pre-Hajj

The Jews of Medina are seen as distant kin to Muhammad with links on his Great Grandfather and mother's side.¹⁴³ They are amongst Muhammad's earliest allies, affording Muhammad safe haven when his own community turned against him and his followers in Mecca.¹⁴⁴ From the biographical material of the life of Muhammad it is very clear that the Jewish reception of Muhammad, as a leader and as possible prophet is generally cautious.

¹⁴² There will be greater discussion of the Dhū Nuwās's below. Cf. Axel Moberg, *The Book Of The Himyarites; Fragments Of A Hitherto Unknown Syriac Work*, ed. Axel Moberg, trans. Axel Moberg, vol. VII, Skrifter Utgivna Av Kungl. Humanistiska Vetenskapssamfundet I Lund (Leipzig: Lund, C. W. K. Gleerup, 1924), xxv-xxxv. Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 64-72.

¹⁴³ Ling, *Muhammad*. Salmā (bint 'Amr) from the tribe of Khazraj marries Hashīm the great-grandfather of Muhammad, also mother Aminah's half-sister (Salmā bint Qays) lived in Medina 8, 27, 231. The marriage of Jewish women from Yathrib to men from the Quraysh and the possible inferences that might be deduced from such arrangements are further discussed by Lecker, (drawing upon the work of Muhammad b. Habib (d.245/860 CE)) in Michael Lecker, "A Note On Early Marriage Links Between Qurashis And Jewish Women," in *Jews And Arabs In Pre-And Early Islamic Arabia*, ed. Michael Lecker, *Variorum Collected Studies Series CS639* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), 18, 24, 27-28. Pre-Hajj converts from the Medinan tribes of the Aws and Khazraj pledge at Aqabah to submit to Muhammad and to protect him. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 1:582-586 & 631.

¹⁴⁴ Here the author is accepting that there is no evidence that the Jewish leaders made a decision to afford Muhammad and his followers safe-haven. However, by mere acquiescence the Jews allied to the Aws and Khazraj and did not move against the new comers. It is thought there initial motive of wait and see may have to a degree been tempered with a desire to improve relations between the warring tribes of Medina involved in a civil war. Ling, *Muhammad*, 108.

Setting the advantage of hindsight aside, and beginning with the perception that the Jews of Medina were prone to the expectation of a prophet/messiah, it is not much of a surprise that the Jews of the Medina begin their interrogation of the credentials of Muhammad as a would-be prophet, from a messianic perspective.¹⁴⁵ In fact given the likely origins of the Jews of Medina and the Hijaz it is not surprising that they might greet Muhammad with both open arms and a degree of trepidation. Certainly the arrival of the rumoured prophet would create intense interest. Perhaps some had heard of the accolades bestowed on the young man by the monk Bahīrā or Nestor.¹⁴⁶ Others may have only heard of him through his travels as a trader.

2.4d Entry into Medina and the Treaty

One can only imagine the excitement that Muhammad's initial entry brought to the people of Medina. Anticipation of a prophet that most had only heard about surely ushered a sense of *détente* whereby the senseless feuding would no longer dominate daily life.¹⁴⁷ How many would remember the approach of the envoys from the Quraysh, enquiring as to what to make of this man that declared himself prophet and his correct response to the three questions the rabbis of Medina posed?¹⁴⁸ An image of this festiveness is characterized by the fact that a Jew, not a supporter, is acknowledged as the first to sight the approach of Muhammad's entourage from the top of his castle and shout the news of his arrival as Muhammad approached the very outskirts of Medina in the district of Qubā.¹⁴⁹ He called out to those waiting, "Sons of Qaylah, he is come, he is come!"¹⁵⁰ Then there is the hearty

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 16. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:803-804. An interesting conversation is recounted here where Safiyyah bint Huyaih ibn Akhtab, a young Jewess, overheard her father and uncle discussing the merits of Muhammad's prophethood. Her uncle Abu Yaasir ibn Akhtab asked her father Huyaih ibn Akhtab what he thought of Muhammad. He said that he thought Muhammad was a prophet. When pressed further what he felt about Muhammad Huyaih ibn Akhtab said he felt "Enmity, by Allah, for as long as I live."

¹⁴⁶ Ling, *Muhammad*, 29-30, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 82, 108. Mention is made here of the battles between the Aws and the Khazraj that plagued Medina. It is a very interesting fact that prior to Muhammad's arrival in Medina that the 'helpers' or Muslims from Medina learned the Qur'ān and Islam from Mus'ab of 'Abd ad-Dār. Muhammad sent Mus'ab of 'Abd ad-Dār to Medina after the First 'Aqaba in 621 CE. He previously migrated to Abyssinia with Ja'far.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 77. These questions are: first the legend of the Sleepers of Ephesus. Apparently, the communities of the Hijaz took this legend literally. It is quite an odd story for rabbis to present since it is considered a legend of Christian origin. Cf. Griffith, "Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur'ān: The "Companions of the Cave" in Surat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition." The second question concerned tidings of a far traveler. And the third, concerned the Spirit of God.

¹⁴⁹ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:668-669. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 227.

¹⁵⁰ Ling, *Muhammad*, 121. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:668-669. A slightly different wording is uttered in this rendition; "O group of Arabs, here comes your grandfather..."

confusion as the people mistakenly greet the elder Abu Bakr as the prophet.¹⁵¹ They only realised their mistake when Abu Bakr shaded Muhammad from the sun.¹⁵²

After three days Muhammad left Qubā for Medina proper. There the festive atmosphere continued as Muhammad playfully allowed his camel Qaswā to decide where he would stay. Qaswā chose a courtyard in the district of the Bani Malik branch of the Najjār that belonged to two brothers, Sahl and Suhayl. While accommodation was prepared Muhammad stayed with Abu Ayyūb Khalid, the man who possessed the letter from the Tubba.¹⁵³

Not long after Muhammad arrived he set about to unite the different communities in Medina, *al-Madinat al-Nabi*, the City of the Prophet, into a community of believers. This new community was not only to be comprised of the *ansār* and *mujājirah*, but Jews as well. Muhammad's effort to unite Medina came in the form of a Treaty. There are many important facets to the Treaty that deserve more attention than this chapter can afford.¹⁵⁴ Certainly there are as many lessons for today's world to learn from the spirit of the Treaty as there were in the time of the prophet.

In short the treaty forms more of a social contract of mutual defense and security without seeking conversion.¹⁵⁵ The Treaty began by defining the residents of Medina that believed in one God as *Al-Ummah*, the nation, creating a new social entity.¹⁵⁶ This is a very important detail since one characteristic of *al-jāhiliyya* is that blood ties and tribal loyalties defined the political and social interaction.¹⁵⁷ *Ansār* and *mujājirah* were thus united as a brotherhood by belief in Muhammad as prophet and in following *sharī'ah*. An important fact, however, is that the Treaty did not insist that Jews accept Muhammad as a prophet, although the treaty referred to him as such. The Jews could follow their own laws and religious irrespective.¹⁵⁸ In fact an important aspect of the Treaty states, "The Jews of the Banū Auf are a nation with the believers."¹⁵⁹ Muslims and Jews enjoyed equal status as

¹⁵¹ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:669.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 2:669-669.

¹⁵³ Ling, *Muhammad*, 123, 124. The Adī branch of the Bani Najjār is reported to be distant kin to Muhammad. They are part of the Khazjarite clan.

¹⁵⁴ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 231-233. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:787-848. Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam*, 137-138.

¹⁵⁵ Tariq Ramadan, *The Messenger, The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad* (London: Penguin, 2007), 88-90.

¹⁵⁶ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:788-792. Cf. Qur'ān 21:92.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:788-789.

¹⁵⁸ Ling, *Muhammad*, 125. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:790-791. Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism; An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*, 2002 ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 150.

¹⁵⁹ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:791-792. Here As-Sallaabee is citing the work of Dr. Diyaa Al-'Umaree, *As-Seerah An-Nabawiyyah As-Saheehah*.

citizens and all were free to worship as their conscience prescribed. If a person was wronged then it was incumbent on Jews and Muslims to come to their assistance. In cases of peace or war between tribes, neither party would make a separate treaty that threatened the peace of Medina.¹⁶⁰ All of the signed parties accepted the final arbitrator in matters of dispute between inter-communal rivalries rested with God and Muhammad.¹⁶¹

The treaty provided a means by which aggrieved parties could forgo revenge without losing face, since the signatures were in effect submitting to Allah and his prophet. In theory the Treaty also made provisions for the People of the Book to maintain their existing beliefs.¹⁶² To a greater degree the Treaty successfully united the Aws and Khazraj. Surprisingly, Jewish support for the Treaty was tendentious at best. On occasion they would, however, avail of Muhammad's services as an arbitrator. A very positive example reinforces the ability of an offended party to remit retaliation as a charity and this act of forgiveness would count as expiation for any sin that a person may have committed.¹⁶³ This is thought by Ibn Kathir to be the occasion of revelation for *sūrat al-mā'idah*. (5):45 examined in chapter one.

Alternatively, a less sincere example comes from *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):49. Here four members of the Jewish community in Medina, Ka'b ibn Asad, Ibn Saluba, Abdullah bin Surya and Shas bin Qays, conspired together to misguide Muhammad concerning "his" religion. They went to Muhammad and said, "O Muhammad! You know that we are the scholars, noblemen and chiefs of the Jews. If we follow you, the Jews will follow suit and will not contradict us. But there is enmity between us and some of our people, so we will refer to you for judgment in this matter, and you should rule in our favour against them and we will believe in you."¹⁶⁴ Muhammad's response to this particular request for arbitration is captured in the exegesis of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):50, also examined in the first chapter, that specifically mentions *al-jāhiliyya*. The context of the request demonstrates that the rejection of Muhammad as prophet and leader of Medina had little to do with sincere matters of faith and more to do with traditional allegiances and worldly gain. The verse

¹⁶⁰ Ling, *Muhammad*, 125.

¹⁶¹ As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 2:792-793. Cf. Qur'ān 4:104.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 2:792.

¹⁶³ The case involved blood money in feuds between two Jewish tribes, the Banū Nader and the Banū Qurayzah. Here the Banū Nader pressured the Banū Qurayzah to give twice the blood money that the Banū Nader would pay for killing of one of the Banū Qurayzah. *Ibid.*, 2:795.

¹⁶⁴ See above chapter 1.

asks, “Do they seek then the judgment of the Days of Ignorance? And who is better in judgment than Allah for a people who have firm faith?”¹⁶⁵

2.4e From Treaty to Enmity

It is unfortunate that interaction with the Jews of Medina became increasingly contentious. Historians and the biographers of Muhammad agree that relations between Muhammad’s *Al-Ummah* deteriorated rapidly and with devastating effect. The fate of the Banū Khazraj, the Banū Nadir and the Banū Qaynuqa: death conversion, or submission, echo through the ages.¹⁶⁶ Within a few short years all Jews would come to be described as hypocrites and those most likely to have enmity for the believers, as in *sūrat al-mā'idah*, (5):82 examined in chapter one.¹⁶⁷ Yet history is also replete with examples of cooperation and compassion. From a Jewish perspective, as well as peace, the arrival of Muhammad changed the social, political and religious landscape of Medina in an unanticipated way. The new facts on the ground exposed weaknesses within the worldview/ontological view of the Jews of Medina to challenges that would prove to be their undoing. An underlying factor being their understanding of ‘chosen.’¹⁶⁸ As Ling points out, they could not accept that God would send a non-Jew as a prophet.¹⁶⁹ Whereas the Jews were masters of the art of survival under the traditional order, they lacked faith in the new untested way.¹⁷⁰

Before Muhammad arrived the Jews of Medina looked to God to destroy their enemies, not to provide the conditions of co-existence.¹⁷¹ It would seem for the Jews of Medina the promise of universal salvation through Abraham, found in the Torah, and the command to spread the faith of Abraham, found in the Talmud, did not and could not possibly include the Arabs of the Hijaz. On the other hand, Muhammad’s willingness to take on all opposition in Arabia and the high cost of his early military campaigns failed to convince the skeptics of his prophethood, especially those expecting God’s messenger to be a little less fallible.

¹⁶⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-Azim*, 3:202.

¹⁶⁶ Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 10. Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*. Cf. discussion of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82-83 above in chapter 1. See further Kister *The Massacre of the Banū Qurayza*, M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jāhiliyya to Islam*, Collect Studies Series; CS327 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, Gower Publishing Group, 1990).

¹⁶⁷ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 313.

¹⁶⁸ See Rashid Rida in the previous chapter.

¹⁶⁹ Ling, *Muhammad*, 16, 126-127. Another question the defeat of Exilarch Nehemiah ben Hushiel raises is whether, or not, help from a non-Jew was ever interpreted as not waiting for God and forcing God’s hand.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 127.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Looking at the evidence of opposition to Muhammad in light of the three oaths and in conjunction with recent devastating defeats of Jewish campaigns that tried to pre-empt the hand of God; it is a great pity that more empathy is not afforded to Judaism in general, and these historical Jews in particular, by modern exegetes. History certainly attests to the fact that the Jews of Medina are guilty, if anything, of a gross error of judgment with regard to Muhammad and Islam.¹⁷² Their willingness to cling to the ways of *al-jāhiliyya*, as seen through the eyes of Islam, proved to be their undoing.

2.5 Christians of Abyssinia

In *al-jāhiliyya* Christians could be found the width and breadth of Arabia, in towns, amongst the settled communities, as well as within the Bedouin communities that adopted Christianity as their religion. The spread of Christianity on the Arab peninsula is a very interesting subject and an area in need of further study in order to properly understand the teachings of the Qur'ān. Seminal in this field of research is the enterprise of J. Spencer Trimingham in his *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*.¹⁷³ In this work the slow and steady spread of Christianity is followed from the time of the Evangelists to the dawn of Islam, from Syria to Yemen, from Petra to Baghdad. Also examined is the spectrum of diversity that thrived in an area beyond the reach of control of Byzantine Church authorities seeking to enforce the oscillating edicts of the various Church Councils. Consequently, the Qur'ān, rather than responding to heretical notions of the nature of Christ is making its own statements in the milieu of what will develop into mainstream Christian Melkite, West Syriac Jacobites, East Syriac Nestorians as well as mainstream Ethiopian *Tawahedo* creedal formula.¹⁷⁴

Through the exegesis of the verses examined in the previous chapter it is possible to present a Qur'ānic image of Christians that is generally quite favourable in comparison with Judaism. The Qur'ān accepts that Christians received divine revelation in the form of the Gospel through the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah. It is, however, a matter of dispute just how much of Jesus' authentic teachings remain intact and where, or how, changes came about. Similarly, as seen in the previous chapter, there is an argument to suggest that

¹⁷² Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 10.

¹⁷³ Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*.

¹⁷⁴ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: the Scriptures of the "People of the Book"*, ed. William Chester Jordan and Peter Schäfer Michael Cook, *Jews, Christians, And Muslims From The Ancient To The Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 26-27. David D. Grafton, "The Identity and Witness of Arab pre-Islamic Arab Christianity: The Arabic Language and the Bible," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 6-7.

enough of the authentic message of Jesus is retained to lead sincere Christians to salvation and even to Islam. *Sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82-83 examines the potential for Christians to be considered nearest to Muslims.

The *asbāb an-nuzūl* of this verse is thought to relate not to Christians on the Arab peninsula, but rather to Christians from the Kingdom of Abyssinia. These Christians are believed to have traveled with Ja'far and the refugees, as a delegation from the King of Abyssinia to Muhammad in Medina. The text suggests that they are true Christians, because their faith, their submission to God, *islām*, encourages them to move from the teachings of Christ to recognizing Muhammad as the Paraclete, the 'comforter,' that Jesus promised he would send.¹⁷⁵ However, the exegesis moves from the specific to the general, in order to suggest a potentially favourable reception of Muslims by any Christian, not just Abyssinians, unless their attitude towards Muslims and, or, Islam is influenced by ulterior motives. This amicable theological construct is the basis for considering Christians as potential pre-Qur'ānic Muslims.¹⁷⁶ This implies that the faith of Christianity was essentially *islām* before the coming of Muhammad and reified Islam, as a religion in its own right. The potential for harmonious relations is epitomised by the relationship between early Muslims and the Kingdom of Abyssinia to the extent that during the period of conquest Muhammad instructed his army, *utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum*, "Until the Abyssinians attack you, do not attack them," and "As long as they do not bother you and let you live in peace, you too should not bother them [allow them] also to live in peace."¹⁷⁷ In fact, in classical times, Abyssinia was the only country to earn the designation, *dār al-hiyād*, realm of neutrality.¹⁷⁸

2.5a Social Political Considerations

This section seeks to briefly describe the Christians of Abyssinia and to investigate whether the favourable relationship between early Muslims and Abyssinians was based on

¹⁷⁵ Mujahid, *Tafsir Mujahid*, 202. McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians*, 288. Interestingly, the religion in Ethiopia prior to Christianity may well have been Judaism. See further Acts 8:26-40; Abebe Zegeye, "The Construction of the Beta Israel Identity," *Social Identities* 10, no. 5 (2004). Here Zegeye contends the Jews of Ethiopia may have originated with the tribe of Dan, or like the Jews of the Hijaz, migrated during the Babylonian captivity.

¹⁷⁶ See also *sūrat al-qasas* (28): 52-55.

¹⁷⁷ Dr Farooq Hassan, "Re-examining the Possibility of Peaceful Co-existence of Muslims and non-Muslims in the West Based on the Abyssinian Model " *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 3, , no. 11 (2012): 878. Citing a Hadith from the collection of Abu Dawud.

¹⁷⁸ F. Peter Ford, "Christian-Muslim Relations in Ethiopia: A Checkered Past, a Challenging Future," *Reformed Review*, no. Spring (2007): 3. Haggai Erlich, *Ethiopia And The Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), 15. Erlich, *Ethiopia*, 9.

some social, political or theological commonality or was simply a matter of congenial personalities. Dr. Farooq Hassan believes that the Abyssinian model of coexistence is one that has several lessons for today's society. He contends that there were certain characteristics of Abyssinia that first prompted Muhammad to encourage early Muslims to emigrate there in order to escape persecution in Mecca. These characteristics concern the type of society that existed and the reputation of the king, the *Negus*, Ashama ibn Abjar or Najashi, as he was commonly known.¹⁷⁹ Muhammad advised the Muslims in 615 CE, "Migrate to [Abyssinia] Ethiopia and live there till Allah relieves the hardship you face here as that is a *land of justice and truth*. There is a king who loves justice; no one is treated unjustly by him."¹⁸⁰

Ethiopia, where Abyssinia is located today, can truthfully claim to be one of the world's oldest civilizations, since some of the earliest human remains have been found there.¹⁸¹ Equally its trading links to the Mediterranean world can be traced back to pre-historic times. Items exported include ivory, tortoise shells, incense, fragrant gums, precious stones and pearls, spices, exotic animals, elephants, pottery, glass, metals and slaves. In return traders brought cloth, olive oil, wine, iron tools, gold and silver.¹⁸² Later trade via the Red Sea connected Abyssinia beyond the Mediterranean world to Persia, India and the Far East. The development of several ports along the coast such as Adulis and Ptolemaist Theron (near Suakin) as well as inland towns such as Aksum and Koloe facilitated this trade.¹⁸³ By the 6th century CE, Abyssinia controlled trade along the Red Sea, allowing for the development of a prosperous society. Alongside trade came the development of maritime skills and agriculture, including the cultivation of coffee.¹⁸⁴

The ruling Aksum dynasty came originally from southern Arabia. Accordingly, people from southern Arabia migrated across the Red Sea, while maintaining links to southern Arabia.¹⁸⁵ This would account for the fact that many of the Abyssinian towns grew along the most practical routes to the sea and the towns show strong southern

¹⁷⁹ There are several scholarly variations of the name of the King of Abyssinia. I will try to hone a neutral rendition in the editing process.

¹⁸⁰ Hassan, "Abyssinian Model," 871-872. It would seem that this major meeting point can be interpreted in a negative way as well. Through this interpretation Abyssinians are seen as the powerful nemesis of Islam because once the King converted he needed to keep his new faith secret. See Erlich, *Ethiopia*, 17.

¹⁸¹ Paul B Henze, *Layers Of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 1-2. The Rift Valley Chris Johns, *Valley of Life, Africa's Great Rift* (Charlottesville: Thomas-Grant, 1991), 27.

¹⁸² Henze, *Layers Of Time*, 15-19.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹⁸⁵ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 287 & 292. Gradually these ties weakened by c.340 CE Himyarites formed a separate kingdom with Zafar as its capital.

Arabian influences.¹⁸⁶ When the Aksums left southern Arabia they maintained a nominal interest with the establishment of military outposts. Abyssinia was for centuries an ancient superpower alongside Persia, Byzantium and China.¹⁸⁷ Abyssinia can rightly claim to be the only African country that was not colonized.¹⁸⁸ In spite of its military ability Abyssinia, did not venture to expand beyond the region of the Horn of Africa.¹⁸⁹ Fortunately too, Abyssinia and its Aksum empire were remote enough not to merit envious attention from the Persians and Byzantines.¹⁹⁰ In the fifth century an army returned to south Arabia at the behest of the Byzantine Emperor to support the fledgling Chalcedonian Christian community of Najrān. These Christians suffered sectarian attacks from the Jewish King Dhū Nuwās.¹⁹¹

2.5b Biblical Abyssinia & Post-Apostolic Christian Mission

The Bible attributes the origins of monotheism in Abyssinia to Noah's son Cush, and his two grandsons Seba and Sabta (Gen 10:67; Chron. 1:8-10). These sons are thought to have been the original settlers of Ethiopia.¹⁹² Other references mention that Moses married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1). Judaism is traced to the love affair between the young Ethiopian Queen Makeda of Sheba, and wise King Solomon, (1Kings 10:1-14).¹⁹³ Closely connected to this affair is how the Arc of the Covenant, built by Moses (Exodus 25:10), is claimed to rest in the Church of Saint Mary of Zion, Aksum.¹⁹⁴ The Christian era begins with Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Gaza, (Acts 8:26-40). In addition, the disciples Matthew, Nathanael and Thomas are purported to have preached in Abyssinia.¹⁹⁵

Prior to the adoption of Christianity as the main religion, the religious make up of Abyssinia was a mix of Judaism, Christianity, Sabeanism and other African religions.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁶ Henze, *Layers Of Time*, 16-21.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 22. Here Henze is citing the Persian prophet Mani.

¹⁸⁸ Wendy Murray Zoba, "Guardians of the Lost Ark: Ethiopia's Christians stake their identity on being heirs of Solomon and keepers of his treasure," *Christianity Today* 43, no. 7 (1999): 60. Liberians make a similar claim, but the origins of the country speak for itself.

¹⁸⁹ Henze, *Layers Of Time*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 30. Here Henze is citing Munro-Hay.

¹⁹¹ Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 273.

¹⁹² Zoba, "Guardians of the Lost Ark: Ethiopia's Christians stake their identity on being heirs of Solomon and keepers of his treasure," 60.

¹⁹³ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Kebra Nagast: The Queen of Sheba and Her Only son Menyelek*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (UK: Forgotten Books, 2007; reprint, 2007), 132-135.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 176. Zoba, "Guardians of the Lost Ark: Ethiopia's Christians stake their identity on being heirs of Solomon and keepers of his treasure," 60-61.

¹⁹⁵ Zoba, "Guardians of the Lost Ark: Ethiopia's Christians stake their identity on being heirs of Solomon and keepers of his treasure," 60.

¹⁹⁶ The pre-Christian history of Ethiopia is a field of study that has not received adequate attention and is an area far beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that if Acts of the Apostles is accurate then

The origins of Christianity in Abyssinia may well have begun as early as the first century.¹⁹⁷ However, more is known about the development of the Church from the 4th century onwards. According to Ethiopian tradition, the story begins with two Syrian boys, Aedisius and Frumentius, who were shipwrecked and sold into slavery.¹⁹⁸ The Emperor Ella Aminda employed them in his royal court. Over time, through hard work and dedication, the young men were granted their freedom and earned the Emperor's and the Queen's respect and admiration. Indeed, the Queen was so impressed with their character that when her husband died she asked Aedisius and Frumentius to stay on to help educate their son Ezanas, who was still a boy.¹⁹⁹ During this time the two encouraged Christian traders to build churches to help spread the good news of the Gospel.²⁰⁰

In 303 CE Frumentius travelled to Alexandria in Egypt to request that the Patriarch Athanasius assign a bishop to Abyssinia. To his amazement Athanasius appointed Frumentius.²⁰¹ This began a centuries long relationship between the Egyptian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, whereby the Egyptian Orthodox Church appointed the bishops of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.²⁰² Athanasius, one of the great Church Fathers, was very active in Church politics and frequently, suffered the consequences of his convictions. Once declared "the Column of Orthodoxy" Athanasius suffered numerous stints in exile for his opposition to Arianism.²⁰³ He was a strong advocate of the Nicene formulation, which stood against Arianism.²⁰⁴ Frumentius stayed in Egypt for two years preparing for his role as bishop. On his return he converted

sometime in the first century CE Christian teachings first impacted on the Judaic leaning empire. See further Zegeye, "Beta Israel Identity." Trimmingham makes reference to a Sabaeen King Shāmir Yuhar'ish ruling Axum as well as southwest Arabia Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 288.

¹⁹⁷ John Binns, "Theological Education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church," *The Journal of Adult Theological Education* 2, no. 2 (2005): 103. Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5-7. Here with the rise of trade came wealth and a thirst for regional military dominance. Increased trade with the Byzantines exposed Ethiopian elites to Christianity well before the 4th century.

¹⁹⁸ Steven Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity: Kingship, Ethnicity, and Christianity in Orthodox Ethiopia," *Church History and Religious Culture* 89, no. 1-3 (2009): 293. Citing Rufinus & Sergew Hable Sellassie.

¹⁹⁹ Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 80.

²⁰⁰ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 7. Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 293-294. Gay L Byron, "Manuscripts, Meanings, and (Re)Membering: Ethiopian Women in Early Christianity," *Journal of Religious Thought* 59/60, no. 1 (2006): 93. Here citing Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

²⁰¹ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 7. Ninian Smart, *The Phenomenon of Christianity* (London: Collins, 1979), 260.

²⁰² Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 294.

²⁰³ Khalid Anatolios, *Athanasius: The coherence of his thought* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 86-87. 86-87; Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 19-33. Barnes explains Athanasius was not immune to resorting to intimidation.

²⁰⁴ J Stevenson and W H C Frend, eds., *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church to A. D. 37*, 7th ed. (London: S. P. C. K., 1957), 270-271, 279.

Ezanas and his family.²⁰⁵ The conversion of the royal family was one thing; conversion of the country to Christianity was another. The top down approach took several generations.

Overtime Christianity replaced Judaism and Sabeanism as the country's predominant religion. Those who remained Jewish are referred to as *Beta Israel*, or *Falashas*, meaning House of Israel, exiles, or strangers.²⁰⁶ History (circa 351 CE) records one attempt by the Emperor Constantius, an Arian, to recall Frumentius back to Alexandria so that the newly installed Bishop George of Cappadocia could investigate his conduct and beliefs. Frumentius and the Ethiopian Church however remained loyal to Athanasius and his anti-Chalcedonian ideals.²⁰⁷ By the fifth and sixth centuries Ethiopia was quite a developed country economically, a regional military force and a Christian Kingdom.²⁰⁸ King Kaleb and his son Gabra Masqal (The Servant of the Cross) consolidated Christian authority in Ethiopia by establishing a new law code, commencing a massive church building program and by destroying pagan temples and synagogues.²⁰⁹ Legend has it that it is during this period that the *Kebrā Nagast*, the formative epic narrative of Ethiopia History was orally composed.²¹⁰

Some Theological Considerations

Ethiopian Christians name their unique Christology as Tawahedo, meaning union. Here the human nature of Jesus is described as gradually uniting with the divine, forming a single nature.²¹¹ This concept was rejected by the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) who preferred the description of the nature of Jesus as, "perfect God and man, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with Man, one sole being in two natures, without division or separation and without confusion or change."²¹² A poetic description of the Ethiopic position might be the participation, or deification, of man through union with the Divine Light. This idea stems through the experience of humanity with the sacrifice of Jesus and

²⁰⁵ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 8. Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 293. Kaplan is citing Church Historian Rufinus in *Historia Ecclesiastica* and Hable Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*.

²⁰⁶ Zegeye, "Beta Israel Identity." Here citing Kessler, 1982, 4.

²⁰⁷ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 7-8. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 30-31, 35.

²⁰⁸ Byron, "Manuscripts," 88.

²⁰⁹ Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 295.

²¹⁰ The *Kebrā Nagast* describes the Solomon and Sheba 'Israelite' origins of Ethiopian Judaism, including procurement of the Arc of the Covenant by their son Menelik that is thought to rest in Lalibela, Ethiopia, till this day. The dating of the text is much debated. It was not written down until the 14th century. Cf *Ibid.*: 296, fn 210. Also Jack Fellman, "Kebrā Nagast (The Glory of Kings)" *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999).; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 17-18. Here Marcus explains the purpose of the epic is to create a Judeo-Christian lineage for Emperor Yekuno Amlak and thus creating an air of inheritance for a restored Solomonic line and presenting Ethiopia as the new 'chosen people.'

²¹¹ Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 302. 302; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 7.

²¹² Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 8. Kimball, "An Exploration," 55-56.

through his taking on of human nature, as Athanasius once said, “He became man in order that we might become divine.”²¹³ The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church defines their belief in the Trinity as,

The Father is the begetter and not the begotten. The Son is the begotten and not the begetter. And the Holy Sprit is the one who comes out from the Father, and takes up from the Son; three names, one God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Their Kingdom is one and their authority is one, and from the angels and humans they bow down to them once, and we also having believed, bow down to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever, Amen.²¹⁴

This creed offers a unique blend of Syriac monotheism and Coptic Orthodox teachings. It is partially derived from events in the 5th century, where following anti-Monophysitism prosecution in the Byzantine Empire, refugees began to arrive from Syria and eastern controlled Byzantine countries.²¹⁵ These refugees, known as the Tsadkan (the Righteous Ones) followed an Antioch Greek version of the Old and New Testaments.²¹⁶ Amongst the refugees were nine men who became known as the ‘Nine Saints.’ These ‘Nine Saints’ are celebrated for translating the Bible into Ge‘ez.²¹⁷ The unique theological blend of Syriac and Egyptian remained preserved and unquestioned until the Portuguese invasion in the 16th century. After the Portuguese expulsion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church struggled to formulate a unifying systemized articulation of the nature of Jesus. The resulting debates left three competing options; *Tawahedo*, Union, as described above; *Qebat*, fully unified through the Holy Spirit; and *Sost Ledat*, an adoptionist approach.²¹⁸

²¹³ Gerald Hiestand, "Not 'just forgiven': how Athanasius overcomes the under-realised eschatology of evangelicalism," *Evangelical Quarterly* 84, no. 1 (2012); Smart, *Christianity*. Citing Athanasius, 128.

²¹⁴ Roger W Crowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: a Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics*, vol. 38, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 284.

²¹⁵ Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. 288-9; for further information of the Syriac Church's formulation of the nature of Jesus see Bas ter Haar Romeny, "Athanasius in Syriac," *Church History and Religious Culture* 90, no. 2-3 (2010): 249-250. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 32.

²¹⁶ Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 19, 120. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 8-9. Marcus here is a little skeptical of these claims. The language of Ge‘ez was first written in Sabaeen Arab letters. Ge‘ez is a literary language developed in the 4th century for the translation of Christian text, Biblical, service books, homilies, commentaries, works on theology, ecclesiastical and civil law, history and medicine. See further Byron, "Manuscripts," 89, fn24.

²¹⁷ Niall Finneran, "Hermits, Saints, and Snakes: The Archaeology of the Early Ethiopian Monastery in Wider Context," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 2 (2012): 258-259. The “Nine Saints” and the “Righteous Ones” are credited with facilitating the conversion of the country to Christianity as well as establishing the monastic tradition.

²¹⁸ Kaplan, "Dominance and Diversity," 301.

2.5c Asylum, Dialogue & Détente

From the above description of the history and faith of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church one can state that they maintained a strong allegiance to the teachings of Athanasius. They believe in the Trinity, and also that Jesus is the true Messiah, one in substance with the Father through the action of the Divine Spirit, i.e., the true begotten son of God. Nothing about the creed of the Abyssinian Church could in the slightest way be misconstrued as anything other than Christian. Yet, it was to this community, ruled by King Ashama ibn Abjar, that Muhammad sent members of his nascent community around 615 & 616 CE so that they might escape persecution from the enemies of Islam in Mecca.²¹⁹ As Martin Ling, citing Ibn Ishaq reports, Muhammad instructs those most oppressed, “If ye went to the country of Abyssinia, ye would find there a king under whom none suffereth wrong. It is a land of sincerity in religion. Until such time as God shall make for you a means of relief from what ye now are suffering.”²²⁰

In Abyssinia, Muslims let their lives speak. They were not encouraged to proselytize, but encouraged instead to nurture relations with Christians. Some Muslims chose to remain in Abyssinia even when it was safe to return to Arabia.²²¹ The *hijra* to Abyssinia is a monumental meeting in history. Here the prophet of God sent his people not only to another country for their protection, but also to a country that devotedly followed another religion. Just as in a similar manner, Muhammad would later travel to Medina.

The question is, was this instruction prompted by God, or was it merely a well-known fact that the Kingdom of Abyssinia would offer refuge to any person or group suffering persecution?²²² Either way, this is a true example of crisis, faith and response.²²³ In the history of the world there are occasions when the fate of humanity comes down to simple choices. This is one of them. Muhammad must have deliberated the circumstances and accepted that he could not protect all of his community. He needed help. The King of Abyssinia, for his part, would have to choose to provide a safe haven for refugees, at the request of a stranger purporting to be a prophet, or honour his longstanding friendship with

²¹⁹ Hassan, "Abyssinian Model," 871-872.

²²⁰ Ling, *Muhammad*, 80.

²²¹ Hassan, "Abyssinian Model," 874. Henze, *Layers Of Time*, 43. An interesting caveat to this relationship is the fact that some emigrants chose to remain in Abyssinia. They settled and are buried in the Negash in eastern Tigray.

²²² As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 1:490-491. Here As-Sallaabee examines a few of the issues involved in the choice of Abyssinia, such as the character of the King and the relative social and political autonomy his kingdom enjoyed from influence of the Meccans.

²²³ Another way of looking at the issue is to consider the choices as a matter of cause and effect, the choices made have long lasting effects. See further *Ibid.*, 1:479-484.

the people of Mecca. The decisions each man made set an exemplary standard for future generations to follow.

Martin Ling reports that the first emigrants numbered no more than 80. They were well received and free to worship as their conscience dictated.²²⁴ The Quraysh responded by sending a team headed by ‘Amr ibn al ‘Ash to bribe the King’s generals to persuade the King to send the refugees back. It is the measure of the man that King Ashama ibn Abjar first insists the refugees are given a chance to state their case. He said,

“Nay, by God, they shall not be betrayed—a people that have sought my protection and made my country their abode and chosen me above all others! Give them up I will not, until I have summoned them and questioned them concerning what these men say of them. If it be as they have said, then will I deliver them unto them, that they may restore them to their own people. But if not, then I will be their good protector so long as they seek my protection.”²²⁵

The king asked them “What is this religion wherein ye have become separate from your people, though ye have not entered my religion nor that of any other of the folk that surround us?”²²⁶ Ja‘far ibn Abī Tālib explained to King Ashama ibn Abjar,

O King, we were a people steeped in ignorance, worshipping idols, eating unsacrificed carrion, committing abominations, and the strong would devour the weak. Thus we were until God sent us a Messenger from out of our midst, one whose lineage we knew, and his veracity and his worthiness of trust and his integrity. He called us unto God, that we should testify to His Oneness and worship Him and renounce what we and our fathers had worshipped in the way of stones and idols; and he commanded us to speak truly, to fulfill our promises, to respect the ties of kinship and the rights of our neighbours, and to refrain from crimes and from bloodshed. So we worship God alone, setting naught beside Him, counting as forbidden what He hath forbidden and as licit what He hath allowed. For these reasons have our people turned against us, and have persecuted us to make us forsake our religion and revert from the worship of God to the worship of idols. That is why we have come to thy country, having chosen thee above all others; and we have been happy in thy protection, and it is our hope, O King, that here, with thee, we shall not suffer wrong.²²⁷

Once Ja‘far’s speech was translated, the King asked if he had any revelation from their prophet and Ja‘far recited from *sūrah Maryam* 19:16-2;

²²⁴ Ling, *Muhammad*, 82.

²²⁵ Ibid. 82. Possible origins for the King’s love of justice stem from the fact that he was one time sold into slavery after his father was murdered. These events occurred because of political turmoil in Abyssinia. Due to lack of a suitable replacement the enslaved King was liberated and returned to the throne. Since then he felt free from the need to show favouritism and chose the purest path in matters of conscience. Cf. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 153-154.

²²⁶ Ling, *Muhammad*, 83.

²²⁷ Ibid., 83. The origins of the reputation of the King’s reputation for justice are discussed below.

And make mention of Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her people unto a place towards the east, and secluded herself from them; and We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it appeared unto her in the likeness of a perfect man. She said: I take refuge from thee in the Infinitely Good, if any piety thou hast. He said: I am none other than a messenger from thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a son most pure. She said: how can there be for me a son, when no man hath touched me, nor am I unchaste? He said: Even so shall it be; thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me. That We may make him a sign for mankind and a mercy from Us; and it is a thing ordained.²²⁸

The King and his bishops were visibly moved by Ja'far's presentation of Islam and by his recitation of the *āya* from *sūrah Maryam*. To those assembled the King said, "This hath truly come from the same source that which Jesus brought." Then the King turned on Amr and his colleague Abdullah and said, "Ye may go, for by God I will not deliver them unto you; they shall not be betrayed."²²⁹

Amr and Abdullah accepted they had lost the day. However, they continued to conspire to upset the balance of this newly formed relationship. Amr decided he would tell the King what Muhammad taught concerning Jesus. Abdullah cautioned against this move since he felt that the King would harm the refugees. Abdullah, in spite of everything, still considered the refugees kin, even if they had gone astray. Amr, perhaps aggrieved by his inability to sway the King the day before, felt no such compassion. The next morning Amr went straight to the King and told him that Muhammad declares Jesus, son of Mary, no more than a slave. This upset the King and he sent for Ja'far and his companions.²³⁰

According to tradition, the refugees were frightened. They felt they were in serious trouble. Nevertheless, they decided to say exactly what Muhammad taught them. When they were before the King, the King asked what Muhammad had to say about Jesus. Ja'far responded by saying, "We say about which our prophet brought, saying he is a slave of God, and his apostle, and his spirit, and his word, which he cast into Mary the blessed virgin."²³¹ The King was again impressed and said, "By God, Jesus, son of Mary, does not exceed what you have said by the length of this stick."²³² In front of his generals and court, the King again declared that the refugees were free to remain in his country for as long as

²²⁸ Ibid., 83.

²²⁹ Ibid., 83.

²³⁰ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 152.

²³¹ Ibid., 152.

²³² Ibid., 152.

they wished. The King returned the gifts that he received from Amr and said that he would not betray the refugees for a mountain of gold.²³³

The analogy of Jesus as a slave is very interesting. This author wonders what the point of common reference would have been between the King, who spoke Ge‘ez and Ja‘far who spoke in Arabic. It may be of interest to note that Muhammad would later describe the slaves of God as,

My slave ceaseth not to draw near unto Me with devotions of his free will until I love him; and when I love him I am the hearing with which he heareth and the sight with which he seeth and the hand with which he graspeth and the foot with which he walketh...²³⁴

Perhaps the thought of Jesus as a slave to God, his servant, and his word, captured the imagination of the King and his bishops, providing a mental image that reinforced their creedal position. Unfortunately, historical accounts lack further dialogue and explanation. In any case the King was comfortable with the verse recited by Ja‘far and pledged his support to the refugees. Stories concerning correspondence between Muhammad and the Negus are well celebrated amongst Muslims and Christians. Sometimes the friendship put a strain on their respective communities, who may have been more willing to focus on doctrinal differences.²³⁵ Others try to explain the friendship by erasing differences, as may be the case of those Muslims who contend that the Negus not only accepted Muhammad as prophet, but actually embraced Islam.²³⁶ Whatever the case, several conclusions can be deduced from this initial meeting between Christianity and Islam that can provide a normative example for the present.

²³³ Ibid., 153.

²³⁴ Ling, *Muhammad*, 330-331. This *hadīth* is discussed as part of the Greater Holy War, the “The war against the soul” where the soul of the fallen man is against itself... See further Al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meaning of Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 1, Book 8, 275-276. *Gebr/gäbr*, in Ge‘ez appears to allow a similar meaning and usage. See further http://www.letsrun.com/forum/flat_read.php?thread=3211398, accessed 21.2.16. Both the Qur’ānic Description and the *hadīth* remind this author of the verse in John 14:9-14 where Jesus says to the disciples, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me...” and “else, believe on account of he works themselves.”

²³⁵ Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, 1 ed., vol. 1 (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 185. There were two rebellions against the King while the immigrants resided in Abyssinia. The first was purely political, beyond the River Nile. The other was in the capital and concerned the King’s alleged conversion to Islam based on the writings of Al-Tabari.

²³⁶ Sergew Hable Sellassie sees the contention of the King’s conversion as a leap of faith. However, Islam had not developed its distinct theology at the time to challenge the beliefs of the King or his bishops. See further Ibid., 185-190. Henze, *Layers Of Time*, 42-43. In Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 657. Correspondence between Muhammad and the Negus implies that the King accepts all the tenets of Islam. The King even offers to join Muhammad; However in Ling, *Muhammad*, 318. Muhammad leads the funeral prayers for the King *in absentia* without referring to the King as a Muslim. Muhammad describes him thusly, “This day a righteous man hath died. Therefore arise and pray for your brother Ashamah.” Another source contends that the King recited the *shahada* in the company of Ja‘far but remained a secret Muslim for fear that his people would riot. 9, Cf. fn. 23, E. Cerulli, “L’Islam Etiopico, in his *L’Islam di ieri e di Oggi*, p113-133. The question of the conversion of king Ashamah ibn Abjar to Islam is an area this author hopes to research in the future.

Undoubtedly there are theological similarities between Ethiopian Christianity and Islam, as there are between all denominations of Christianity, both East and West and Islam. Potential fraternal admiration is facilitated by shared values and respect for justice. However, significant doctrinal differences do exist. Issues like Trinity, crucifixion, sonship, Paraclete, forgiveness of sin and a myriad of religious rituals certainly present issues of contention. Yet in spite of all the possible reasons to differ it would seem that respect for the sincerity of believers allowed for a healthy portion of tolerance between the two communities. This tolerance and respect provided a backdrop, even in *al-jāhiliyya*, for the invocation of Muhammad not to attack the Abyssinians unless they attack you and to allow the Christians of Abyssinia to live in peace as long as Abyssinians allow Muslims to live in peace. The fact that not every generation decides to honour such an understanding is not a reflection on Islam or Christianity, but rather on the sincerity of the individuals concerned.²³⁷ The fact remains that even when there are substantial theological differences, as with the case of the King of Abyssinia and the early Muslim community, it is possible to create sincere fraternal relations.

By extension the verse continues to invoke ideal relations between Muslims and the People of the Book, well beyond the original occasion of revelation and beyond the intended parties. An illustration of this point is made by Sheikh Nimr al-Darwish, “If the Israeli government would render justice to Muslims the way the Najashi and the Christian Ethiopia did with the *Sahaba*, I am fully ready to follow in the line of Ja‘far bin Abu Talib, who, as instructed by the prophet himself, lived respectfully under the Ethiopian government and the Najashi ‘under whom none are persecuted.’”²³⁸

2.6 The story of the People of the Book in the Himyar region of Southern Arabia

In south Arabia monotheism progressed from Sabeanism to Judaism to Christianity.²³⁹ The story of the transition from Judaism to Christianity in the southwest corner of Arabia is as

²³⁷ Erlich, *Ethiopia*, 9. Following the death of Muhammad there have been various occasions when both sides have attempted to undermine the timelessness of the hadith with political and economic motives, fortunately the aggressor paid a higher price.

²³⁸ Ibid., 16. Sheikh Nimr al-Darwish is a founding member of the Islamic Movement in Israel with close links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

²³⁹ Andrey Korotayev, "Apologia for 'the Sabaean Cultural-Political Area'," *Bulletin of the Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57, no. 3 (1994). This article provides an excellent synopsis of the political history of the people described as Sabaeans from the first millennium B. C. Andrey Korotayev, "Apologia for 'The Sabaean Cultural-Political Area'," *Bulletin of the Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57, no. 3 (1994); Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 33. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. 293,

fascinating as the history of faith in Abyssinia or al-Hijaz. The Christians of Najrān are discussed in more than 80 verses in the Qur'ān.²⁴⁰ It is therefore important to understand as much as possible about this community, in order to better understand the nuanced way the Qur'ān and its exegesis deal with this community in comparison with other Christian communities from different social, political and theological contexts.

2.6a From Sabaean to Judaism

According to the composite legends narrated by Ibn Kathir that draw upon renditions of stories collected by Imam al-Hāfiz, ibn Ishaq, as well as several others, the people of southern Arabia descend from Sām bin Nūh, otherwise known as Shem, son of Noah. Alternatively, Sahih al-Bukhari reports that the Aslam people, a tribe of the *ansār*, who had settled in Medina from Yemen, before the prophet arrived, descended from the family of Ishmael, because they were archers. Both variations draw upon the legend of the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis, as recorded in the Ethiopian legend.²⁴¹ The story of the Tibān As'ad Abū Karib, mentioned above, advances another variation of the introduction, or reintroduction of Judaism to the region. This marks the establishment of the Jewish Himyarite Kingdom replacing the Sabaean hegemony.²⁴²

Regretably, a major feature of the propagation of faith in *al-jāhiliyya* included strong inclinations towards superstition and sectarianism.²⁴³ When Abū Karib's returned to Yemen/Himyar he invited his people to accept Judaism. Understandably, they would not convert until they could test to see if Judaism was better than their own religion. The test involved an ordeal by fire, *mubāhala*.²⁴⁴ According to Ubaydallah, the two rabbis accompanying Abū Karib wore their sacred books around their necks and stepped into the fire along with some Yemenites with their sacred books and idols. The Yemenites could

describes the form of monotheism prevalent as worshipping *rahmanān*, (the merciful) c 384 CE found in (GI 389).

²⁴⁰ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 272.

²⁴¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 8:74-76. Genesis 10 relates that the lands inhabited by Shem extend from Mesha to Sephar to the hill country in the east, otherwise known as Himyar or Yemen. Rosalie Rakow & Lynda J. Rose, *Sana'a City of Contrast* (Burke: Tandem Publishers, 1981), 1.

²⁴² Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 296. There were Jews in this region going back to the return of the Queen of Sheba following her visit with King Solomon. This theory is also accepted by Michael Lecker, "The Conversion of Himyar to Judaism and the Jewish Banū Hadl of Medina," in *Jews And Arabs In Pre-And Early Islamic Arabia*, ed. Michael Lecker, *Variorum Collected Studies Series CS639* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), 635.

²⁴³ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 9. The story of the conversion to Judaism of Tibān As'ad Abū Karib relates that Jews used to worship at Mecca, as a sanctuary built by Abraham, but later avoided worshipping there, because the rituals of the pagan pilgrims included blood sacrifices.

²⁴⁴ The ordeal of fire was used to decide guilt and innocence. If a person could withstand more heat than their adversary it was considered truthful.

not stand the heat and wished to come out, but their companions urged them to stand their ground. The Yemenites remained, but soon perished. The rabbis emerged from the fire sweating profusely, but unharmed.²⁴⁵ Thus Judaism became the religion of the land.

Abū Karib's kingdom did not last beyond the lives of his sons. Due to an act of fratricide the kingdom fell asunder to a truly despotic leader by the name of Lakhnī'a Dhū Shanātir.²⁴⁶ Lakhnī'a was a sodomite who raped the sons of the Himyarite nobles so that each was publically humiliated. This way he thought that no one would emerge as a leader to challenge him. However, when Zur'a Dhū Nuwās, the younger son of Abū Karib, learned that Lakhnī'a's guards were coming to seize him he slipped a knife between his foot and sandal. The guards came and delivered Dhū Nuwās, just as the others. Dhū Nuwās waited till he was alone with Lakhnī'a, then sprung up and attacked Lakhnī'a, cutting off his head. He emerged from the chamber and motioned to the guards to look inside. Greatly relieved at what they saw, they thanked Dhū Nuwās and asked him to be their king. Zur'a Dhū Nuwās took the name Yusuf, with the title 'The King of all the Sabaean' and reigned over all of Himyar for many years.²⁴⁷ The religion of the land remained Judaism. In Himyar there was the general perception at the time that Judaism was a religion independent of all foreign influence.²⁴⁸ However, Christianity and the power struggle beyond the borders of Himyar soon began to take root with disastrous results for Judaism.

2.6b The Beginnings of Christianity

There are several variations as to how Christianity spread throughout Himyar.²⁴⁹ In one version Ibn Ishaq reports that a Syrian ascetic by the name of Faymiyūn is responsible for bringing Christianity to the people. This man traveled around Syria offering his services as a builder in order to earn his daily bread.²⁵⁰ One day while he and his companion Sālih were walking in the desert they were abducted and sold into slavery to two noblemen from Najrān. At the time the people of Najrān worshipped a palm tree.

²⁴⁵ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 10. There is an alternative, less ghastly variation of the story as well.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 10. Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 297. Trimingham contends that the Abyssinians installed this ruler based on a Syriac letter of Simeon of Beth Arsham.

²⁴⁷ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 13-14. Korotayev, "Apologia for 'The Sabaean Cultural-Political Area'," 472.

²⁴⁸ Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 37. Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 289, 297-288.

²⁴⁹ Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 290-291. Here Trimingham describes some very early missions to southern Arabia undertaken by Bartholomew in the first century, Pantaenus second century and by a slave woman in the early fourth century. 294-295 lists the influence of a merchant from Najrān by the name of Hannān or Hayyān, (probably a Nestorian), as well as the work of people that were converted to Christianity by Faymiyūn.

²⁵⁰ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 6-61.

Gradually, the people appreciated Faymiyūn as a hard working, virtuous man, who often prayed alone at night in his room and whose prayers were answered.²⁵¹ It was also noticed that while he was alone praying in his room, his room would become bright. Out of curiosity his master inquired as to his religion. Faymiyūn replied that he was a Christian. His master then challenged Faymiyūn to produce a single miracle to prove the veracity of his religion. In return, if Faymiyūn could produce such a miracle, his master pledged that he and the people of Najrān would leave their religious customs and become Christians too. So, Faymiyūn prayed and cursed the palm tree that the people worshipped. As he prayed a strong wind came and uprooted the tree and threw it on the ground. In this way Christianity became the religion of Najrān.²⁵²

A more historically traceable account follows the missionary efforts of the Arian Bishop Theophilus in 356 CE.²⁵³ He too was once a slave, who may originally have been a native of the island of Dibu and therefore practically a native of Himyar. Theophilus was sold into slavery and sent to Syria where he became a Christian.²⁵⁴ As a deacon he requested to be sent back to his own country. Emperor Constantius and his Arian co-religionists handsomely endorsed the mission of Theophilus with gifts for the King of Himyar. In due course the king converted and in his new zeal built three churches from his own resources.²⁵⁵

Later Theophilus travelled to Abyssinia, the Axum Empire, in an attempt to undermine the efforts of Frumentius' mission. As discussed above Frumentius and the Christians of Abyssinia closely followed the teachings of Athanasius. Athanasius' teachings were out of step with the Arianism of Constantius and Theophilus. Theophilus considered it his duty to replace the teachings of Frumentius with those acceptable to the emperor. To this end Constantius issued a letter to the Emperor Ezana and his brother Shaizana requesting that they send Frumentius to Egypt to give account of his teachings on the nature of Christ and explain his allegiance to the teachings of Athanasius.²⁵⁶ It is thought that the motivation behind the mission included the worldly desire to bring Himyar

²⁵¹ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 14.

²⁵² Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 60. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 15-16.

²⁵³ Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 34.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 34-35. Glaser believes his home is close to Anfuda on the Red Sea coast.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 34-35. Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 101. These churches are situated in Zafār, Adane and the name of the third is unknown but described as a Persian market town.

²⁵⁶ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 101-102. Emperor Ezana was not only the emperor of Abyssinia (Aksum) but also Himyar and Saba

and Abyssinia closer to Byzantium. The mission failed in Abyssinia and had only limited success in Himyar.²⁵⁷

2.6c The People of the Trench

What follows next in the region of Himyar is a period of dark sectarianism that defies reason, but attests to an underlying hatred of Abyssinian rule in Himyar, as a foreign influence, including its Christian religion. The steady spread of Christianity brought with it a real or perceived change in the allegiance of the local population away from Dhū Nuwās. The nature of the rivalry between Judaism and Christianity in the south of Arabia is a story that merits further investigation, but is beyond the remit of this thesis.²⁵⁸ Suffice to say there are hints of ruthless sectarianism against native Jews before the winter of 523 CE, when Dhū Nuwās ‘The King of all the Sabaeans’ attacked the Abyssinia Christian garrison of Zafār.

Dhū Nuwās’ target and timing are well chosen. During the winter months it would be very difficult for Abyssinia to send reinforcements to its outposts in Himyar. Zafār was the largest garrison town. If his soldiers could take Zafār there would be limited resistance in the rest of Himyar.²⁵⁹ However, Zafār was well fortified against attack. After several days of fighting Dhū Nuwās realized he would have to come up with a better plan. His solution required a promise to allow the soldiers to return safely to Abyssinia. He sent priests to the gates of the town to convince the soldiers of his sincerity. The soldiers took the bait. Three hundred soldiers along with their leader marched out to meet Dhū Nuwās. Dhū Nuwās prepared a feast for them to keep them off guard, but he had already ordered his soldiers to stay beside every Abyssinian soldier and to cut off their heads while they slept. This they did. In the morning 300 heads were presented to Dhū Nuwās and he proceeded to march on Zafār. There he burnt men, women and children in churches as they prayed. He gave instructions to the Jews of Zafār and all of south Arabia that if they tried to hide a Christian they would have their property confiscated and that they too would be burnt alive.²⁶⁰ Following Zafār, Dhū Nuwās proceeded to attack the Christians tribe of Ash‘ar then the port of Mokhār, inhabited by the Christian Farasān tribe, a branch of the

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 102. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 35-36. Frumentius remained in Abyssinia and the Church there remained loyal to Athanasius. Across the Red Sea Christianity remained a mix of Arianism and Ethiopian Orthodoxy. Politically the Church may have been viewed as being marginally closer to Byzantium.

²⁵⁸ Kung, *Islam*, 32-33.

²⁵⁹ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 298. Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 128. idem, *Ethiopian History*, cv-cvi.

²⁶⁰ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 128. Moberg, *The Book Of The Himyarites*, cv-cvi.

Taghlib.²⁶¹ The repercussions of attacking his next target, the Christians of Najrān, are remembered to this day.²⁶²

Dhū Nuwās employed similar tactics at Najrān. He first requested support from the garrison of Abyssinian soldiers, claiming he was under attack by pagans. An indication of just how well Dhū Nuwās caught the Christians by surprise is the fact that the entire garrison marched out in support, leaving the town unprotected. On the way the army met a Christian who asked where they were going. Then he informed them of the massacre at Zafār. The soldiers returned to Najrān immediately, while Dhū Nuwās plotted another ruse. This time he arrived at the town and declared to the inhabitants that he was now King of all Arabia and if the people accepted him, he would forgive them for closing the gates against him. 150 people from several nationalities living in the town decided to meet him at his camp to agree terms.²⁶³ When they arrived he offered them a simple choice, renounce Christ and become Jews or die. They refused and Dhū Nuwās ordered his soldiers to kill them on the spot. Then Dhū Nuwās took the town, burnt the churches, then tortured and murdered the Christian population.²⁶⁴

Among the many descriptions of the torture and perseverance in faith of the Martyrs of Najrān is the testimony of Habsa, daughter of Hayyān, one of those responsible for spreading the Christian faith in Himyar. As the massacre progressed Habsa begged her Jewish neighbour to turn her over to Dhū Nuwās' men. Habsa's neighbour reluctantly succumbed to her request, after she threatened to turn him in for hiding her. Two of Habsa's friends joined her. Habsa beseeched the soldiers to allow them the honour of martyrdom, but the soldiers were reluctant to touch Habsa, a woman of noble reputation, without consulting Dhū Nuwās. So, Habsa along with her two friends were brought face to face with Dhū Nuwās. Habsa said to him "I am the daughter of Hayyān of the family of Hayyān, the teacher, him by whom our Lord sowed Christianity in our land. But Hayyān, my father once burned your synagogues."²⁶⁵ Dhū Nuwās intimated to Habsa that she was of the same opinion as her father and if given the chance would burn synagogues as well. To which she replied no, that she would prefer to be a martyr and cursed him for all his evil deeds. Dhū Nuwās gave Habsa and her companions a chance to convert to Judaism. Habsa's declined preferring martyrdom. Habsa's friends declined as well adding, even if

²⁶¹ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 298. Trimmingham is citing the work of Hamdānī.

²⁶² The Feast Day of the Martyrs of Najrān in the Roman Catholic tradition is the 24th of October.

²⁶³ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 295-296. It would seem Najrān was a very metropolitan Christian centre with different denominations of Christians present as well as indigenous and non-native citizens.

²⁶⁴ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 129. Moberg, *The Book Of The Himyarites*, cv-cvi. Kung, *Islam*, 32.

²⁶⁵ Moberg, *The Book Of The Himyarites*, cxxiii.

we did not speak the words of Habsa we agree with all she said. Dhū Nuwās granted their wish and they met a tortuous end.²⁶⁶

Eventually, news of the massacres leaked out to the Christian world; winter ended and the army of Ellā-Asbehā, (Caleb in Ethiopic), King of Abyssinia crossed the Red Sea to avenge the murder of his citizens and fellow Christians.²⁶⁷ Dhū Nuwās' call to arms to all the local leaders, including Mundhir III of Hira, fell on deaf ears.²⁶⁸ Alone, Dhū Nuwās faced a very large and angry army. The King of Abyssinia crossed the Red Sea with some 230 ships; some provided by Justin I, as well as more than 70,000 soldiers.²⁶⁹ He landed near Mokha, the main port in south Arabia. Dhū Nuwās managed to stave off the first expedition against him by retreating up into the mountains. Caleb entered Zafār victorious and rebuilt the churches, then appointed Sumuyafa' 'Aswa', a Himyarite by birth, ruler of the region. Caleb met those who apostatized. He spoke to them at length then arranged a service for them and ordered the priests to forgive them and intercede with God on their behalf.²⁷⁰ However, as soon as Caleb returned to Abyssinia Dhū Nuwās began to attack the garrison. In 525 CE Caleb returned well equipped with 100,000 soldiers in order to pursue Dhū Nuwās by land and sea.²⁷¹ This time Dhū Nuwās could not escape, in defiance he rode his horse into the sea, never to be seen again. Caleb left general Abreha in charge of the garrison in Zafār, officially commissioned, in the Holy Trinity Church with Bishop Grigentius.²⁷²

Soon after his return to Abyssinia Caleb abdicated his reign and embraced the ascetic life.²⁷³ Whatever loyalty Abreha felt towards Caleb did not transfer to the new emperor Sumuyafa Aswa. Aswa sent several expeditions to Himyar to restore order, but each failed. In face of the expedition led by the accomplished general Ariat, Abreha seemed as destined to fail as Dhū Nuwās. Yet, bizarrely, Abreha challenged the general to a duel, claiming that they were both trying to serve the king and that their soldiers should not shed each other's blood. Ariat an accomplished soldier agreed. However, Abreha had

²⁶⁶ Ibid., cxxiii-cxxvi.

²⁶⁷ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 299; Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 131-135. Citing Ryckmans, *La persécution des chrétiens himyarites au sixième siècle*. 17 and A. A. Vasiliev, "Justin and Abyssinia": *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 33 (1933).

²⁶⁸ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 129-130.

²⁶⁹ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. 299. Sellassie dates this first expedition at 523 CE in the fifth year of Justin I's reign. 133.

²⁷⁰ Moberg, *The Book Of The Himyarites*, cxi-cxli.

²⁷¹ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 135. Citing Tabari.

²⁷² Ibid., 135, 143. According to the historian Procopius Abreha might at one time have been a slave. The Greek and Roman Churches consider Caleb a saint. Caleb's feast day is the 24th of October, along with the Martyrs of Najrān.

²⁷³ Ibid., 137, 143. He stayed in the hermitage of Abba Pentelēwon and he sent his crown to Jerusalem to hang from the Holy sepulcher.

no intention of losing. He positioned one of his trusted soldiers, Arangada, in hiding, with instructions to kill Ariat if Ariat got the upper hand. When Abreha began to lose Arangada thrust his spear into Ariat. As a reward Abreha granted Arangada the first night with every new bride in Yemen.²⁷⁴

2.6d The Reign of Abreha and the Birth of the Prophet

In many ways Abreha's reign over Himyar was beneficial to both Abyssinia and the people of Himyar. Once secure in position he paid tribute to Abyssinia.²⁷⁵ Abreha moved the capital from Zafār to Sana'a, placing his capital on the main route north through the towns of Al-Ta'if, Mecca and Medina, to Damascus. He conquered the northern tribes and consolidated power both eastward and southward to include Hadramawt. This allowed the Abyssinians to realise their goal of controlling the spice route. Along with Bishop Grigentius, he improved the administration of the region and set out a common code of law. He embarked on an ambitious development plan that saw the reconstruction of the famous dam at Marib. He also built many churches, including the Cathedral of Sana'a in the style of Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, using stones from the ruins of the castle of the Queen of Sheba.²⁷⁶

Sellassie explains that the Cathedral served two important purposes. One was to help propagate the faith after the reign of Dhū Nuwās. The second was to tap into some of the wealth that made the Quraysh of Mecca rich, namely pilgrims. Ibn Ishaq tells that Abreha wrote to the Emperor of Abyssinia, "I have built a church for you, O King, such as has not been built for any king before you. I shall not rest until I have diverted the Arabs' pilgrimage to it."²⁷⁷ In order to help spread the Christian faith Bishop Grigentius advised Abreha to take measures against pagans and Jews to encourage them to accept Christianity.²⁷⁸ Shortly afterwards, and quite conveniently, a man from Mecca defiled the church, thus giving Abreha reason to attack Mecca and destroy the Ka'bah.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 145-146.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 145.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 146-150. The Arab word used is *al-qalis* from the Greek *Ecclesia*. According to Albright, the Dam can with a high degree of certainty be dated to 750 B. C. It was important for drinking water and agriculture. An inscription, 136 lines long, commemorates the building of the great church in Sana'a.

²⁷⁷ Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 21.

²⁷⁸ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 150. In light of the campaign of Dhū Nuwās against the Christians it is difficult to imagine the encouragement left little choice.

²⁷⁹ Kister, *Society and Religion*, 44, 63 & 65. This church is thought to have been desecrated by Nufayl b. Habīb al-Khath 'amī, citing Al-Tabari, Ta'rikh Cairo 1939 I. 556, as well as al-Zurqānī, Mughultāy. Attacks on rival pilgrimage sites were not uncommon. The sanctuary built by Banū Murra at Buss was destroyed by the Meccans for attempting to compete with the Ka'bah; Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 151, 153. Sellassie reports an alternative reason for attacking Mecca concerned the grandson of Abreha, who was attacked and

Abreha's expedition to Mecca in 570 CE is remembered as the Year of the Elephant, *ām al-fīl*.²⁸⁰ Both Muslim and non-Muslim sources accept, in the main, the outline of the events of the expedition. On the journey north, forces led by Dhu Nafr al-Himyar and Nufayl in Khatham attempted to save the Ka'bah from destruction. Both attempts failed miserably. As Abreha's army approached Mecca his soldiers raided the surrounding region. Some of the villagers lost quite significant quantities of livestock, including Abdul Al-Muttalib, the grandfather of Muhammad, who lost approximately 200 camels. The raids intimidated the Meccans to such a degree that they abandoned the city, stating that only God could defend the Ka'bah.²⁸¹ Before the invasion began Abdul Al-Muttalib brazenly approached Abreha demanding his camels back. Abreha comments on the request as odd, inquiring why Abdul Al-Muttalib did not plead for his sacred Ka'bah. To which Abdul Al-Muttalib replied, "The camels are mine, but the temple belongs to another, who will defend it." Abreha retorted, "He cannot defend it from me." Abdul Al-Muttalib said calmly, "That is your affair; only give me back my camels."²⁸²

The next morning Abreha began his assault on Mecca, his war elephant (Mahmūd) in the lead. Yet, no matter what they did the elephant would not march towards Mecca. According to Ling, a man named Nufayl, one of the prisoners previously taken in battle, had learned from the elephant's keeper the command to stop and whispered this into the elephant's ear. Dutifully the elephant knelt down and would not take a step towards Mecca even when beaten.²⁸³ Then the sky grew dark, swift-flying birds filled the air, each carrying three small stones between their claws and beak. They pelted the soldiers causing them to retreat in panic. The velocity of the stones pierced through their coats of mail. As the soldiers made their retreat, each man struck by a stone fell dead. The skin of the soldiers began to rot like those stricken with small pox. Some of the soldiers died quickly others suffered and died slowly including Abreha.²⁸⁴

robbed by men from Mecca. Following the incident, they looted the church in Najran; According to L. Caetani a man from the tribe of Banū Fugayn Harīth ben Malik desecrated the church. Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 304-305. Here a second alternative reason is given for the expedition. Cf. fn. 47.

²⁸⁰ There is a slight variation of the dates of this expedition based on Sabaeen inscriptions examined by Ryckman. This year is remembered as the year Muhammad was born, but historians consider this probably not accurate. See further Trimingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 304-305. 304-305; Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 152-153, fn 135. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 4. Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 61.

²⁸¹ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 151-152. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 40-41. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 22-23.

²⁸² Kister, *Society and Religion*, 65. Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 152. Abreha give Abdul Al-Muttalib back his camels and this encourages a delegation from Mecca to approach Abreha and offering a third of their wealth to him if he spares the Ka'bah, but he refuses the offer.

²⁸³ Ling, *Muhammad*, 20-21.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 21; Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 26-27. Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 152-153. Abreha is reported to have lived for several more years after this incident.

Following the death of Abreha, his sons Yaksum and Masruk took over. Within a few short years the political power of Abyssinia and Byzantium weakened in the region and Persian control increased. Many of the natives of Himyar, led by Sayf b. Dhu Yazan, preferred the rule of Babylon to that of the Abyssinians. To this end the Persians joined with locals to massacre the remnants of Abyssinians in Himyar.²⁸⁵ Gradually the Christian faith became increasingly diversified. Bishop Grigentius is thought to have favoured Byzantium, while most people of Himyar remained loyal to the Abyssinian Church. Nestorian Christians inhabited the island of Socotra and the coastal region of Yemen. In Yemen Christianity stagnated primarily due to the perceived rivalries between different factions of Christians.²⁸⁶ This state of disarray of beliefs, warring and sectarianism provides the backdrop to *al-Jāhiliyya* in south Arabia at the time of the delegation of Najrān.

2.6e Christian Deputation from Najrān

Towards the end of Muhammad's life he received many delegations and envoys from communities all over Arabia including several from Himyar.²⁸⁷ In the tenth year after the Hijra a delegation of Christians from Najrān of the Byzantine Rite arrived.²⁸⁸ It is noteworthy for several reasons. The deputation comprised some 60 delegates, including 14 nobles, two leaders, Abd al-Masīh and al-Ayham and the patriarch, Bishop Abū Harithā.²⁸⁹ In contrast to the deputation from the Christians of Abyssinia, that sought to discern the character of Muhammad, this deputation, came prepared to defend their religion.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, when it came time for the delegation to pray Muhammad invited the deputation to use the Masjid al-Nabawi.²⁹¹

²⁸⁵ Sellassie, *Ethiopian History*, 154-158.

²⁸⁶ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*, 302-303. 302-3. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 41-42.

²⁸⁷ Ling, *Muhammad*, 319, 324. According to calculations this is year 9 A. H. or 631 CE. Elsewhere the Romans led by Heraclius, recaptured Jerusalem from Jewish and Persian control, circa 626-629 CE. Four Himyar princes wrote to Muhammad informing him of their acceptance of Islam. The princes were informed of their duties as Muslims including their obligations to protect the People of the Book who agreed to pay taxes.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 326. Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. 273. Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 65. Suggests the date is closer just before 622 CE. According to A. Guillaume's translation of Ibn Ishaq, Christian kings of Byzantium funded churches and paid Bishop Abū Harithā a subsidy. He also reports that there were slight variances in the expression of the Christology of the deputation. These variances may be indicative of the creedal debates of the time. For instances he relates that some would describe Jesus as God, others as Son of God, or that Jesus is part of the Trinity. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 271.

²⁸⁹ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 65. One might expect Bishop Abū Harithā's defense of Christianity to be similar to the arguments of other Byzantine Christians of later generations. i.e. Theodore Abu Qurrah.

²⁹⁰ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 2:176.

²⁹¹ Ling, *Muhammad*, 326.

One very important aspect of the visit is that the Islamic literature records a brief summary of the arguments the Christians employed in defense of their beliefs. According to Ibn Ishaq's the logic of their belief that Jesus is God and Son of God is based on the miracles he performed. For instance, that Jesus used to raise the dead, heal the sick and could declare the unseen. Among the miracles mentioned are some obscure miracles only found in eastern Christian traditions. These miracles include fashioning clay birds and bringing them to life by breathing into them and that he spoke when just a baby in the cradle. They declared Jesus God's son, because he did not have an earthly father; that he is third of three, because God says, We have done...We have commanded...We have created and We have decreed. Therefore if God was one he would have said, I. Here the Christians are remembered as associating Mary and Jesus with God as part of the Trinity.²⁹² They responded to Muhammad's call to Islam with the retort, "We were *Muslims* before you were born..."²⁹³ This raised the ire of Muhammad who told them, "You cannot be Muslims since you ascribe a son to God, [and] worship the cross..."²⁹⁴

So, began a hearty exchange of positions on faith and doctrine concerning the nature of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God as well as many other tenets. The delegation remained in Medina for a couple of days. One night during their visit Muhammad reportedly received more than 80 verses for the beginning of *sūrah Āl-ʿImrān* as well as three for *sūrat al-qasas* that deal with Christians and their doctrines.²⁹⁵ These verses could be interpreted as part of the Islamic challenge to the beliefs of *al-jāhiliyya* held by the delegation that the mission of Muhammad intended to correct. The gist of the verses discuss the oneness of God (3):18 the right for only God to be worshipped (3):18, the likeness of Jesus to Adam (3):59 i.e., without an earthly father, but rather as commanded by God to 'be' (3):47. There is a requisite acceptance of Muhammad as prophet and messenger of God and a need to follow what Muhammad teaches in order to be a believer (3):31. There are verses that chastise Christians for contorting scripture to suit their own wills rather than following clear guidance (3):24.²⁹⁶ Many of the verses praise Mary as the

²⁹² Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 271-272. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 9. Referring possibly to terms like *theotokos*. Cf Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings And Stories In Islamic Literature*, 12 vols., Convergences (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 51-218.

²⁹³ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 65-66. Cf. chapter one p32, pre-Islamic *Muslimūm*, i.e., People who submit their will to God. Kung, *Islam*, 35. Here Arabic is discussed as a Christian language.

²⁹⁴ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 66. Here citing Ibn Hishām; Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 272. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 3:1929-1932. This gives a very thorough description of the meeting.

²⁹⁵ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 65-66. *Sūrat al-Qasas* 28:52-55. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 2:107-205. Here discussing the first eighty-three verses of *sūrat al-imrān*.

²⁹⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 2:111-117. Here there is a concise explanation of the interpretation, *ta'wīl*, of scripture based on verses that are *muhkamāt*, easy to understand or *mutashābihāt*, difficult to interpret. If verses that are *muhkamāt* are employed to interpret verses that *mutashābihāt* a correct

most virtuous woman (3):42-44. Several verses discuss Jesus as Messiah, affirming his miracles, even his intercession on behalf of some believers (3):49. Yet, the same verses specify unreservedly that the acts Jesus performed were intended as signs for mankind, accomplished only by God's leave (3):45.²⁹⁷ So too, the Qur'ān makes the point that a true prophet has never called people to pray to them, but rather God is always the focus of worship (3):79.

Famously, the verses reveal the challenge of *mubāhala* to settle the veracity of the message of Muhammad in relation to the beliefs of the deputation (3):60-63. When the delegation received the challenge, they asked for some time to consult.²⁹⁸ The next day Muhammad arrived with his daughter Fatimah, her husband Ali and their children, Hasan and Hussein. Muhammad spread a large cloak on the ground for the five of them, known as "the People of the Cloak" to stand on. The delegation from Najrān, whose people had previously suffered martyrdom rather than convert to Judaism, responded to Muhammad's challenge by saying, we are not prepared to carry the disagreement so far as *mubāhala*.²⁹⁹ Now, either they lost their nerve, or the differences between them and Muhammad did not merit putting God to the test. The deputation left on good terms, agreeing a settlement that allowed them the freedom to practice their religion, in exchange for accepting Muhammad as a ruler.³⁰⁰

The dramatic challenge of *mubāhala* perhaps overshadows other verses that leave both parties equally committed to their own faith and religion, yet at the same time diffuses any animosity generated by the evident contradictions. The first set of verses outline the duties and limits the responsibility of Muhammad towards those who refuse to follow his guidance. These are *sūrah Āl-ʿImrān* (3):18-20, where the closing *āya* says, "And say to those who were given the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) and to those who are illiterate (Arab pagans): 'Do you also submit yourselves?' If they do, they are rightly guided; but if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the message."³⁰¹ Verse (3):64 opens the way

interpretation is possible. However, if the opposite is attempted, it is quite possible to develop an overly esoteric interpretation that may well be completely misguided. Only God knows the correct interpretation of the difficult verses (3:7). Verse 3:24 can then be applied directly to Christians and an explanation is given as to how Islam perceives changes developed away from Jesus' original teachings. Cf. 170-1, 176-77.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 160-161. Jesus' intercession on behalf of 'some people' is Ibn Kathīr's explanation of the verse, "Held in honour in this world and the Hereafter, and will be one of those near to Allah." Accordingly, this ability to intercede is granted by God. It is not something Jesus has any ability to do without God's leave.

²⁹⁸ Ling, *Muhammad*, 326. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 2:176-179.

²⁹⁹ Ling, *Muhammad*, 326.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 326-327. Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 66. Abd al-Masīh, one of the delegation leaders said to the Bishop that if they wished to remain Christians they should conclude a peace treaty with Muhammad, for they were certain he was certainly a prophet with a genuine message.

³⁰¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, 2:131.

for each generation to discuss the recurrent questions of faith, not as an inherited tradition, but experienced; Say: “O people of the Scripture: Come to a common word that is just between us and you, that we worship none but Allah the same, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.”³⁰² Admittedly a challenging verse for Christians, but one that allows Christians to discuss their submission to God and not just defend a formula of words.

2.7 Conclusions

The Time of Ignorance, *al-jāhiliyya*, is a term Muslims use to describes the period of time as well as the condition of man’s mind, prior to the arrival of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur’ān. The term *al-jāhiliyya* describes the way of life, the habits, beliefs and, or traditions of the people of that time that are out of keeping with God’s guidance. In contrast, *al-jāhiliyya* is employed by Sayyid Qutb and ‘Abdil-Wahhaab and other Islamic reformists in a modern sense to describe anything they see as deviating from the tradition of the righteous ancestors. However, not everyone from the period of *al-jāhiliyya* was out of keeping with God’s guidance. Some were living *islām* if the term is used in its unreified sense as submitting to God. The difference between pre-Islamic ignorance and pre-Qur’ānic *islām* are highly nuanced. In general, as discussed in chapter one, submission to God, *islām*, is the same for all times. With the revelation of the Qur’ān, those who follow the true teachings of God are expected to recognise the authority of the teachings of Muhammad and to follow him. From an Islamic perspective failure to accept Muhammad is failure to continue in *islām*. Those *muslimūm* before Muhammad are no longer considered *muslimūm* if they refuse to accept the revelations that he received, or relinquish the tenets of faith that the Qur’ān challenge. In Islamic terms after hearing and understanding Muhammad’s teachings the choice is between continuing in *islām*, or choosing ignorance, *jāhl*. Nevertheless, it is important to note that failure to accept Muhammad does not mean damnation. The Treaty of Medina as well as the agreements with delegations from Najrān and Abyssinia testifies to the fact that allowances for matters of conscience are acceptable and coexistence preferable. Sincerity, deeds and peaceful intention seem to be key factors governing whether or not those who do not follow Muhammad in *islām* are friend or foe, not adherence to any particular form of creed. This point is affirmed repeatedly throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis.

³⁰² Ibid., 2:180.

This chapter examines a number of important communities of the People of the Book from the period of *al-jāhiliyya* that are discussed in the Qur’ān. The Communities examined are the Jewish communities of Hijaz and Himyar, the Christian communities of the Abyssinia and Himyar as well as the Bedouin communities. The reception of these communities to nascent Islam set precedents for interaction with the People of the Book that remain normative to this day. It is hoped that this exercise of reconstructing the image of these communities helps provide greater understanding of the *asbāb an-nuzūl* and the varying factors that might have influenced the initial meeting between these communities, Muhammad and Islam.

This chapter demonstrates that from the very beginning the land of Arabia and the monotheistic tradition of Noah and Abraham are intertwined. Both Jewish Biblical and legendary *Rabbanan d’Aggadta* material place Abraham in the region of Arabia in contact with Hagar and his firstborn son Ishmael. Islamic and Jewish traditions share the possibility that these two men built the great Ka’bah together. Jewish sources not only include the reconciliation of Isaac and Ishmael, but also between Abraham and Hagar. Their children help populate Arabia and to varying degrees keep the faith of their father. From the very beginning knowledge of the one God and *islām*, the practice of submitting one’s life to God’s guidance is present in Arabia.

The *al-jāhiliyya* poetry describes the life and times of the Bedouin communities. Here tradition customs and membership of tribe provide all necessary guidance, ‘*asabiyyah*. This is true even for the tribes that have accepted, at least nominally, the religions of Christianity or Judaism. The transgressions described in the Mu‘allaqat range from excessive drinking, sexual promiscuity, gambling, tribal feuding, misplaced loyalties in the form of revenge duty to infanticide. ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum and Imr al-Qais’ exemplify the traits that stereotypically define *al-jāhiliyya*. In contrast, the poetry of Zuhair Abu Salmā, champions a life more in tune with the religion of Abraham, with an awareness of God, *taqwā*, serving God through acts of piety and chivalry aware that there will be a day of reckoning at the end of time. For this Zuhair is remembered as a pre-Islamic true believer.

Over the centuries, and as the descendents of Isaac moved into the territory of the Hijaz as part of the Diaspora, they brought with them their faith and culture. At the dawn of Islam the Jews of Medina gave sanctuary to Muhammad and protection from those who wished to harm him in Mecca. They failed however, to embrace Muhammad as the chosen prophet with whom they had threatened their neighbours and with whom Islam identifies

in their sacred text. This is in spite of the fact that Islamic tradition contends that many of the Jews of Medina acknowledged that Muhammad was indeed a prophet. Yet, according to the likes of Safiyyah bint Huyaih ibn Akhtab, the Jews ultimately rejected Muhammad as either their prophet or leader.

In fact, a great deal of the Islamic literature focuses on the inability of the Jews to leave the ways of *al-jāhiliyya* behind with regard to tribal loyalties, as described in the exegesis of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):50 “Do they then seek after a judgment of the Days of Ignorance?” The Jews of Medina and Hijaz worked against Muhammad’s attempts to create a new community based on faith in one God, rather than traditional family/tribal ties. This Treaty became known as the Treaty of Medina. The gist of the treaty included mutual defense, forbade unilateral treaties with tribes outside Medina, and afforded Muhammad the role of adjudicator over any unresolved disagreements between members. Most importantly, the treaty allowed for freedom of worship for the *People of the Book*. From an Islamic perspective, when the history and biographical accounts of Muhammad and Islam are considered, there is little wonder that the Jews of Medina and the Hijaz are described in *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82 as “Strongest in enmity to the believers...” However, when the gradual demise of Judaism in the region from Jerusalem to Abyssinia to Yemen is taken into consideration, there is a great deal of sympathy for their fate. They paid a very heavy price for their failure to accept Muhammad. An interesting question for future research entails why the Jews of the Hijaz, who for all accounts were waiting for a messianic figure, did not migrate to Jerusalem when a Persian army supported by Jewish soldiers captured the city in 614 CE? Nevertheless, in the next chapter it will be seen that the Jews of the Levant, as People of the Book, adopt an entirely different attitude. The relationship that ensued demonstrates that enmity between Muslims and Jews need not necessarily prevail. In our modern world, with all its troubles, people have the choice to construct the conditions for peace, whereby citizens of the global *ummah* may respectfully allow each community to live as intended. The words of Rashid Rida describing those who create enmity between Christian and Muslims may apply to Jews as well. “May the curse of Allah be upon those who provoke animosity and hatred among the servants of Allah in utter self-interest or to please their masters.”³⁰³

The Christians of Abyssinia in many ways represent the ideal *Qur'ānic* Christians as discussed in the first chapter. They progressed in faith from one form of monotheism, to the next, from Sabeanism, to Judaism to Christianity and Islam; at least this is how the

³⁰³ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, 7 & 8:10.

Islamic sources recount the outcome of the delegation to Medina and the response of King Ashama ibn Abjar. Even those who do not convert to Islam, and this would include the citizens of the Kingdom of Abyssinia, their faithfulness and solidarity to nascent Islam is revered. In fact, their reception of Islam is contrasted with the Jews in the other half of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82 where it says, "...And nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians'... In addition, there is the *hadīth* from Muhammad, *utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum*, do not attack them if they do not attack you.

Theologically the Abyssinia Christians are devoted Trinitarians following the Tawahedo formula. There is therefore no obvious reason why their reception of the refugees should be any different to any other Christian community. According to Islam, they remained guilty of the sin of *shirk*, by associating partners with God. Yet, as the Islamic literature describes, the King found very little difference between their beliefs and offered friendship. Perhaps, then, the defining factors have more to do with the moral fiber of the King in addition to the social and political factors of the day. The Abyssinians were in fact, one of the world's superpowers. They had nothing to fear politically from affairs on the Arab peninsula. Yet, the paradigm of relations between the first Muslims and the Christians of Abyssinia remains an inspiration and one that today's Christian societies need to cherish and promote.

The ancient Kingdom of Himyar offers another perspective for both Jews and Christians. Here again Judaism replaces the religion of Sabeanism. Within a few generations Christianity threatens the Jewish hegemony. The words of Habsa concerning the deeds of her father reveal volumes, even if the deeds till this day lie hidden. In an article written by Michael Lecker, there is a note that Dhū Nuwās came to Najrān after the Jews there complained that the Christians were trying to dominate them.³⁰⁴ Could there have been attacks on synagogues, intimidation, or incidents of forced conversion that have gone unrecorded? Could the reign of Lakhnī'a Dhū Shanātir, installed by Abyssinia, explain the ferocity of the attacks against the Christians at this time? These questions might provide avenues for further study. Although the literature does not describe the levels of sectarianism as *jāhl*, certainly the extension of tribal warfare to religious persecution qualifies as an aspect of *al-jāhiliyya*.

³⁰⁴ Lecker, "The Conversion of Himyar to Judaism and the Jewish Banū Hadl of Medina," 636. Lecker is citing the work of Nashwān al-Himyarī.

The story of the delegation from Najrān to Medina marked the first recorded in-depth exchange of views in defense of Christian dogma.³⁰⁵ This meeting should be considered in light of the previous sectarianism between Jews and Christians, as well as the provocation in the Year of the Elephant. The *sīra* and *tafsīr* material attest that the delegation, which included Bishop Abū Harithā, was anything but a diplomatic exchange of niceties, or one political entity acknowledging the rise of a new regional leader. This delegation defended the Christian faith in earnest. The views of the Christians from Najrān inspired more than 80 verses of the Qurʾān. The image of the exchange is heated, not reflective. They respond to Muhammad’s call to Islam with their own declaration that they were *Muslims* before Muhammad was born. In spite of their differences the delegation departed on amicable terms, agreeing a treaty that allowed them to keep all of their property, run their own affairs and practice their own faith, *shirk* and all.

The next chapter continues the dialogue between Muhammad’s followers and a new generation of Christians as they grapple with the historical legacies. More specifically this research examines how the image of the *People of the Book* and *al-jāhiliyya* aided or hindered the discourse between Christians and Muslims following the death of Muhammad, after the period of conquest, when Christians of the Levant begin to respond to the challenges of Islam in the language of Arabic.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 35-36. Griffith makes the compelling argument that Islamic criticism of Christian beliefs is in response to extant Christian views represented by Melkite, Nestorians, Jacobites and Ethiopian confessions spreading through the Arab peninsula at the dawn of Islam.

Chapter 3. Resisting the Construct: Post Conquest Christian Theological Responses to Islam *lā ilāha ‘illa Allāh*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the post conquest Arabic speaking Christian responses to aspects of the theoretical construct of Christianity created by traditional Qur’ānic, *tafsīr*, by three Arabic speaking Christian scholars of the Levant.³⁰⁶ In specific terms the chapter examines how Arabic speaking Christians responded to accusations of ‘excesses in your religion’ that the traditional commentary draws attention to in *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171, as discussed in chapter one. These include the Incarnation or Sonship of Jesus and the description of God in Trinitarian terms.³⁰⁷ In order to accomplish this task effectively this chapter briefly outlines the consolidation of Islam on the Arab peninsula following the death of Muhammad and the outward expansion of Islam throughout the conquest period. From here an overview is offered of the types of theological reactions to the conquest as Christians adjust to the new political and social reality as People of the Book.

One of the key features of the conquest is that Christians in the region of all denomination gradually adopted Arabic as their *lingua franca*. This presented their religious leaders with a dilemma, since the new language systematically excluded the meanings desired for expressing theological truths previously expressed in Greek and Syriac. In addition, they faced the challenge to prove that the standard Christian teachings, namely the Incarnation or Sonship of Jesus and descriptions of God in Trinitarian parlance are found in the Bible and are not the product of Byzantine emperors or Church Councils.³⁰⁸ This chapter examines three texts by three Chalcedonian scholars who lived between the early 9th to the 13th centuries of the Abbasid Dynasty (c. 749-1258 CE). These interlocutors are Theodore Abū Qurrah, (d. 820 CE), Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī (b. 940 CE) and Paul of Antioch (c. 1200 CE). This chapter explores the continuity and diversity of their theological and rational arguments in light of the social and political

³⁰⁶ The term Levant is used here to describe the region covering: Gaza, Palestine to Sidon, and Syria. Other Names include the Holy Land, al-Shams, Bilād al-Shams, Fertile Crescent, and Syria-Palestine...

³⁰⁷ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 93. Here the Griffith identifies the Trinity and Incarnation as pivotal concepts challenged by the Qur’ān. See also Sidney H Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," in *Thinking the Divine in Interreligious Encounter*, ed. Norbert Hintersteiner and François Bousquet, *Currents of Encounter - Studies on the Contact Between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs, and Cultures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2012), 151.

³⁰⁸ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 94-95. Sidney H. Griffith, "Muslim and Church Councils; the Apology of Theodore Abu Qurrah," in *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 274.

environment in which they lived. It is hoped this examination will contribute to the debate concerning the early Arabic Christian response to Islam.

3.2 Setting the Scene: From the Death of Muhammad to Al-Quds

It had been barely two years since the delegation from Najrān visited the prophet Muhammad and prayed in Masjid al-Nabawi.³⁰⁹ On the 8th of June 632 CE, as Usāma prepared to lead the Muslim army north to Syria, Muhammad at the age of 63, succumb to an ailment that had plagued him for some time.³¹⁰ Following Muhammad's death Abu Bakr is reported to have said, "O people, whoso hath been wont to worship Muhammad- verily Muhammad is dead; and whoso hath wont to worship God- verily God is living and dieth not." Then Abu Bakr recited from *sūrah Āl- 'Imrān*, "Muhammad is nothing but an apostle. Apostles have passed away before him. Can it be that if he were to die or be killed you would turn back on your heels? He who turns back does no harm to God and God will reward the grateful."³¹¹

Almost immediately the orphaned community faced some very serious challenges that would test their resolve to understand and follow the teachings of Muhammad as well as maintain their newly formed alliance to the *ummat al-mu'minin*. The challenges were threefold; record the hitherto oral Qur'ān, preserve the *hadīth* of Muhammad and consolidate Islam as the regional religion before spreading north and west beyond the Arab Peninsula. Muhammad's dearest friend and companion Abu Bakr valiantly met these challenges, followed by his successors, beginning with 'Umar ibn Al-Khattāb and 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (632-656 CE).³¹² Under their leadership the community of believers staved off the dissension to Islamic rule on the Arab Peninsula that developed into the Wars of Apostasy. In addition, they succeeded in expanding the influence of Islam east and west.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Mourad, "Christians in the Sira," 65.

³¹⁰ Ling, *Muhammad*, 343. Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah* 679. As-Sallaabee, *The Prophet*, 3:1606. Vol. 3. 1606. As-Sallaabee records that Muhammad acquired this illness after tasting poisoned meat in Khaibar.

³¹¹ Ling, *Muhammad*, 345.

³¹² Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, 1 ed. (Cambridge: The Belcamp Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 97-106. The *hadīth* took generations to collect.

³¹³ Ling, *Muhammad*. Here Ling identifies Musaylimah of the Bani Hanīfah, Tulayhah a chief of the Bani Asad, Aswad ibn Ka'b of the Yemen, along with Sajāh, who claimed to be a prophetess. Cf Kung, *Islam*, 164-168. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, "The Patriarchal And Umayyad Caliphates," in *The Cambridge History of Islam*, ed. P. M. Holt, Ann K S Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, *The Central Islamic lands From Pre-Islamic Times To The First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 57-58. For a more detailed account of the period see Dr. 'Ali Muhammad Muhammad As-Sallaabee, *The Biography of Abu Bakr As-Siddeeq*, trans. Faisal Shafeeq, First ed., vol. 1 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2007), 311-547. Leone Caetani, "The Art Of War Of The Arabs, And The Supposed Religious Fervour Of The Arab Conquerors," in *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State*, ed. Fred M Donner, *The Formation Of The Islamic World* (Hants:

3.2a The Apocalypse or Days of Redemption

For centuries Christians in the Levant lived under the confident vision *in hoc signo vinces*, “under this sign you will conquer.” This Christian battle cry heralded back to the days of Emperor Constantine who encouraged Christians to link political and military success with God’s favour.³¹⁴ However, as the Muslim army advanced, the seismic shift in fortunes prompted many to consider the conquest as an apocalyptic or eschatological event.³¹⁵ In fact the earliest historical accounts of the conquest originate amongst the non-Chalcedonian communities, who perceived part of the success of the conquest due to the errors of the Chalcedonians and therefore perhaps, justification of their own Christological formulations.³¹⁶

There are several theories regarding the success of the Arab invaders. Bousquet suggests the reasons for the swift success of the Arabs were multi-faceted and included the poor state of the Byzantine army in contrast with the invaders. Bousquet also considered the promise of the spoils of war a strong motivational factor, thus reducing the image of the invaders to marauding mercenaries.³¹⁷ Gil considers religious motivation a key factor of the conquest, as Muslim soldiers may have believed, after the death of the prophet, that they were waging war in the ‘End of Days’ to impose the mastery of the new religion on the world.³¹⁸ Caetani downplays religious zealotry as a driving force behind all but the earliest followers of Muhammad, while positing hunger and material poverty as the real catalysts.³¹⁹

Bell posits that local interests saw the conquest as potentially beneficial to their own concerns, citing the fact that Jews in the vicinity of Jerusalem acted as guides for the Muslim army in retaliation for sectarian abuse suffered following Heraclius’s recapture of

Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 9. Here Caetani makes the point that within a very short period of time the very same Arabs who were suppressed by Muhammad’s army during the Wars of Apostasy (*Ridda*) joined those fighting for an Islamic empire.

³¹⁴ John C. Lamoreaux, *Theodore Abū Qurrah*, ed. Daniel C. Peterson, trans. John C. Lamoreaux, vol. 1, Library Of The Christian Text (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), xviii. xviii. M A Smith, *From Christ to Constantine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), 170-171. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 78-79.

³¹⁵ Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East*, 52, 56. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 24-25. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 26-31, 57, 257-335, 526-531.

³¹⁶ Walter E. Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Conquest," in *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State*, ed. Fred M. Donner, *The Formation Of The Classical Islamic World* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 122-123.

³¹⁷ G. H. Bousquet, "Some Critical And Sociological Remarks On The Arab Conquest And The Theories Proposed On This," in *The Expansion of the Early Islamic State*, ed. Fred M. Donner, *The Formation Of The Islamic World* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 20.

³¹⁸ Moshe Gil, *A History of Palestine, 634-1099*, trans. Mrs. Ethel Broido, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 12-13.

³¹⁹ Caetani, "The Art Of War," 9-10, 11-12.

Jerusalem from the Persians just a few years previously.³²⁰ In fact Gil makes an excellent argument that the Jews of Palestine may have regarded the Muslim conquest as a harbinger of the messianic ‘Days of Redemption.’³²¹ Sebeos suggests that earlier generations of displaced Jews approached the Muslims for aid and “informed them of their blood relationship through scripture.”³²² It is interesting here to note that initially under the Covenant of ‘Umar, Jews were not allowed to live in Jerusalem in order to placate Christian concerns. However, after a period of three years the Jews were allowed not only to return and live in Jerusalem, but one was appointed Governor.³²³ This ended a 500-year old Roman/Byzantine ban that was only briefly interrupted a generation before with the aid of the Persians.³²⁴

Donner notes that the invading armies employed a simple strategy that relied heavily on winning the hearts and minds of rural communities, before eliciting their support to communicate with urban populations. Consequently, the generous terms offered to the People of the Book that submitted to Muslim rule, including religious freedom, thus ensured that heavy fighting only took place on rare occasion. These terms required communities to pay the *jizya* tax and not “aid the enemies God.”³²⁵ There is certainly more to the story of the conquest than Muhammad’s great commission, for what other reasons would inspire even the Christian tribes of the Judhām, Lakhm and Taghlib to join the conquering army?³²⁶ The period of conquest represents a fascinating aspect of Islamic history that will need to be set-aside for present purposes. Whatever the deciding factors may have been, there is little disputing that the invading Islamic army did conquer the Levant rapidly and with lasting repercussions.

³²⁰ Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 164-165.

³²¹ Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 61-64.

³²² Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, ed. R. W. Thomson and James Howard-Johnston, trans. R. W. Thomson, 31 vols., vol. 31, Translated Texts for Historians (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), Part 1, 94-98. Here Sebeos implies the joining of Jews and Ishmaelites as “God is accomplishing His promise to Abraham and his seed for you.” 96.

³²³ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 114. Here Donner translates the Armenian word for *prince* as governor. See further Sebeos, *Armenian History*, Part 1, 103.

³²⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 127. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 51, 68-74, 297. This ban was imposed following the Bar Kokhba rebellion 132-5 CE. Cf. comments by Abdul Jalil Sajid and Norman Solomon in Bayfield, Race, and Siddiqui, eds., *Beyond The Dysfunctional Family: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Dialogue With Each Other and With Britain*, 134-135, 138.

³²⁵ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 117, 121-124. Cf. Treaty of Tiflis. Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 140-142. Cf. Sebeos, *Armenian History*, Part 1, xxvi-xxx, 94-113, 132-154.

³²⁶ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among The Arabs*. 124. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 114, 124 Some of the poorly behaved conquerors/raiders may have been from Christian tribes as well. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 184-185.

3.2b People of the Book, Dhimmitude or Détente

Once the military campaigns concluded, Christians and Jews of all denominations, as People of the Book, benefitted by a certain *dhimmīs* status that guaranteed protection. As a result, quite possibly for demographic reasons, Christians who for decades outnumbered the Muslim population in vast areas of the Middle East were relatively free to govern themselves and practice their own religion in exchange for social and political submission.³²⁷ In a sense, the conquest of Islam throughout the Levant provided an accord between the People of the Book and the ruling Muslim community not dissimilar to the Treaty of Medina, or the accord between Muslims and the Christians of Najrān.³²⁸ It is now accepted that the spread of Islam did not require the forced conversion of Christians, or Jews, nor were Christians exiled from their lands.³²⁹ Interestingly, Donner surmises that part of the reason for this accord may be that acceptance of Muhammad as prophet was not a dominating expression of the conquest. As evidence Donner examines the coinage from the period that inscribes the first half of the *shahādah*, without mention of Muhammad.³³⁰ In contrast to *tafsīr* literature in chapter one, this idea finds support from the testimony of escaped prisoners of war who claimed their captors believed Muhammad was calling Arabs, as children of Abraham, back to monotheism.³³¹ Undoubtedly however, for Christians of the majority denomination, as they soon emerged, the conquest was an outright disaster. They lost power and control of society and were set on an equal footing with adversaries whom they once ruled.

³²⁷ As-Sallaabee, *Abu Bakr*. Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East*, 56-57. Here Cragg defines "Scriptured People" as confined by *dhimmīs* status. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 15. Vaglieri, "Patriarchal And Umayyad," 64-65. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 11-20. Strictly speaking the competing Christological formulae had yet to be identified as denominations at this time. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 42-43. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 11. Thomas W. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions to Trinitarian Theology: The Development of the Doctrine of the Trinity in an Islamic Milieu* First ed., Emerging Scholars (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 2. David Thomas, "Muslim Regard for Christians and Christianity, 900-1200," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallet (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 16-17.

³²⁸ As-Sallaabee, *Abu Bakr*, 690-694. Muhibbu-Din, "Ahl Al-Kitab and Religious Minorities," 116, 122. Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 114. See further references discussed in chapter 2. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 107, 110, 115. Cf. Appendix A. 227-232. For more information regarding the details of the treaty with the Christians of Najrān cf. Addai Scher and Robert Griveau, "Histoire Nestorienne (Chronique De Séert), seconde partie, fasc. 2.," *Patrologia Orientalis* 13(1919): 600-625.

³²⁹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 11. Joshua Starr, *The Jews In The Byzantine Empire 641-1204*, ed. Nikos A Bees, Texte Und Forschungen Zur Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Philologie (Hants: Gregg International Publishers Limited, 1969; reprint, 1969), 1-11, 83-85. Richard W. Bulliet, *Conversion To Islam In The Medieval Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1, 3, 41, 106-107. Bousquet, "Some Critical And Sociological Remarks," 15-16. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 17-18.

³³⁰ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 71-72, 111-115.

³³¹ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 128-129. Citing the Chronicle of Sebeos.

As one might expect cooperation between the newly subject people and their overlords varied from one community to the next as they came to grips with the new political reality.³³² For instance, there is archaeological evidence to suggest that Christians and Muslim occasionally shared sacred space.³³³ For the People of the Book in general and specifically for minority Jewish and Christian communities, who had been previously suppressed by their co-religionist, the Islamic conquest brought a modicum of stability and relief.³³⁴ In fact this new parity benefitted greater ecumenical scholarship whereby non-Chalcedonian Christian communities were free to make greater contributions to the development of Arabic Christians literature.³³⁵ It is very important to keep in mind that the degree of toleration exhibited by Muslims rulers was a marked improvement to the sectarian strife that preceded it in the Levant during the conquest of Jerusalem by the Persians in *c.* 614 CE and the subsequent reconquest by Heraclius in *c.* 629 CE, or indeed the circumstances surrounding the pre-Islamic massacres in Najrān and Himyar discussed in chapter two.³³⁶ This is not to say, however, that the People of the Book did not on occasion face severe persecution. In simple terms, they did. The work of Bat Ye'or (Gisèle Littman), Hoyland, Friedman, Yousef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, for example, testify that on occasion and generally as part of other extenuating social and political and economic circumstances, Christians and Jews did face severe persecution at the hands of those from whom they were promised protection.³³⁷ Conversely, it must be noted that under Islamic rule many People of the Book, due to their protected status, retained and rose to high rank in their professions as doctors, politicians, merchants and scribes, while others engaged in the great Graeco-Arabic translation movement.³³⁸ More will be said about the latter subject later. Nevertheless, Christians faced an ever-increasing challenge to maintain

³³² Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 140.

³³³ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 115. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 170. Cf. St. John the Baptist, Damascus. This is still the case with Abraham's Mosque in Hebron. It is presently reluctantly shared between Jews and Muslims. For many years, Greek Orthodox Christians also used the facility.

³³⁴ Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 181-182. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 11, 12, 27. As-Sallaabee, *Abu Bakr*, 692-694. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 18, 58-59. Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 142. Will Durant, *The Age of Faith*, 11 vols., vol. 4, *The Story of Civilization* (New York: MJF Books, 1950), 218-219.

³³⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 15. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 4-5.

³³⁶ Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora*, 64-72. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 3, 8. Cf. Katz, "The Persian conquest of Jerusalem," 13-20. Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 141. Maher Y. Abu-Munshar, *Islamic Jerusalem and its Christians: A History of Tolerance and Tensions* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013; reprint, 2013), 87-97. Cf. Sebeos, *Armenian History*, Part 1, 69-70.

³³⁷ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 148-149. Cf. fn. 60-64.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 339. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 8, 90-91. Muhibbu-Din, "Ahl Al-Kitab and Religious Minorities," 122. Mark Swanson, "The Trinity in Christian-Muslim Conversation," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44, no. 3 (2005): 260. Bell, *The Origin Of Islam*, 187. Cf. Lawrence Conrad, "Ibn Butlān in Bilad al-Shām: The Career of a Travelling Christian Physician," in *Syrian Christians Unser Islam: The First Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 131-158. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 8.

their own faith communities in the face of social and theological challenges that were responsible for the slow but constant diminution of Christianity in the Holy Land.³³⁹

3.3 Early Christian Response to Islam: Arabic Speaking Christian Tradition Begins

For some time, the written and spoken languages of Christians of the Levant following the period of conquest remained the traditional languages of Greek, Armenian, Syriac and Coptic. These languages represent the liturgical languages of what would become the Coptic, Chalcedonian, Nestorian, and Jacobite Christian denominations. The Arabisation and Islamicising of the culture accompanied with the adoption of Arabic as the everyday language took generations.³⁴⁰

Beginning as early as the later half of the eighth century, during the first Abbasid century (circa 750 CE), Christian scholars in Palestine and elsewhere began to write in Arabic.³⁴¹ The first tracts were translations of catechist type literature designed for everyday worship. Over time a second genre of more apologetic literature developed whose dual purpose was not only to defend the particular creedal formula of one denomination against other Christian formulae, but also to provide reassuring arguments to Christians tempted to convert to Islam.³⁴² These tracts were composed with an air of confidence with full knowledge that Muslims may hear of, or even read, such works. Sometimes the works suggested that any right-thinking Muslim would understand the reasonableness of their arguments and convert to Christianity, if it were not for fear of losing their position in society.³⁴³ Perhaps coincidentally, or perhaps not, these types of

³³⁹ Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East*, 58. Here Cragg discusses the slow process of *mawlā*; whereby non-Muslim individuals are adopted by an Arab tribe and eventually convert, thus escaping *dhimmīs* status. Cf. Bulliet, *Conversion To Islam*, 41, 107. An area of deep contention that plagues Muslim/Christian relations to this day involves the fate of those deemed to have committed apostasy from Islam or Christians who conduct missionary work. Cf. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 147-149.

³⁴⁰ For a brief discussion of early Christian apologists see Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 23-74. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 67, 92, 480.

³⁴¹ Sidney H. Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine and the Growth of Christian Literature in Arabic," *The Muslim World* 78, no. 1 (1988): 2. Cf. 6-13 for a brief analysis of developing peculiarities of 'Christian' Arabic, known as Old South Palestinian Arabic, a dialect of Middle Arabic according to Joshua Blau.

³⁴² Ibid.: 4-6. Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 63.

³⁴³ Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 4. idem, *The Church in the Shadow*, 38. LL.D. William Muir K. C. S. I. , *The Apology of Al Kindy: Written at the Court of Al Māmūn, (A. H. 215, A. D. 830) In Defence of Christianity Against Islam* (Charleston: Bibliolife, 2014; reprint, Bibliolife LLC), 2, 4-8, 11, 20-22, 58-59. Al Kindy uses a variation of tactics in his apology. He responds to an invitation to convert to Islam first by positing an analysis of the absurdity of Islam as a prophetic religion in contrast to the merits of Christianity then invites his friend to convert to Christianity. 2, 4-8, 11, 20-22, 58-59. In defence of his arguments Al Kindy quotes a speech from the caliph Al Māmūn where the caliph criticised converts to Islam in his own

responses echo the sentiments Christians are said to have expressed when rejecting Muhammad's invitations to Islam discussed in chapter one.

Early Arabic speaking Christians drew upon an array of tools in order to recommend the soundness of Christian doctrines. These tools include rational arguments based on Greek philosophy, clever analogies and scriptural defences from the Old and New Testaments as well as from the Qur'ān and from Islamic idiom.³⁴⁴ These scriptural defences provided several functions in support of the Christian understanding of the oneness of God, by responding to accusations of 'excesses' in religion often by challenging and or inverting Muslims arguments against Christian doctrines.³⁴⁵

3.3a *On the Triune Nature of God*

An excellent example of scriptural apology is offered by one of the earliest Arab Christian works, *On the Triune Nature of God*.³⁴⁶ Here the anonymous author expresses a defence of the concept of Trinity, the Messiah in the history of salvation, the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the Great Commission, in terms that are both striking in their simplicity and ingenious in their theology.³⁴⁷ The text is replete with expressions of tenets of the Christian faith that are in sympathy with Islam including the ongoing debate amongst the Muslim Mutakallimūn over the Divine attributes.³⁴⁸ For example the anonymous author writes, "To thee (shall we) return; Thou art almighty, to Thee be the praise, O God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein by thy Word and Spirit."³⁴⁹ The author

court for converting for political advantage, material gain and for the pleasures of this life. Xii-xiii. Cf. El-Kindi, *The Apology of El-Kindi: A work of the ninth century written in defence of Christianity by an Arab*. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1885). This volume includes 'Abd Allāh ibn Isma'īl Hāshimī's initial invitation to al Kindy to convert to Islam.

³⁴⁴ Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 81. 81. idem, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 153.

³⁴⁵ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 171.

³⁴⁶ Anonymous, *An Arabic Version of the Acts of the Apostles and the Seven Catholic Epistles: From an Eighth or Ninth Century Ms in the Convent of Catherine on Mount Sinai. With a Treatise on the Triune Nature of God: with a translation from the same codex*, ed. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, trans. Gibson, First ed., vol. VII, *Studia Sinaitica* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003). Cf. Mark N. Swanson, "An Apology for the Christian Faith," in *The Orthodox Church In The Arab World, 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger, *The Orthodox Christian Series* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2014), 40-59.

³⁴⁷ Swanson, "The Apology," 41-43. Please note the use of the well-known pairing of Islamic names for God as a triad, "You are the Merciful-in-Deed, the All-merciful, the Merciful-in-Self.

³⁴⁸ Richard M. Frank, "Attribute, attribution, and being: three Islamic views," in *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas, *Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām. Variorum Collected Studies Series CS835* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), chapter V, 258-278. Cf. Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms." 153-5.

³⁴⁹ Anonymous, *An Arabic Version*, 2. Cf. *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):18, 48, 105. Other translations or paraphrase of the phrase *البيك المصير* would reveal other verses. The other phrases leading up to "by thy Word and Spirit" also have Qur'ānic parallels.

employs Islamic idiom to define the basic similarity and difference between Christian and Muslims as; “we do not distinguish God from his Word and His Spirit.”³⁵⁰ This of course echoes *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171, where the Qur’ān describes Jesus as the Messiah, an apostle of God, His Word and a Spirit proceeding from Him.³⁵¹ A further example illustrates the author’s focus on the grammar of the Qur’ān to illustrate the use of the first person plural, rather than the singular, when God creates man, “*We* created man in misery and *We* have opened the gates of Heaven with water pouring down, and have said, And now are ye come unto *Us* alone, as *We* created you at first.”³⁵² Drawing direct parallels with what is identified as excesses in the Qur’ān the author reminds Muslims, “Ye have said that ye believe in God and His Word and the Holy Ghost, so do not reproach us, O men! That we believe in God and His Word and His Spirit: and we worship God in His Word and His Spirit, one God and one Lord and one creator...”³⁵³ The author surmises “that this is our faith and our testimony in God and His Word and His Spirit. He is the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, one God and one Lord...”³⁵⁴

Further, *On the Triune Nature of God* draws upon several themes that later interlocutors will employ. The text makes use of interesting analogies of Jesus as begotten in the manner of the sun begetting rays, the mind words, or fire heat. In each case the author notes that one could not exist before the thing begotten, nor is the use of the term begotten by Christians anything like begotten in a worldly sense.³⁵⁵ The author humbly acknowledges that Christians do not understand exactly how this is, as the ways of God are beyond human comprehension.³⁵⁶ Perhaps a key strength of the text is the fact that a little humility goes a long way. Moreover, the text draws upon miracle stories found in scripture, Christian lore, as well as the Qur’ān, such as creating birds from clay. There is also the example of Jesus sending his disciples the gift of the *Paraclete*, here meaning the Holy Spirit, something the author says only God can do.³⁵⁷ An interesting enculturation of the author’s apology concerns the use of the word “beloved” in place of the word “begotten” when describing the baptism of Jesus. The author has the Father bear witness

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 3. Frank, "Attribute, attribution," 261. In contrast the Muslim scholar Abū l’Hudhayl Jubbā’ī separated the act of the creation from the thing, *shāy*, being created.

³⁵¹ The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 271-272.

³⁵² Anonymous, *An Arabic Version*, 5. Here the author is citing *sūrat al-balad* (90): 4, *sūrat al-qamar* (54): 11, and *sūrat al-An’ām* (6):94. The italics are this author’s.

³⁵³ Ibid., 6. Sidney H. Griffith, "The Melkites and the Muslims: The Qur’ān, Christology, and Arab Orthodoxy," *Al-Qantara* XXXIII 2, no. July-September (2012): 430.

³⁵⁴ Anonymous, *An Arabic Version*, 6.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 5.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 12, 13. From (*sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):110), 34 fn. 132b-133b. The former are addressed to an audience familiar with the Qur’ān.

from Heaven, "This is my *beloved son*, in whom I am well pleased..."³⁵⁸ These arguments attempt by way of testimony and use of Christian and Islamic idiom to build a bridge between Islamic and Christian understanding of faith in one God.

3.3b Greek Translation Movement

Today it is easy to underestimate the influence of Greek science and philosophy on cultures outside the Byzantium Empire during the early medieval period. However, Greek studies wielded remarkable influence stretching from Spain to India.³⁵⁹ One of the most influential facets of Greek influence is seen in the popularity of the Greek translation movement, which in point of fact began long before the Islamic conquest.³⁶⁰ From the dawn of Christianity Greek philosophy had a pervasive influence on Christian theology.³⁶¹ Christian missionaries with Greek philosophical underpinnings aided the dissemination of Greek learning wherever Christianity spread. Christians, especially from what was emerging as the Nestorian formulation of Christianity, were at the forefront of the early translation movement in Baghdad, long before the Islamic conquest.³⁶² Yet as Lindberg and Gutas are at pains to point out the diffusion of Greek culture, the process of Hellenisation that took place across Persia and into Asia, was not dependent on any particular religious or ethnic grouping, but took place over several centuries and was driven by a multiple of factors.³⁶³

With the Islamic conquest and with the adoption of Arabic as the main language by Christians living under Muslim rule, a social phenomenon took place across lands controlled by the Abbasid Dynasty that is on par with the Italian Renaissance, or the scientific enlightenment that occurred during the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁶⁴ This is the Graeco-Arabic translation movement that centred in Baghdad and blossomed under the

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 6.

³⁵⁹ David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science: The European Scientific Tradition in Philosophical, Religious, and Institutional Context, Prehistory to A.D. 1450*, Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007; reprint, 2007), 163, 166.

³⁶⁰ Cf. The effects of sectarian in the pre-Islamic translation movement see Ibid., 163-164.

³⁶¹ Kimball, "An Exploration," 39-43. For a taste of the application of Greek philosophy on Christian theology cf Martin Hengel, "The Prologue of the Gospel of John as the Gateway to Christological Truth," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 265-294. And the development of the concept of *Perichoresis* in Jurgen Moltmann, "God in the World-the World in God: Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology," in *The Gospel of John and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 369-381.

³⁶² Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 165. The name Nestorian is actually a misnomer. Cf Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 6.

³⁶³ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 165. Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 7.

³⁶⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 8.

first Abbasid caliph al-Mansur and his son al-Mahdi. They commissioned the translation of Aristotle's *Topics* (On the Art of Argumentation).³⁶⁵ In turn, the translation of Greek works into Arabic helped Muslims formulate a defence of their beliefs using similar language and concepts.³⁶⁶ For more than two centuries the Graeco-Arabic translation movement captured and held the attention of people from all levels of society, from caliphs and engineers, to theologians, across all religious lines and linguistic demarcations.³⁶⁷ The reasons for its popularity defy general explanations such as altruistic motives of Syriac speaking Christians or the open-mindedness of a few rulers who saw themselves as the intellectual descendents of the ancient Greeks and Persians.³⁶⁸ The need to transform the new Islamic empire from tribal rule to centralised state rule should not be underestimated.³⁶⁹ The increasing requirements to manage the empire required greater sophistication than the followers of Muhammad could ever have envisioned. Perhaps it is fair to say that each facet of the emerging empire saw within the Greek classics their own reasons for sustained interest, including proselytizing.³⁷⁰ By the end of the 10th century scholars from the extant spectrum of society translated almost all of the Greek books including works on mathematics, geometry, medicine, astrology, botany, wisdom sayings and all the works of Aristotle available in the Near East into Arabic.³⁷¹

Bayt al-Hikma, House of Wisdom

One of the early seminal figures in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement is the Nestorian Christian physician Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (d 873 CE).³⁷² Hunayn Ibn Ishaq administered a school of translation in the famous Baghdad library *bayt al-hikma*, *The House of Wisdom*, with his son, Ishaq ibn Hunayn and nephew, Hubaysh. Together they adopted a method of translation that differed from other translators. They did not translate word for word, *ad verbum*, but rather sought to ascertain the meaning of the text, offer a translation *ad sensum*.³⁷³ No doubt this method made the consumption of the translated material more accessible to the reader and helped sustain the interests for generations.

³⁶⁵ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 168-171. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 9.

³⁶⁶ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 9-10.

³⁶⁷ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 3-5.

³⁶⁸ Ibid. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 9-10. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 170.

³⁶⁹ Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 168.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 170-171.

³⁷¹ Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 1.

³⁷² Ibid., 2, 14, 109, 124, 133-106. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 119.

³⁷³ Ibid., 141-150. Here the complexities of the translation movement are discussed further. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 119-122. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science*, 171-172. Hunayn Ibn Ishaq was fluent in Syriac, Arabic and Greek. He was also a trained physician who studied under Ibn Māsawayh.

Another really interesting figure from this early period is Abū Yusūf Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 873) who influenced many Muslim scholars with his Greek philosophical works.³⁷⁴ Al-Kindī is described as the first Arabic Muslim philosopher.³⁷⁵ It is thought al-Kindī was born in Basra, but moved at an early age to Baghdad where he received his education. He was a contemporary of Hunayn Ibn Ishaq and is thought to be a direct descendant of the Imr al-Qais the poet discussed in chapter II and al-Ash'ath b. Qays, a king of the Kinda tribe, not to mention a companion of Muhammad.³⁷⁶ In addition to the many works translated by Al-Kindī there are over 300 of his own writings recorded by the 10th century book merchant Ibn al-Nadīm in *List*, chief amongst these is *On First Philosophy*.³⁷⁷

Ilm al-kalām, Theological Discourse

One of the most exciting consequences of the translation movement is the opportunity afforded Muslim and Christian scholars to draw upon Neoplatonic or Aristotelian logic as a common vehicle for discourse, *kalām*.³⁷⁸ This *kalām* facilitated the systematic defence of aspects of Christian faith like the concept of the Trinity and Incarnation just as Muslims from both the Mu'tazilite and Ashrite traditions developed the tools necessary to grapple with important Islamic themes including the conundrum of absolute *tawhīd* in light of the multitude of divine attributes, *sifāt Allah*.³⁷⁹ Yet, describing Neoplatonic logic or reasoning

³⁷⁴ Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 81.

³⁷⁵ Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, ed. Brian Davies, 8 vols., vol. 8, Great Medieval Thinkers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3. Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 165-166. Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 52. This Muslim Al-Kindī should not to be confused with the Nestorian Al Kindy (Al-Kindī) discussed above by William Muir who also participated in the translation movement. To appreciate the extent of the intergenerational influence of the translation movement one need only compare the similarities between al-Kindī's ideas in *On First Philosophy* with those of the 5th century Syrian Christian Dionysius of Areopagite in *The Divine Names*, concerning the namelessness of God. Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, trans. The Editors of The Shrine of Wisdom, First ed., 19 vols., Shrine of Wisdom (Letchworth: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1957), 14-15.

³⁷⁶ Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 4, 5. Cf. Tony Abboud, *Al-Kindi: the Father of Arab Philosophy*, ed. Munir A. Shaikh, First ed., Great Muslim philosophers and scientists of the Middle Ages (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc., 2006), 12-30.

³⁷⁷ Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 7, 9.

³⁷⁸ Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians." Cf. for a discussion of the use of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian logic in early Christian Arabic discourse I 67, 75, also III 161. idem, *The Church in the Shadow*, 94-95. Most Christian drew upon strategies first employed in the Greek works of John of Damascus. Moltmann, "God in the World," 373. Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 151, 155. Sidney H. Griffith, "Faith and Reason in Christian Kalām: Theodore Abū Qurrah on Discerning the True Religion," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasad Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Studies In The History Of Religions (Numen Bookseries)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1-6.

³⁷⁹ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 17-19. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 1, 11. For an in depth discussion of the meaning of *Kalām* see Richard M. Frank, "Science of Kalām," in *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas, *Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām. Variorum Collected Studies Series CS835* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 7-37. Cf. Richard M Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, ed. George F Hourani, et al., *Studies in Islamic Philosophy And Science*

as a common language requires qualification. It is true Muslims and Christians both found Greek logic as a valuable tool to augment the expression of their respective faiths. Nevertheless, it is critically important to understand that Muslims and Christians both employed logic to different ends.³⁸⁰ In fact for Muslims one of the pitfalls of using Greek philosophical terms in their theological discourse was the threat of being accused of defining their religion in similar terms as Christians. This problem is highlighted in the writings of as-Sahraṣṭānī against his co-religionists' discussion of the divine attributes.³⁸¹ Similarly the Neoplatonic body of thought associated with Gahm ibn Safwān (d.746) drew the wrath of both Mu'tazilite and the school of Islamic law associated with Ahmad ibn Hanbal, because they were willing to engage in independent reasoning, *ijtihād*, with Christians using common philosophical conceptions in contrast with basic Islamic principles.³⁸² This problem underscores this present authors thesis that for all the theological apologetics, for all the *kalām*, very little can be classed as an attempt to embark upon a mutual exploration of our experience of God.³⁸³ This represents a challenge and opportunity.

It would seem that one of the root obstacles to understanding one another is be found in the different ways Muslims and Christians derive authoritative knowledge of God. Traditionally for Muslims true knowledge of God comes from reading and understanding the Qur'ān.³⁸⁴ That is through *tafsīr*. Christians, on the other hand, believe they can derive authoritative knowledge of God by use of their own reasoning faculties.³⁸⁵ Another way of looking at the difference is to consider that traditionally Christians are quite content to think of theology as faith seeking answers, but for Muslims theological discourse, *ilm al-kalām*, should lead one to faith, since all the primary doctrines of Islam are held to be rationally demonstrable.³⁸⁶ Therefore the discourse between Muslims and Christians at this time should be seen very much as a product of the ongoing renaissance of learning and

(Albany: State University of New York Press, 1978), 8-28. Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 151, 155.

³⁸⁰ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 19. Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on the Signification of Names " *Vivarium* 48(2010): 55, 58, 62, 74. Here Kukkonen points out that Al-Ghazālī's examination of the Beautiful Names, although highly influenced by Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, is nevertheless safely within the bounds of the commentary tradition.

³⁸¹ Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 80-81, fn 79.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 81-82. The potential ramifications of being accused of *ijtihād* are discussed at length in chapter one of this thesis. Cf for views expressing the dangers of *kalām*, Gibrīl Fouād Haddād, *The Four Imams and Their Schools* (London: Muslim Academic Trust, 2007), 363-365.

³⁸³ Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 155. Griffith notes the degree of mutual influence is debatable. More will be said on this topic in the next chapter as for instance with Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at Regensburg in 2006.

³⁸⁴ *idem*, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 81.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 78, 80-81. Frank, "Attribute, attribution," 275.

³⁸⁶ Frank, "Kalām," 18-19, 36-37.

mutual exploration through the science of Greek philosophy in light of their competing faith claims. Rather than suggest definitive solutions, *kalām* literature points, *ishārāt*, to meanings requiring an understanding of the cultural milieu of the interlocutors who themselves struggled to cross multi-dimensional bridges between faith, experience, tradition, intent and understanding.³⁸⁷ It would appear that even the best intended efforts to communicate their beliefs between faiths faced a certain disconnect between the limits of empathy and the barriers constructed by social conditioning, or theoretical constructs, in spite of sharing the same language and terms. This is due to the fact that the application of the terms, in effect reflects the differing perspective of both communities. Therefore, a point of convergence is nearly impossible since the participants intend primarily to restate their faith claims without examining what truth the other's faith may impart to them.³⁸⁸ Dall'Oglio will describe this seemingly insurmountable problem in the next chapter as the dialogue of the deaf. Fortunately, in spite of the difficulties to achieve a common understanding, Griffith captures the attractiveness of using Aristotelian logic when Abū Qurrah cites the words of an adversary who says, "Persuade me not from your Isaiah or Matthew, for whom I have not the slightest regard, but from compelling acknowledged, common conceptions."³⁸⁹

A major theological characteristic of the Christian works going back to the writings of John of Damascus is that they consciously integrated a notable degree of Islamic idiom with reasoning, especially through the use of terms found in the divine attributes, *sifāt Allah*, as expressed in the *Beautiful Names, al-asmā' al-husnā*. Together these terms were frequently used to demonstrate that the divine attributes of *essence* and *action* may be reduced to three irreducible substantial attributes: existing, *mawjūd*, living, *hayy*, and speaking, *nātiq*.³⁹⁰ In turn, Christians identify these substantial attributes as the three hypostases of the Trinity, *thalātha aqānīm*. Furthermore, through discussion of the divine attributes and the application of the rules of Arabic grammar Christian scholars attempted to demonstrate to Muslim the reasonableness of their belief in God's oneness, in light of His multiple attributes.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Richard M. Frank, "Hearing and saying what is said," in *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas, *Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām. Variorum Collected Studies Series CS835* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 6.

³⁸⁸ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 18-19. This is what Fr. Paolo will describe as the conversation of the deaf in the next chapter.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95-96. Frank, *Beings*, 8-38. A sketch of the development of debate within the Basrian School of the Mu'tazila is found in chapter 1. See further Geisler, *Answering Islam*, 23-28.

³⁹¹ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 11; Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 160, 162-165. Here Griffith discusses the seminal contribution of 'Ammār al-Basrī, there will be more below.

3.4 Three Arabic Speaking Christian Scholars.

The three early Arabic speaking scholars examined below were chosen from a possible selection of more than a dozen scholars from the Abbasid period whose writings are still extant. Each of these interlocutors lived amongst Muslims. They were prolific writers and leaders of their respective Chalcedonian communities whose writings portray scriptural and rational defence of their faith. This thesis chose Chalcedonian or Melkite Christians since their creedal formula is similar to western Christians and might therefore, be more easily understood by those familiar with this strain of Christianity.

Although not devoid of sectarian tensions, the works of Theodore Abū Qurrah provides interesting insights into the time when *ahl al-kitāb* as *ahl al-dhimmī* could also look towards the new Islamic Centres of Damascus and Baghdad as their intellectual centres.³⁹² The work of Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī however, reveals a sensitive use of Islamic idiom mixed with rational argument as a defence of mainstream Christianity at a time of persecution. Paul of Antioch's *Letter to a Muslim Friend* demonstrates how familiarity with the text of the 'other' needs to be tempered with the greatest of respect. It is hoped that the three Christian interlocutors, through their apologetic texts can add to the debate in defence of the concepts of the Trinity and Incarnation. In addition, it is hoped their work will help inform and inspire Christians and Muslims today in our increasingly integrated societies, to look afresh at the potential for an inclusive appreciation of the sincerity and faith of our fellow believers.

3.4a Theodore Abū Qurrah

Theodore Abū Qurrah is the earliest Arabic speaking Christian *mutakallim* who is known by name.³⁹³ The details of his personal life are scarce, since he did not write about himself and those who wrote about him were generally hostile to him.³⁹⁴ It is believed that the Mu'tazilite 'Isā ibn Sabīr al-Murdār (d. 840) wrote a refutation of Abū Qurrah, *Against Abū Qurrah, the Christian*. This work is presently lost, but perhaps may be found one

³⁹² Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 3-4.

³⁹³ Ibid.: 21. A *Mutakallim* is a person who engages in theological dialectic discourse.

³⁹⁴ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 55.

day.³⁹⁵ The Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī refers to the writings of Abū Qurrah when discussing the faith of the Melkites.³⁹⁶ His fellow Christians the Jacobites apparently did not hold Abū Qurrah in high regard. Patriarch of Antioch, Michael I considered Abū Qurrah a 'sophist,' a person who engaged in dialectical debate with his adversaries using reasoned argument to establish the truth of a subject.³⁹⁷ John C. Lamoreaux provides extended detail of accusations made by Michael I that suggest Abū Qurrah may have been removed from his bishopric for propagating unsound doctrine. Michael I's account however, remains the only source of these accusations and may not therefore be considered entirely reliable.³⁹⁸

Yet, more is known about Abū Qurrah's life than other theologians of his time. It is known, for example, that he wrote many works in both Syriac and Arabic, some of which were translated into Greek by the monks of Palestine.³⁹⁹ He seems to have enjoyed a strong connection with the monks of Palestine, especially with the well-known Judean monastery at Mar Sabas, but it is not thought likely he ever lived there.⁴⁰⁰ It is believed Abū Qurrah was born in Edessa and was Bishop of Harrān between 792 and 812 CE.⁴⁰¹ He travelled the length and breadth of the Levant and Mesopotamia where his writings were of service to the Arab speaking Chalcedonian community in opposition to the beliefs of both Muslims and other Christian communities.⁴⁰² He also participated in Church Councils as well as many debates.

In fact, Abū Qurrah's opinions on the authority of the true Church and on seeking true religion merit examination here, in order to gain a clearer understanding of Abū Qurrah's overall response to the challenges of Islam. In the essay referred to as, *On the Law, the Gospel, and Orthodoxy*, Abū Qurrah defends the authority of the Christian Bible as the word of the Holy Spirit and the authority of the properly convened six Church

³⁹⁵ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 63. idem, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 64.

³⁹⁶ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xvii.

³⁹⁷ Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 23. This is a rough definition of Sophist presented by this author.

³⁹⁸ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xv.

³⁹⁹ Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 23. He is credited with having written 30 tracts in Syriac and 16 in Arabic. idem, *The Church in the Shadow*, 61. It is debatable whether Abū Qurrah wrote in Greek himself. Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History of the Middle East*, 80. Here Cragg contends, citing Adel Theodore Khoury that Abū Qurrah did write in Greek when expressing opinions of a derogatory nature concerning Islam or Muhammad. 80. Cf. Adel Theodore Khoury, *Les Théologiens Byzantins et l'Islam* (Paris 1969), 83-105. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 56. Ricks also thinks that Abū Qurrah must have written in Greek due seemingly to the volumes extant in Greek.

⁴⁰⁰ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 60. Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xiii. Griffith, "Muslim and Church Councils," 271. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 55.

⁴⁰¹ Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 22. John C. Lamoreaux, "Theodore Abu Qurra," in *The Orthodox Church In The Arab World, 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger, *The Orthodox Christian Series* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2014), 60-61.

⁴⁰² Griffith, "The Monks of Palestine," 22-23. Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xv-xviii.

Councils that affirm the full divinity and humanity of Jesus the Messiah against Christological objections from Nestorians and Jacobites.⁴⁰³ Of primary importance to Abū Qurrah's apologetic arguments is the authority of the Bible.⁴⁰⁴ The authority of the Bible he argues stems from the evidence of the miracles performed by the apostles and disciples in Jesus' name. While the authority of the Church Councils derives from the authority of the Bible.⁴⁰⁵ This defence is primarily aimed at the challenge of Jacobite monothelitism to the nature of Jesus. Abū Qurrah sought to prove to Muslims and his fellow Christians that the Chalcedonian Church correctly represented the teachings of Christ.⁴⁰⁶ This argument also addresses the Muslim claim of 'excesses in your religion' an assertion that claims the church councils corrupted and distorted the religion of Jesus.⁴⁰⁷

An important aspect underpinning Abū Qurrah's work is the question of ascertaining the true religion. Griffith notes that this question was especially relevant in light of the challenges posed by Muslim apologists commending Islam as the rightly guided religion.⁴⁰⁸ In defence of Christianity Abū Qurrah composed, *Theologus Autodidactus* (self-taught theologian).⁴⁰⁹ This work draws upon clever analogies in a manner sympathetic to Islamic soteriological perceptions whereby after receiving divine revelation humanity gradually drifts away from "right worship."⁴¹⁰ Therefore God sends messengers, some with a book, to call people back from sin.⁴¹¹ In addition, Abū Qurrah posits, by examining the divine attributes, man can discern what God permits and what God forbids. Abū Qurrah surmises that people innately distinguish deeds that are good from those that are evil if committed by our neighbour against us. The only religion that he sees capable of bringing people to a true understanding of God, what he permits and what he forbids, as well as offering the reward of eternal life, is Christianity.⁴¹² This is because Jesus alone commands us to do what is right, to refrain from what is bad and to strive to be perfect. He says that the other religions command nothing of virtue. Their vision of heaven only panders to man's earthly desires. Those who follow Christ's teachings are promised an

⁴⁰³ Griffith, "Muslim and Church Councils," 280-282, 274, 295.

⁴⁰⁴ The possible corruption of scripture is a charge levied against the People of the Book through the *tafsīr* of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 examined in chapter one.

⁴⁰⁵ Griffith, "Muslim and Church Councils," 292.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 282. This opinion is later expressed by 'Abd al-Jabbār al Hamdhānī (d 1025) in his polemic work *Tahbū dalā'il an-nubūwah* (*The Establishment of the Proofs of the Prophet*).

⁴⁰⁸ idem, *The Church in the Shadow*, 62.

⁴⁰⁹ Lamoreaux, "Theodore Abu Qurra," 1-25.

⁴¹⁰ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 57-58.

⁴¹¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 5-6. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 57-58.

⁴¹² Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xix. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 14, 57-59. Lamoreaux, "Theodore Abu Qurra," 62, 86., Lamoreaux calls this human intuitive process "natural theology."

eternal reward, where Jesus, the Father, and Spirit will come and make their dwelling place within them.⁴¹³

Through *Theologus Autodidactus* Abū Qurrah develops an argument in defence of the Trinity and the Incarnation whereby begetting and headship are attributes that God must have, since they are attributes of man. In keeping with all of God's attributes, the understanding of begetting, in this context, is contrary and transcends the concept of begetting as experienced and understood by man. God's begetting does not require a consort, sex, pregnancy or development.⁴¹⁴ More importantly God's begetting and headship must be of something worthy, without degradation, or disagreement to his nature. Consequently, He must beget not earthly creatures, but something sharing His nature, a Son and a Spirit proceeding from Him. "Thus among the many things the mind can infer from the likeness of Adam's nature is that God is three persons: one who begets, another who is begotten, and another who proceeds..."⁴¹⁵

Despite the exclusivist thrust of his arguments Abū Qurrah's relations with Muslims must have been amicable. It is reported that he made a translation of the pseudo-Aristotle's *De virtutibus animae* for Dhū al-Yamīnayn Tāhir b. al-Husayn, the governor of Mesopotamia between 813 and 820. This translation may have been undertaken while Abū Qurrah studied philosophy near Harrān. Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 995), the biographer records that Abū Qurrah was for a time the bishop of Harrān and that he debated with the Nestorians there.⁴¹⁶ The last historical referant to Abū Qurrah was in the year 829. This is when Abū Qurrah met caliph al-Ma'mūn. During their meeting Abū Qurrah took part in a debate with a group of Muslims in the caliph's presence. Apparently, the debate took place while the caliph was preparing to battle the Byzantines.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 22-23. Here Abū Qurrah is citing passages from John's Gospel and drawing upon images of Perichoresis. Abū Qurrah concludes the text by positing the idea that Judaism is defective because it does not teach the message of the Gospel and that Moses is only accepted as a prophet because he is mentioned in the Gospel and his message is contrary to what man's nature can discern about God, a theme that is revisited below.

⁴¹⁴ Since *Divine* Begetting is not understood as directly comparable to human begetting and since the term is found in both the New and Old Testament, then Rashid Rida's acceptance of the term in a non-literal sense in chapter one is certainly credible where the theologically nuanced meaning is not understood.

⁴¹⁵ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 12-13, 19. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 64, 75, 78-80, 88-92. Abū Qurrah is perhaps the first Arab speaking Christian to link the divine attributes to the divine Persons.

⁴¹⁶ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 61. Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xvii.

⁴¹⁷ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 63. Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, xvii.

3.4b Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī

The next Christian scholar examined is the former Bishop of Gaza, Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī.⁴¹⁸ Sulaymān was a prolific writer of theological tracts and *dīwān*, poetry.⁴¹⁹ In fact what is known or believed to be true concerning the details of his life have been extracted from events mentioned in his poetry.⁴²⁰ Sulaymān is the first Christian who wrote spiritual poetry in Arabic, and is considered by Ignace Dick to be an apologist in the tradition of Abu Qurrah.⁴²¹ Most of his works have yet to be studied or translated into a European language.⁴²²

The era in which Sulaymān lived was for a very long period of time a matter of some debate. Paul Sbath believed Sulaymān lived in the 16th century, while I. Maluf and L. Cheikho considered the 14th century more likely. G. Graf happily conceded that Sulaymān lived in an indeterminate époque.⁴²³ Mgr. J. Nasrallah, after examining dozens of manuscripts found empirical evidence in the form of a small tract attributed to Sulaymān circa 1056 CE titled, *Discussion by the blessed Samonas, Archbishop of Gaza, with Ahmed the Muslim, demonstrating that the bread and the wine, consecrated by the priest are the body and blood of our saviour Jesus Christ*. Nasrallah deduced that it was highly unlikely that there was a Greek speaking Archbishop, indicated by the name ‘*Samonas*,’ engaged in an in-depth dialogue with a Muslim. Therefore, Nasrallah reasons that this hitherto unknown Greek ‘*Samonas*’ must have been none other than Sulaymān. The confusion Nasrallah surmises is down to the difference in the spelling of the name, thought to be the result of a simple clerical error.⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁸ Paolo La Spisa, *I Trattati Teologici Di Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī, Tomus 53*, vol. 649, Tomus 53, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium (Louvain: In Aedibus Peeters, 2013), v-vii. Cf. Samuel Noble, "Sulaymān al-Ghazzī" in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallet (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 617-622.

⁴¹⁹ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T53*. *Dīwān* poetry is a collection of poetry usually of a spiritual or inspirational nature. See further Samuel Noble, "Sulayman al-Ghazzi," in *The Orthodox Church In The Arab World, 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger, *The Orthodox Christian Series* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2014), 160-170. Noble's chapter examined two of Sulayman poems.

⁴²⁰ Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xxi.

⁴²¹ Ignace Dick, "Samonas de Gaza ou Sulaïmān al-Gazzi: Évêque melchite de Gaza XIe siècle," *Proche Orient Chrétien* no. 29 (1980): 175. Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xxi. The risqué *al-jāhiliyya* poetry of the Christian Imr al-Qais' hardly counts as spiritual poetry. However, Zuhair Ibn Abu Salmā poetry seems to reflect his religious/moral views quite well.

⁴²² Paola La Spisa, an Italian scholar, is presently engaged in a pioneering exercise to translate a number of these works in Italian. See further Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*.

⁴²³ Dick, "Samonas ou Sulaïmān," 175. Cf. Élie Khalifé, "Notice Sur Un Manuscrit Du Poète Arabe Chrétien Sulaimān Ibn Hasan al Gazzī" *Parole de l'Orient* 2(1966): 161-162.

⁴²⁴ Dick, "Samonas ou Sulaïmān," 176-178. Apparently an error by a copyist who mistook *Samonas* for Sulaymān left many scholars in doubt as to the identity of Archbishop *Samonas* and the correct time of Sulaymān. Cf. Jugie A. A. Martin, "Une nouvele invention à mettre au compte de Constantin Palaeocappa: Samonas de Gaza et son dialogue sur l'Eucharistie," *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati* III(1946): 343. In short

Like Abū Qurrah, there is little known about Sulaymān's personal life. As mentioned above what is known has been extracted from his poetry.⁴²⁵ Harald Suermann, citing the work of Néophytos Edelby, posits that Sulaymān was born in Gaza in the middle of the 10th century. His father, Hasan was a Melkite Christian, despite the Muslim name. Nothing is known of his mother except that she left Sulaymān's father, consequently Sulaymān grew up in a broken home.⁴²⁶ As a very young man he entered monastic life in Jerusalem, but did not stay there long.⁴²⁷ He married and the marriage was blessed with several daughters and a son. For a time Sulaymān was a civil servant in the Fatimid Caliphate where he amassed a small fortune.⁴²⁸

Sulaymān lived during the reign of the controversial Fatimid Caliph, Abu 'Ali Mansur Tāriq al-Hākim. This caliph is referred to by his supporters as, Al-Hākim bi-Amr Allah, "the ruler by God's Command" and by his critics as the "Mad Caliph." It is noteworthy that al-Hākim initiated a phase of ferocious persecution against the People of the Book, quite uncharacteristic of the time, in spite of the fact that his own mother was a Christian.⁴²⁹ During this period of persecution many churches were confiscated and turned into mosques and many Christians converted to Islam in order to save their lives.⁴³⁰ On a personal level Sulaymān's wealth was confiscated. He lost his job, his wife, son and his grandson (Ibrahim) died.⁴³¹ His poetry encouraged Christians to "bear their cross" to submit to the humiliating conditions of the day rather than emigrate. These conditions included restrictions against public worship, destruction of religious buildings, prohibition against wine production and also instituting regulations that publically differentiated, *libs al-ghiyār*, People of the Book from Muslims. These regulations included an obligation for Christians to wear a wooden cross around their necks.⁴³² Ignace Dick, citing the work of

there are no historical documents that vouch for the authenticity of any biographical information on Sulaymān Ibn Hasan Al Gazzī. Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, viii.

⁴²⁵ Khalifé, "Notice Sur Un Manuscrit Du Poète Arabe Chrétien Sulaimān Ibn Hasan al Gazzī ": 161. Johannes Den Heijer and Paolo La Spisa, "La migration du savoir entre les communautés; Le cas de la littérature arabe chrétienne," *Res Antiquae* 7(2010): 67. Citing Nasrallah, *Oriens Christianus* 62 (1978).

⁴²⁶ Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xxii, xxv-xxviii. Harald Suermann, "Sulaymān Al-Gazzī, Évêque Melchite De Gaza (XIe Siècle): Sur Les Maronites," *Parole de l'Orient* 21(1996): 190.

⁴²⁷ Suermann, "Sulaymān: Sur Les Maronites," 190. Spisa, "La migration du savoir," 67. Noble, "Sulayman," 169. Sulaymān would later regret the constraints of family life, especially following the death of his son.

⁴²⁸ Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xxiii.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., xviii, xix {Calderini, 2006 #2327. Cf. The arguments concerning the mother of Al-Hākim are very interesting.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., xx, xxiv. Nissim Dana, *The Druze in the Middle East: Their Faith, Leadership, Identity and Status* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003), 41. At the end of his reign people were allowed to return to their original faith.

⁴³¹ Suermann, "Sulaymān: Sur Les Maronites," 190. Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xxiv.

⁴³² Edelby, *Sulaimān Al-Gazzī*, xix, xxiv. Dana, *The Druze*, 41-43.

Nasrallah, adds that Sulaymān's poetry reveals his personal desire for martyrdom.⁴³³ However, his desire was not realised, though he defiantly put himself in harms way. At an advanced age, having lost all, Sulaymān re-entered religious life once more and became Bishop of Gaza.⁴³⁴ Of Sulaymān's many texts available, this dissertation limits its study to an examination of the tract titled, *The Faith of the Orthodox Christian Community*.⁴³⁵

3.4c Paul of Antioch

The third Christian interlocutor examined in this chapter is Paul of Antioch, Bishop of Sidon. Paul lived around the mid 12th to mid 13th century.⁴³⁶ Similar to the other scholars, very little detail is known about Paul's life. It is believed that he was once a monk, possibly from the Monastery of Siméon le Jeune.⁴³⁷ It is believed that he hailed from Antioch as his name suggests.⁴³⁸ He is credited with the authorship of several texts including the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* and the *Letter from Cyprus* among dozens of other works.⁴³⁹ The former is directly attributed to Paul. The latter is an extension of the former, amended anonymously in Cyprus at the beginning of the 14th century.⁴⁴⁰ Collectively his works discuss important matters of faith including the Trinity, Incarnation, the miracles of Christ, the authenticity of the scriptures, free will and predestination as well as the oneness of God. The assumed period of his life is based on the dating of MS Sinai Arabic 448 and

⁴³³ Dick, "Samonas ou Sulaïmān," 177.

⁴³⁴ Khalifé, "Notice Sur Un Manuscrit Du Poète Arabe Chrétien Sulaimān Ibn Hasan al Gazzī ": 162, Cf. folio 164, 108, 133.

⁴³⁵ This is the working title of the text. The translation of the text into English took place during the summer of 2013 at the Catholic University of America. I am deeply grateful to Fr. Sidney H. Griffith S. J. for his care and tutorage, without which I would not have been able to translate this text. The use of the term *Orthodox* by Sulaymān is an indication of his perception of the Melkite Church's correct Christological formulation rather than the modern usage of the term. The Arabic is from Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, Cf. manuscripts examined XI-XV and Spisa's compilation. 31-40, T33 17-24.

⁴³⁶ David Thomas, "Paul of Antioch's Letter to a Muslim Friend and The letter from Cyprus," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The first Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 203-204; Sidney H. Griffith, "Paul of Antioch," in *The Orthodox Church In The Arab World, 700-1700: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. Samuel Noble & Alexander Treiger, *The Orthodox Christian Series* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2014), 217.

⁴³⁷ Paul Khoury, *Paul D'Antioche: évêque melkite de Sidon (XIIe s.)*, trans. Paul Khoury, vol. XXIV, Publiées Sous La Direction De L'Institut De Lettres Orientales De Beyrouth (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964), 17.

⁴³⁸ Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 203.

⁴³⁹ Griffith, "Paul," 216.

⁴⁴⁰ Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 213-214. This date is based on the date of the first known response by Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Idriīs al-Qarāfi in 1285 C. E. David Thomas, "Idealism and Intransigence: A Christian-Muslim Encounter in Early Mamluk Times," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (2009): 85.

531, which place the earliest copy of the *Letter to a Muslim Friend* to around the death of Elias of Nisibis (d. 1041) whom is mentioned in his writings and 1232.⁴⁴¹

Paul lived in interesting times. If the period assumed above is correct then Paul lived while the western monarchs were still committed to Pope Urban II's vision of liberating the Holy Land.⁴⁴² Paul quite possibly wrote between the Third Crusade involving Richard the Lionheart and Salāh ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, and the fratricidal Fourth Crusade that divided the Latin Christian Church from the Byzantine Eastern Church based in Constantinople.⁴⁴³ This occurred during a period of détente following the Treaty of Ramla in 1192, which ended the third crusade.⁴⁴⁴ The Treaty allowed Muslims to control Jerusalem while Christians controlled the coast from Joppa to Tyre.⁴⁴⁵ A caveat of the treaty guaranteed the free passage of Christian pilgrims and Muslims merchants.⁴⁴⁶ If Paul, in fact, wrote the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*, (henceforth, the *Letter*), at this time then he wrote while Antioch and Sidon were part of the Principality of Antioch and the Province of Tripoli respectively.⁴⁴⁷ This is a time when Christians of the Levant might have felt confident to respond frankly to the theological challenges of Islam.⁴⁴⁸

Since it is generally agreed that the *Risāla* is not an original work of Paul of Antioch and since the *Risāla* basically makes the same arguments as the *Letter*, albeit in changed circumstances, this study will focus exclusively on the *Letter to a Muslim Friend*. The style of writing is interesting compared to the other two documents under consideration. The *Letter* recounts a dialogue between Paul and his Muslim friend concerning the former's travels to Byzantine territories, including Rome and Constantinople, Moldova and the Frankish provinces.⁴⁴⁹ Through the dialogue Paul is able to express his understanding

⁴⁴¹ Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 203-204. S. K. Samir contends the *Letter* that was written between 1041 (death of Elias of Nisibis, mentioned in the *Letter*) and 1232, based on MS Sinai Arabic 531. Paul Khoury considers the *Letter* was written before 1200. Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 10.

⁴⁴² Barber, "Crusader States," 4. Cf. Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzantium And The Crusader States 1096-1204*, ed. Wilhelm Fink Verlag, trans. J. C. Morris and Jean E. Ridings, Poikila Byzantina (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; reprint, 1988), 1, 246-258.

⁴⁴³ David Nicolle, *The Fourth Crusade 1202-04: The Betrayal of Byzantium*, First ed. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 5, 78-88. This Crusade is referred to as the 'The Great Betrayal.' It was a disaster for the Byzantines, a ridiculous pursuit for Latin Christians, as it facilitated future instability in the region for Christians. Cf. Jonathan Phillips, "The Fourth Crusade And The Sack of Constantinople," *History Today* 5, no. 54 (2004): 21-28.

⁴⁴⁴ James Reston, *Warrior's of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 2001), 298-299. Durant, *Faith*, 601. Abu-Munshar, *Islamic Jerusalem*, 181.

⁴⁴⁵ Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, trans. Amin Maalouf (London: Al Saqi Books, 1984), 214-215. Thomas Asbridge, "Talking to the enemy: the role and purpose of negotiations between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart during the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 3 (2013): 291-292.

⁴⁴⁶ Reston, *Warrior's of God*, 298-299.

⁴⁴⁷ Barber, "Crusader States," 1-20.

⁴⁴⁸ It seems unlikely to this author that Paul would have adopted such a confident tone in his *Letter* if the Church on which he relied were imploding behind him.

⁴⁴⁹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 169, Arabic 159-160.

of the mission of Muhammad, the Qur'ān and Islam while defending aspects of the Christian faith. Whether or not the trip and conversations ever actually took place is an interesting question. Khoury considers that it is plausible that Paul made the trip. As a bishop Paul would have motive and opportunity to attend the 3rd Latin Council held in Vienna in 1179 CE.⁴⁵⁰ Could Paul have met western Christians interested in Islam and who would have read the Qur'ān and were familiar with its teachings? According to Khoury there were western Christians beginning to take an interest in Islam around the middle of the 12th century. In fact, Robert de Ketene completed a translation of the Qur'ān into Latin in 1143 CE. Thomas considers it highly unlikely however, since the Europeans at that time would not have been able to introduce the subtle changes into the text of the Qur'ān that the *Letter* demonstrates.⁴⁵¹ Perhaps the literary personae in Paul's *Letter* are a composite of characters. The dialogue could therefore be a mix of truth and artistic license, useful to convey what Paul would like to say about Islam to his Muslim friend, while leaving Paul free from negative repercussions of any blame for insults deliberate or unintentional. Thus Paul stands free to be corrected and more importantly, free to carry the dialogue further.⁴⁵²

Paul's extensive use of the Qur'ān in defence of Christian beliefs is ultimately self-serving. Paul selectively draws upon the Qur'ān in support of the Christian faith in ways that Muslims find highly controversial.⁴⁵³ Paul's use of the Qur'ān would well and truly qualify for *ijtihād* or *bid'ah*, heretical innovation in matters of religion, since he ignores *tafsīr*.⁴⁵⁴ It is worth considering that if the mood of the debate between Patriarch Timothy and the Caliph Mahdi is in hindsight thought too diplomatic, (Timothy was a subject of the Caliph Mahdi), then perhaps the opposite is true of Paul's *Letter*. Paul had little to fear by expressing his insidious opinion.⁴⁵⁵ The tone of his *Letter* not only cast Christians in a

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁵¹ Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 206-207. Khoury, *Paul D'Antioche*, 13-14.

⁴⁵² Griffith, "Paul," 218.

⁴⁵³ Thomas, "Paul of Antioch." 207. 209, use of Qur'ānic verses to prove Trinity and other aspects of Christian faith. Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentations of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Kwame Bediako, et al., Regnum Studies In Mission (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011). 114.

⁴⁵⁴ For definitions of *bid'ah* and *ijihad* see Al-Khudrawi, *Dictionary of Islamic Terms*, 35-36, 75. Griffith, "Paul." 218-9. Samir K Samir, "The Prophet Muhammad as Seen by Timothy I and Some Other Arab Christian Authors," in *Syrian Christians Under Islam: The first Thousand Years*, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001). 105. Respect for traditional *tafsīr* was the common practice of Arab Christian scholars. Cf. 91-106.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. Alphonse Mingana, *The Apology of Timothy the Patriarch before the Caliph Mahdi*, trans. Alphonse Mingana, vol. 2, Woodbrooke Studies: Christian Documents in Syriac, Arabic, and Garshūnī, edited and translated with a critical apparatus (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009)., 1-10. David Thomas, "Christian Doctrine in Islamic Theology: Opportunity or Obstacle for Contemporary Muslim-Christian Interreligious Dialogue," in *Islam and Muslim Christian Relations Day* (Irish School of Ecumenics2014).

negative light, but also inspired several polemic texts that influenced generations.⁴⁵⁶ Although the medieval period controversies between Muslims and Christians and their aftermath are a fascinating area of study, this chapter's focus is on the post-conquest Arabic speaking Christian use of the term *ahl al-kitāb*. The medieval period and its legacy will have to be left for another time.

3.5. Abū Qurrah's Scriptural Defence of the Trinity and Incarnation, *On the Trinity*

In *On the Trinity* Abū Qurrah provides a defence of the Trinity and Incarnation by employing a variety of arguments. Through the use of scripture, Islamic idiom, philosophy, grammatical considerations and analogy he demonstrates that it is appropriate not only to speak of God in Trinitarian form, but also in terms of begetting and begotten.⁴⁵⁷ He begins the discourse by outlining an analogy of what he sees as the possible responses "to faith in what is from God" that are beyond the intellectual comprehension of people. He claims, when it comes to faith in discerning what is from God there are in general three types of responses. There are those who reject faith because they are too arrogant to accept what their intellect cannot comprehend. There are others who submit their minds humbly to a message from God, yet do not seek intellectual justification for their faith. Then finally there are those who tentatively submit to a message in faith, but do not rest until their minds determine that a message is truly from God.⁴⁵⁸

Focusing on the people who are arrogant and do not accept what their minds cannot comprehend in relation to God, Abū Qurrah makes some interesting analogies. He points out that these same people rely on faith everyday without realizing it. For instance, they rely on doctors to prescribe medicine for them when they are ill. People must place faith in the doctor that what is given to them is not in fact a poison.⁴⁵⁹ In the same way when people board a boat they must trust that the pilot is capable of controlling the boat. Then there are judges who must listen to the testimony of witnesses in relation to an allegation. They must place faith in the veracity of the testimony and come to a conclusion as to the guilt or innocence of an accused. At some stage a judge, after making all possible enquiries

⁴⁵⁶ For example motivating polemic responses from Shihab al-din al-Qarafī, as well as from the Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and Ibn Abi Talib al-Dimashqi (1321) to pen a response to the *Risāla*. Griffith, "Paul." 217.

⁴⁵⁷ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 88-92, 171-172.

⁴⁵⁸ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 175.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

must make a decision based on the best of their ability in light of imperfect knowledge. They must act *in faith*, even though their decision will have dramatic consequences for all concerned. Therefore it is part of life that people place their faith in people and things of whom and which they have limited knowledge and understanding. Abū Qurrah further analyzes the motivation of people that reject faith. He concludes, “That they abandoned belief in God’s message for fear that it will sully their desires.”⁴⁶⁰

On the other hand, Abū Qurrah adds, “The right-directed intellect submits itself to Christianity alone and confesses it alone, nor does it doubt that it was accepted for any other reason than divine wonders, the performers of which deserve to be believed and followed.”⁴⁶¹ Abū Qurrah states that Christianity would be deficient if the Gospel did not complete the Torah, because Christianity is the fulfilment of the Law of Moses and the intervening books. He then reminds the reader that the wise are required to trust in the scriptures, even if they cannot understand all of what the scriptures say.⁴⁶²

From Abū Qurrah’s introduction it would seem difficult not to choose Christianity. Not to do so would imply that a person is open to the influence of worldly inducements when choosing which religion to follow. Accordingly, the reader is not required to understand precisely how the concept of Trinity works, but rather to accept what they must on faith. Those who cannot do so are reminded that they should not disturb the children of the Church who might also struggle with such issues in the strongest of terms. He reminds them of the time when Moses was instructed to prepare the People of Israel to hear the voice of the Lord from Mount Sinai, (Exodus 19:13). At this time the people were warned on pain of death that they would be stoned if they tried to approach the mountain. Therefore those whose faith remains weak after hearing the persuasive arguments should not weaken the faith of others. The persuasive arguments that Abū Qurrah presents entail the use of scripture and polemic argument. In a direct way Abū Qurrah links the authority to requisite total submission to the edicts of Church Councils as would be demanded of Moses.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 176-178. Griffith, "First Christian Arabic Theologians," 173-174. Here Abū Ra'itah outline 6 less than honourable reasons for leaving one's religion that are shared by Abū Qurrah. They are worldly desire, ambition, overpowering fear, license, personal aggrandizement and tribal solidarity.

⁴⁶¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*. Cf. References to proofs of the veracity of Christianity, i.e., *Theologus Autodidactus, Against the Jews, that Christianity is from God, On the Characteristics of True Religion*, 1-57.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 178.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 179. This is in reference to Exodus 19:13 and the authority of Moses in relation to edicts.

3.5a Abū Qurrah's Scriptural Defence

Abū Qurrah utilises more than twenty scriptural references from the Torah and New Testament, commending the authority of pre-Islamic scripture, in a way that he hopes will resonate with Muslims.⁴⁶⁴ He argues that if one believes in and examines the Gospel, the Law of Moses and the “intervening books of the prophets” one will find mention of the Father as God, the Son as God and the Holy Spirit as God.⁴⁶⁵ Therefore the goal of Abū Qurrah's interpretation of Biblical texts is to strengthen the faith of people, so that they can accept in faith that the Biblical references speak of God grammatically as multiple persons, as fully God.⁴⁶⁶ Abū Qurrah's defence of God as multiple persons sees God as lord, angel, and word, light, power and spirit, as begetter and as begotten.

His scriptural defence begins with Psalms 110. Here David says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘sit at my right hand, till I place your enemies under your feet.’” Thus presenting a visual image of the absolute authority of God as sitting on a throne.⁴⁶⁷ Abū Qurrah explains that the one speaking and the one spoken to are both called Lord and that David did not count them as two lords.⁴⁶⁸ Continuing on in the same Psalm he draws further reference to the verse, “I begot you from the womb, before the light.”⁴⁶⁹ Therefore God begets God, still one God, one eternal begotten and begetter.⁴⁷⁰ From Psalms 45:6-7 Abū Qurrah cites, “Your throne, O God is forever and ever. Your royal sceptre is a sceptre of equity; you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God your God, has anointed you with oil of gladness above your fellows.” The implications suggest that God anointed another. This anointed God is Christ. He became incarnate and was anointed by God. This image draws upon verses 4:25-26; 10:38 of Acts where Jesus is discussed as God's anointed one. In Hosea 1:6-7 God speaks through the prophet and says that he will

⁴⁶⁴ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 57, 63-63. Ricks notes that Abū Qurrah uses the Islamic term *manuzilah*, reveals when discussing the authority of the Bible.

⁴⁶⁵ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 178, 179. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 62-63. Abū Qurrah stretches the Islamic understanding of the *injīl* here beyond the teachings of Jesus.

⁴⁶⁶ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 179.

⁴⁶⁷ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 60. This image helps build the argument of God as multi person. Abū Qurrah does not make the link later made by Paul of Antioch of hints of anthropomorphism.

⁴⁶⁸ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 179. This dissertation accepts the given translation of the verses cited. John C. Lamoreaux notes in his introduction that Abū Qurrah often paraphrases Biblical citations, Cf. xxxv and fn. 116.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.* This challenges *sūrat al-Ikhlās* (112): 2-3 where God is described as neither begetting nor begotten. 19.

save Judea “...by the Lord their God shall I save them.” Abū Qurrah sees in this verse that the one who saves is Lord and God and the one that speaks is also God.⁴⁷¹

The most frequently cited book of the Old Testament is Genesis. Abū Qurrah examines 10 verses to demonstrate numerous references to God as multiple persons, while still insisting that there is only one God worthy of worship. In verse 9:6 God says to Noah, “In the image of God I created man.” Accordingly, the one who created man is God and the one in whose image man was created is God, but they are not counted as two gods. A similar example is provided with verse 1:27. In verse 16:7, and 10, verses sure to attract the attention of Muslim ears, Hagar the handmaiden of Sarah fled into the desert, “The angel of the Lord found her by a spring in the desert. And the angel of the Lord said to her, ‘I shall so greatly multiply your seed that it will not be counted for the multitude.’” Subsequently in verse 16:13 “Hagar called the Lord who spoke with her ‘the God who is seen.’” The one who appeared to Hagar is the angel of the Lord, who is God, as is the one whose angel this is, is God, but they are not counted as two.⁴⁷² As is the case in verse 22:11-12 where Abraham is prevented from sacrificing Isaac by the angel of the Lord, as the angel says, “...now I know that you fear God, seeing that for me you did not spare your beloved son.”⁴⁷³

In Genesis verse 31:3, 11, 13 God identifies himself to Jacob as “The *angel* of God.” God later refers to himself as “...the God who appeared to you at Bethel...” “Thus the angel is God and the one whose angel this is, is God.”⁴⁷⁴ In verse 35:1 God instructs Jacob, “Arise, go to Bethel, and dwell there; and make an altar to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother.” Therefore the one who spoke to Jacob is God and the one who appeared to him when he fled his elder brother Esau is also God, but they are not counted as two Gods.⁴⁷⁵ Further in verse 48:15-16 Jacob blessed his son Joseph and his other sons saying, “The God whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac served, the God who has fed me from my youth to this day, the *angel* who has delivered me from all tribulations, bless these lads; and in them let my name be exalted, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into an innumerable multitude on the earth.” Consequently, Abū Qurrah assesses that the God whom his fathers Abraham and Isaac served and the God who fed him from his youth is the angel who delivered him from all

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid., 181.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 180. Ricks identifies comparisons with “angel of the Lord” to a sort of pre-Incarnate Son. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 63.

⁴⁷⁵ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 181-182.

tribulations. They are not counted as two. “The angel is God, even as Jacob said and the one whose angel this is, is God, but they are not counted as two Gods.”⁴⁷⁶ In verse 19:24, “The Lord rained from the hands of the Lord fire and sulphur on Sodom.” The implications are similar to the previous examples cited; the Lord rained from the hands of the Lord...two references to Lord, but one God.⁴⁷⁷

In Exodus 3:2-6 makes the same point, “the angel of the Lord” appeared to Moses in a burning bush. Later in the verse God called to Moses and said, “Moses, do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place in which you are standing is holy ground.” God then identifies himself as, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” Hence, the angel of the Lord is God, who is at the same time the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. “The angel is God and the one whose angel this is, is God.”⁴⁷⁸ In verse 33:18-19 there is quite a clear indication that the one who is God calls upon God. Moses asks God to show him His glory. God replies to Moses, “I shall pass before you with my glory and I shall call upon the name of the Lord in your presence.” As Abū Qurrah says, “Do you not see that God called upon the name of the Lord? Thus God is God and the Lord whose name God called upon is God, but they are not counted as two gods.”⁴⁷⁹

In the concluding Biblical references, Abū Qurrah elicits images of God as Word, the Christ and Spirit thus placing his above argument now within an Islamic context.⁴⁸⁰ From John 1:1-2 he quotes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” Abū Qurrah makes the obvious conclusion that the Word is God and with God, but they are again not counted as two gods. Through Paul in Romans 9:5 there is a reference to Jesus as the Christ, as God, “From them according to the flesh, Christ appeared, he who is God over all, who has praises and blessings forever.” Thus, Christ is praise worthy as God and the one Christ praises is God, but not two gods.⁴⁸¹ In Job 33:4 there is a reference to ‘Spirit’ as the creator of Job, and therefore God, because creating is an attribute of God. “The Spirit of God is the one who created me.”⁴⁸² The last reference employed by Abū Qurrah to reinforce his argument that God can be spoken of in multiple persons as the one God comes from Matthew 28:19. Here he stresses that Christ commissioned his disciples, “Go teach all nations and baptise

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 180-181.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁸⁰ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 62-63.

⁴⁸¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 182.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” As Abū Qurrah says, “Human beings would not have been renewed through baptism in theirs and the Father’s name if both of them were not as the Father is.”⁴⁸³ Abū Qurrah summarises his arguments by drawing attention to the fact that whoever directs their faith rightly and governs it with reason must believe in the testimony of the scriptures. He further states that the wise know that scripture comes from God. Consequently, the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. These are never spoken of as more than the one God.⁴⁸⁴

3.5b Abū Qurrah’s Rational Defence

Abū Qurrah’s rational defence of the Trinity draws together the Islamic grammatical discourse and Greek Aristotelian logic for its terms of reference. In so doing Abū Qurrah, along with other Christian apologists demonstrates that the translation movement was more than just an exercise in translation, but developed a new common mode of discussion of theological concerns.⁴⁸⁵ An important element of his argument requires the understanding of the difference between what are referred to as the “nature” of something and the “person.” For instance, Abū Qurrah uses the analogy of names that refer to nature such as “man,” “horse” and “ox.”⁴⁸⁶ All men share the same basic qualities as every other man therefore we can refer to their nature as the nature of “man.” All horses share the same basic qualities as every other horse therefore we can refer to their nature as that of a “horse” and all oxen share the same basic qualities as every other ox therefore we can refer to their nature as the nature of “ox.” Likewise, names of person like “Peter,” “Paul” and “John” refer to different men, the person, but not to different “man”, the nature. Accordingly, it is wrong to speak of three different men, all of whom share the same nature, but different names, because they are different persons, as three mans, their nature. As Abū Qurrah explains, “If you want to count many persons with one nature, you must not predicate number of the name that refers to the nature.”⁴⁸⁷

The above analogies appear clear to follow. Issues arise when the logic is applied to God since the Islamicised culture of the audience was quite aware of the Qur’ānic invocation not to associate three with God, or that God would take a “son.” In addition, as noted above, Muslims would not accept rational argument as being sufficiently

⁴⁸³ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 69.

⁴⁸⁶ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 183. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 67.

⁴⁸⁷ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 183.

authoritative. One could imagine a mixed crowd of Christians and Muslims nodding their heads in agreement until the same logic applied to animals and men was applied to God. Applying the logic Abū Qurrah posits, “In a similar way, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons with one nature (that being God). If you count them, you must not predicate number of the name “God,” which is the name of their nature. If you do, you cause their single nature, to which the name “God” refers, to be different natures and fall into manifest error.”⁴⁸⁸ He then uses a brilliant analogy whereby he says, “The Father is God, but God is not the Father; the Son is God, But God is not the Son; the Spirit is God, but God is not the Spirit.”⁴⁸⁹ This sort of reasoning, although logically sound, is admittedly a little difficult to follow.⁴⁹⁰ It is correct to count three persons, but wrong to count three natures, because the nature of God is one. Continuing with the analogy of the crowd, the Muslim heads stop nodding.

Similarly, Abū Qurrah’s reasoning includes the definition of “person” as a logical name. He defines the logical name as not belonging to any particular person and therefore can be predicated by number. Whereas it is wrong to predicate number to their common name, their nature. Through this line of reasoning Abū Qurrah explains that it is also wrong to apply number to “particular non-logical names,” otherwise there could be further confusion. Wherein number will make each of the numbered entities to be all of them. The example he gives is “...Peter, James and John are three,” ‘you make each one to be the three of them.’⁴⁹¹ Similarly if you say, “In heaven, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three,” ‘you make each one to be the three off them.’⁴⁹² Therefore number should be applied to the logical name only, which is predicated to each of them (the person), but the common name remains singular.

When speaking of God there are limits to analogies to man. It is possible to speak of “man” in different places, taking different forms, having different will and state. However, in relation to God this is not the case. Abū Qurrah reasons that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share all things in common. It is not conceivable that either would occupy a place that one of the others was not present, or possesses a will contrary to the others. This is the nature of God. The analogy used by Abū Qurrah is of three lamps lighting a dark house. “The light of each is dispersed in the whole house, and the eye cannot distinguish the light

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 183, Cf. 171.

⁴⁹⁰ I used a similar example in my Postgraduate Day presentation 12-12-13, ISE, TCD. Several of the Christian students present would not accept the definition. A few insisted that it was correct to say, “Jesus is God and God is Jesus.”

⁴⁹¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 184.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

of one from the light of the others or the light of all from the light of one. So also, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, even though each is fully God.”⁴⁹³ Other analogies are used to make the same point that the union of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is pure. There should never be a number predicating the nature of God, “that there is no difference among them that effects the hypostasis of one of them, other than that each is different from the other.”⁴⁹⁴

In addition to supplying rational reasoning in defence of the Trinity Abū Qurrah also provides readymade responses for ways Christians can counter criticism of their beliefs by “certain foolish people,” while not identifying these people as doubting Christians, Muslims, or Jews.⁴⁹⁵ In relation to questions that try to undermine the concept of the union between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit Abū Qurrah anticipates the question, “Was it three or one that created the world?” To which Abū Qurrah outlines the grammatical pitfalls of answering the question by saying one or three. Typically, with these sorts of questions Abū Qurrah tries to invert a grammatical challenge in favour of the Christian position.⁴⁹⁶ He begins by saying that the question itself indicates a sense of unwillingness on behalf of the individual posing the question to accept both Biblical and rational argument. Their motive he implies seeks only to trick the Christian into doubt over the validity of their faith at the cost of the soul of the one posing the question. He says, “Their minds’ logic impels them to their souls’ destruction.”⁴⁹⁷ The response he suggests is, “It is one that created the world, and to say this does not prevent each of the other hypostasis from being the creator.” Further, Abū Qurrah offers an analogy that relies on grammar to help defend the concept of Trinity. “You say, ‘The tongue of the prophet Moses spoke the truth’ and are right to do so. You say, ‘The prophet Moses spoke the truth,’ and are right to do so. You cannot say ‘the prophet Moses and his tongue spoke the truth,’ for Moses spoke the truth with his tongue.”⁴⁹⁸ He further suggests as an analogy, “You say, ‘The sun gives light to human beings,’ and are right to do so. You say, ‘The rays of the sun give light to human beings,’ and are right to do so. ‘You do not say, “The sun and its rays give light to human beings,” for the sun gives light through its rays.”⁴⁹⁹ Abū Qurrah offers several more analogies that employ the rules of Arabic grammar to similar effect before coming to a more direct application of the defence.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 184-185.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 69.

⁴⁹⁷ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 185.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 185-186.

As for the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, it is possible to say, “The Father created the world,” and “the Son created the world.” Whereas, it is wrong to say, “The Father and the Son created the world,” since Christians maintain that the Father created the world through his Son (the Word).⁵⁰⁰ The point being that it is wrong to associate two nouns with one verb. Abū Qurrah supports this statement by slipping into Biblical references; Hebrews 1:2; John 1:1-3. He further qualifies the uniqueness of the relationship between the Father and the son as, “We do not think that the tongue and the mind or the rays and the sun or the craftsman’s hand and the craftsman, or the eye and the brain are more closely united than the Father and the Son-and this, because of the refinement of the divine essence, which is unimaginably more refined than the most refined creatures.”⁵⁰¹ In this sense, then none of the analogies truly represent the unity between the Father and the Son, since the divine nature is not subject to composition as bodies are, nor matter and form. Even though the Father and the Son are different hypostasis, the divine nature is too refined to detect a difference.

Associating Jesus with other divine attributes Abū Qurrah cites St. Paul and St. John. St. Paul in Hebrews 1:20-3 described Jesus as “Son” thus; “In these last days God has spoken to us by his Son, through whom he created the world. He is the light of the Father’s glory and the form of his essence.”⁵⁰² Abū Qurrah reminds the reader that St. Paul refers to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 1:24 as, “Christ is the wisdom of God and his power.”⁵⁰³ This Abū Qurrah says is analogous to heat and fire, because heat is the power of fire. In a similar fashion St. John refers to Jesus as “Word” in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”⁵⁰⁴ Through these examples Abū Qurrah says that St. Paul and St. John wish to demonstrate that as with annexed nouns, the noun annexed and the noun to which annexation is made are not said to do something together, but both are said to do something by themselves apart from the other. This Abū Qurrah phrases slightly different later on, when he surmises that “the Father and the Son are not said to create, even if each is said to create by itself...For this reason each of them (St. Paul and St. John) called the Son “God” ...they taught that he is a full hypostasis and denied that

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 186. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 89-90.

⁵⁰¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 186.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 187. Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 91-92.

⁵⁰³ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 187.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

the divine nature was subject to composition, or that change was to be found with regard to each of its hypostasis.”⁵⁰⁵

Abū Qurrah applies the same reasoning to the Spirit as annexed to the Father, and that in the same manner that the Spirit can be spoken of as a complete hypostasis like the Father and the Son. Ricks points out that the comparisons between the attributes describing Son and the Spirit are rather vague.⁵⁰⁶ The Holy Church thus says that the Father created and that each of the others created, but does not say that they created together. On the one hand, in that the Church teaches that the Son is fully God and that the Spirit is fully God, even though they are annexed to the Father in this manner, she hypostatically counts Son and the Spirit with the Father and speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and thus by counting the Son and the Spirit hypostasis with the Father, she has gone beyond the limit of these annexed entities, none of which are hypostatically counted with that to which they are annexed. On the other hand, in the ways mentioned earlier, even as the sun and its rays and its light are one sun, and so on she says that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created (singular) the world but does not say they created it. Similarly, she says, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have mercy (singular) on me” but does not say, “Have mercy (plural) on me.”⁵⁰⁷

Abū Qurrah employs more Biblical quotations to basically reinforce the point that both the Son and the Holy Spirit are fully God, and not in any way “in” God, in a manner that the examples above might be considered “in” the thing that they are annexed.⁵⁰⁸ For those wishing to defend the concept of the Trinity Abū Qurrah provides advice on another line of questioning that he believes attempts to trick Christians into denying the logic of the Trinity, or at least misrepresent it. Here, Abū Qurrah supposes that the Christian is asked, “Tell me. Do you deny every God other than the Father? Do you deny every God other than the Son? Do you deny every God other than the Holy Spirit? Abū Qurrah then explains the pitfalls of answering the question in various ways, labelling the line of question itself crass, before providing a theologically sound response. He maintains that the correct way to respond to this line of questioning is to say, “I deny every God other than Christ.”⁵⁰⁹ The reason why this is the correct response is explained in terms of the difference between the nature of God and the hypostasis of Christ. For the nature of Christ

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. Lamoreaux Abū Qurrah’s explanation stems from Arabic grammar and the correlation between the words fire and heat Cf. 187, fn. 86.

⁵⁰⁶ Ricks, *Early Arabic Christian Contributions*, 91.

⁵⁰⁷ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 188.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid. Cf. Genesis 1:26; 11:7; John 14:23; Isaiah 48:16 & Proverbs 8:22.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 189.

is God, but the hypostasis of Christ as God does not exclude the Father and the Spirit from having the nature of God. Since the divine nature of the Son, Father and Spirit are one and the same. In an effort to drum home this point Abū Qurrah uses further analogies including whether it is correct to say that there is just one “Gospel” or if there are in fact many Gospels through which the Holy Spirit speaks. Then there is the analogy of an image of a person in a mirror, whether or not one of the reflections represents the person, or does all three. This analogy is followed by the countenance of a person drawn on paper and whether or not this image is a true representation of a person’s countenance and if so what of the others. To each the difference is whether or not the question speaks of the nature or essence of a thing and not its hypostasis.⁵¹⁰

Up until now it could be argued that the text provides support for the veracity of the Trinity in face of Jewish criticisms. From here on in, Abū Qurrah goes on the offensive. His new line of argument draws upon the phraseology found in *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171, where Jesus is crowned with the appellations of God’s Word and Spirit. Although Islam is not mentioned by name the Qur’ānic parallels are too obvious to ignore. In this defence Abū Qurrah sets out the rationality of his argument by establishing that it is agreed that the divine nature is not subject to composition. Next, that it is accepted that the divine hypostases are not subject to change or cannot be added to. Therefore he asks those who deny the Son and Spirit are divine hypostases for fear of believing in three gods,

Does God have a Word? If you say that he does not, you have both made him mute and made human beings better than him. There is no escape: you must say that God has a Word. We then ask: with regard to the word of God, is he part of God? If you say that he is part of God, you ascribe parts to God and introduce composition into his nature, which cannot be; nor can you say that God’s word is in God as form is in matter or anything else similar to that, for all this is excluded from God, as we have already said. You are thus compelled to make the Word a full hypostasis and to say that he is fully God...⁵¹¹

Abū Qurrah maintains that the same logic can be applied to Spirit. Therefore God and his Word and his Spirit are one. It logically follows that the Son and the Spirit are to the Father as a word of a person and the spirit of a person are thought of in terms of one person. This is especially true with the divine because the divine is not thought of in terms of composition. To reinforce the idea that God can be spoken metaphorically in terms of physical attributes without affecting God’s unity Abū Qurrah cites Psalms 98:1 where he

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 70, 189-190.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 190.

describes the Son as the right hand and the arm of God and both saved human beings.⁵¹² Likewise in Luke 11:20 and Matthew 12:28, Jesus cast out demons with the finger of God, meaning the Holy Spirit. These examples relate the Son and Spirit to God, indivisibly and without composition understood as fully God. The above defence demonstrates an awareness of a Muslim as well as a Christian audience. This is especially clear if the two other texts discussed above are considered. His use of grammar, scripture, Aristotelian logic and analogy, work hand in hand to make a convincing and readable argument for the Trinity and the Incarnation.

3.6. Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī's Defence of the Trinity and Incarnation *Faith of the Orthodox Christian*

Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī's defence of the Trinity in *Faith of the Orthodox Christian* adopts a completely different tack than Abū Qurrah. The opening of his defence bears more than a striking resemblance to Islamic idiom, rather than to Biblical verse. He responds to accusations of excesses made against Christians by describing God in a manner conducive to those familiar with Islamic teaching. For instance, Sulaymān says, "God is one," an affirmation of the Islamic principle of *tawhīd*, that God does not have any partners, a repudiation of the accusation made against Christians of *shirk*. Sulaymān describes God as *subtle* or *refined*, *powerful* and *mighty*, *primordial*, without end, *obscure* or *hidden* due to His refinement, *evident* by His works, *unique*, said to be one by reason of His *strength* and *perfection*, *giving blessings*, *providing judgment*, *originator* of everything from nothing, *knower* of things before they come to be and secrets before their concealment, *living*, He will not die.⁵¹³ These are all attributes of the substance of God that Sulaymān declares that orthodox Christians hold to be true.⁵¹⁴ Sulaymān makes more than a dozen of these short statements concerning the attributes of God that, are all in perfectly harmony with the *al-asmā al-husnā*.⁵¹⁵

One garners from the discourse that Sulaymān intends to build a bridge between the attributes of God as seen from a Christian perspective with those of the attributes of God

⁵¹² Ibid., 191. The use of "Son" here is a prime example of Abū Qurrah's artistic use of Biblical text.

⁵¹³ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 31-33. Translation of this text is by Sidney H. Griffith and Richard Kimball.

⁵¹⁴ Noble, "Sulayman," 162. Sulayman is as interested in putting forward the orthodox Christian viewpoint as he is to counter Muslim misconceptions of Christianity.

⁵¹⁵ The Beautiful Names are a list of superlative names that describe God. The list is not definitive, however a list of 99 names is generally agreed. This list is discussed widely in hadith literature. Griffith, "Christian Theology in Islamic Terms," 157.

described in Islam. The use of these bridge building phrases act to assure the reader that there is much common ground between what Christianity and Islam have to say about God, before making a rational defence of the more polemical characteristics of the Christian faith. Therefore, it is possible to make a couple of assumptions about the text. The audience to whom Sulaymān addressed his text included Muslims and Christians familiar with Islamic idiom, or perhaps the type of “wavering” Christians discussed above by Abū Qurrah. The use of Islamic idiom here therefore is as much an evangelic tool as it is a bridge-building device, employed to demonstrate the soundness of the Christian faith in line with debates within Islamic circles regarding God and His attributes.⁵¹⁶

3.6a Sulaymān’s Scriptural Defence

Sulaymān’s use of the Gospel and the Qur’ān is economic. He does not quote a verse directly from either to support the concept of the Trinity or the Incarnation of the Messiah in a manner that is anyway similar to Abū Qurrah, or Paul of Antioch for that matter. Sulaymān’s apology relies almost entirely on rational argument, which is examined below. However, his subtle use of scripture makes a poignant case for expanding the readers’ horizon of perceiving faith from a Christian perspective, as well as questioning the value of claiming orthodoxy without orthopraxis. To begin Sulaymān states that he is going to set the record straight concerning the beliefs of orthodox Christians in light of accusations made against them. In his opening lines, he describes God and what He does in a manner that borrows directly from Islamic idiom before adding the Christian experience of God in Trinitarian form. He says, “We believe God is one. No partners through eternity, and no match in lordship... God creates... He raises the dead... He forgives sins... He is the goal of all believers... a single object of worship... no god before Him and no god after Him... until the destruction of time...” before adding, “we believe God is the one who has these attributes, one single substance that entails three hypostases.”⁵¹⁷

Sulaymān describes the Gospel as something that is not easily understood.⁵¹⁸ He says “poor folks” only have knowledge because of what is in the Book, according to the interpretation given by the holy apostles. However, the word of the apostles, the message

⁵¹⁶ Frank, "Attribute, attribution," 258-278.

⁵¹⁷ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 32-34. Orthodox here implies Melkite expression of faith. He is quite critical of other Christian denominations. Cf. Noble, "Sulayman," 163-167. "Not All Baptized with Water Are Christians."

⁵¹⁸ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 39-40.

of the apostles was not accepted until signs of their works were visible.⁵¹⁹ When the apostles came to spread the message of the Messiah (as part of the Great Commission) they did not beleaguer people with “obscurities of speech,” but rather placed a blessing on the water and immersed the people, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁵²⁰ So that the pure water would purify their bodies and the blessings purified their souls and minds, for their longing for faith after infidelity and tyranny.⁵²¹ Thus those longing for faith would become pure and not doubt the truth of the Trinity for all who accepted the Messiah.⁵²²

The verse used to justify true understanding of God comes from the Epistle of James 2:26, “Because knowledge without works is like the spirit without the soul.”⁵²³ The context of the quotation refutes the idea that those who say, “God is one” are necessarily virtuous. “As for the healthy spirit it knows there is no validity except through works of the flesh...”⁵²⁴ It seems to this present author that Sulaymān is speaking in the context of his contemporary experiences, aware of the harshness of life for Christians under the caliphate of al-Hākīm, and bearing witness that claiming to have “exalted” knowledge with regard to an understanding of God is without merit, unless this understanding is visible in the conduct of one’s life. The absence of good works Sulaymān says; “Is like a spirit without a body,” or better yet, “The healthy spirit is only known by works of the flesh.”⁵²⁵ The signs of a healthy spirit, he informs the reader, are humility, love and asceticism in the things of this world and not with concern for religion.⁵²⁶ It would appear by this statement that Sulaymān is accusing certain people, perhaps religious and political leaders, of purporting to have a superior understanding of the oneness of God while lacking the traits of a spiritual life, because of their repression of Christians. Sulaymān asserts that a life full of humility, love and asceticism is therefore a requisite to gaining an ability to understand the higher levels of spiritual matters.⁵²⁷

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 39. In other Christian documents of this nature ‘works,’ generally referred to miracles as a sign, or proof of their message, for which Christians claimed Muhammad lacked as far back as the delegation from Najrān.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 40.

⁵²¹ Ibid., 39-40.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid., 38.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

⁵²⁵ Ibid. This statement echoes James 2:26 “... faith without works is dead.”

⁵²⁶ It is interesting to note that one of the rumours surrounding the disappearance of al-Hākīm suggests he later became a Christian and lived his life as a hermit. Johannes Den Heijer, "Apologetic elements in Coptic-Arabic historiography: The Life of Afrahām ibn Zur'ah, 62nd Patriarch of Alexandria," in *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, ed. Samir Khalil Samir and Jørgen S. Nielsen, *Studies In The History Of Religions (Numen Bookseries)* (Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258): Brill, 1994), 201, fn 244. Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, *Christians and Jews Under Islam*, trans. Judy Mabro, 2 ed. (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), 25.

⁵²⁷ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 38-39.

Weaving together a rational argument for faith with the Great Commission, Sulaymān discusses the difference between concepts that are heavy (tangible) and subtle (intangible). Certain things he says are difficult to comprehend, especially things that are not visible. “It is difficult for mankind to know something created in his own body, heavy or subtle. It is necessary for him, if he is weak for that, to recognise his inability to know the creator of the world. Praise be His power.”⁵²⁸ Since mankind does not even understand the working of his mind, soul and of his body, he argues, how can anyone possibly claim to know God. The idea that mankind could know the creator is absurd.⁵²⁹ He says, even the wisest only possess a fraction of His knowledge and only then because God discloses certain things. Sulaymān further employs the analogy of the sun with its heat and light as it is for the soul and mind and speech, like Abū Qurrah and the author of *On the Triune Nature of God* above, to underscore the point that God is one, but with three hypostases. This understanding of God as Trinity, he says, came to the apostles through the Gospel, alluding to the Great Commission, to baptise the believers in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a single God, a single object of worship.⁵³⁰

3.6b Sulaymān’s Rational Defence

Sulaymān relies heavily on Aristotelian logic to reinforce his apologetic for the beliefs of orthodox Christians. He tailors his use of Islamic idiom to compliment his very important argument that the Divine attributes that are recognised by Muslims can also defend the orthodox Christian view of the Trinity. Sulaymān describes God by His many attributes as one *essence*, one *substance* that *exists* and is *alive* and capable of *speaking*, echoing *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171.⁵³¹ Therefore it is fitting to describe God as one single substance that entails three hypostases.⁵³² How Sulaymān supports this statement concerning the uniqueness of the substance or essence of God is quite interesting. He describes God *via negativa*, that His essence is not a physical body, nor is it a composite.⁵³³ God cannot be touched, nor divided, nor is God subject to change.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 40. Citing the Great Commission, Matthew 28:19 as Abū Qurrah above.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 32-34.

⁵³² Ibid., 34.

⁵³³ Ibid., 31.

God is, on the positive side, a substance unlike any other substance, *jawhar*, which occupies space and can be given properties like colour, hot or cold.⁵³⁴ The essence of God is primordial, *qadeem*, without beginning and staying without end. God is the creator, *khāliq*, or originator, *mahadth*, of all things from nothing, as He willed. “Making creation from His Word, *biklimitat*.”⁵³⁵ God is living and does not die, a single object of worship, *ma’bowd*, no other god or lord before or after Him, to him belong all praises, *as-subha*, in heaven and earth.⁵³⁶ Sulaymān describes God as one single substance that entails three hypostases.⁵³⁷ He builds his argument by saying God is a substance that exists on His own accord, *qah-emah binafis-ha*, and is not found in something else, based on a term borrowed from Syriac (*qnômâ*).⁵³⁸ He rationally asserts that this substance of God must be either living or not living. Since it would be absurd to think that the creator of all would not be living, Sulaymān posits that God must be existentially living or life itself.⁵³⁹ This statement relies on Arabic grammar to maintain an Islamic friendly conception of God’s absolute oneness.⁵⁴⁰ Another attribute of this existential, alive, being, is that it is not free from speaking, or not speaking. However, Sulaymān points out that he is not referring to the speech of created beings that speak using lips and tongue, but rather the speaking that exists in itself and the soul.⁵⁴¹ From this soul he says, proceeds all knowledge and wisdom.⁵⁴² Since it is impossible for the creator of speech to be speechless, Sulaymān says that this speaking is due to the unique self-existing essence that is alive and speaking. The issue then comes down to how to appropriately name the self-dependent being, or as he says, “...when as the meaning of names are taken as required by language we will not find this self-dependent being another appropriate name.”⁵⁴³

In keeping with the beliefs of the orthodox Christian community, Sulaymān names the unique essence of the self-existing creator Father, His speech, Son, and His life, Holy Spirit. This he defends by saying that the self-existing being is not an accident, neither is the act of speaking, nor living, meaning, in an Aristotelian sense, of not being changeable

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 31-34.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁵³⁸ “*qah-emah binafis-ha*” is related to the Syriac term *qnômâ pl. qnômê*, a perfect thing, not in need of anything else for its substance. It is found in the Syriac edition of John 5:26. Griffith, “Christian Theology in Islamic Terms,” 163-164. Griffith states that this term when translated into Arabic carried negative connotations of trism which Christian scholars tried to avoid.

⁵³⁹ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 34-35.

⁵⁴⁰ Griffith, “Christian Theology in Islamic Terms,” 157-161.

⁵⁴¹ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 35.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

or effected by properties or qualities like other substances, Therefore these attributes are part of the one unique substance and not capable of being separated from the unique substance.⁵⁴⁴ An excellent summary of his reasoning is provided below,

...The truth of what we say is there is clear evidence that he is one essence, substance, specified by three hypostases, Fatherhood, Sonship and Spirit, each and everyone of them possesses what the other has in terms of divinity. Without separation, or subordination, except in terms of the rank of the name. So, we then believe that there belongs to the Father everything belonging to the Son and the Holy Spirit in divinity. Except that He (the Father) should not be named born and generated. And thus it is for the Father, as for the Son and the Spirit in divinity. Except that He should not be named a parent (Father) one issuing forth. Likewise as for the Holy Spirit as the Father and the Son in divinity, except that he is named generator or the one issuing forth. And the meaning of our saying three hypostasis is by way of explanation of the three referents, and is not three parts, and not three powers, and not three substances, and not a third of an accident, but three properties by means by which the oneness of the eternal creator are know. Praise be his name and exalted be the mention of him. Existing in His essence and His Word and Spirit. One in substance not like created substances that occupy space, because the essence of the Father and the Son and the Spirit is a single essence.⁵⁴⁵

Sulaymān defends the use of the concept of the Trinity in spite of the fact that the concept is admittedly quite a difficult concept to comprehend. Sulaymān states, that the oneness of God is confirmed by applying number to terms and “therefore the terms lead a sum to their power to the ears.”⁵⁴⁶ This author understands this phrase implies that the understanding of the three hypostases, Father, Son and Holy Ghost leads to an understanding of the oneness of the essence of God. The hearing of this leads to an understanding by the heart, which in turn is gradually understood by the mind, a concept very familiar to Muslims as hearing the recitation of the Qur’ān eventually leads to understanding. Sulaymān acknowledges comprehending the concept requires faith and even then, not everyone can grasp it. This is of course reminiscent of Abū Qurrah’s view that reason only goes so far before faith must take us the rest of the way. Sulaymān reminds the reader that it is impossible for mankind to comprehend even our own bodies, so how then can we expect to know the Creator, since there is nothing visible in the concept of Trinity to aid in its comprehension.⁵⁴⁷ Sulaymān

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 35-36.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 37-38. Sulaymān is obviously referring to the Trinity and possibly in relation to a Pythagorean understanding of the number 3, i.e., the sum of 1, the first odd number and 2, the first even number. Therefore “3” is the summation of all numbers...Cf. Mark N. Swanson, *Early Christian-Muslim Theological Conversation among Arabic-Speaking Intellectuals*, 12.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 39. Meaning intestines and the inner functions of the body.

seems to be implying that, since even the wisdom of the wisest only achieves a modicum of understanding of what God reveals, a little humility and trust are required on the part of those who doubt.⁵⁴⁸

Borrowing an analogy from Abū Qurrah, Sulaymān says people would understand that just as the sun must have heat and light, the same is true for the soul, mind and speech. The essence of the soul is one, as is the Trinity, “a single God and a single substance, a single force and a single object of worship.”⁵⁴⁹ Sulaymān ends his article by requesting in the name of Jesus the Messiah for the intercession of “the Lady of Light” to strengthen the faith of the believers.⁵⁵⁰

3.7 Paul of Antioch’s Defence of the Trinity and Incarnation, *Letter to a Muslim Friend*

As the title suggests Paul of Antioch’s defence of Christianity is in the form of a letter. He purports to respond to his Muslim friend’s queries concerning the views of some noble and learned people that he met on a recent trip to Europe with regard to their opinion of Muhammad and the Qur’ān. Throughout the *Letter* Paul cleverly outlines a defence of Christian beliefs that employs only a few Biblical references in comparison to Abu Qurrah, but extensively quotes from the Qur’ān in a highly cavalier fashion. Therefore it is possible to say that Paul attempts to Christianise the Qur’ān in order to demonstrate its compatibility with Christian doctrines, including the Trinity and Incarnation. Paul’s *Letter* is often criticised for intentionally quoting the Qur’ān out of context and for his disregard for traditional *tafsīr* of the texts he invokes which, understandably Muslims find offensive.⁵⁵¹ As a result of his *ijtihād* and perhaps even *bid’ah* Paul’s strong arguments in support of Christian use of the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit and his refutation of allegations of associating partners with God, or accusations of anthropomorphism, find little sympathy.⁵⁵² At times Paul hints at an experiential truth that perhaps, with a less confrontational delivery, might have opened up more fruitful dialogue.⁵⁵³ Paul begins and ends his defence by calling for a blessing of perception onto those who desire the right

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Three Muslim scholars responded to Paul’s letters that remain influential to this day. Shihāb al-Dīn Ahmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfi (1228-1285) responded to the Letter, while Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad Ibn Abī Tālib al-Ansārī responded to the *Risāla*. Cf. Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 204; idem, "Idealism and Intransigence," 85-103.

⁵⁵² Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 177, 183, ¶130, ¶150. Cf. Arabic 70, 78.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. Paragraph 44. 181. Arabic 85.

direction. In ways, the opening is slightly reminiscent of the many verses similar to *sūrat al-ghāfir* 40:7-8, or *sūrat al-fātiha*, the opening chapter of the Qur'ān that praises God and asks for his guidance for those seeking the right path.

Through his European interlocutors Paul addresses the issue of Christian regard for Muhammad, the Qur'ān. The interlocutors describe how they heard of Muhammad and subsequently obtained a copy of his book. This they felt compelled to do since they heard the book often says, "whosoever searches for a religion other than Islam it will not be accepted of him, and in the next life he will be amongst the losers."⁵⁵⁴ However, their anxieties soon pass as they read that the Qur'ān states that Muhammad was sent to be a warner to his own people, who had not received one before. Due to the fact that the Qur'ān is written in Arabic and that they have received the Torah and the Gospel in their own tongue, these Christians felt the Qur'ān was not sent to them. A few points can be drawn from this statement. First Paul acknowledges Muhammad as sent by God. The statement also reveals Paul's lack of awareness that Muhammad was in contact with native Arabic speaking Christians in the Hijaz. In addition, Paul ignores the fact that Christians living in the Levant spoke Arabic as their native tongue by this time. Furthermore, the Europeans point out that in the Qur'ān, Muhammad was sent to a people in manifest error, understanding that these people were kin to him, and that through his mission they might follow the right path.⁵⁵⁵ Thus the verse, "If anyone seeks a religion other than Islam it will not be accepted of them..." applies to those to whom it arrived in their language and not to others. "Others," they argue, are not obliged to follow Muhammad, nor Islam.⁵⁵⁶

In line with traditional *tafsīr* Paul, through the European interlocutors, points out that the Qur'ān has very high esteem for Mary and Jesus. However he then says, in *sūrat al-hadid* (57):25, altering the text slightly, so that the mission of the Apostles, as well as the Gospel, is commended over and above Muhammad, to be a warning to Christians not to abandon their faith.⁵⁵⁷ In the process he flatly refutes the charge of excesses that Christians have altered the text of the Gospel.⁵⁵⁸ In support of his argument Paul brazenly interprets the mysterious *muqatta`āt* letters, *alif, lam, meem*, appearing at the beginning of *sūrat al-baqarah* as an anagram for *al-Masīh*.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, in Paul's view where the verse says,

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 170. Citing *sūrah Āl-'Imrān* (3):85. Arabic 60.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., 170, ¶176. Arabic 60-1. Griffith, "Paul," 220-221.

⁵⁵⁶ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 170-171. Arabic 60-61. Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 206-207.

⁵⁵⁷ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 171-176, ¶110-116, ¶123, ¶124. Cf. Arabic 62-64, 67-68. Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 209. Griffith, "Paul," 222.

⁵⁵⁸ Griffith, "Paul," 223.

⁵⁵⁹ Al-Tabari, *The Commentary on the Qur'an*, ed. W. F. Madelung J. Cooper, A. Jones, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 83-89. Al-Tabari discusses the *muqatta`āt* letters here.

“That is the Book, *dhālika al-kitāb*, in which there is no doubt, guidance for the pious,” the verse, he argues, is referring to the Gospel, not the Qur’ān. If the verse had intended the Qur’ān, Paul further argues, it would have said *hādhā*, “this” Book.⁵⁶⁰

Interestingly, Paul proceeds in a *reconciliatory note* by citing verses from the Qur’ān that support amicable relations as with *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46 where it says, “Do not dispute with the People of the Book, unless it is in the better way, except those of them who have been unjust. And say, ‘we believe what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and it is to Him we submit.’”⁵⁶¹ Here Paul argues that Christians are not required to follow Muhammad, that they are acknowledged in the verse as submitting to God. Meaning that their *Islām* is acceptable to God as is, otherwise the verse would say “submit.” In addition, he adds that Christians are the closest of the People of the Book to Muslims.⁵⁶² Similarly Paul interprets *sūrat al-baqarah* 2:62 to endorse Christianity in an *ipso facto* manner.⁵⁶³ This interpretation goes far beyond the traditional *tafsīr* examined in chapter one, at the very least it provocatively challenges the salvific capacity of other religions after Islam.⁵⁶⁴

3.7a. Paul’s Scriptural Defence

Paul’s cites less than a dozen Biblical verses. Most are different from the verses cited by Abū Qurrah. His use of these verses is different as well. For example, paragraph 19 of the *Letter* makes references to Psalms 106. Here the text is used to distinguish Christians from those Paul claims are the unjust, namely the Jews. In the subsequent verses the Jews are denigrated *en masse*, as people who are guilty of sacrificing their children and engaging in idol worship. In contrast, in paragraph 20 of the *Letter*, Paul quotes from *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82 where Christians are identified specifically as those closest to those who believe and who are praised for the honesty of their actions and the goodness of their intentions.⁵⁶⁵ Considering the historical context of the *Letter* these are quite profound analogies. In addition, whereas Abū Qurrah uses Biblical verse to demonstrate that the divine acts under different names, Paul states that God names His divinity Father, Son and Holy Ghost.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 173, ¶116. Arabic 65. Thomas, "Paul of Antioch," 209. Griffith, "Paul," 223. For a more in depth discussion of the *muqatta`āt* letters see chapter one of this dissertation.

⁵⁶¹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 174-176, ¶118-124. Arabic 66-68. Griffith, "Paul," 223.

⁵⁶² Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, ¶19. Citing Psalms 105. Griffith, "Paul," 224.

⁵⁶³ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 175¶122. Arabic 67.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. *tafsīr* for *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 in chapter 1. Griffith, "Paul," 225.

⁵⁶⁵ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 174. Arabic 66.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 177, ¶177. Arabic 70. Griffith, "Paul," 226.

Paul's Biblical defence of the Trinity begins about halfway through the text in paragraph 30.⁵⁶⁷ In Deuteronomy 32:6 Paul demonstrates that God, speaking through Moses, addresses the sons of Israel, "Is it not the Father who has made you, who created you, acquired you?" In Genesis 1:2, Moses describes how "The Spirit of God hovered over the water." In Psalms 51 through the words of the prophet David, God is described as "Spirit." David says, "Your Spirit does not leave me." In Psalms 33 David also says, "By the Word of God the heavens strengthened and by the Spirit of his mouth all their powers." Paul quotes Job describing the Spirit of God as his "creator" and his "instructor."⁵⁶⁸ Through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah in verse 40:7-8 God says, "...The astragalus withers and the grass dries, but the Word of God remains forever..."⁵⁶⁹ Similarly to the views of Abū Qurrah and Sulaymān before him, Paul justifies the hypostases of the Trinity with the words of the Messiah dispatching his disciples on the Great Commission, "Go to all nations, baptise in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teach them and guard all that I have prescribed for you."⁵⁷⁰

In support of the above Biblical citations Paul seamlessly weaves in verses from the Qur'ān to recall how in Islam God also works through his *Word*. In *sūrat al-ghafir* (40):68, God demonstrates that when He wishes to do anything God merely says 'be' and it is. God speaks to Moses with clear Words in *sūrat an-nisa* (4):164. In *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):110 God strengthens Jesus with His Spirit. In *sūrat at-tahrim* (66):12 God breathed His Spirit into Mary and preserved her virginity. In addition Paul makes the comparison that Muslims call their Book, God's living word, living and rational, hinting at the inlibration of the Qur'ān. In effect for all intents and purposes Paul, like Abu Qurrah above, accepts the credibility of the Qur'ān as a Christian vehicle at least as far as it suits his argument.⁵⁷¹

From here Paul makes his defence of the concept of the Incarnation of Jesus. In paragraph 33 he says that the Messiah is the Son of God, begotten before the centuries, pre-existing and through him all things came into being. By this Paul says that Christians indicate that there was never a time when the Messiah was not the spoken Word and the Father never ceased to be the Father, speaking. Thus, when the Father sent His Word, the Messiah, the Word did not separate from Him. An analogy Paul uses to describe this relationship is the familiar sunlight and the disk of the sun. Another is the Word of a man

⁵⁶⁷ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 177. Arabic 78-9. There are 64 paragraphs with this text.

⁵⁶⁸ Job 33.

⁵⁶⁹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 177. Arabic 75, translation from Arabic by Richard Kimball. Astragalus is a member of the plant family found in the Middle East with a high degree of utilities ranging from food production to leather manufacture.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 178, ¶130. Arabic 70-1. Griffith, "Paul," 227.

from the one who hears, without separating the intellect from the generator.⁵⁷² This Messiah is the perfect man, *begotten* by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, without corruption, without carnal copulation. Paul in paragraph 34 differentiates between Jesus' eternal divine and begotten human nature. This is evident since the divine nature cannot be affected by accidents, in the Aristotelian way, just as God spoke to Moses through the burning bush without the bush being consumed by the flames.⁵⁷³ Paul further refutes any accusations that Christians are speaking of a carnal sonship by citing *sūrat al-anam* (6):101.⁵⁷⁴ Here it says, "Wonderful originator of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a son when He hath no consort...?" Yet Paul through *sūrat al-balad* (90):1-3 suggests that the Qur'ān also speaks of the begetter and the begot as referring to the God and his Son, "I swear by the creator and this his begotten..." This interpretation of the verse, however, is a gross innovation of traditional *tafsīr*.⁵⁷⁵

Perhaps a more appropriate defence is presented in *sūrat ash-shura* (42):51. In this verse Paul makes the comparison between God speaking through Jesus and God speaking to Moses through the burning bush. The verse reads, "It is not fitting for a man that God should address him except be revelation or behind a veil."⁵⁷⁶ Paul says that God appeared to man his most noble creation in this manner, through Jesus. In support of the concept of the Messiah being of two natures Paul cites *sūrat al-nisa* (4):171 where Jesus is described as a messenger of God, His Word cast into Mary by Him, and a Spirit issuing from Him. Yet, the traditional *tafsīr* from chapter one would only accept this as a sign of the authenticity of Jesus as Messiah, not as proof of his sonship. Another verse Paul cites concerning the nature of the Jesus is *sūrah Maryam* (19):34, "This is the Word of truth, about which they vainly dispute."

Returning to Biblical verse in paragraph 41 Paul reviews the verses cited earlier in paragraph 30. In paragraphs 42 and 43 Paul draws upon analogies such as the tailor sewing a dress and the hand of the tailor sewing a dress; the carpenter and the carpenter's hand making a chair; fire its light and heat; the sun, its rays and warmth, to demonstrate that Christians insist that God and His Word and his Spirit are one sole God.⁵⁷⁷ These analogies lead to what this present author considers a less guarded and perhaps more personal reflection. Paul posits in paragraph 44 that, "this is how we see God, Holy be His names..."

⁵⁷² Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 178. Arabic 71-2. Griffith, "Paul," 227-228.

⁵⁷³ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179. Arabic 72. Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁷⁴ Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁷⁵ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179. Arabic 72. Griffith, "Paul," 228. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azim*, Vol. 10, 483.

⁵⁷⁶ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179-180, ¶136. Arabic 72-3. Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁷⁷ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 181. Arabic 75.

He says further that Christians do not deserve blame for what they believe, nor should they give up what they have received for something else; especially since they can find support for their beliefs in the Book brought by its messenger.⁵⁷⁸ If this is a sincere statement then Paul is getting to the heart of the matter. Christians don't hold onto a difficult concept like the Trinity just because it comes down through tradition. It is because Christians experience God through the three hypostases.⁵⁷⁹

Interestingly, Paul immediately moves from a dialogue inspiring statement to some of his more polemic thoughts. He anticipates Muslim reaction to his highly Christianized interpretations of the Qur'ān, or lack of respect for *tafsīr*, by posing the question, that if Christians accept part of the Qur'ān then should they not accept all of it? He answers his own question in paragraph 45 with an analogy of a debt for 100 dinars. If a debt is recorded in a book, but the debt is eventually paid, the creditor cannot reproduce the book and demand payment a second time just because it is written in the book. Paul is insinuating that the payment of the debt abrogates the initial entry into the debt book. For this reason Paul argues his interpretation of the Qur'ān is also valid.⁵⁸⁰ In paragraph 46 he threatens to cite verse for verse with Muslims from their own Book in defence of Christian beliefs. In paragraph 47 Paul declares that the Qur'ān gives Christians the strongest arguments. Since He says the Qur'ān has “placed Christians over the infidels, until the Day of Resurrection” and because Christians follow Jesus they are “the closest in friendship to those who believe.” In addition, Paul recalls that in the Qur'ān it says, “God has placed in our hearts humility and piety.” Paul further states that the Qur'ān praises the Gospel, our writings, monasteries and churches and that Christians are recognised for their good deeds. For these reasons and the fact that, “No one has advantage over us,” Paul declares the Qur'ān supports Christian beliefs.⁵⁸¹ He then boldly asserts that not only does the Qur'ān support Christian beliefs, but it warns Christians not to abandon what they have received. In paragraph 48 Paul paraphrases *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):112-115 where the disciples of Jesus seek a sign from God that Jesus is truly God's messenger. God sends down a 'communion table' as a sign for the first and the last of them. They accept faith and are

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. Arabic 75.

⁵⁷⁹ This author is thinking in terms of the juxtaposition between how things are named within a community through a common process of social conditioning of the meaning of terms and how outsiders interpret these same terms.

⁵⁸⁰ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 181-182. Arabic 76.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 182. Arabic 76-7. Perhaps the statement, “No one has advantage over us” helps locate the text historically to when Latin and Byzantine Christian were united and held lands they would loose in the 4th Crusade and later times.

given a stark warning of a torment that “no other people have endured,” if they abandon what they have received.⁵⁸²

3.7b Paul’s Rational Defence

Paul’s rational defence of the Trinity and the Incarnation is a central element of the *Letter*. His argument is similar to his predecessors especially, Sulaymān al-Ghazzī above. In conjunction with his use of reason Paul also combines Biblical and Qur’ānic support for his argument. In the process Paul takes great liberties with traditional *tafsīr*, frequently turning Islamic criticism of Christian excesses into support. Paul in his opening statement wastes no time in getting straight to the point, describing God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, “whose substance is confessed to be one, and whose hypostases are posited to be three.”⁵⁸³ In so doing he immediately describes God as a thing or substance knowing this is not acceptable to Muslims.⁵⁸⁴

In paragraph 25 Paul presents Muslim disapproval as a misunderstanding of what Christians actually mean by the terms used to describe God. “I say: They disapprove of us in our saying Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ‘They say (the European interlocutors): If they (the Muslims) knew that we intended by these words to make more explicit the assertion that God most high is a *living rational thing*, they would not disapprove of this.’”⁵⁸⁵ He says that by this (God most high is a living rational thing) Christians infer that something else created the things that exist, that they could not create themselves. This thing, *shay*, is not like other things, because it is the creator of all things. Accordingly, it follows that the creator of all must be a *being* in order to deny God nothingness. Paul continues to reason that there are two types of things, living and non-living. God the creator of all things must be living, the more noble of the two, in order to deny God mortality. Living things are further divided between rational and non-rational beings. We say God is the more noble; therefore God is living-rational, *hayy nātiq*, in order to deny God is ignorant, *jāhl*.⁵⁸⁶ The three names represent the one unique God who does not cease to be a living-speaking thing. For Christians, the essence is the Father, the Son is the spoken Word (rational), and the life is the Holy Spirit. In support of this argument he draws upon *sūrat al-baqarah*

⁵⁸² Ibid. Arabic 77.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 169. Arabic 59. Griffith, "Paul," 219.

⁵⁸⁴ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 185, ¶155. Arabic 81. Griffith, "Paul," 226.

⁵⁸⁵ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 176. Arabic 69.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., 176-177. Arabic 69. Griffith, "Paul," 226.

(2):255 where it says “God, no other God than He, living, *self-existing... (al-qayoum)*.”⁵⁸⁷ The importance here for Paul is the use of the word *al-qayoum*, that is found in the verse and would suggest that there are occasions when it is appropriate in Islam to discuss God as a thing or self-existing substance.

As seen above these statements and the names of the hypostases of God are supported by Biblical verse in paragraph 30 and Qur’ānic verse in paragraphs 31 and where the Qur’ān is described as the Word of God, *living speaking*. Paul states that these are essential attributes and each is different. Yet God is one, not apportioned or divided. Paul further states that at the beginning of the Qur’ān three attributes are mentioned at the exclusion of others where it says, “In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful...”⁵⁸⁸ Paul therefore justifies the Christian use Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three attributes at the exclusion of others, because none of the other attributes of consequence are *living rational*. The others attributes depend on these attributes. As for example in *sūrat al-isra* 17:110, where it says, “Call upon God, and call upon the Compassionate One; whatever you call Him, His are the most beautiful names.”⁵⁸⁹

Paragraphs 33 and 34 discuss the concept of the Incarnation of the Messiah with his human and divine natures. Paul argues that the divine nature of the Messiah, like Sulaymān above, is not affected by accidents. Through paragraph 33-36 Paul explains what Christians mean when they say the Messiah is the begotten Son of God. By this Paul says without the Christ, the spoken Word of God, nothing came into being. That the Messiah never ceased to be Son, that is the spoken Word and the Father never ceased to be Father, that is speaking. Paul uses two analogies to describe this relationship. The first compares the relationship of the Father and the Son to that of the sun and its rays. The second compares the word of a man that when spoken does not separate from the intellect of the man, the generator.⁵⁹⁰

In reference to the Incarnation Paul says that Christ became the perfect man through the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit. Thus the Word became flesh. The Messiah is begotten in his human nature, but not his divine, since it is not possible for the divine to be affected by accident, *‘arid*. Consequently, the virginity of Mary remained intact. Paul refutes the accusation levied against Christians that they believe Jesus is begotten in a carnal manner. Paul supports this philosophical argument with reference to the story of the

⁵⁸⁷ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 177, ¶129. Arabic 69.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 178. Arabic 71. Griffith, "Paul," 227.

⁵⁸⁹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 178. Arabic 71. Griffith, "Paul," 227, fn. 283.

⁵⁹⁰ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179. Arabic 72. This is similar to the description found in the *Triune Nature of God* mentioned above.

burning bush found in Exodus 3:2-3 and *sūrat al-anam* (6):101 where it denies God a consort.⁵⁹¹ Similarly, the divine nature appears in the Jesus not due to carnal physical union, but as something *subtle* appearing in a solid form as with *sūrat ash-shura* (42):51, “...It is not fitting for a man that God should address him accept by revelation, or behind a veil.”⁵⁹² Further to his argument Paul cites from *sūrat al-balad* (90):1-3 where he alters the verse to say, ‘swearing’ by the begetter and the begotten.⁵⁹³

Paul argues that God operates through this dual nature. That through the Messiah the divine achieves the impossible and demonstrates his humility through his humanity.⁵⁹⁴ This is how Christians can say, in face of Islamic claims of excesses, that Jesus suffered crucifixion, in his human nature, but His divine nature did not die. Paul very interestingly supports his argument by referring to *sūrat an-nisa* (4):157 where it states, “He was not killed nor crucified, but it appeared to them as such.”⁵⁹⁵ Paul therefore claims that the Qur’ān supports what Christians say about the Messiah. The Messiah is God’s spoken word. God is further described as a thing that is not affected by accident. Paul defends the dual nature of the Messiah, unique in his person, by citing further in paragraph 40 from *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 where its states that Jesus is both the Word of God and a Spirit issuing from Him as well as from *sūrah Maryam* (19):34 where Jesus is referred to as “...the Word of truth which they vainly dispute.”⁵⁹⁶ By analogy Paul uses the example of a blacksmith heating a piece of iron. The heat turns the iron into fire, which retains its nature to provide heat and light while allowing the iron to be affected by the heat.⁵⁹⁷

In paragraphs 49-54 Paul discusses the difference between literal meaning of the words Christians and Muslims use to describe God and the intended meaning. The use of the hypostases for the one unique God, Muslims say, leaves Christians open to accusations that Christians flatly deny, such as a belief in three Gods, or carnal begetting.⁵⁹⁸ Therefore the use of logic creates a scenario whereby Christians appear to believe there are three Gods, or three parties and that one is called a son, i.e., that God acts anthropomorphically. In paragraphs 50-54 Paul compares verses of the Qur’ān that describe God in anthropomorphic, *at-tajism*, terms as having eyes, and limbs and travelling via clouds in order to demonstrate that Muslims also need to step away from the apparent meaning of

⁵⁹¹ Ibid. Arabic 72. Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁹² Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179-180. Arabic 72-3. Griffith, "Paul," 227-228.

⁵⁹³ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 179. Arabic 72. Griffith, "Paul," 228. Here once again Paul ignores *tafsīr*.

⁵⁹⁴ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 180. Arabic 73. Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁹⁵ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 180. Arabic 73. Griffith, "Paul," 228.

⁵⁹⁶ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 180. Arabic 74. Griffith, "Paul," 229.

⁵⁹⁷ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 180. Arabic 73-4. Griffith, "Paul," 228-229.

⁵⁹⁸ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 182-177. Arabic 77. Griffith, "Paul," 230.

terms. Here Paul refutes accusations of excesses that suggest Christians believe in any form of association of partners between three Gods, or paternity, marriage, begetting, because these are accusations Christians curse outright.⁵⁹⁹ In paragraph 54 Paul makes references that are partially based on *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):255 that suggest Muslims believe God has two eyes, hands, a face, a leg, a side and sits on a throne. If read literally these physical features imply Islam supports anthropomorphism. Paul therefore posits that Muslims should not criticise Christians for discussing God in terms of the Trinity, where the literal reading would imply association and assimilation, since, on occasion, Muslims also discuss God in terms not intended literally and deny outright literal interpretations.⁶⁰⁰ This remark taken together with the statement made in paragraph 25 that, if Muslims understood what Christians are really saying about God they would not disapprove, suggests further that the Qur'ān supports Christianity.⁶⁰¹

In paragraph 55 Paul makes a statement that acknowledges the fact that many Muslims are well versed in Greek philosophy and logic. More importantly the statement acknowledges that, for Muslims, there are limits to the degree to which they will rely on logic to discuss and define the nature of God.⁶⁰² For Muslims even naming God a *substance*, a basic premise of the Christian argument, is a step too far, noting the criticism received in earlier centuries. Therefore, even though Christians and Muslims both engaged in dialogue using Greek philosophical reasoning it would appear by Paul's statement that Christians needed to augment their arguments to reflect this obstacle. The misuse of the Qur'ān and *tafsīr* as a means of approval was hardly the correct approach. In paragraphs 56-58 Paul outlines a summary of the argument used to describe the three hypostases of the Trinity making the further distinction that God is a *subtle substance*, *jawhar al-thā'yf*, not affected by *accidents*. He names subtle-substances as the soul, the mind, light, as they are not affected by accidents nor do they occupying space. God is the most noble, a self-subsistent, meaning not in need of another for existence. Still Paul acknowledges that Muslims do not accept that it is appropriate to call God a subtle substance.

In Paul's closing argument (paragraphs 59-64) he discusses the difference between the law of Justice given to Moses to guide the children of Israel and the Law of Grace given by the most magnificent provider, through His spoken word. The Law of Grace is so perfect that it could come from nowhere else. Paul contends that it is necessary that God

⁵⁹⁹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 184, ¶153. Arabic 79. Griffith, "Paul," 231-232.

⁶⁰⁰ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 184-185. Arabic 79-80. Griffith, "Paul," 232.

⁶⁰¹ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 176. Arabic 68.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 185. Arabic 80. Griffith, "Paul," 232.

himself by giving His Word must assume the essence of His most noble of creations to manifest his power and magnificence. He chose to do so by becoming man, through the Virgin Mary. Paul concludes, as discussed previously and in keeping with other Arab Christian authors, that after this perfection there is nothing more to establish. He argues that everything that preceded this perfection points to its coming and everything after it, even if it is excellent, it must be lower, or will borrow from it.⁶⁰³ Paul further states that what is borrowed, (rather than inspired), is of a type of excellence that no one has need.⁶⁰⁴ The implications being that the message of Muhammad is inferior to the message of Jesus and that Christians are thus not required to follow the teachings of Muhammad.

From a 21st century perspective it is indeed difficult to regard Paul's *Letter* as a sincere attempt to build a bridge between Islam and Christianity.⁶⁰⁵ Rather the tone of the *Letter* reads as a cleverly written provocative document primarily for the entertainment of a Christian audience, or for debating purposes with Muslims, rather than a vehicle searching for truth, or to win the hearts and minds of Muslims. Through the mouths of his European *personae* Paul jettisons any goodwill created by his knowledge of the Qur'ān, self-serving as it is, or his appeal for an empathetic hearing. In his final verses Paul unexpectedly closes the door by insinuating that there is nothing in Islam for Christians to learn, that Christianity is superior in all manner and that there is certainly nothing in Islam that requisites their submission. Christians have in their own tongue a message far superior than anything the messenger of the Qur'ān received. How unfortunate this is, since the closing paragraphs also intimates that the experience of so many Christians of the love of the Messiah and the forgiving law of grace. This could have been presented in a much more inviting manner rather than the polemical manner in which Paul chose to close his argument.

3.8 Conclusions

In an attempt to understand the early Arabic speaking Christian response to Qur'ānic accusations of 'excesses in your religion,' this chapter offers a brief summary of the rise of Islam from the death of Muhammad to the conquest of the Levant a few short years later.

⁶⁰³ Samir, "The Prophet Muhammad," 104-105.

⁶⁰⁴ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 187. Arabic 82. Griffith, "Paul," 233-234. Samir, "The Prophet Muhammad," 105. Insinuating that Muhammad's teachings are from someone else and not from God, which is both insightful and out of step with most Arabic Christian Authors. idem, "The Prophet Muhammad."

⁶⁰⁵ Griffith, "Paul," 219. Noting here that Sidney Griffith considers that Paul's manner of defence is perfectly in keeping with Paul's time.

An observation of the conquest is that it occurred in far more nuanced terms than one might popularly perceive. An interesting characteristic of the Church at this time is the fact that Christianity across the region was anything but unified. Besides socio-cultural differences, there were emerging distinct communities of differing creedal formulations living side-by-side, while at the same time exhibiting increasing hostility towards each other. Some Christians initially interpreted the armies of Islam as an apocalyptic event, while Christians from minority creedal formulas suggest their position improved under Islamic rule. Likewise, Jews could view the conquest as the harbinger of Messianic times. In spite of differences in perception, as *People of the Book*, Christians and Jews of all creedal formulations benefited from the new political reality that ensured their safety as *dhimmīs*. Historically this is a great departure from previous conquests throughout the region where Christians and Jews, Byzantines and Persians each extracted inter and intra-religious revenge for previous atrocities. Nevertheless, peace and security had a price and the price included political and social submission.

This chapter demonstrates that over time the Christians of the Levant settled into the new social and political reality. Eventually their native tongues, as well as their main liturgical languages, gave way to Arabic. The first Christian Arabic texts were written in the form of liturgical or catechistic material used to serve the pastoral needs of the emerging creedal communities that would become known as Melkites, Jacobites, Nestorians and Copts. Gradually a second genre of Arabic writings followed that would defend central tenets of the Christian faith against accusations of ‘excesses in your religion’ posed by traditional Islamic exegesis. Many of the early Arabic Christian works were written to bolster the faith of Christians at a time when scores were converting to Islam. These writings often suggested that Muslims would readily convert to Christianity if it were not for loss of position in society and their desire for worldly pleasures. Other works like *On the Triune Nature of God* were quite prepared for the Muslim reader and respectfully drew upon Islamic idiom to defend the reasonableness of Christianity.

Long before the period of conquest, Christians were actively involved in the translation of all types of Greek science and philosophical works into their native languages. As Arabic became the *lingua franca* of the region, Muslims also developed a keen interest in these Greek texts. For more than two centuries Christian and Muslim scholars worked side-by-side translating almost all scientific and philosophical works into Arabic. Through lessons learned from Greek philosophical reasoning, Muslims from both the Mu’tazilite and Ashrite traditions developed the tools to help rationalise the absolute

oneness of God, *tawhīd*, in light of the multitude of divine attributes, as expressed in the *Beautiful Names*. Christians saw an opportunity with Muslim interests in Greek philosophy, as well as the debates going on within Islam itself, to respond to accusations of ‘excesses in your religion’ using similar terms as their Muslim interlocutors. The Christian Arabic literature from this period argued that the divine attributes of *essence* and *action* could be reduced to three irreducible substantial attributes of existing, living, and speaking. Christians identified these three substantial attributes as the three hypostases of the Trinity.

However, in spite of the fact that Greek philosophical reasoning provided a common means of conducting theological discourse, Muslims and Christians never truly accepted the credibility of reasoning to the same degree. Whereas Christians were quite comfortable with the thought of discovering authoritative knowledge of God through reasoning, or ‘faith seeking answers,’ the same could not be said for their Muslim interlocutors who valued the application of Greek philosophical reasoning only so far as it was able to substantiate values espoused in the Qur’ān and Islamic teaching. Muslim scholars were unwilling to break with Islamic exegesis and risk accusations of innovation or heresy, by adopting the tactics of Christians. Nevertheless, the use of Greek philosophical reasoning provided common concepts for discourse whereby Muslims and Christians could better understand the faith of the other.

This chapter examined three specific texts by three authors who lived in different historical times and circumstances. Although it is impossible to say exactly how these varying circumstances affected their respective defences, it is highly unlikely that the social and political environment did not play some role. From the perspective of hindsight, in the opinion of this author, the tone of the texts seems to reflect what is known about the circumstance in which each scholar lived. The works of Abū Qurrah reflect a period of stability where a Christian Mutakalam might feel relatively free to enter into discourse with a Muslim interlocutor and respectfully express an exclusivist Christian apology. Whereas the tone of Sulaymān al-Ghazzī and Paul of Antioch’s work reflect more turbulent times. The collective works of Sulaymān al-Ghazzī reflect a heroic life committed to strengthening the faith of Christians during a period of uncharacteristic persecution. The cavalier, and often tactless approach of Paul’s *Letter*, composed possibly between the third and fourth Crusades and delivered from a position of relative safety, is still a matter of contention.

Theologically, between the defences of Abū Qurrah, Sulaymān al-Ghazzī and Paul of Antioch share many similarities, but also nuanced differences. Abū Qurrah argues that the

Torah and all the prophets foretell of the coming of Christ. Paul of Antioch insists that it is only because of Jesus that Christians respect Moses and the Torah, while Sulaymān al-Ghazzī, perhaps with a touch of sarcasm, maintains that the words of the disciples were accepted only after seeing clear signs and works of faith. Each of the scholars employs various means including analogy, grammatical analysis, scripture and reason to defend the Trinity and the Incarnation. In the documents examined here, only Paul refers to the nature of God as a *subtle substance* in order to assure Muslims that the type of substance that Christians have in mind when referring to God is unique and not susceptible to change. Overall, each scholar skilfully advances his respective defence of Christian teaching. Yet, in spite of the common language of Arabic, in spite of the common manner of discourse of *ilm al-kalām*, no matter how lucid the arguments for the veracity of the Sonship, Incarnation and Trinity, the Christian scholars could not counter the fact that the Qur'ān expressly forbids speaking of God in terms of Trinity/three, or Incarnation or as a substance. In addition, although the introduction and mutual fascination with Greek logic did have a positive influence on dialogue, both Muslims and Christians used Greek sciences to serve distinctly different ends.

Familiarity with and use of the Qur'ān by these early Arabic speaking Christians in support of Christian faith and beliefs is inspirational. It demonstrates their lack of inhibition with regard to attempting to understand the Qur'ān and that at the very least it demonstrates that Christianity can be expressed in a culture dominated by Islam. Can the same occur in the West in our post-Christian multicultural and secular societies? This author believes that it is not only possible, but that it is entirely necessary. However, greater respect is required on behalf of Christians with regard to the interpretation of the Qur'ān, (i.e., *tafsīr* and respect for Muhammad). In addition, the veracity of stated Christian and Muslim beliefs defended by scripture and reason might be supported by use of expressions of experiences of faith in an interfaith context.

It is the experience of God through His *Word* and *Spirit* that compels Christians to retain the concept of the Trinity and the expression of Jesus as the Incarnation. It is important to keep in mind, (as demonstrated by Paul of Antioch), that what the Qur'ān declares to be heresy, to a greater extent than is appreciated, Christians also accept as heresy. This is in spite of the fact that some terms Christians use present challenges to Muslims. There are moments when each of the scholars examined admits that these concepts are difficult to grasp. Each scholar offers the occasional glimpse into what can be described as an understanding of God, through an experience of God that follows faith.

Abū Qurrah says as much when he warns that people should not let their intellect stand in the way of what is proven by “the mind’s use of analogy,” expressed with a certainty approaching that of experiential testimony.”⁶⁰⁶ For Sulaymān it is in the word and deeds of the disciples who brought the Gospel and baptised the people. Expressing faith in terms of the Trinity and Incarnation came gradually to Christianity following exposure to the Word and with faith. For Paul of Antioch the deciding factor pivots around his belief in Grace as God’s perfect gift that could only be delivered by God himself, through the veil of the Messiah. From these scholars it seems clear that there is a need for greater inter-scriptural reasoning on key verses of the Qur’ān and Bible that are problematic. Christians and Muslims need to study each other’s scripture and traditions with greater respect. Verses like *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 and Matthew 28:19 appear to hold the key to creating mutual understandings, whereby Christians and Muslims can respect the faith claims of the other as somehow including their own.

Interestingly, the historical Christian communities from the nomadic Arabian tribes, Abyssinia, or Yemen who provided the context for the revelation of the verses from the Qur’ān that accuse Christians of ‘excesses,’ are not an important part of the defence of Christianity during the post conquest period. This is in spite of the fact that Christians from the post conquest period were apt to defend the orthodoxy of their own communities in relation to the other emerging Christological formulas.⁶⁰⁷ Therefore, at this juncture either Christians of the Levant were basically unaware of the various types of Christians inhabiting Arabia and its environs during the period of nascent Islam (to the degree that it could not be discussed meaningfully), or alternatively they were unwilling to differentiate between their respective positions. On the other hand, perhaps Muslims were reticent to discuss the differences in Christological formulas with Christians for fear of saying anything more than what is stated in the Qur’ān or *tafsīr*? Therefore, it is safe to say that by and large both Christians and Muslims during the post conquest period are culpable of maintaining a deliberate intellectual disconnect between understanding an important aspect of the occasions of revelation in preference to the theoretical construct produced by the traditional commentary.

⁶⁰⁶ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 191-192.

⁶⁰⁷ Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow*, 62.

The first chapter in Part II examined the socio-cultural, historical and interreligious terrain of the pre-Islamic period. The period referred to as *ahl al-jāhiliyya* is refuted to have been a time when people followed the ways of ignorance with respect to morality and belief in God. However, the research into the occasion of revelation, the *asbāb an-nuzūl*, clearly demonstrates that the pre-Islamic period was quite nuanced. Throughout Arabia faith in the God of Abraham was not new. Here the terms of *islām* and *muslimūm* were considered personal traits of people with *taqwā*, consciousness of God. At times there was intense sectarian rivalry between Sabaeans, Jews and Christians. With the arrival of Muhammad and the formation of his nascent Islamic community of believers what qualifies as “belief” changes, but not as dramatically as the construct of *al-jāhiliyya* purports. What appears to be the deciding factors between those who would coexist with Muhammad and those who would not, was an acceptance of God, letting one’s life speak through good deeds and a willingness to coexist with Islam, rather than conspire against it. These are the basic principles behind the Treaty of Medina. The research suggests that there is no particular creedal position that would incline one religious community to coexist with Islam more than another. Since the beginning, with regard for the People of the Book, Islam could tolerate quite a degree of diversity for the sake of peace.

The second chapter of Part II examined the post conquest Arabic speaking Christian response to the theoretical construct of the People of the Book. Here in a completely new context and without the prophet, Muslims must learn to rely on the Qur’ān, *hadīth* and developing *tafsīr*. Politically and socially the post conquest period ushered in lasting changes to the Levant. One of the first striking changes is the political fortune of the Jewish community, who as People of the Book, were allowed access to Jerusalem and their Holy sites as well as protection from sectarian attack. Minority Christian creedal positions also benefited from the Islamic conquest. As People of the Book they too were protected from persecution and developed into the denominations by which they are known today.

As Arabic became the *lingua franca* of the region major changes in religious dialogue took place. Christians began to employ Arabic as a liturgical language and to developed theological defences in face of the Islamic challenge to important tenets of the Christian faith. At the same time Christian, Jewish and Muslim scholars worked together to translate classic Greek works into Arabic. This translation movement helped launch a

period of détente whereby scholars discussed the merits and criticisms of their respective faiths using Arabic as the common language, through Greek philosophy, as well as Biblical and Islamic idiom. The distance between Islam and Christianity receded, but never faded. Christian scholars, although prepared to quote the Qur'ān for their own purposes were reluctant to endorse the Qur'ān or Muhammad as inspired by God and therefore as normative. Muslim scholars, in a similar manner, were willing to employ Greek logic to reinforce faith in Islamic teachings, but not to accept Christian arguments in favour of the Incarnation, Sonship, or use of the term Trinity.

Part III of this thesis examines the views of contemporary scholars and their use of the term People of the Book for interfaith dialogue and cooperation in order to ascertain whether anything substantial has changed. More importantly, what are the challenges and opportunities presented by the concept of the People of the Book today? Is the concept still relevant or has it been replaced by other concepts?

Part III: Contemporary Refiguring of the People of the Book: Challenges and Opportunities

Thus far this thesis has explored Christianity as the theoretical construct of the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) through the lens of the Qur'ānic commentary tradition, in the social historical context and through the early Arabic Christian response. The focus now moves to modern discourse in order to ascertain the contemporary challenges and opportunities for interfaith dialogue and understanding of religious pluralism.

The texts from the Muslim and Christian scholars examined in this part oscillate between fidelity to their respective traditions and immense respect for the tradition of the religious other. Together they highlight a trajectory of thought, an edging closer to the metaphoric swim across the sea of uncertainty described by Jack Renard.¹ Together the texts offer insights into the challenges and opportunities for dialogue by their use of the term People of the Book.

Chapter 4. Contemporary Islamic Use of the Term *People of the Book*

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on a number of key texts by modern Islamic scholars. The texts emerge from a plethora of possible sources as offering guidance and advice for Muslims living in the modern world. The selection offers a broad cross-section of material. Each scholar echoes both a call to tradition and a call to engage with a rapidly changing world where the boundaries between faith, secularism and culture are increasingly blurred. Therefore, the thoughts of these authors, in part, herald the opportunities and challenge of the modern world that Muslims and Christians share.

The first texts examined are by the highly regarded Egyptian scholar Yusuf Al-Qaradawi. He is an Egyptian born scholar and political activist living in Qatar. He serves on the boards of a number of international Islamic organisations including the European

¹ Renard, *Islam and Christianity*, 223-232. Cf. Renard's mixing and blending of Maulana Jalalu-'d-din Muhammad Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book One*, trans. Jawid Mojaddedi, 2004 ed., 6 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 174-175, lines 2847-2864. And Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of Al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Gazālī*, ed. Ilse Lichtenstadter, vol. 1, Library of Classical Arabic literature (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), lix.

Council for Fatwa Research based in Dublin, Ireland.² The texts examined are *Non Muslims in the Islamic Society* and *The Lawful And The Prohibited In Islam (Al-Halāl Wal Harām Fil Islam)*.³ These texts demonstrate an awareness of the critical inquiry concerning the term People of the Book, including aspects of social historical studies pursued in the previous chapters, in addition to the complexities of modern pluralistic society.

4.2. Confirming A Traditional Islamic View of the People of the Book

Yusuf Al-Qaradawi defines and outlines the rights and duties of non-Muslim residents of Muslim countries in *Non Muslims in the Islamic Society* (1985). In the preface Al-Qaradawi says his purpose in writing the book is to set the record straight in light of what he sees as an attack by hostile opinions from the West against Islam. He states further that, “the old war against Islam has however, not ceased; only its form has changed.”⁴ In the introduction to *The Lawful And The Prohibited In Islam (Al-Al-Halāl Wal Harām Fil Islam)*, Al-Qaradawi explains that the purpose of the text is to provide educational material for Muslims living in Europe and America and to attract non-Muslims to Islam. Al-Qaradawi perceives that many Muslims living in the West have distorted views of Islam, confusing what is forbidden with that which is allowed.⁵

The Social Contract.

In *Non Muslims and The Lawful And The Prohibited* the People of the Book are defined as a group among non-Muslims whose religions are based on divine revelation, even if this revelation is somehow distorted.⁶ In *Non Muslims* the phrase *non-Muslim* replaces the traditional use of the People of the Book, on more than thirty occasions, as when the term *non-Muslims* clearly refers to the People of the Book. For example, while citing *sūrat al-*

² Islamic Cultural Centre Ireland, "Fatwas of European Council for Fatwa and Research," ed. Said Fares Al-Falah Foundation (Cairo: Islamic Inc., 2002), vii.

³ Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims in the Islamic Society*, trans. Khalil Muhammad Hamad Sayed Mahboob Ali Shah, 1 vols., vol. 1 (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1985). And idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited In Islam ((Al- Al-Halāl Wal Harām Fil Islam)*, ed. Ahmad Zaki Hammad, trans. M. Moinuddin Siddiqui Kamal El-Helbawy, Syed Shuky, 2cnd ed., 1 vols., vol. 1 (London: Shorouk International Limited, 1985).

⁴ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, ii. Henceforth referred to as *Non-Muslims*.

⁵ idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 1-7.

⁶ idem, *Non Muslims*, 1. In idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 19, 59, 336. In this text the term *People of the Book* refers more strictly to Christians and Jews.

Ankabut (29):46, Al-Qaradawi states, “The words of Qur’an indicate the correct manner of discussion with ‘non-Muslims’: And do not dispute with the People of the Book...”⁷

An examination of *Non Muslims* reveals that the description of members defined as the People of the Book, their rights and obligations, follow the time-tested *tafsīr* examined in chapter one. Al-Qaradawi emphasizes that Islamic society calls for peace, justice and the highest degree of tolerance for ‘peoples of other faiths’ as long as they do not disturb, or prevent Muslims from practicing their faith as in *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):8-9.⁸ The life of Muhammad sets a normative example for the *ummah* of the closeness with which Muslims and non-Muslims can coexist. Muhammad always maintained friendly contact with the People of the Book. He met their delegations, allowed Christians to pray in his mosque, consoled their sick, mourned for their dead and conducted business with them.⁹ In fact Al-Qaradawi points out that whether Muslims form the majority of society, or a minority, Muslims are encouraged to form good relations with the People of the Book.¹⁰

Protected Citizens.

People of the Book when citizens, or residents, in an Islamic society are given a special status as protected people along with other non-Muslim citizens. The designation of *ahl adh-dhimma* or *dhimmi*s is one that denotes due regard for the divine origins of the respective revelation and requires that the Muslims offer protection for people and property, including churches, as long as they pay the *jizyah* tax.¹¹ Al-Qaradawi cites a *hadīth* that says, “Anyone who kills a *dhimmi* will not smell of the fragrance of the Garden.”¹² Alternatively, Al-Qaradawi employs other *hadīth* where Muhammad warns, “He who hurts a *dhimmi* hurts me, and he who hurts me annoys Allah”, or “Whoever hurts a *dhimmi*, I am his adversary, and I shall be an adversary to him on the Day of Resurrection,” or similarly, “On the Day of Judgment I shall dispute with anyone who oppresses a person from among the People of the Covenant, or infringes on his right, or puts a responsibility on him which is beyond his strength, or takes something from him against his will.”¹³

⁷ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, 29. idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 37.

⁸ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, 28.

⁹ Ibid., 28-31.

¹⁰ Ibid., 44-46. idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 59-61, 183. For example, Muslims are allowed to eat the food of the People of the Book including meat that has not been prepared in a Halal manner and marry their women.

¹¹ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, 2, 7. Of course in practice there are exceptions. There are noted violations of the ideal. See fn. 55 below.

¹² idem, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 336. This *hadīth* is reported by al-Nisai.

¹³ Ibid., 338. Al-Tabarani recorded the first *hadīth*, the second al-Khatib and the third is by Abu Daoud.

Interestingly, even items that Muslims are forbidden to possess themselves are not to be denied to protected people including wine and pigs. There are however, some constraints on the businesses of the *dhimmīs*, like charging interest, *ribā*, as well as restrictions on outwardly defying Islamic practice like drinking in public or eating pork.¹⁴ The *jizyah* tax is generally in lieu of military service, it is not a punitive tax.¹⁵ Al-Qaradawi goes to great lengths to stress that the level of tax is generally equal to what Muslims pay in *zakāt*.¹⁶ This protected arrangement is guaranteed by God, His messenger, and by Islamic communities.¹⁷ This is the ideal, accepted with broad consensus, *ijmā*, among all schools of Islamic jurisprudence. When this ideal is challenged it is due to external factors, both social and political, as seen above in the time of Al-Hākim, (the “Mad Caliph”) and today for example, in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi’s self-styled Islamic State.¹⁸

Religious Freedom.

Religious diversity in Islam is an ethical reality uniquely ordained.¹⁹ Al-Qaradawi offers numerous verses from the Qur’ān that help bridge the seeming contradictions of faiths in order to allow amity and tolerance such as *sūrat al-hud* (11):118 “If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one People: but they will not cease to differ.” Alternatively, there is *sūrat ash-Shura* (42):15 where it says, “...I believe in whatever book Allah has sent down; I am commanded to judge justly between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord! For us (is responsibility for) our deeds, and for you your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will bring us together, and to him is our goal.”²⁰

Al-Qaradawi insists that Islam has always extended religious freedom to its non-Muslim citizens, apparently referring to the People of the Book who have paid the *jizya*. No one is compelled to convert to Islam, citing *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):256, “Let there be no compulsion in religion...”²¹ There are several historical treaties that reinforce the ideal that Islam does not demand that the People of the Book leave their religion. The examples given include the treaty between Muhammad and the Christians of Najran as well as the

¹⁴ Ibid., 264.

¹⁵ idem, *Non Muslims*, 19, 24, 38, 39. Christians may have their own non-shari’ah courts. Muslims who have refused military service have paid the *jizyah* and Christians willing to fight on the side of their Islamic government have been exempt. Umar ibn al-Khattab called the tax levied against the Christian Bani Taghlib, *sadaqah* alms.

¹⁶ Ibid., 38. *Zakāt* is a form of charity tax Muslims pay in order to alleviate poverty.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20-23.

¹⁸ Qasim Rashid, "A Muslim's Ramadan Message to ISIS: You Don't Speak for Islam," in *Huff Post* (Huffington Post, 2014).

¹⁹ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, 53.

²⁰ Ibid., 31-32.

²¹ Ibid., 9. Cf. *Sūrah Yunus* (10): 99. This author does not consider that Al-Qaradawi includes polytheists.

covenant between Umar ibn al-Khattab and the residents of Jerusalem at the time of conquest. In defence of his position Al-Qaradawi cites Ibn Kathir who explains that the truth of Islam is “self-evident” and does not require the use of force to gain converts.²² This present author contends that this freedom of conscience needs to be considered against the backdrop of relations between religious groups examined in pre-Islamic times, as discussed in chapter 2 and in the post conquest period, as examined in chapter 3. Muslim rule in the post conquest period proscribed intra-Christian sectarianism.²³ Al-Qaradawi states however, that there has never been an incident where non-Muslims were forced to convert to Islam.²⁴

Accordingly, Al-Qaradawi explains that, “Islam simply wants non-Muslims to consider the feelings of Muslims and respect the sanctity of their religion.”²⁵ It should go without saying that non-Muslims should refrain from publically insulting Islam, the prophet, or the Qur’ān.²⁶ Ironically Al-Qaradawi goes on to express that Christians should refrain from outward displays of religion, including displays of crosses, or the construction of churches in Islamic areas where there had never been churches previously. The logic behind these prohibitions is to maintain public order. However, Al-Qaradawi notes that historically prohibitions against religious displays were seldom ever enforced. In fact he observes that there are several famous churches and monasteries in Egypt built during the first century of Islamic rule. Al-Qaradawi notes this point is not overlooked by the 19th century social scientist Gustave Le Bon, citing the great historian William Robertson who commented that, “Muslims are the only people who possess both a zeal for their own faith as well as a spirit of tolerance toward the followers of other religions.”²⁷

If it is fair to say that the religious freedom of the People of the Book is safeguarded in Islamic society, as the will of God, an ideal practiced by Muhammad, his companions and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, then one must be honest and acknowledge that, in reality, things can be quite different. Otherwise the demographic hemorrhage of Christians fleeing from Islamic lands at the time of writing would not be as marked as it is.²⁸ Al-Qaradawi acknowledges that often the success of non-Muslims in Muslim societies

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 49-52.

²⁴ Ibid., 10. Yet there are documented historical and contemporary exceptions. The reign of al-Hākim comes to mind, examined in the previous chapter.

²⁵ Ibid., 10.

²⁶ Ibid., 25.

²⁷ Ibid., 11. Here Al-Qaradawi is citing ancient works, *Arab Civilization* (trans ‘Adil Za’aytar) p128

²⁸ Cf.: <http://imemc.org/article/59618/> accessed 17 April 2016. Conor Gaffey Janine Di Giovanni, Lara Adoumie, Stav Ziv, "The New Exodus: After Years of Slow And Steady Decline Christians Are Being

can cause rancor amongst certain elements of the Muslim population.²⁹ It would also appear that Al-Qaradawi is not well disposed to allowing non-Muslims to reach senior posts in Islamic society.³⁰ In spite of his misgivings, according to the Qur'ān, injustice against non-Muslims is forbidden in the same way as injustice against Muslims is forbidden. Instances of discord may be appealed through Islamic *Shari'ah* courts, whereby even a political or religious leader's conduct can be scrutinized. Al-Qaradawi gives a historical example involving a case where a Christian was offered the right to strike the head of the Caliph for his son's abuse of power.³¹ In general, Al-Qaradawi surmises, periods of oppression are followed by a return of balanced leadership and compensation for iniquities.³²

Reading through the two documents one finds a sense that Al-Qaradawi is well aware of differences between Christian denominations, though this is not his primary concern. His interest remains largely with the socio-historical context, without exploring diverse creedal differences. The area of divorce provides a notable exception and an opportunity to engage in some inter-scriptural reasoning while also allowing him to display his knowledge of differences between some Christian denominations. In the area of divorce Al-Qaradawi examines the teachings of Jesus from a Jewish context and as interpreted by Catholics and Protestants. He posits that the teachings of Jesus were intended to counter Jewish excesses in the area of divorce. Al-Qaradawi cites Matthew 5:31-32, Mark 10:11-12 and a commentary by the Institute of Coptic Catholic Research that states that Jesus prohibited divorce except for reasons of infidelity and taught that remarrying a divorced person is paramount to committing adultery.³³ He notes that some Protestant denominations, like Catholics, do not allow for divorce, while others permit divorce where there are prolonged irresolvable differences.³⁴ Al-Qaradawi argues that one of the consequences of such stringent requisites for divorce in the West is that Christians resort to civil legislation, where divorce is granted for quite trivial reasons. Consequently, he argues that the application of the teachings of Jesus to demand that couples with irreconcilable differences remain married must have been a temporary injunction. Al-

Driven From The Middle East By Isis," *Newsweek Global* 164, no. 13 (2015): 24-33. Neither article refers to the People of the Book.

²⁹ Al-Qaradawi, *Non Muslims*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 14-15. Christians may hold their own courts for internal matters. 23-4.

³² *Ibid.*, 16. A famous case in point is the Church of St. John, Damascus. Where one caliph forced the local Christians to relinquish their church in order to provide more land for the expansion of the Umayyad Mosque. The local Christians bided their time for a more sympathetic caliph who reviewed their case and offered substantial compensation.

³³ *idem*, *The Lawful And The Prohibited*, 208-209.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

Qaradawi argues that Islam achieves a balance, even though “Among the lawful things, divorce is the most hated by Allah.”³⁵ He goes as far to say that the teachings of Jesus, in this instance, are therefore abrogated by the universal teachings of Islam. Since the ability for both men and women to divorce and remarry are granted along with compassionate guidelines for how couples should conduct themselves before, during and after a divorce.³⁶

4.3. Modern Western Islamic Use of the Term *People of the Book*

This section examines a number of pre-*Common Word* texts by a generation of scholars who have lived most of their lives in the West. These texts are: *Christian-Muslim Dialogue In The Twentieth Century* (1997) by Atallah Siddiqui, a British scholar of Indian origins; *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (2004) by Tariq Ramadan, a Swiss scholar of Egyptian origins; *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism; An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (1997), *Muslims Engaging The Other And The Humanum* (2000) and *On Being A Muslim: Find a Religious Path in the World Today* (2002) by Farid Esack, a South African scholar and political activist.³⁷ These texts tactfully draw upon critical inquiry of the People of the Book. Yet, in contrast to Yusuf Qaradawi, each are proponents of Muslims living in the West seeking their own contextual solutions to living in pluralist society rather than seeking direction from Eastern Muslims who may not understand Western society. The texts examined deal primarily, but not exclusively, with the scenario of Muslims living or engaging with the West, or non-Muslim societies. In the context of modernity and instantaneous communication, events taking place in one part of the world have inevitable repercussions in other parts of the world.

4.3a Social Contract, New Contexts Reshaping Coexistence

In *Christian-Muslim Dialogue In The Twentieth Century*, Siddiqui identifies the People of the Book in keeping with the critical analysis discussed in chapter one and with the

³⁵ Ibid., 307. Abu Daoud records this *hadīth*.

³⁶ Ibid., 211-220.

³⁷ Atallah Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue In The Twentieth Century*, 1 ed. (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1997). Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 1 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*. Farid Esack, "Muslims Engaging The Other And The Humanum," *Emory International Law Review* 14, no. 2 (2000). Farid Esack, *On Being a Muslim: Finding a Religious Path in the World Today* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002).

writings of Al-Qaradawi.³⁸ Yet, Christians, he argues, are conspicuous in the main for their lack of reciprocal respect shown to Islam.³⁹ Nevertheless, despite this apparent perception, Muslims are still encouraged to live peacefully as active citizens and to engage in dialogue with Christians in a respectful manner.⁴⁰ Siddiqui cites several verses that discuss the People of the Book; among them are *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46 and *sūrah Āl-‘Imran* (3):64.⁴¹ These verses acknowledge that Christians and Muslims as well as Jews have been given divine revelation, even if this revelation is understood differently.⁴² The concept that God guides humanity; reveals His will, and that people need God’s guidance in all spheres of life is a concept that is a growing source of contention for Muslims wishing to embrace modernity and the West.⁴³

In comparison to Al-Qaradawi, and Siddiqui, Ramadan’s use of the appellation People of the Book is reserved primarily for interreligious dialogue. In *To Be A European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context*, the appellation People of the Book is used only once. On this occasion, the reference is to the Biblical Joseph, the son of Jacob, working for the King of Egypt, who was “not from the People of the Book.”⁴⁴ The analogy here is between the polytheist King and European Society. In *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, henceforth *Challenges of Modernity*, the term appears three times in relation to dialogue and cooperation in reforming society. In *Western Muslims and The Future of Islam*, henceforth *Western Muslims*, Ramadan’s use of the term appears more frequently as a means of identifying Christians as potential partners in dialogue and social reform. Throughout *Western Muslims* he discusses how Muslims living in the West need to chart their own future independent of outside influences, based on faithfulness to the universal principles of Islam applied for all intents and purposes in secular society.⁴⁵ Use of the term People of the Book is reserved for specific conversation dealing with religious forms of dialogue.⁴⁶

Farid Esack’s use of the term People of the Book is more nuanced. In *Qur’an, Liberation & Pluralism; An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against*

³⁸ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 49. Henceforth, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. Here *ahl al-kitāb* signifies Jews and Christians.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xiii, 35-36, 59, 195. Siddiqui notes a negative opinion of Islam is not only the legacy of western Christian contact, but is also carried forward in secular society.

⁴⁰ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 43, 53, 73, 95, 124, 156.

⁴¹ *Sūrah āl-‘Imran* (3):64 is the key verse for the *Common Word* initiative.

⁴² Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 57-58; Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 19.

⁴³ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 58.

⁴⁴ Tariq Ramadan, *To Be A European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1999), 167. Henceforth referred to as *European Muslim*.

⁴⁵ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 126, 158-161. *idem*, *European Muslim*, 93-95.

⁴⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*. See chapter 9, Interreligious Dialogue 200-214.

Oppression, he demonstrates not only an awareness of traditional critical understanding of the term, but also highlights what he sees as the need to rethink relationships with categories of believers.⁴⁷ This sense of the intrinsic value of the other is present in Esack's other works including *Muslims Engaging the Other and the Humanum*, as well as *On Being A Muslim: Find a Religious Path in the World Today*. Esack acknowledges that the struggle against Apartheid challenged the Muslim community in South Africa. On the one hand the regime allowed certain Muslims a privileged existence while others felt the pains of oppression.⁴⁸ Based on traditional teachings, Esack examines the early Muslim community's integration in the town of Medina. Here he views the twinning of exiles with helpers and the inclusion of non-Muslims in the Treaty of Medina as the first steps to a "New Society" based on a fraternity of believers.⁴⁹

Similarly, there are examples of different contextual interactions with Christians from Abyssinia and Najran. These examples are important because Esack affirms that Muslims look to Qur'ānic literature for templates for coexistence with religious 'others.' In the time of Muhammad, the religious 'others' were predominantly the People of the Book and therefore their examples are very important for determining relationships today.⁵⁰ However, as part of Esack's hermeneutic of liberation he notes that it is very important not to forget the historical context. The Jews and Christians today may be part of the legacy of the People of the Book known to Muhammad and the early Muslims Umma, but they are not exactly the same and neither are the Muslims. There is a need therefore to avoid generalisations. Esack prefers to examine the contextual interactions as indicators of practices and attitudes in order to differentiate between allies today in the struggle for social justice. Relying on categories of people who lived during the time of Muhammad and who were predisposed to seeking justice may prove counterproductive given the role of Judaeo-Christian political supremacy today.⁵¹ Citing *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):134 Esack reminds Christians and Muslims that communities cannot base their claims of moral superiority on the achievements of their forebears. "That is a community foregone; to them belongs what they earned and to you belong what you earn, and you will not be asked about what they had done."⁵² The point being, the People of the Book today may have

⁴⁷ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 17, 149-155. Henceforth referred to as *Liberation & Pluralism*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 218 fn. 216. Here the contrast is made between the lives of members of the National Youth Action, and the South African Black Scholars Association with the conservative Durban based Islamic Propagation Centre, headed by the renowned evangelist Ahmad Deedat.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 152; *idem*, "Muslims Engaging," 533-546. Henceforth referred to as *Muslims Engaging*.

⁵¹ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 152-153.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 175.

different attitudes and political interests that are incompatible with the quest for justice of their forebears.

Siddiqui and Ramadan both acknowledge the change in traditional understanding of the People of the Book from a religious perspective. The West is viewed in the context of modernity as increasingly secular, to the point where secularism exerts an influence on the expression of Christianity.⁵³ Hence, Christianity rather than actively engaging with modern society to explain the teachings of Christ is considered a servant of secularism.⁵⁴ Siddiqui and Ramadan write extensively concerning the secularisation of the West and the challenges this has on religious pluralism. Ramadan states that people in the West are at best more likely to describe themselves as “spiritual” rather than religious. Outwardly society is religion free.⁵⁵ Siddiqui points out an interesting feature of this idea, the fact that the writings of Sayyid Qutb, considered a spiritual founder of modern Salafi Islam, berates Christians for not providing leadership in the face of the modern drive to separate religious ideals from society.⁵⁶ The lack of spiritual discipline endemic in the West, as well as the lure of consumerism, inspires Ramadan to warn Muslims that they need to guard their faith. In addition, through their faith Muslims can be a bridge to other people of faith, or none, if they too are concerned about human values.⁵⁷

For Siddiqui, the term the ‘West’ sometimes acts as a euphemism for contemporary Christianity. Unfortunately, this simplification links western Christians with colonialism and imperialism, rather than as a people following in the footsteps of Christ.⁵⁸ One positive element of modernity is the fact that Muslims and Christians are increasingly sharing the same common space as equal citizens. Muslims in the ‘West’ are growing in confidence and no longer see themselves as immigrants.⁵⁹ Therefore there is the potential and need for greater cooperation between Muslims and Christians.⁶⁰

In light of the fact that there are greater numbers of Muslims living in the West, the old designations of *dar al-salam* or *dar al-harb* are less meaningful. The West, with all its

⁵³ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 23. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 32. Ramadan notes that some Muslim scholars question whether the West has forgotten God entirely. Tariq Ramadan, *Islam, the West and the Challenges of Modernity*, trans. Saïd Amgher, 2009 ed. (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 2001; reprint, 2009), 182. Here, Ramadan notes that often Muslims make the mistake of confusing the West with Christianity.

⁵⁴ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 3, 17, 51-12. Citing Gai Eaton and Ziauddin Sardar, n8.

⁵⁵ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 17. idem, *European Muslim*, 122.

⁵⁶ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 17.

⁵⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 121-124. Paolo Dall’Oglio makes this point clear below.

⁵⁸ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 3, 49.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 199. The point is made that Muslims have played an important, but neglected role in Europe’s History.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20. As identified by the first Muslims-Christian Convocation, Bhamdoun, Lebanon, 1954.

flaws, can be thought in terms of *dar al-ahd*, the House of Agreement, *dar al-shahādah*, Land of Witness, or even *dar al-da'wah*, Land of Mission, as the case for Mecca before the Hijra. Ultimately, there is no consensus in this area.⁶¹ In the West therefore, Muslims are bound to accept the prevailing rule of law as citizens, *al-muslimun inda shurutihim*, as long as they are free to practice their own faith.⁶² If the laws of society interfere with the practices of Islam then Muslims, he argues, should act as conscientious objectors.⁶³

This leads Ramadan to call Muslims based in the West to rethink *fiqh al-aqalliyyat*, the law of the minorities.⁶⁴ He fervently believes Muslims in the West need to respectfully become independent from eastern Muslims intellectually, politically and economically. They need to develop their own ability to independently assess the needs of Muslims living in the West by remaining faithful to the principles of Islam, aware of the “need of Him” but developing their own personality in their own context.⁶⁵ In this regard Ramadan discusses the work of Qaradawi, who views Muslims living in the West as strangers in “other societies” rather than at home.⁶⁶ Alternatively, Ramadan is confident that Western Muslims can participate in society as equal citizens and cooperate with ‘others,’ that share similar values.⁶⁷ In this regard Ramadan is quite visionary, since he encourages Western Muslims to use their influence to effect social justice by bearing witness to Islam and creating a bridge with other concerned people.⁶⁸

A fundamental tool for negotiating the balance of life for Western Muslims between *darura*, necessity, and *rukhas*, exemptions, is the activity to understand the *al-muamalat*, the social teachings of the Qur’ān in their particular context, in order to discern the universal principles from within their historical context.⁶⁹ This is achieved through the application of *ilm usul al-fiqh*, the science of the fundamental laws, in order to gain, *ijtihad*, a critical interpretation of verses from the Qur’ān dealing with the subject.⁷⁰ The rules governing *ijtihad*, as explained by Ramadan, are in keeping with those examined in

⁶¹ Ibid., 64-66, 70-62, 195.

⁶² Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 173.

⁶³ idem, *Western Muslims*, 174. For instance for *ribā*, charging or paying interest see further 94, *alam al-harb* 176. idem, *European Muslim*, 34, 176. It will be interesting to see how this works now that Ireland passed the same-sex marriage referendum. People of all faiths and none are now required to accept same-sex marriage as equal to traditional marriage. The State has indicated that it will not contemplate discrimination guised as ‘conscientious objection.’ Fiachra Ó Cionnaith, “Taoiseach rules out ‘conscience clause’ in same-sex marriage vote,” *Irish Examiner*, 16 April 2015.

⁶⁴ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 6.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6-7. idem, *European Muslim*, 221.

⁶⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 53, fn. 52. Yusuf Qaradawi, *fi fiqh al-aqalliyyat al-muslima (On Law and the Jurisprudence of Muslim Minorities)* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001).

⁶⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 4-7, 169-199.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 123-124. In fact Part II of *Western Muslims* concerns Muslims reforming Western Society.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 43, 54-45.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 21-22, 43-48.

chapter one. As an illustration of early use of *ijtihad*, Ramadan draws upon the example of Muadh; the companion of Muhammad sent to govern Yemen while Yemen was still a Christian country. Muadh needed to rely on his own intellect in a new environment where seeking answers to life's questions may not be clear.⁷¹

Esack does not seem to view the march to secularism with the same degree of trepidation. In fact, the material examined here suggests that Esack is far more willing to engage in a spirit of solidarity with secularists to work on issues traditionally regarded as taboo by mainstream Muslim Clerics. For instance, while speaking in a general sense, Esack describes the makeup of the activists involved in the international solidarity movement as comprising People of the Book, feminists, trade unionists, liberal, gay, environmentalists and others that might have Apartheid “as just one of a number of social-ideological forces that they believed dehumanized people, and had to be relentlessly opposed.”⁷² These are areas where Esack believes faith based movements need to challenge traditional ideologies held by conservatives.⁷³ He further notes that the future of progressive Islam, at least in a South African context, will be shaped by contempt as well as a reverence for religion, since, religion was a tool of the oppressor that justified racial discrimination and other forms of oppression.⁷⁴ The liberation of South Africa came about by all types of people engaged in a struggle whereby all people would be fully human and fully alive, as Esack says, drawing upon a Quakers adage, “that of God in all of us,” would be respected.⁷⁵ In fact, in pursuit of liberation, Esack, perhaps naively, seems to imply that he is willing to tolerate a degree of immorality in the short term, in order to bring secularists closer to God in the long term.⁷⁶

4.3b New Sha'ria Discourse and the People of the Book

Dhimmi and *shari'ah* are two highly emotive topics that come under the heading of ‘Protected Citizens.’ Siddiqui points out quite interestingly that neither word is found in the Qur’ān. Protected citizenship is an area that the followers of Muhammad developed after the death of Muhammad and during the early military conquests.⁷⁷ Siddiqui defines

⁷¹ Ibid., 43. idem, *European Muslim*, 82-83.

⁷² Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 239-240.

⁷³ Ibid., Cf. 6-15.

⁷⁴ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/174603/Dutch-Reformed-Church>: Up until 1986 the Afrikaans Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) followed a Biblical justification for Apartheid.

⁷⁵ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 251.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 197-203. aliciapatterson.org/stories/south-africa's-gay-imam-and-his-disciple (accessed 10.4.2015).

⁷⁷ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 64. Citing Fazlur Rahman.

Shari'ah as 'the way.' The objectives of *Shari'ah*, *maqasid al-shari'ah*, is theoretically clear, but in practice quite vague, "to promote the public good," or as Ramadan would say, *al-maslaha*, the common good.⁷⁸ The purpose of *Shari'ah* is not just to give legal guidance, but guidance for all aspects of life.⁷⁹ Citing Al-Ghazali the purpose of *Shari'ah* is "...to promote the welfare of the people, which lies in safeguarding faith, their life, their intellect, their posterity and their wealth. Whatever ensures the safeguarding of these five serves public interest and is desirable."⁸⁰ Ramadan also lists quite similar objectives of *Shari'ah* based on the teachings of Imam Malik, as *istislah*, to seek the common good.⁸¹ As both scholars note, *Shari'ah* is based on objectives. The objectives allow for a great deal of compromise in light of *al-waqi*, the state of the world. The practice might change but the universal principles remain the same.⁸²

In contrast to Siddiqui, Esack notes that variants of the word *shari'ah* appear three times in the Qur'ān along with the word *minhaj*, meaning a clear path.⁸³ In keeping with Esack's hermeneutics of liberation, he points out that the Qur'ān is a comprehensive guide against injustice.⁸⁴ Therefore *shari'ah* should be something that guides society. He explains the etymology of *shari'ah* and *minhaj* as concerning a path leading to water. While engaging in exegetical investigation, Esack examines the possibility that through verses like *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 and to a lesser extent *sūrat al-hajj* (22):67, that concern the People of the Book, there could be more than one *shari'ah* or *minhaj* acceptable to God, even after the arrival of Muhammad. He approaches this examination by considering whether the context of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 with its emphasis on competing in good works implies that the communities in question were contemporary, i.e., coexisting in Medina, or whether they are communities that passed away along with their abrogated *shari'ah*. While outlining that exegesis of Al-Tabari and al-Razi, both of which accept the latter explanation, Esack opts to side with Rida, since Esack considers the literal interpretation of the verse with its inclusive implications more conducive to reason. What use, he surmises, is a competition for good works for communities that are not contemporary and unaware of their theological differences?

⁷⁸ Ibid., 62. Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 38-43. Cf. idem, *European Muslim*, 76-85.

⁷⁹ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 32, 34.

⁸⁰ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 62. Citing a quotation from Al-Ghazali found in M. U. Chapra's *Islam and the Economic Challenge*, Leicester, (1992), 1.

⁸¹ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 38.

⁸² Ibid., 37. idem, *European Muslim*, 234.

⁸³ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 169. idem, "Muslims Engaging," 543.

⁸⁴ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 106.

Underpinning this plurality of *shari'ah* is a reconsideration of some traditional terms like *islām*, submission, in relation to *dīn*, religion; *imān*, faith, *mu'min*, believer and *kufr*, disbelief, in light of working together for social justice. During the early years of Islam these terms were used to describe personal qualities, only gradually did they come to refer to groups, "bordering on ethnic characteristics."⁸⁵ The nuanced meaning and use of the terms are examined in chapter four of *Liberation and Pluralism*.⁸⁶ For instance Esack employs critical analysis, beginning with *sūrah Āl-Imran* (3):19 which deals extensively with the People of the Book, to demonstrate that traditionally the word *islām* is used in the Qur'ān as both a noun, denoting the community of Muhammad, or the emerging reified Islam, as well as a verb, describing the very personal act of submitting one's life to God.⁸⁷ Understanding *islām* as a person act, once again allows for a plurality of *shari'ah*.⁸⁸ The important feature of plurality is that each community strives to do good works.⁸⁹

The application of *dhimmi* status for minorities within a Muslim country has always been situational, including the areas of *zakāt* and *jizya*. Siddiqui quotes Fazlur Rahman who says, "Muslims jurists in the early centuries of Islam conceived of *jizya* as a tax imposed upon the Peoples of the Book in lieu of military service, because these communities could not be expected to join Muslims in *jihād*."⁹⁰ In the same text Rahman, like Al-Qaradawi above, notes that during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab some (Christian) tribes in Syria refused to pay *jizya* because they considered the tax humiliating. As a form of compromise, Umar requested the tribes pay *zakāt*.⁹¹

The implementation of *shari'ah* in countries undergoing Islamisation or the application of *shari'ah* is the cause of fear amongst Christians in countries like Nigeria, Pakistan and Sudan.⁹² In spite of these difficult cases, Siddiqui elaborates on the possibilities of Muslims and Christians working together to make *shari'ah* more amenable to both communities, since there are no fixed rules for what will make society a better place.⁹³ This includes the rights of Christians and other minority religions to practice *da'wah*. Siddiqui notes that there is a world of difference between the *da'wah* of dialogue

⁸⁵ Ibid., 115. For further discussion of the generic use of the terms *kufr*, *islām* and *fitra* see Ramadan, *European Muslim*, 67. and idem, *Western Muslims*, 205-206.

⁸⁶ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 126-144.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 126. This point is also made in chapter one.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 166-172. idem, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 171-172. idem, "Muslims Engaging," 542-546.

⁹⁰ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 64.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 63, 69; Esack, "Muslims Engaging," 529. The suffering of Christians in Pakistan has greatly affected the world-view of Esack.

⁹³ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 62, 196. Siddiqui notes that there are Muslim scholars, like Usman Bugaje, that feel *Shari'ah* is a highly developed area with less room for maneuver.

and the *da'wah* of evangelisation.⁹⁴ In a very inspiring and enlightened way Siddiqui expects that Christians will try to convert Muslims to Christ, since spreading the message of Christ is part of the great Commission. However, this need not be formal conversion, but through dialogue people may convert from their previous position towards an understanding and acceptance of the other.⁹⁵

4.3c Modernity and the Changing Nature of Dialogue with Christians

Modernity's penchant for the secular provides an opportunity for dialogue and cooperation for Muslims and Christians. Yet, historically, Muslims have regrettably often experienced Christianity in the forms of colonialism, imperialism and aggressive missionaries, who sought to divide and conquer Muslims and demonstrated scant regard for the Qur'ān and Muhammad.⁹⁶ Therefore Muslims have reason to question the dialogue is a gesture to build bridges and reconcile past grievances, or merely a rebranding of the traditional evangelical missionary project?⁹⁷

In *Christian-Muslim Dialogue* Siddiqui demonstrates an awareness of the differences between Christian creedal communities with a concise overview of the development within both the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church encyclicals concerning the challenges of dialogue with Islam.⁹⁸ Accordingly, reconciliatory shoots began to appear following the international evangelical Edinburgh Conference of 1910, the Jerusalem Conference of 1928 and the Tambaram, India, missionary conference of 1938. Here Protestant missionaries from a spiritual perspective, recognised and affirmed the values of other faiths, including the need to understand other faiths and cultures from a first-hand perspective. In addition, from a social or political perspective, the missionaries perceived the need of people of all faiths to confront the growing threats of communism

⁹⁴ Ibid., 194.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 76.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 23-24, 54-55, 59. Following the air of reconciliation brought on by *Nostra Aetate*, Muhammad Hamidullah wrote on behalf of Muslims in France to Pope John XXIII to "officially disavow and declare annulled the [Church's] past unjustifiable resolutions of former Councils, Synods and other writings of anti-Islamic character." This is a mistake repeated by Pope Benedict in Regensburg 2006. Ataullah Siddiqui, "Inter-Faith Relations in Britain Since 1970-An Assessment," *Exchange* 39, no. 3 (2010): 242. For instance the UK's Bishop David Brown urged Christians to look for God's purpose in religious and cultural diversity and called for a reshaping of "theological teaching." Luca Mavelli, "Political Church, Procedural Europe, and the Creation of the Islamic Other," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 1(2008). The theme of Islam as the 'other' carries through into an increasingly secular Europe. 5.

⁹⁷ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 50-55; Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 201.

⁹⁸ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. Cf. chapters 1 and 2.

and secularism together.⁹⁹ Since then, the idea has grown that dialogue with Muslims and other non-Christians is essential. Yet segments within both the Catholic and Protestant confessions struggle to find a balance between responding to the call to ‘make disciples of all nations’ and the need to enter into dialogue.¹⁰⁰

Given the fact that neither mainstream Protestants, as represented by the World Council of Churches, nor the official encyclicals of the Roman Catholic Church are admittedly free from the desire to convert Muslims to Christ, what attitude can Muslims possibly adopt towards dialogue? Siddiqui answers this question in very practical terms. For some Muslims dialogue is not necessary.¹⁰¹ There are verses in the Qur’ān that support the idea that Islam is complete and that Christians cannot be taken as friends or protectors.¹⁰² The history of conflict between Muslims and Christians certainly attests to the fact that Muslims have much to be apprehensive about.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, Siddiqui offers various definitions of dialogue that demonstrate the benefits including inspiring words from A. Z. Abedin, “A dialogue is a process wherein people with diverse faith backgrounds come together and recognising each other’s confessional identity and integrity, join hands in equality and respect to resolve a common and mutually perceived threat to all.”¹⁰⁴

For Ramadan, Western societies’ religious pluralism makes mutual knowledge essential.¹⁰⁵ A challenge for dialogue today is to move the dialogue from the specialist, who may or may not reflect the views of their coreligionists, to ordinary believers and those with more closed opinions. The role of the specialist is to bring others with more traditional views from within their communities along a path towards increased understanding of the other. Thus new horizons may open up for living together in mutual respect and providing better means of resolving conflicts that may arise.¹⁰⁶ Ramadan excels in his explanation of how diversity is part of God’s plan. Citing from a cluster of verses, Ramadan explains that if it had been God’s will, all people would have believed the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 24-26.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5, 32, 35, 38, 57.

¹⁰¹ idem, "Since 1970," 250.

¹⁰² idem, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 51. Citing *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):51.

¹⁰³ idem, "Since 1970," 247. Dialogue can be seen as a political tool of the State against Terrorism.

¹⁰⁴ idem, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 57, 56-60. Cf. *The Role of Believers in Promoting Mutual Trust and Community* prepared for the Muslim-Christian Colloquium organised by the World Council of Churches in 1987.

¹⁰⁵ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 200.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 200-201.

same, that diversity of religion, culture and race are intended to test us.¹⁰⁷ In fact in *Challenges of Modernity* Ramadan's use of the term People of the Book is explicitly linked to striving together for the common good. This point is made clear by way of *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):68, "...People of the Book, you do not stand on anything, until you perform the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to you from your Lord..."¹⁰⁸ This is a very important verse. Through this verse Ramadan seems to accept a salvific potential for both the Torah and Gospel that also encourages People of the Book to follow the guidance given to them. He sees the role of the Torah, Gospels and Qur'ān as tempering and refining how 'we' understand our own sacred texts and God.¹⁰⁹

Further evidence of critical analysis is employed to explain difficult verses that are cited by literalists, as reasons for not entering into dialogue. Ramadan states that difficult texts are frequently cited out of context. Those that declare all the People of the Book *kufir*, or that say their religions are no longer acceptable after Islam, citing *sūrah Āl-Imran* (3):19 and (3):85, assume only inane interpretations of these verses. Such interpretations of difficult verses can reduce dialogue to simply *da'wah*; that is an invitation to accept Islam and nothing more. Purely literal readings however, deny the possibility of interpretations that seek to extract the universal message from the specific context and apply the lesson to new contexts.¹¹⁰

In essence, dialogue should be about mutual understanding towards reducing the reasons for potential conflict.¹¹¹ Dialogue should lead to *ma'rūf* and *munkar*, promoting good and eradicating evil.¹¹² Siddiqui notes that with verses that promote dialogue, while revisiting *sūrah Āl-Imran* 3:64 and *sūrat al-ankabut* 29:46, God is central and "God is the prime motivator in dialogue."¹¹³ Ramadan, like Siddiqui, cites the same verses to demonstrate the need for mutual respect for critical analysis.¹¹⁴ Through dialogue it becomes possible to reinvigorate society, to allow God back into social discourse.¹¹⁵ For Ramadan, "Interreligious dialogue should be a meeting of 'witnesses' who are seeking to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 202-203. Citing extracts from *sūrat al-anam* (6): 35; *sūrah Yunus* (10):29; *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48; *sūrat al-baqarah* (2): 251, 256; *sūrat al-hajj* (22):40; *sūrat al-ankabut* (49):13. idem, *European Muslim*, 230. Citing from *sūrat al-hujrat* (49):13.

¹⁰⁸ Ramadan, *Challenges of Modernity*, 188. *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):68.

¹⁰⁹ idem, *Western Muslims*, 202-204. Here Ramadan cites two verses also cited by Siddiqui that utilises the term People of the Book, *sūrat imran* (3):64 and *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 205-206.

¹¹¹ Siddiqui, "Since 1970," 241-242. Here the Race Relations Act could assume the goodwill of the participants in spite of deep suspicions.

¹¹² idem, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 76.

¹¹³ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁴ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 202-203.

¹¹⁵ Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 58-59.

live their faiths, to share their convictions, and to engage with one another for a more humane, more just world, closer to what God expects of humanity.”¹¹⁶

In addition, Ramadan offers practical rules for dialogue. He says there should be respect for the legitimacy of each other’s convictions. There should be greater appreciation for how other people interpret their own tradition and not what we want them to say. People should be free to ask any question and there should be greater self-criticism of the meanings of texts.¹¹⁷ Moving beyond dialogue, there is a need to motivate religious people to take part in practical engagement. Ramadan suggests that religiously minded people need to find a civil role to counter ‘postmodernism’ that he says, seems to wish to deny any legitimacy to all references to a universal ethic.¹¹⁸

Esack sees a more immediate need for dialogue culminating in political cooperation. In *Liberation & Pluralism* he calls for a hermeneutics of liberation that includes dialogue with the People of the Book and others that is in keeping with Christian liberation theology.¹¹⁹ The hermeneutics of liberation presents a need-based approach that chooses to confront difficult texts in order to understand “the subsumed meanings” while appropriating new meanings.¹²⁰ The hermeneutics of liberation facilitates a discourse with others, since the re-appropriation of interpretations that exclude Muslim cooperation with non-Muslims faces stern challenges of orthodoxy without orthopraxis.¹²¹ Behind the hermeneutics of liberation the choice is simple, to support, or not, the poor and oppressed in society and those who struggle for liberation. In defence of this argument Esack cites the exegetical work of Rida, who chides those who claim to be Muslim, yet do not act in the cause of justice, saying they are in effect, only *ethnic* Muslims.¹²²

In *Muslims Engaging* Esack describes different types of dialogue where Muslims might relate to the other.¹²³ Addressing issues relating to post-modernity is the genre of

¹¹⁶ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 208. Cf. Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, 60.

¹¹⁷ Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 210-211.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹¹⁹ Esack, *Liberation & Pluralism*, 14, 72, 198, 201, 202. In fact Esack frequently cites the works of Gustavo Gutierrez as well as Leonardo and Clodovis Boff.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 115, 118.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 215.

¹²³ *idem*, "Muslims Engaging," 530-534. These types of dialogues vary from ‘the Other as Enemy’ whereby anything that is not of a particular brand of Islam are regarded as *kufir*. There is the ‘Other as Potential Self’ where the ‘other’ is the object of *da’wah* or proselytism. There is ‘The Other as Unavoidable Neighbour.’ Here the dialogue might involve largely symbolic gatherings like the World Conference of Religion and Peace, or interreligious dialogue at local level to promote greater knowledge of the other as well as good neighbourliness. At this level people may develop a better appreciation of the other. At a deeper level of dialogue there is ‘The Other as Self and Intellectual-Theological Sparring Partner.’ Mohammed Arkoun and Ebrahim Moosa adopt this style of dialogue. Here there is an opportunity to appreciate how the other defines themselves. Usually this area is the reserve of Muslims scholars and their traditional theological ‘other,’ the

dialogue called, ‘The Other as Self and Spiritual Partner.’ Here the dialogue is a source of mutual spiritual enrichment against the backdrop of Western society’s push to marginalise belief in God. Yet, Esack notes that this form of dialogue seldom engages with the structures of injustice.¹²⁴ Moving from the spiritual to the practical is the genre of engagement referred to as, ‘The Other As Self and Comrade.’ This form of engagement is more concerned with a *liberative praxis* that intends to create a world with greater socioeconomic as well as gender justice. Through verses like *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62, *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 Esack provides the exegetic groundwork for accepting at least some of the People of the Book as potential allies. This is based on the idea that the Qur’ān acknowledges ‘some people’ among the People of the Book as believing in one God and who fill their lives with good deeds.¹²⁵ Taking the logic of deeds further, Esack notes the struggle against Apartheid and other injustice creates its own definition of who is *mu'minūn* and *kāfir*.¹²⁶

4.4 A Common Word Initiative

In October 2006, thirty-eight Muslim scholars wrote an open letter to Pope Benedict XVI in response to comments made in his Regensburg address.¹²⁷ This open letter went largely unanswered.¹²⁸ The following year 138 Muslim scholars wrote again to Pope Benedict and other Christian leaders calling for peace and understanding between Muslims and Christians.

The letter known as *A Common Word Between Us and You* states that, the basis for peace and understanding already exists between the two faiths. Both faiths are built upon the common principles of love of God and love of neighbour. These principles provide the

People of the Book, at the expense of marginalised, “People of the Fourth World,” from largely “pagan” traditions.

¹²⁴ Ibid.: 534.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 541-546.

¹²⁶ Ibid.: 544-545. idem, *On Being A Muslim*, 151-152. In a very practical sense Esack relates an early experience of solidarity his family experienced with a Christian neighbour, Mrs. Batista. Through her *islām* Esack realised the need to reassess the meaning of many Islamic terms in light of changed contexts.

¹²⁷ David Gibson, "Pope Benedict XVI's Regensburg Lecture On Islam Gets A Second Look In The Wake Of Islamic State," (2014). Cf. w2.vatican.va/.../speeches/.../hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-rege... *The precise initiate of the Common Word is more nuanced than presented here. Although Pope Benedict's Regensburg was a factor there were other factors in train like the Amman Message of 2005 that made the call to dialogue inevitable.* Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 17. Cf. Pope Benedict, "Faith, Reason and the University Memories and Reflections," in *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006).

¹²⁸ Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 16. In fact the Vatican may have only responded positively after other Christian Churches accepted the ACW invitation, 33. For a genesis of the *Common Word* see 131-134.

common ground on which Muslims and Christians should come together. The basic premise of this document outlined the fact that Muslims and Christians together make up more than 55% of the world's population. Without peace between Muslim and Christians there cannot be meaningful peace in the world.¹²⁹ The title of the *Open Letter* comes from *sūrah Āl-‘Imran* (3):64 where it says,

“Say, O people of the Scripture (Book) Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner to Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).¹³⁰

People of Scripture is a variation on the translation of *ahl al-kitāb* as *People of the Book*. Many English language translation of the Qur’ān prefer the translation *People of the Book* to *People of Scripture*.¹³¹ The historical context of the verse is discussed above in chapter two of this dissertation. In brief, this verse pertains to the visit from an official delegation of Najran Christians to Muhammad. Having discussed their theological differences, the delegation made clear that they were willing to submit politically to Muhammad, but intended nonetheless to remain Christian.

The *Open Letter* is significant for a number of reasons. One of the weaknesses of interfaith dialogue for Muslims is that they do not have a centralised authority to support any resolutions that might present themselves from discussions. With the endorsement of 138 leading scholars, Islam is responding with as broad an authoritative voice as possible.¹³² In addition, since the *Open Letter's* publication, hundreds more Muslim and Christian scholars have added their weight to the message.

In line with traditional Islamic exegetics, the *Open Letter's* message draws upon more than thirty Qur’ānic verses, including verses *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 and *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48, some Hadith and more than twenty verses from the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate the fundamental commonality between Christianity and Islam. This demonstration of commonality does not diminish points of departure, but rather, calls

¹²⁹ 38 Muslim Scholars, "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to:," in *A Common Word* (The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan, 2007), 2. Henceforth referred to as the *Open Letter*. Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 251.

¹³⁰ Scholars, "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to:," 13-14.

¹³¹ Alternative translations of *sūrah āl-‘Imran* (3):64 using ‘People,’ rather than ‘Scripture,’ are found for instance in The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur’ān*, 159. Alternatively, *The Glorious Kuran*, ed. Mahmoud Sobhi, trans. Abdallah Yousef Ali, The Call of Islam Society (Libya: The Call of Islam Society Libyan Arab Republic, 1973), 139. Arthur J Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. Arthur J Arberry, vol. 1, The World's Classics (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 55.

¹³² Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 12, 251. Three points that make *A Common Word* significant include its grounding in scripture, the acceptance of theological differences and the participation of high ranking religious leaders. 40-41.

upon Christians to see the wider picture. One of the most profound statements reiterates the fact that in spite of their theological differences, “Muslims, Christians and Jews should be free to each follow what God commanded them...” further insisting that there is no compulsion in religion.¹³³

Muslims state unequivocally in the *Open Letter* that neither they, nor Islam are against Christians. Drawing upon seemingly contradictory verses from the Synoptic Gospels, one question Muslims pose relates to a concern raised earlier by Siddiqui, namely, that although Muslims recognise Jesus, why then are Christians so demeaning of Islam? Matthew 12:30 suggest that those who are not with Jesus are against him. However the *Open Letter* cites the commentary offered by *Blessed Theophylact* that this refers to demons and not people. Therefore, given that *sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 states that Jesus is the Messiah and that both Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50 allow for those who are not opposed to Jesus to be considered ‘on the side’ of Jesus, Muslims invite Christians to consider them as “not against” and thus for them, in accordance with Jesus Christ’s words.”¹³⁴

4.5 Conclusions

The work of Al-Qaradawi acts as a classic juxtaposed in contrast to the voices of Siddiqui, Esack, and Ramadan. Their voices reflect the gradual shift in authority in Islam away from the Middle East to the places of residence of Muslims worldwide. In keeping with traditional *tafsīr*, they affirm that whether Muslims form the majority of society, or minority, they are encouraged to form good relations with the People of the Book.

The modern Islamic scholars develop their understanding of the People of the Book further. Each scholar employs *tafsīr* in order to lay the foundation for discerning the subsumed meaning of the Qur’ān in light of modern context. For Siddiqui, the British model of migration and dialogue uncovers the disparity between Christians and Muslims whereby Islam affords the People of the Book respect, based on the origins of their teaching. Unfortunately, he finds little reciprocation from Christians. This attitude can be seen throughout the history of Christian imperialism and mission that continues even with secularisation. In addition, Christians today are perceived to be more likely to act as the mouthpiece of secular values than promote the teachings of Christ. Nevertheless, Siddiqui

¹³³ Scholars, "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to:," 14. Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*, 19.

¹³⁴ Scholars, "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to:," 14-15.

encourages Muslims to engage respectfully with the People of the Book for reasons of faith and for the betterment of society.

Each of the modern scholars discusses the treatment of non-Muslims in Muslims countries. Siddiqui elaborates on the implications of *shari'ah* and *dhimmi*. He notes that the application of *shari'ah* is intentionally vague. The goal is simply to improve society. Siddiqui points out that Christians theologically have a right as People of the Book, to contribute to the process of governance. Unfortunately, sometimes the relationship between Muslims and Christians are less than harmonious. In spite of the spectrum of coexistence between Muslims and the People of the Book, the People of the Book are not expected to refrain from spreading the message of the Gospel. Siddiqui accepts that witnessing to the Gospel is a requirement of Christianity. However, the goal of dialogue and *da'wah* need not be formal conversion, but may result in a positive change in understandings of the religious other. In the ideal, dialogue should promote good and eradicate evil. Siddiqui notes that with verses that promote dialogue like *sūrah Āl-Imran* 3:64 and *sūrat al-ankabut* 29:46 God is central and “God is the prime motivator in dialogue.”

Ramadan suggests a poetic image of continually returning to the source for guidance when negotiating the present. He states that Western Muslims need to differentiate between what is necessary and what is open for discussion. A fundamental tool for finding the balance in life between *darura*, necessity and *rukhas*, exemptions, is found in understanding the social teachings of the Qur'ān in their particular context. Ramadan's use of the term People of the Book is in keeping with Al-Qaradawi and Siddiqui even if employed with greater reserve. He encourages Christians to follow their religion, citing *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):68. Ramadan sees the role of the Torah, Gospels and Qur'ān as refining how 'we' understand our own sacred texts and God. Ramadan, like Siddiqui, sees People of the Book as potential partners. He councils against simplistic interpretations of difficult verses that label People of the Book as *kufir* like *sūrah Āl-Imran* (3):19 and (3):85. He contends that closer examination of the context of these verses helps identify the root issues concerned and their universal trajectory. This trajectory includes Muslims and the People of the Book working together to counter the secularisation of society.

Esack is far more willing to challenge the claims of those who declare that they are believers based solely on their declaration of Islam, or Christianity. Esack ventures the idea that the People of the Book just happened to be the 'religious other' that Muhammad came into contact with. Still, their willingness, or not, to coexist with Islam in the days of

Muhammad provides a template for interaction with ‘believers’ to this day. Through the lens of a hermeneutic of liberation, other less conventional social groups may in fact better serve the aims of a just society than the traditional People of the Book. In this regard Esack is willing to cooperate with people advocating for social justice who are nontheists and unconventional on issues of *zinā*’, ostensibly with the intent through contact of encouraging the promotion of religious values.

If further proof were needed to underline the importance of *ahl al-kitāb* as a tool for advancing relations between Muslims and Christians then Pope Benedict XVI’s address at the University of Regensburg could not have been better gauged. The *Common Word* open letter epitomises the importance Muslims place on Qur’ānic understanding of *ahl al-kitāb* for coexistence with the religious other. The large support garnered throughout the Muslims world to speak with one voice and to call upon the teachings of *sūrah Āl-‘Imran* (3):64 to remind Christians that Muslims respect Christianity and wish to be seen as on the side of Jesus, the Christ and Messiah speaks volumes.

Chapter 5. Contemporary Muslim-Christian Engagement with the People of the Book

5.1. Introduction

Since the *Common Word* initiative there have been many interfaith conferences around the world.¹³⁵ This chapter examines some post-*Common Word* texts from three Christian and one Muslim scholar to see how they use the term People of the Book in theological, social and political spheres.

The scholars examined are well aware of the meaning and significance of the term *ahl al-kitāb*. There is an acceptance of the value that it affords, but also awareness of its limitations. For this reason the scholars suggest alternatives, or develop the term beyond its traditional use, not as a means of setting the term aside, but as a way of building on the strength of the appellation in order to bring Muslims and Christian closer together.

5.2. From People of the Book to People of the Word (Daniel A. Madigan)

The first scholar examined in this section dealing with modern Christian use of the term *ahl al-kitāb* is Daniel A. Madigan. Madigan is an Australian Jesuit based in Georgetown University, Washington, D. C. He has a keen interest in interfaith dialogue especially in issues relating to coexistence and mutual respect between Muslims and Christians. He is an avid speaker and has published many books and articles relating to these topics, including a commentary on the *A Common Word* initiative.¹³⁶

In *People of the Word: Reading John with a Muslim* (2007) Madigan appreciates the appellation *ahl al-kitāb* and its potential to inspire interfaith dialogue. Madigan translates *ahl al-kitāb* as *People of Scripture*, just as in the *Common Word*.¹³⁷ He notes that the use of this appellation presents both opportunities and obstacles for Muslim-Christian dialogue. On the one hand the term offers Christians, as well as Jews, what he refers to as a special status within Islam that may be called upon to engage in dialogue with Muslims. On the other hand, the term implies a certain polemic, whereby according to Islam, Jews and Christians have somehow corrupted the revelation entrusted to them, which Madigan

¹³⁵ Volf, Talal, and Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word Between Us And You*. Some of the initiatives are described on pages 13-15, 104-118 and responses 22-46.

¹³⁶ Daniel A. Madigan, "A Common Word Between Us And You: Some Initial Reflections," *Thinking Faith: The Online Jesuit Journal*, no. January (2008): 1-6.

¹³⁷ Daniel Madigan, *JMS (2): Resonating With The Word* (Elmhurst College Chicago: 2014). Here the term scripture is preferred since "scripture functions in ways differently from most books."

maintains can inhibit dialogue. Further, the term *ahl al-kitāb* potentially obscures the fact that as Madigan asserts, “Jesus is not simply the bringer of the Word, but that he himself is the Word and message.”¹³⁸ For this reason Madigan suggests entering into dialogue with Muslims as the *People of the Word*.¹³⁹ Madigan contends that this term is appropriate since Muslims and Christians both recognise the presence and expression of the divine Word, albeit in the text of the Qur’ān and the person of Jesus respectfully.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, John’s Gospel, with its highly developed theology of the Word, is an ideal catalyst for Muslims and Christians to begin a dialogue towards better understanding of each other.¹⁴¹

Through his commentary on the prologue of John’s Gospel Madigan demonstrates the profundity of John’s understanding of the incarnation of Jesus from and within Jewish tradition, to the Word’s universal *kerygma*.¹⁴² Madigan notes that John’s Gospel begins with a phrase that brings the reader back to Genesis, *wa-yomer* “and He said...” This phrase occurs eleven times in the first thirty verses of Genesis, affirming that it is through God’s speaking that God realizes creation.¹⁴³ Therefore John’s Gospel makes clear that the ‘Word’ of God is a very powerful “something.”¹⁴⁴ It is in fact the ‘Word’ of God that comes to the prophets.¹⁴⁵

Madigan, citing Daniel Boyarin, devotes considerable effort to examining how the use of the term ‘word’ or *logos* in John’s Gospel might be considered within the first century drift in Judaism from an understating of God’s Word, as a verb *amar*, in Hebrew, to a noun, *memra*, in Aramaic.¹⁴⁶ Here, God’s Word is increasingly thought of as *deuteros theos*.¹⁴⁷ Within the Greek speaking Jewish world of Philo emerged a *logos* theology that Boyarin compares with John’s use of *logos*, increasingly seen as in relationship with God, as an attribute, or a form of binitarianism, or even a hypostasis.¹⁴⁸ In fact Boyarin, citing Hannah and Niehoff, who both cite Philo, identify an Aristotelian description of an uncreated divine Word, yet not identical to God, as found in Deuteronomy 5, or more appropriately, in John, “...What God was the Word was...”¹⁴⁹

¹³⁸ Daniel A. Madigan, "People of the Word: Reading John with a Muslim " *Review and Expositor* 104, no. Winter (2007): 91-93.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*: 81, 91-83. The *People of the Word*, meaning for Christians the Word-made-Flesh.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 92.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*: 82.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*: 82, 83, 92.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*: 83.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 84.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John," *The Harvard Theological Review* 94, no. 3 (2001): 243-284. Cf. discussion of *Memra* 246, 252-261.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 249-252. This drift from verb to noun occurs in spite of rabbinic opposition.

¹⁴⁸ Madigan, "People of the Word," 84-86.

¹⁴⁹ Boyarin, "Gospel of the Memra," 249-250.

Following an intricate examination of the beginning of John's Gospel Madigan establishes the foundation for drawing parallels with Islamic theology. John's Gospel expresses the relationship between God and the 'Word' as, *pros ton theon*, "was with God."¹⁵⁰ *Pros*, implies a movement towards God, not simply beside God. Madigan explains the phrase *kai theos en ha logos*, and [a] god was logos, states that the logos is divine.¹⁵¹ The phrase implies that "God is not reducible to the Word, yet the Word is no less divine than is God," this is reminiscent to the description offered by Abū Qurrah in the third chapter.¹⁵² From here Madigan makes the link with *memra* as the aspect of the divine that is in relationship with humanity. It is through the *memra* that God creates, reveals and saves.¹⁵³ Madigan examines how in Islam the speech, or Word of God, *kalām Allah*, is understood as an essential attribute, *sifa dhātiyya*. The Word of God acts in a manner reminiscent to Genesis, "God said... and it was so."¹⁵⁴ Hence for Judaism, Christianity and Islam the Word of God is an essential aspect of faith. For instance, in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):117 "The originator of the heavens and the earth when He determines something, just says to it, 'Be' and it is."¹⁵⁵ He notes the similarities between the Islamic tradition with John's prologue, where the divine attribute of *kalām* is described as, neither identical with God nor other than God."¹⁵⁶ A translation of the Greek into English renders John's opening verse, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."¹⁵⁷

In Islam, as in Christianity, *kalām*, the Word is an eternal attribute of the divine. In John verse 2, the Word existed in relationship with God in the beginning unlike anything created. The Word is not a possession, neither is it a part of God, since God is not divisible by parts. Further Madigan notes that just as with Judaism, Muslims and Christians face the challenge of how to appropriately express the relationship between the *kalām* of God and God.¹⁵⁸ The dilemma expressed by Madigan is very similar in tone to the debates of the 9th-12th centuries examined previously.

¹⁵⁰ Madigan, "People of the Word," 84.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.: 85.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.: 85-86.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.: 86.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. Madigan does not provide a source for his comment. However, Al-Nasafī's Islamic Creed offers a rendition of this formula. See Austin P. Evans, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzāni on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, ed. Austin P. Evans, trans. Earl Edgar Evan, vol. XLIII, Records of civilization Sources and Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 49, 58.

¹⁵⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 1056.

¹⁵⁸ Madigan, "People of the Word," 86-87.

Through John 1:4-5 Madigan compares the Word with *life*, *light* and *darkness*. These verses state, using the pronoun ‘him and it’ for the Word, that “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” Most importantly Madigan demonstrates that in the Qur’ān God undertakes these activities. “...That [God] He may bring you forth from darkness to light...” *sūrat al-ahzab* (33):43; God is the light of the heavens and the earth...Light upon light. God guides to His light whom He will” *sūrat an-nur* (24):35. In addition, just as with John’s Gospel, the darkness is no match for the light, as in *sūrat ar-rad* (16):13 and *sūrat fatir* (35):20.

There are other points of commonality that involve the role of the prophets bringing the message of God’s light into the world. John the Baptist (John verses 6-8), as Moses and Muhammad, bore witness to the light.¹⁵⁹ This harbingering of the light into the world has two points of commonality: the Light of God and the reception of the light. The prophets throughout history have acted as vehicles of God’s word, inviting humanity toward the light of God, which is constantly attempting to reconnect with humanity, or restore humanity’s relationship with God. More often than not, as the Qur’ān reminds the reader, the reception is disbelief, ingratitude, *kufur*.¹⁶⁰ For John’s Gospel those who accept the Word become “children of God.”¹⁶¹ Madigan notes that this concept can be divisive. However, he also notes, (as Rashid Rida in the first chapter of this dissertation) that the word ‘child’ can imply metaphorical closeness, as with the Arabic use of *ibn*, for ‘son’ rather than *walad* with its more biological connotations.¹⁶²

John 1:14 introduces two contentious terms; ‘only begotten’ and ‘father.’ Although these terms are obvious points of contention within Islam, they may similarly be treated as expressions of faith rather than literal truths. Interestingly, Madigan suggest that John’s, *hōs monogenous para patros*, “as of a father’s only son,” probably does not intend the same sense that the phrase will come to have in later generations.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, Madigan recommends that the phrase ‘begotten’ is retained as a Christian attempt to express the relationship between God’s Word and God’s self. Christians imply, Madigan posits, to communicate the point that God’s Word and self share the same nature. The term ‘begotten’ has fairly obvious limits as an analogy, since a parent and a child have two different natures. What Christians wish to express is the relationship between the Word and God’s self is very similar to the Islamic description of an eternal divine attribute

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.: 87-88.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.: 88-89.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.: 89.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.: 90.

discussed above, or God's eternal self-expression, *kalām nafsi*.¹⁶⁴ Consequently Madigan boldly suggests that rather than defending a creedal position, Christians should invite Muslims to work with Christians to grapple with the theological challenge to express the relationship between God and his Word. As Madigan posits,

We are both confronted with the double necessity of recognizing that the Word has its origin in God, but also that it is not originated in the way anything else is. In this way, we learn the limits of traditional theological language, or perhaps better, the metaphoric and analytical nature of that language. Muslims, also learn that Christians have not fallen back into a pagan belief in gods who beget other gods.¹⁶⁵

Through *People of the Word: Reading John with a Muslim* Madigan pioneers a faithful alternative to *ahl al-kitāb* as a basis for entering into dialogue with Muslims. As People of the Word, Muslims, Christians and Jews may explore the perhaps indescribable unity of God's Word and God's self. Although the remit of the article is decisively theological the ramifications are potentially far more profound, since dialogue leads to understanding, and through mutual understanding to better social and political relations. Rather than pit our scripture, which only obtains its importance because the believing Christian community has judged that the words of scripture put us in touch with Christ, against their scripture, Madigan suggests a closer examination of the *Word* behind the text, the subject of the text, and our experience of the Word-made-Flesh.¹⁶⁶

Madigan in his 2008 response to the *Common Word* document further clarifies some points raised above. He notes the motivation behind the writing of the *Common Word* is the realisation that peace, even the existence of humanity, depends on the two largest religions in the world reaching not only a political détente, but theological common ground as well.¹⁶⁷ Muslims see this common ground between the *ahl al-kitāb* in the joint commands to love God and to love neighbour. He suggests that *A Common Word* is in keeping with the attempts of the Vatican's *Nostra Aetate*, "the bracketing of differences in order to work together for justice and peace in the world."¹⁶⁸ As such *A Common Word* is in keeping with the Amman project that seeks by weight of authoritative voice, to reclaim the position assumed by extremist voices. Therefore the audience of *A Common Word* includes not only Christian leaders, but also Islamic leaders.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.: 91. This term bears a very strong resemblance to Sulaymān's *qah-emah binafis-ha*, God's self-existing substance examined in the previous chapter.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.: 93.

¹⁶⁷ idem, "Some Initial Reflections," 1-6.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.: 2.

As laudable as the *A Common Word* endeavour is, Madigan questions whether Christians should (in the air of communality) accept the reduction of Christian faith to verses from Leviticus and Deuteronomy as a summation of faith. Since, as Madigan discusses, Jesus' response in the Gospel to the greatest commands are invariably responses to trick questions.¹⁶⁹ Rather than accept the premise that our commonality is based on "the love of God," meaning humanity's obligatory love of the creator, we should acknowledge that God is the source of this love. The implications are then that God loves us, therefore we should love God and neighbour as explicated in 1 John 4:10, John 15:9 and 13:34. This focus on God loving the sinner regardless of fault or failure as the basis for loving our neighbour, although present in Islam, is crucially missing from the *A Common Word* document.¹⁷⁰

Another concern is found in the terms of acceptance. Madigan notes that there is a pre-condition that Muslims are not against Christians. This pre-condition is citing from *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):8 "so long as they do not wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes..."¹⁷¹ However, this "problematic point" is not an impediment to the larger goal of both *A Common Word* and *Nostra Aetate*; an appeal to common elements of our respective faiths to move beyond theory to praxis. Madigan contends a necessary development is to go beyond talk of loving God and neighbour to a dialogue of mutual repentance, of *mea culpa*.¹⁷²

5.3 Lover of Islam, Believing in Jesus (Paolo Dall'Oglio)

The next text examined is by Paolo Dall'Oglio. He is an Italian Jesuit who has been living in Syria for more than 30 years. At the time of writing, *Daesh*, or the self-professed "Islamic State" are holding him hostage.¹⁷³ In his book, *Amoureux de l'Islam, Croyant en Jésus* Dall'Oglio gives a fascinating insight into the heart and mind of a man who has

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.: 3. Citing Matthew 22:35; Luke 10:25 and Mark 12:34.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.: 3-4. For example see *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):54, or *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):7.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: 5. This current author would like to register that the Muslim pre-condition is quite reasonable as well as spiritually responsible. As long as Christians allow war to be progressed in their name Muslims are denied meaningful partners in peace. There are numerous examples around the world where Christian tacit or complicate collaboration with unjust wars is nothing short of infidelity to the teachings of Christ.

¹⁷² Ibid. On other occasions refers to the next *Common Word*, *mea culpa*. Cf. Daniel Madigan, *JMS 2014 (01): A Word in Common* (Elmhurst College Chicago: World Community of Christian Meditation 2014).

¹⁷³ Cf.: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/islamic-state-syria-father-paolo-dalloglio-alive-raqqa-according-isis-defector-1525076> and <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/02/29/the-mysterious-fate-of-the-dissident-italian-priest-snatched-by-isis.html> Accessed 8 May 2016.

dedicated his life to building bridges between Muslims and Christians.¹⁷⁴ The stated goal for *Amoureux de l'Islam* is to present Islam as a religion with a wealth of values capable of nourishing our emerging global society.¹⁷⁵ Here Dall'Oglio has some very interesting things to say concerning the Patriarch Abraham, the Incarnation, and the Crucifixion, the prophethood of Muhammad and the syncretism of faiths.

To begin Dall'Oglio is part of a religious community in Syria that lives in Deir Mar Moussa the Abyssinian, an ancient monastery dating back to the 6th century. Before the civil war it acted as a centre for interfaith dialogue.¹⁷⁶ The modern use of the monastery is in harmony with its past. On the entrance wall of the Monastery are the remains of a salutation that could easily come from the Qur'ān, "In the name of God the Most Merciful and Compassionate."¹⁷⁷ The ecumenical community that lives and worship there have taken the name *al-Khalil*, the Friend of God, the Biblical and Qūr'anic title for the patriarch Abraham. There the hospitality of Abraham is more than just symbolic.¹⁷⁸ Those who visit are expected to join in the daily contemplative Syriac monastic life of prayer, learn about Islam and Arabic.¹⁷⁹ Dall'Oglio's hope for Mar Moussa is that it will provide a template for other Christian Churches in Muslims lands.¹⁸⁰

Dall'Oglio expresses his knowledge of the term *ahl al-kitāb* in the second chapter titled, *Ma relation à l'Islam*. He candidly discusses his admiration for Islam, describing his temptation to convert as a young Jesuit following Friday prayers in a mosque in Bosra. He defines his relationship with Islam as dual membership that finds its source in Christ and a Church in motion.¹⁸¹ Dall'Oglio's use of the term *ahl al-kitāb* is limited. He identifies Islam as a religion that has always respected other religions. This tolerance he says, "is based on knowledge of the fact that God established these communities..."¹⁸²

Islamic tolerance for *ahl al-kitāb* is in contrast to the historical Church that Dall'Oglio describes as imperialistic and totalitarian. Throughout *Amoureux de l'Islam*

¹⁷⁴ Paolo Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux de L'Islam, Croyant en Jésus* trans. d'Églantine Gabaix-Hailé, 1 ed. (Paris: Les Éditions l'Atelier, Éditions Ouvrièrs, 2009). Henceforth this book is referred to in this dissertation as *Amoureux De L'Islam*.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 170-171. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, Dall'Oglio is a captive of Isis. <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/07/27/pope-francis-prays-for-jesuit-kidnapped-in-syria/> accessed 7/11/15.

¹⁷⁶ Guyonne de Montjou, *Mar Moussa, un monastère, un homme, un désert* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2006), 23-25.

¹⁷⁷ Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 14. These are two attributes of God. They are written as calligraphy at the beginning of this thesis.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 19, 174.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 21-28.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 31-32. In fact he tells the young Imam that he has been a *Muslim* since birth, echoing the response of the historical Christians of Najran to the call to Islam while staying with the Muhammad.

¹⁸² Ibid., 44. Only Judaism and Christianity are mentioned specifically.

Dall'Oglio expresses his understanding of the term *ahl al-kitāb*. For instance in chapter three of *Une Église de l'Islam*, he discusses three Qur'ānic verses that mention the People of the Book in relation to the primacy of God as judge of mankind and their deeds.¹⁸³ Other times under the subheading of *Good neighbours in spite of discrimination*, he discusses the unequal rights in marriage whereby a Muslim man can marry a Christian woman, but a Christian man cannot marry a Muslim woman without changing his religion.¹⁸⁴ Therefore it is safe to say that the concept of *ahl al-kitāb* is an important part of Dall'Oglio's unarticulated knowledge of Islam, but it is not a concept he chooses to employ to promote dialogue and improve relations. In fact, he employs alternative terms like *People of God* and *People of the Prophets* just as often.¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, there is not enough information given to discern if Dall'Oglio's reluctance to use the term *ahl al-kitāb* is due to its limitation, as with Daniel Madigan, or if it is because his audience is primarily western Christian and therefore explaining the concept to westerners would entail a separate discussion in itself. To promote dialogue and better relations Dall'Oglio prefers dialogue in a framework of modern, evolving pluralist society using a plethora of means.¹⁸⁶ Although *Amoureux de l'Islam* primarily presents theological arguments there are immense social and political ramifications interwoven throughout.

5.3a Social Inculturation and the Sacrament of Good Neighbours

Dall'Oglio describes the Arabic culture as his adopted culture.¹⁸⁷ It should come as no surprise then that inculturation is an important feature of Dall'Oglio's mission as well as that of Mar Moussa; enabling the witness of the Gospel to the host culture. Examples of inculturation include carpets on the floor of the church, removing shoes before prayer and adoption of the Syriac Rite and Arabic as the liturgical language. Most importantly inculturation encourages Muslims and Christians to engage in daily life in a way that brings out the best of each religion.¹⁸⁸ The practice of hospitality and Dall'Oglio's desire to

¹⁸³ Ibid., 52. *Sūrat al-baqarah* 2:62, Cf. discussed in chapter one; *sūrat al-mā'idah* 5:69; and *sūrat al-hajj* 22:17. These verses discuss the communities of the People of the Book as well as polytheists.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 53-54. The right for a Muslim man to marry a woman from the People of the Book is intended to promote better relations between Muslims and Christians, but the right still implies the superiority of Islam over Christianity as the perfected religion. Therefore, the bias favours Islam.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 138-139. Cf. People of God Conference. 144. People of the Prophets offered by Christian de Chergé.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 54. Examples of subtle cultural discrimination cited by Dall'Oglio against Muslims by the West include the prominence of Christian heritage, dietary laws, and dress, even the calendar.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 22.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 66, 79.

inculturate the Church and message of Christ within an otherwise Muslim society rely primarily on the basic Qur'ānic acceptance of Christians as *ahl al-kitāb*.¹⁸⁹

Yet, inculturation does not imply absorption or reduction or mixing of core values, but rather a Church that is willing to exist lovingly and harmoniously amongst Muslims.¹⁹⁰ In fact Dall'Oglio aspires to transform the Church “*aller vers*” a Church for Islam.¹⁹¹ He draws inspiration from Fr. Matteo Ricci's work in China during the 16th century. Since, as John Paul II notes, Fr. Matteo Ricci encouraged the Church to be “*Chinois avec les Chinois*.”¹⁹² Dall'Oglio thus tries to be as close to Islamic culture and beliefs as he can.¹⁹³ Through greater empathy, Christians in the Middle East are able to trust the work of the Spirit with regard to difficult theological questions concerning, for example, the prophethood of Muhammad. Christians are able to “leave it to God alone.”¹⁹⁴

Within the framework of inculturation, Dall'Oglio discusses the issue of conversion. Dall'Oglio believes Muslims and Christians should be free to convert if they wish.¹⁹⁵ Yet, this present author senses that Dall'Oglio would prefer that the lines between Islam and Christianity become somewhat vague.¹⁹⁶ For instance, he prefers the word “adhesion,” since, as he sees it, adhesion is to a way, or a teaching, whereas, conversion is from sin to God. Consequently Fr. Paul does not desire to convert Muslims to Christianity; rather he desires to bring every soul to God.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, while there are some Muslims who are led by the Spirit to Christ, many choose not to be baptised.¹⁹⁸ Conversely, there are others who are baptised as Christians, but outwardly Muslim, since it is forbidden for a Muslim to convert to Christianity.¹⁹⁹ Not surprisingly, these Muslim-Christians describe their experience of Jesus as saviour differently from the Jesus they experience in Islam. Some do not sense that it is necessary to believe in Christ's torture, crucifixion and

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 169-170.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Cf. 49-68

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 30, 49. This Church for Islam is in contrast to an Islamo-Christian Church discussed here.

¹⁹² Ibid., 80. In addition Dall'Oglio mentions 1 Corinthians 9:20-23.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 33-34.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 28, 81. This empathy makes Muslims part of the family of Mar Moussa. An important lesson of inculturation in China for the Jesuits, based on their experience of the work of the Holy Spirit, is that they do not engage in arguments on whether or not Confucius is destined for heaven or hell as they may have in times past.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 88.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 139-140.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 85-88. Dall'Oglio acknowledges that not every person who wishes to convert is sincere. Cf. 86.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 85-86, 90, 93. Interestingly, Meggitt explains Early Quakers acknowledge that they may have enjoyed good relations with Muslims due to the fact that they did not practice outward sacraments, including Baptism. Cf. Meggitt, *Early Quakers and Islam*.

¹⁹⁹ Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 88-89, 93.

death.²⁰⁰ These Muslim-Christians therefore, are a natural bridge between the two faiths. He hopes they will help develop a harmony between the Qur'ān and Christian teachings.²⁰¹

Through inculturation Muslims and Christians are inevitably playing a greater role in each other's lives including occasions for prayer. Dall'Oglio identifies the opportunity of 'Communal Prayer' as occasionally awkward. Nevertheless, there are times when Muslims and Christians can and do take the name of God together in praise. One way is when remembering God, *dhikr*. This remembering takes place before and after a meal or conference. Other times include reciprocal presence as guests at each other's services. Here Dall'Oglio says it is important to have pre-established boundaries. The third occasion includes spontaneous prayer, keeping in mind that, "All authentic prayer is sustained by the Spirit of God who is mysteriously present in the hearts of all men."²⁰²

5.3b Theological Considerations

Dall'Oglio chooses several hermeneutical devices to convey his hopes for greater understanding and harmony between Christians and Muslims. These devices do not contradict the lessons surrounding the appellation *ahl al-kitāb*. In many ways devices like returning to the faith of Abraham, the reappraisal of the prophethood of Muhammad and the Hermeneutics of Love all compliment the nuanced issues raised by the traditional commentary of *ahl al-kitāb*.

Abraham, Hospitality and a Model of Faith

The place of Ishmael in Arab culture and Islam is both ethnic and symbolic.²⁰³ God's fulfillment of the promises made to the patriarch Abraham potentially plays a major unifying role, according to Dall'Oglio. This is a different approach than the approach taken by many Christians who look for deficiencies in Islamic perceptions of Biblical themes.²⁰⁴ In Islam, Abraham is also the "Friend of God," where God takes the initiative and offers his alliance. Abraham is a model of faith and patriarch of the Arabs through his son

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 117.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 90. See further Muslim-Christians 55-6.

²⁰² Ibid., 91, fn. 97. Citing John Paul II.

²⁰³ The link between Arabs and Abraham is discussed above in chapter two of this dissertation, *Al-jāhiliyya, Revisiting the People of the Book in the Time of Ignorance*. Louis Massignon, using his moral imagination, draws spiritual strength through contemplation of the anguish that must have been experienced by Abraham, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael. Their suffering and joys go largely unrecorded by historians. Ibid., 76.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 72-73. For example, the lack of discussion of the Messianic promise, whereas in Islam the Alliance is loyalty to God only.

Ishmael. Therefore through Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur'ān the circuit of the three prayers of Abraham is complete.²⁰⁵ Dall'Oglio contends that understanding the role of Abraham in Islam is the key for Christians trying to understand Islam.²⁰⁶ To this end Dall'Oglio examines the question, in what way is it possible to speak of an Abrahamic ascendance of Islam, or create a Judeo-Christian Islamic community of Abraham.

This trajectory views God's promises to Abraham as running parallel to promises made to Isaac. Dall'Oglio is not trying to erase or minimise the differences, but would like Christians to consider that God did not abandon Ishmael and Hagar, nor did He chastise them.²⁰⁷ Through reading the Qur'ān it is possible to appreciate that Muhammad entered into contact and engaged with the Bible at a moment in time. Through the Qur'ān Christians can discover that Islam is the inheritance of the promises made by God to Abraham regarding his son Ishmael.²⁰⁸ This theme is discussed further in chapter VI of *Amoureux de l'Islam* where Dall'Oglio challenges Christians who are interested only in Sarah and not the fate of Hagar and Ishmael, since they were sent to wander the desert like displaced people.

Although Vatican II highlights some of the common ground between Islam and Christianity, for Dall'Oglio the authenticity of Islam is found in the conscience of Muslims.²⁰⁹ For instance Lumen Gentium 16 speaks of the faith of Abraham, monotheism, the experience of Divine Mercy and similar eschatology. There are, however, differences. In Islam the centre of experience is with Muhammad. The Messianic promises found in the Bible are absent. For Islam the theme is loyalty to God alone. For Dall'Oglio this represents a deepening of the theology of history and of existence. This enlargement of salvation through Islam is the work of the Holy Spirit. Dall'Oglio explains, however, that this view is not a challenge to the Church's essential understanding of the salvific role of the divine through the person of Jesus Christ. The role of Christ is as a source of faith that remains open to each person, in all places and all times.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 39-40, 131.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 69.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 74. Here Dall'Oglio is citing an opinion given by Cardinal Carlo Mario Martini. Cf. fn. 9.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 71-72. See further *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):124, 126 & 128-9.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 72. For instance Lumen Gentium 16 speaks of the faith of Abraham, monotheism, the experience of Divine Mercy and similar eschatology.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 73, 110, 115. This draws upon understanding Jesus as the pre-eternal Word of God. Just as a matter of interest I detect sentiments akin to the Patriarch Timothy before Caliph Mahdi here mentioned in the previous chapter.

Challenging Traditional Positions

A major theme of *Amoureux de l'Islam* concerns the degree to which Christians are willing to accept the mission of Muhammad. For non-Muslims familiar with Islam this question is easier to answer than it is for the Church due to its traditional and dogmatic position.²¹¹ Historically however, the first Christians that came into contact with Muhammad could not decide whether or not he was a prophet. Dall'Oglio, aware of the historical context of Muhammad, points out that part of the problem is that the historical context includes the internal fighting amongst Christians regarding a number of heresies. For this reason perhaps, John of Damascus describes Islam as a new heresy from Arabia.²¹² Today Dall'Oglio posits that it should be possible for Christians to accept the prophethood of Muhammad.²¹³ His argument is multi-pronged and includes a description of what it means to be a prophet, leading on to developments in the Church's teaching regarding re-examination of types of prophets and Biblical narratives, in addition to taking on board the results of Muhammad's mission.²¹⁴

While examining attributes of prophets it is clear that Muhammad fulfils some of the criteria, as outlined by the Church, even if questions remain regarding other aspects. If the Qur'ān and Islam are outside the alliance with Abraham and Isaac, is there a precedent for viewing Muhammad as a non-Biblical prophet? Dall'Oglio makes the case by listing a number of well-known prophetic figures that are not part of the alliance with Abraham. These include Noah, Balaam, Job, Lemuel, and Cyrus. In addition, there are Biblical passages that call for the gift of prophecy to be extended to all peoples.²¹⁵ The Second Vatican Council allows for such a possibility and declares that the Church does not reject anything that is true in other faiths.²¹⁶ This position represents a fundamental shift in attitude from centuries of condemnation.²¹⁷ Perhaps, Dall'Oglio asserts, it is time for the Church to promote a positive image of Islam and allow for people to recognise Muhammad as a prophet without imposing acceptance.²¹⁸

²¹¹ Ibid., 95. Here the "Church" is the Roman Catholic Church.

²¹² Ibid., 98. For more discussion of the historical context see 106.

²¹³ Ibid., 100.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 95-108. Outside Church texts Meggitt mentions that historically much of the Islamic sentiment in Europe is based on prejudice without first hand knowledge. Meggitt, *Early Quakers and Islam*, 25-33.

²¹⁵ Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 95-97, 165. Incidentally Isaiah 45:1 declares Cyrus (a non-Jew) God's anointed Messiah, Cf. Kimball, "An Exploration," 14. Also the idea that Muhammad could be consider a prophet since all people may receive the gift of prophesy is discussed by Meggitt above as a reason Quakers could consider Muhammad a prophet.

²¹⁶ Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 98, fn. 95. Referring to *Nostra Aetate*. Ironically Muhammad is not mentioned in the text.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 101.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 99-100.

Yet, for Christians there are serious questions concerning the acceptance of a prophet that does not recognize the incarnation of Jesus, or in his crucifixion and resurrection.²¹⁹ At best, Dall'Oglio believes these issues necessitate Christians contemplate a deeper understanding of the Oneness of God, and to find ways to get beyond the Qur'ānic criticism. He relays the thoughts on the subject of the Incarnation held by an anonymous sheikh, who says that the problem with the Christian description of Jesus as the "Son of God" is that Christians do not understand that we are all children of God. Further, that all creation is "family of God" loved by God, even though man has a special status, "...as viceroy of God in creation, as an eldest son to whom the father has entrusted his property."²²⁰ In addition, Dall'Oglio discusses *sūrah Āl- 'Imran* 3:159 and Colossians 1:15-16, where he compares the similarities between Jesus and Adam as created by God's volition. Dall'Oglio considers the image of angels kneeling before Adam and Jesus. For Muslims, Adam and Jesus are created beings, favoured, but not separate. Further, humanity shares in a greater portion of Divine attributes with God than other forms of creation, such as reason. In this manner it is acceptable to assert that man is created in the image of God.²²¹

Dall'Oglio devotes an entire chapter to the examination of what the crucifixion means for Muslims and Christians.²²² It is not an area where Christians and Muslims will achieve agreement. It is an area however, where we can better understand each other. For Muslims the authoritative witness to the fate of Jesus on that epoch Friday is described in *sūrat an-nisa* (4):157-8. In these verses God elevates Jesus to himself rather than let those who rejected faith kill or crucify him. For Muslims Jesus will return in the future, inaugurate the resurrection and fight the anti-Christ.²²³ An interesting question is whether or not Jesus could be considered a martyr since he intended to die on the cross.²²⁴ From here Dall'Oglio explains the eschatological details are vague. It is not known whether or not Jesus is the Mahdi, or works with the Mahdi, or even if Jesus can be killed in battle by the anti-Christ. If so, Dall'Oglio asks, how is it possible that Jesus' death in battle would be glorious, but unacceptable to die on the cross?²²⁵ For Muslims it is not necessary to

²¹⁹ Ibid., 96. Previous Biblical prophets announce Christ the Son of God who fulfils the law of the prophets. Christians are not waiting for another prophet.

²²⁰ Ibid., 125.

²²¹ Ibid., 125-126.

²²² Ibid., Mort et Résurrection 150-165.

²²³ Ibid., 151.

²²⁴ Ibid., 156.

²²⁵ Ibid., 154.

believe in the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ to have faith in an afterlife, belief in the miracle of the Qur'ān is sufficient.²²⁶

Harmony and Syncretism

Dall'Oglio hopes that the Church will one day embark upon a hermeneutic of interpretation of the Qur'ān and prophethood of Muhammad that will lead to a greater harmonisation of the Bible and the Qur'ān.²²⁷ Dall'Oglio posits that it is important for Christians to keep in mind that Muslims are not only part of the Abrahamic tradition, but that they believe Jesus is the Messiah and wait for his return.²²⁸ If Christians can accept Islam as at least chronologically a post-Christian community then it is possible to focus on the future where Christians as well as Muslims envision the return of Christ. Here there is a future replete with harmony for the final manifestation of Jesus and the inauguration of God's Kingdom.²²⁹

The future reconciliation of the Church with the Muslim world relies on the Spirit of God.²³⁰ Dall'Oglio recognizes the Spirit of God is at work within Islam in spite of the differences between the Church and the Ummah that often make Islam appear to be a rival. The theological differences need to be taken as a catalyst for renewal, for reinterpretation in light of theologies of faith.²³¹ Dall'Oglio considers several functions of Islam in salvation history that Christians should consider. The functions include the last revelation in the Abrahamic tradition and completing the circuit of bringing the children of Ishmael back into the fold. Islam also calls people to faith against the failings of Christians mission in the secularised West. For Dall'Oglio this call to faith is not necessarily a call to convert to Islam as for people to reconnect with their own faith, “...*car le conversion est à Dieu.*”²³²

One way of learning to empathise with Muslims is to consider the results of the prophethood of Muhammad. For Dall'Oglio it is not difficult to admit that Muhammad enjoyed a relationship with God. Muhammad understood his mission was to recall people to an original truth, *fitrah*, and he amassed a large following.²³³ Nevertheless, Dall'Oglio

²²⁶ Ibid., 156-157.

²²⁷ Ibid., 97, 116, 134.

²²⁸ Ibid., 139.

²²⁹ Ibid., 116, 119-120. Dall'Oglio values the potential of eschatology as a unifying force much more than Evangelization. Eschatology draws Muslim and Christian attention to the common future.

²³⁰ Ibid., 35.

²³¹ Ibid., 39.

²³² Ibid., 39-44.

²³³ Ibid., 112. This idea lends itself to viewing the mission of Jesus as *walia*, guardian of the truth.

clearly states that the Grace of Christ affects all souls.²³⁴ Christ is the Eternal Word that empowers all truth for all time.²³⁵ Muhammad's mission includes a call to pluralism that accepts other faiths alongside Islam. These other faiths are historically the People of the Book. Dall'Oglio euphemistically describes this built-in pluralism as the *cross* of Muhammad.²³⁶ When our spiritual experience meets their spiritual experience it might be easier to overlook the paradoxes and contradictions of our traditions, which ironically are in part responsible for our spiritual experiences, "...*même par voie de contradiction et de paradoxe, notre attitude cherche un accès à une expérience spirituelle qui ne peut exister sans cette lettre à dépasser.*"²³⁷

Acceptance of Muhammad as some degree of prophet and an extension of the practice of good neighbours, allows for a rereading of both the Bible and the Qur'an in ways that opens up new horizons.²³⁸ Here Muslims and Christians can remain loyal to their respective teachings yet open to viewing the text of the other as inspired and worthy of consideration.²³⁹ As mentioned above, issues of Christian faith such as the Trinity, Incarnation and Crucifixion are difficult for Muslims to accept. Questions regarding the prophethood of Muhammad are likewise difficult for Christians. Yet through greater knowledge and respect for each other, Muslims and Christians can explore alternative understandings of these issues. Failure to integrate, failure to explore each other's experience of faith is centuries old.²⁴⁰ Perhaps when seeking to understand the experience of faith of the other, Muslims and Christians, can create a common language of dialogue and move beyond the dialogue of the deaf.²⁴¹ Dall'Oglio offers the historical example of St. Francis who said it should be possible to live amongst Muslims and still be Christian.²⁴²

Dall'Oglio considers the political implications of loving God and loving neighbour. One of the clearest products of inculturation is empathy and action.²⁴³ Towards the end of *Amoureux De L'Islam* Dall'Oglio discusses his opinions regarding the state of democracy in the West, comparing the results of valueless secularisation to a tyranny.²⁴⁴ On one

²³⁴ Ibid., 129.

²³⁵ Ibid., 110.

²³⁶ Ibid., 106.

²³⁷ Ibid., 117, 120.

²³⁸ Ibid., 121-134.

²³⁹ Ibid., 106.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 68. Nayla Tabbara explores this issue more deeply below.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 142. A great example is when John Paul II while visiting a mosque cited the Qur'an.

²⁴² Ibid., 43, 84, 128. Other notable examples discussed are Louis Massignon, Charles de Foucard, and Christian de Chergé.

²⁴³ Paolo Dall'Oglio, *La Rage et la Lumière: Un Prêtre dans la Révolution Syrienne*, trans. d'Églantine Gabaix-Hailé, 1 ed. (Ivry-sur-Seine: Les Éditions l'Atelier, Éditions Ouvrières, 2013), 127.

²⁴⁴ Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 170.

occasion Dall'Oglio cites a friend, Sheikh Yasser Hafez, concerning his observations of European politics. Sheikh Hafez notes that even though Europe likes to say it is pro-Arab, Europe always sides with the enemies of the Arabs (who are primarily Muslim). When asked about democracy Sheikh Hafez says he is disappointed with the Western model, but considers democracy still possibly the best model, if it is tailored to suit different cultures and situations.²⁴⁵ Dall'Oglio believes that Christians in this ever-increasing global society should make friends with Muslims. He says that Muslims have a lot to offer in terms of values that the West are losing. Instead of dwelling on past differences Muslims and Christians should focus on building a more spiritual future together.²⁴⁶

5.4 Divine Hospitality: Foundations for Interreligious Coexistence. (Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara)

The last publication examined in this dissertation is *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane* by Fadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara, a Maronite priest and a Sunni scholar.²⁴⁷ Jean-Marc Aveline states in the preface that *L'hospitalité Divine* introduces a new approach to interfaith dialogue, “*théologies en dialogue*.” With *théologies en dialogue* exists “*la communion spirituelle*” between believers of different religions where theological questions faithfully translate into terms of everyday life.²⁴⁸ The strength of this approach is that it does not rely on apologetic or polemic confrontation. Rather *théologies en dialogue* encourages a growing understanding and appreciation of the religious other as a companion on a long journey. This approach promotes the idea that the religious other, without reduction or syncretism of beliefs, is genuinely part of God's plan and that “*la foi est plus un cheminement qu'une identité*.”²⁴⁹ As the authors see it, theology is responsible for providing answers for religious diversity in order to promote the common good. Failure to do so is paramount to contributing to a

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 171.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. The pages of *Amoureux De L'Islam* do not offer an indication of Dall'Oglio's own political concerns. Perhaps at the time of writing the cracks in Syrian society were not yet fissures, but the deep divisions within Syrian society soon fell prey to larger regional interests. In *La Rage et la Lumière: Un Prêtre dans la Révolution Syrienne* Dall'Oglio explains the origins of the present implications of the conflict and his aspirations for the future. For more information see idem, *La Rage*, 45-62, 155-184.

²⁴⁷ Fadi Daou & Nayla Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine: L'autre dans le dialogue des théologies chrétienne et musulmane*, ed. Prof. Dr. Jean-Marc Aveline, French ed., vol. 1, Colloquium salutis: Études en science et théologie des religions (Berlin: Lit Verlag 2013). Henceforth referred to as *L'hospitalité Divine*.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 13-14. Jean-Marc Aveline is the series director of *Colloquium Salutis: Études En Science Et Théologie Des Religions*. In many ways *théologies en dialogue* is very similar to Dall'Oglio's philosophy of inculturation, divine hospitality and dialogue discussed above.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 14, 19.

hostile environment between people of different faiths.²⁵⁰ A paradigm for this approach is found in the concept of Divine Hospitality exemplified by the patriarch Abraham.

Although there are social and political implications from this tome, its approach is primarily theological. The concept of the People of the Book is critical to *L'hospitalité divine*. Tabbara expounds the Islamic understanding of the People of the Book in order to provide the theological foundation for embracing religious plurality.

Elsewhere membership of the collective People of the Book and understanding of the concept is implied without formal identification as necessarily separate from other religions. This is patently true for Daou who, although he does not use the term, considers the concept germane to the Muslim narrative of other religions. One might assume therefore that when Daou refers to Christians in an Islamic context, or the collective group of Jews, or Christians, he is well aware of how Muslims perceive the collective, i.e., that the concept can be called upon to help build better relations.²⁵¹ Daou further explains,

That Islam recognize the divine origin of my faith; that Islam considers Christianity being in the same category with Islam and Judaism (religions of the book); it reminds me the importance of the word of God (the biblical text and its holy dimension, not just moral or theological ones); that I have a role to explain to Muslims that Christians are not only “*ahl kitāb*” but also “*ahl Allah*” through the incarnated word of God. (Daou, research question.)

Daou promotes *théologies en dialogue*, based on Christian teachings. In this way, he prepares the Christian audience for the Capernaum leap of faith from perceiving God in the other through a traditional Christological lens to recognizing that of God in other faiths as authentically part of God’s plan. In his opening chapter, *Le Christ et Les Autres*, Daou sets the foundation for viewing the faith of others as something that Christ acknowledged through his interactions with people of other faiths, in spite of traditional Jewish reticence. This is demonstrated through his interaction with the Canaanite and Samaritan women as well as the Centurion.²⁵² Here Christ places a greater value on faith than on external practice. This aspect of faith became part of the early Church exemplified by the Apostle Peter in Acts 10:34-35. Yet, Daou acknowledges that the Church has not always been welcoming of other religions, but rather insisted, “outside the Church, no salvation.”²⁵³ Therefore for some Christians, faith as a shared journey with Muslims may require a reappraisal of values. Daou makes the point, that the basis for dialogue with people of

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 17, 18.

²⁵¹ Fr. Fadi Daou, 20 June 2015.

²⁵² Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 24-29.

²⁵³ Ibid., 31.

other faiths is the realization that we are all children of God.²⁵⁴ However, it is through Christ's sacrifice and the work of the Holy Spirit that all humanity benefits.²⁵⁵

5.4a. *Fitra* and the People of the Book

The first appearance of the term People of the Book is found in chapter two, *L'économie du Rappel*. Here Tabbara introduces a discussion of the religious 'other' found in the Qur'ān. Tabbara notes that there are verses that encourage a spirit of tolerance and fraternity as well as verses that foster the need to keep separate and to subjugate the religious other. In order to avoid the charge of contradiction, Tabbara reminds the reader, like Ramadan above, that knowing the context of the verses is of the utmost importance.²⁵⁶ The use of the term People of the Book begins with discussion of *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):135. Here there are Jews and Christians who implore people to join their religions in order to secure salvation. This comes in the wake of the discussion of the pure religion *fitra*.²⁵⁷ Through the discussion of *fitra* Tabbara points out differences between Islam and Christianity in relation to understanding human nature and salvation.²⁵⁸

Another shared theme concerns God sending or guiding all people. In Islam this refers to messengers. This idea is emphasised with the concept of *dhikr*, that all communities have received God's message, as noted in several verses including *sūrat fatir* (35):24. Most importantly, Tabbara comments that some of the messengers are more easily recognised than others. Thus the way is open for Muslims to keep an open mind as to who is sent to call people to believe in God and act justly, since the call to believe in God and act justly is for all people regardless of religion.²⁵⁹ Tabbara defends this argument through examination of verses *sūrat ar-rahman* (55):7-9; *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48; *sūrah Luqmān* (31):28 and *sūrat al-mutaffifin* (83):1-3. Here the onus is on humanity to strive in faith and good works as a response to God's natural calling.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 34. Citing Pastor Wesley Ariarajah.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 37-42. Here Daou draws upon the teaching of *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* 22:2 & 5, as well as several verses from the Gospel of John.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 45-49. Cf. *sūrat al-araf* (7):172. According to the Sufi Scholar Tirmidhi, *fitra* is nothing less than divine anointing, *sibhga*, of all humanity.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 48. For instance the fact that Islam does not subscribe to the concept of original sin and that man only needs to repent and return to original *fitra* for his sins in order to be forgiven. Incidentally, the Religious Society of Friends also denies the theory of original sin. See further Barclay, *Barclay's Apology*, 67-68.

²⁵⁹ Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 48-50, 52.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 52-53.

The Faith of Abraham is inclusive islām

Tabbara examines two ways in which Abraham responds to God. These are through *fitra*, and through revelation. In pre-Islamic times and throughout the Qur'ān the faith of Abraham is regarded as an example for mankind. Those that followed the pure faith of Abraham were called the *hunaḡā*.²⁶¹ Like Esack and Ramadan above, Tabbara notes that the Qur'ān uses *islām* and *Muslim* as terms to refer to those who follow God in the broader sense.²⁶² This logic is then applied to *sūrah Āl- 'Imran* (3):19, which states that the religion before God is *islām*. Tabbara challenges the medieval interpretation of the verse that refers to a reified *islām* rather than the state of faith of a believer. For Tabbara the *sense large*, of *islām* represents “the way,” the spiritual path, followed by all the prophets and individuals. They are called *Muslims* since they placed their trust in God and submitted to Him.²⁶³

In chapter three, *Alliances et Révélations*, Daou discusses different types of alliances between God and man. There is the alliance with Adam. Here God is like a parent. Man, however, refuses to take responsibility and brings disorder into the world. This alliance is followed with a renewed alliance with Noah, where even though man continues to disobey God, God still hopes for a new life for man.²⁶⁴ With Hosea God's relationship with humanity is like a fiancée. The results of God's love for humanity are peace and reward in heaven for those who are faithful. Yet, the revelation of God is love for all humanity and knowledge of God. Through the alliance with Abraham, the universal invitation to a relationship with God is expanded. In Genesis 12:2-3 God promises to bless all people. Through the example of the faith of Abraham and his relationship with Melchizedek, Daou demonstrates that God's alliance with Abraham is not exclusive to other forms of grace in the world. All people are “people of God.”²⁶⁵ This love is exemplified by God's promise and relationship with Hagar and Ishmael. Here even though Hagar is cast away from Abraham's household the Angel of God comforts her and announces God's plans for Ishmael.²⁶⁶

The common feature of these prophetic alliances is that they are external as well as internal, with the emphasis on a personal relationship with God.²⁶⁷ Through Moses and the revelation of the Ten Commandments the People of God are required to uphold a moral

²⁶¹ This subject is extensively covered in this dissertation's chapter concerning *al-jāhiliyya*.

²⁶² Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 56. See for example *sūrat al baqarah* (2):135 or *sūrat an-nisa* 4:125.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 56-58.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63-64. Cf. Genesis 6:1-21 and 9:9-10.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-68. Cf. John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, 1985, fn. 19.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68. Cf. Genesis 16:13. This is a slight variation of Dall'Oglio's revision of the blessings bestowed on Hagar and Ishmael.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

standard as their part of the alliance. God's alliances are permanent.²⁶⁸ Salvation in history is not linear. Salvation does not pass from one revelation to the next replacing the former.²⁶⁹ This point is crucial to Daou's defence of the universality of the mission of Jesus as God's eternal word in contrast to the Islamic concept of abrogation.

In addition to recognizing that both Judaism and Christianity share a common heritage with the faith of Abraham, Daou acknowledges that Islam also follows the faith of Abraham and believes in the same God. This pronouncement is clear in *Lumen Gentium* 16.²⁷⁰ For Daou Islam is the closest to the faith of Abraham, even closer than Judaism and Christianity, since both Judaism and Christianity contain new revelations; they develop the faith of Abraham, whereas Islam heralds a return to the faith of Abraham. This is why in Islam Abraham represents the model of faith, while in Judaism and Christianity Abraham is the Father of Faith.²⁷¹ Daou asks what are the implications of Christians accepting Islam as the new branch on the Abrahamic tree of salvation? He recalls that for Christian de Chergé the joy is accepting Muslims as fellow believers and finding God in their religion and life, with all the questions and perhaps not too many definitive answers. "*J'apprends à mieux découvrir les solidarités et même les complicités d'aujourd'hui, y compris celles de la foi, à ne pas figer l'autre dans l'idée que je m'en fais, que mon Église peut-être m'en a transmis, ni même dans ce qu'il peut dire de lui actuellement, majoritairement.*"²⁷² Most importantly he states that the experience of solidarity with dialogue produces the best environment for interreligious dialogue as well as for reassessing Christian faith.²⁷³

However, there are quite varying ideas of just how Islam fits into the Abrahamic spectrum.²⁷⁴ Daou suggests Islam is not 'son' of the promise like Judaism and Christianity, but is 'son' of an alliance as described in Genesis 17:18-20. Islam affirms and revitalises the religion of Abraham as well as brings its own revelation with the *Sunnah* of Muhammad, "...n'est pas non plus un pur reflet de l'alliance Abrahamique."²⁷⁵ Daou points out that this revelation brings with it challenges as to how it views the status and message of Jesus Christ as well as the fullness of his revelation. Fortunately, these issues do not need to divide Muslims and Christians. he refers to *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):48 as an

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 69-72. Cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16 and *Nostra Aetate*, 4. This is a rejection of earlier Church teaching regarding replacement theory.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 74.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid., 75. This return Daou sees in Hanafism.

²⁷² Ibid., 76. This quote is from Christian de Chergé, *L'invincible espérance*, 171.

²⁷³ Ibid., 76-77. This idea is supported by *Ad Gentes, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*, 22.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 77-79. Daou examines the opinion of two renowned Lebanese Maronite scholars, Fr. Michel Hayek (d. 2005) and Fr. Youakim Moubarac (d.1995). These scholars offer different opinions regarding the place of Ishmael and Islam within the various alliances discussed above.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 81-82.

example of how Muslims and the People of the Book can live together in spite of differences. In a spirit of Abrahamic fraternity, Muslims and Christians should learn to appreciate the differences between the two faiths, just as most people can recognise the work of the Spirit of God in the lives of Mother Teresa, Gandhi, or Badsha Khan.²⁷⁶

In fact, Daou, like Dall'Oglio, posits that it is possible for Christians without complaisance or compromise of fundamental values to afford the Qur'ān as well as Muhammad a degree of recognition as divinely inspired. This follows from the Christian concept of Salvation History, where Islam is seen in the mystery of the light of Jesus as the universal saviour and in the fullness of the revelation of God for humanity. An important detail that Daou wishes to assert is that this recognition challenges the Islamic idea that the Qur'ān in some way takes on a greater importance than Jesus due to chronology, or abrogation, since Daou argues the importance of Jesus is eschatological. In this view Muhammad's prophethood is within the alliance of Abraham. However, for Daou, unlike Dall'Oglio, the Qur'ān is not the uncreated word of God, but the Qur'ān can function as a revelation, or *dhikr*, a reminder, for Christians when it is consistent with the teachings of Abraham. By accepting a limited authenticity for Islam he hopes Muslims will reciprocate by considering the Torah and Gospel as a sort of ancient Testament to the Qur'ān.²⁷⁷

Indeed, Tabbara ventures that Muslims should also consider the scriptures of the People of the Book as a form of *dhikr*. In support Tabbara cites a number of verses including *sūrat al-anbiyā'* (21):7, *sūrah Yunis* (10):94 and *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):44-47.²⁷⁸ Where there are differences between the Qur'ān and the respective texts, she hopes that these differences will be considered matters of interpretation and not, falsification of the text, *al-tahrīf*, since, the Qur'ān sees itself as confirming the scriptures that came before it. Muslims should therefore study the scriptures in order to understand the Qur'ān better.²⁷⁹ Further, Tabbara notes that the Qur'ān mentions that there are People of the Book who accept the revelation given to Muslims as well as their own revelation.²⁸⁰ Ultimately, the Qur'ān does not differentiate between *mu'minūn*; they are *Muslim* whether they are followers of Muhammad or People of the Book.²⁸¹

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 83-85.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 85-88, fn. 34. Dall'Oglio, *Amoureux De L'Islam*, 147.

²⁷⁸ Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 167-168. *Sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):44-47 reflects Jesus' teachings regarding the expiation of sins.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 168-170. Seems to be type errors here listing *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):57 instead of (5):47 and (5):60, instead of (5):50. Cf. Genèvieve Gobillot discusses this idea in *Chrètiens Face à l'islam*. 163 and Gabriel Said Reynolds in *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*. Cf. fn. 10, 11 & 12.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 170. The verse incorrectly listed above as *sūrah āl-Imran* (3):119 instead of (3):199.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 171-172. This opinion is partially based on the work of Fred Donner. Cf. fn. 18.

Jesus is the Son of God and Muhammad is a Prophet

Through Jesus the fullness of God is known.²⁸² Yet, Jesus is not the founder of a new religion, but the founder of the new alliance with all creation as described in 1 Corinthians 15:28 and Colossians 2:9. Through Jesus God speaks, not as a prophet but as the ‘son’ who is heir to all things. For these reasons Christians do not accept that there is a new revelation that is greater. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of history.²⁸³ However, citing the work of Jacques Dupuis, Daou makes the point that this does not prevent the self-revelation through other prophets and other religions. Without attempting to unravel the theological challenges presented by the seeming contradictory beliefs held by Islam and Christianity regarding the role of Jesus, Daou presents the prophethood of Muhammad in line with the universal gift of prophesy following Pentecost found in Acts 2:17.²⁸⁴ Further, Daou shifts the focus to recognising the accomplishments of the prophets and the *One* through whom the prophets are fulfilled. Ultimately, in light of the universal mission of Christ, the role of the Church is to help bridge the gap between other faiths.²⁸⁵

5.4b Evolution of the Relationship with the People of the Book

In the fourth chapter, *L’Islam et les autres religions*, Tabbara discusses the People of the Book through the study of a number of Qur’ānic verses. Citing Aziz Esmail, Tabbara examines the different phases of revelation as well as the context that contributes to the emerging Qur’ānic position regarding not only the People of the Book, but also polytheists.²⁸⁶ Unlike most Qur’ānic scholars, Tabbara divides the phases of revelation into three, not two. These are the first Meccan phase, beginning with the first revelation, the Medinan phase following the migration of Muhammad and a third phase beginning with the triumphant return to Mecca before Muhammad’s death in 632 CE. Viewed in a thematic and chronological order, Tabbara presents an evolution of theological understanding of the religious other generally overlooked in Qur’ānic studies.²⁸⁷

In the first Meccan phase, approximately 609-622 CE, Islam faces persecution. Discussions concerning the People of the Book are characterised predominantly by

²⁸² Ibid., 91.

²⁸³ Ibid., 89-90.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 90-91. Daou notes that the International Theological Commission supports this idea. Cf. fn. 37.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 91-97.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 102. Aziz Esmail interestingly views the Qur’ān as a running commentary and response set in the context and environment of the Hijaz.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 123.

Biblical narrative and reference to previous patriarchs and prophets. Initially, religious diversity is frowned upon, as exemplified by *sūrat al-mu'minun* (23):52-53. However, by the end of the period there is direct contact with People of the Book. This is characterised by a growing attitude of tolerance expressed in *sūrat al-ankabut* (29):46.

In the second phase, the Medinan phase, there is further direct dialogue and acceptance of living individuals and communities from among the People of the Book. Tabbara notes in *sūrat al-baqarah*, (2):62 faith and good works are upheld as meriting salvation.²⁸⁸ An important feature of the period is the call to the People of the Book to join with Muhammad and his followers to form a single faith community. In this wider community Muslims and the People of the Book are required to believe in all the prophets and patriarchs, Jews must accept Jesus as the Messiah, and Christians must relinquish belief in Jesus as God's incarnation and son.²⁸⁹

Through *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):75 Tabbara further addresses the charge of *al-tahrīf*. She notes different interpretations of the verse championed by two highly respected scholars, Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari (d. circa 922 CE) and 'Ali b. Sahl Rabban al-Tabari (d. circa 855 CE). Both scholars accept multiple understandings of the text and context. Yet Rabban al-Tabari makes the point that just as Christians discovered new meanings in the ancient Jewish texts after experiencing Jesus, so too Muslims discovered new meanings in the Gospel in light of Muhammad. An important distinction is that Christians adopted the Jewish texts as their own while Muslims have thus far refrained from embracing the Torah and Gospel as theirs.²⁹⁰ The reason for this omission lies in part with the importance Muslims place on the chronology of the Qur'ān. However, in spite of the greater importance Muslims place on the Qur'ān and in spite of the fact that the historical Jews and Christians of the time did not accept Muhammad as a prophet, the Qur'ān continues to define the measure of faith in terms of belief in one God, belief in the Last Day and the importance of performing good works, not membership of a religious community *per se*.²⁹¹ In fact, following the meeting with the delegation of Christians from Najran, Muhammad, through the revelation of *sūrah Āl-Imran* (3):64 invites People of the Book to compromise, and to a "common word..."²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 104-106.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 104.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 107-108, 161. Cf. Abdelmajid Charfi, *La pensée islamique, rupture et fidélité*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2008, 193-194. This is in spite of the fact that there is no consensus regarding abrogation. 161. See further *sūrat al-mā'idah* 5:68-69.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 109, 113, 123.

²⁹² Ibid., 111.

Tabbara, like other scholars above, notes that criticism of the People of the Book is constrained to personalities and never to the collective. In fact, the Qur'ān never forgets that there are believers amongst the People of the Book and most importantly the collective are never called *kufir*. Disagreements with the People of the Book generally can be divided into three categories concerning dogma, ethics and political contexts. Tabbara asserts that those who apply the term *kufir* to the People of the Book are tampering with the meaning of the Qur'ān.²⁹³ Conversely, however, Tabbara laments the fact that the historical People of the Book did not embrace the early community of Muslims and it is this that has largely contributed to the development of Islam as an autonomous religious community. Tabbara explains that even in *sūrat at-taubah* (9):29, that heralds the great cry of *jihad* against the People of the Book is historically questionable.²⁹⁴

During the latter period of the Medinan phase strong theological differences emerge between the People of the Book and Islam. *Sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 refutes the incarnation of Christ and the concept of the Trinity. *Sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):116 refutes that Jesus ever demanded that people should pray to him or his mother. *Sūrat at-taubah* (9):30 accuses Christian of declaring Jesus the Son of God and the Jews of declaring that Uzayr is a Son of God. Two very interesting verses that Tabbara identifies from this period are *sūrat an-nisa* (4):156-159 and *sūrah Āl-'Imran* (3):55. Both these verses concern the crucifixion of Jesus. In *sūrat an-nisa* (4):156-159 the Jews are said to sully the reputation of Mary and boast that they killed Jesus. Tabbara focuses on verse 159 that says, "And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; And on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them."²⁹⁵ This verse, she says, is certainly one that could use greater exploration. *sūrah Āl-'Imran* (3):55 concerns the crucifixion of Jesus and the issue of whether he died on the cross. The traditional debate centres round the meaning of *mutawaffika*, and whether or not the word in this context implies the death of Jesus. Tabbara suggests that the earliest exegetes accepted the possibility that Jesus may have died briefly on the cross.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Ibid., 113-115.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 118-119. See further Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar (Ar-Raheeq Al-Makhtum)*, 2002 ed. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2002; reprint, 2002), 495-510. It is noteworthy that the cause of the battle and subsequent verse may concern the killing of one of Muhammad's emissaries. Apparently, the Byzantine army, seeing the strong position of the Muslim Army, never engaged in battle.

²⁹⁵ Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 122. English translation from The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 268.

²⁹⁶ Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 121-122. Citing Tabari *Tafsir* III, 289. Unfortunately Al-Tabari, *L'Exegese d' Al-Tabari*, Vol 1:166. Suggests that God gave Jesus' image to another is an authentic Hadith. Further to the point she notes that the theory that Jesus was somehow switched or saved from death is not in the Qur'ān, but is a later exegetical concept.

The third phase of revelation concerns the return of the prophet to Mecca. Tabbara notes a distinctive change in the relationship with the People of the Book and other communities. Here there is even accommodation for polytheists, as in the time of Abraham, so long as there is mutual respect.²⁹⁷ At this time the inclusive nature of Islam based on *fitra* comes to the fore. Tabbara makes the point that this nuanced change in the relationship with the religious other is a neglected area in most Islamic studies.²⁹⁸

For People of the Book interested in interfaith relations or religious diversity the third phase of revelation provides the context of some of the most heartening verses in the Qur’ān. Tabbara discusses several verses from *sūrat al-mā’idah*, as well as from *sūrat al-hujrat*, *sūrat al-hajj*, *sūrah Āl-‘Imran* and *sūrah Luqmān*. These verses promote the idea that God calls all humanity to return to Him, no one that devotes their life to God and performs good works need fear.²⁹⁹ Most importantly, religious diversity is portrayed as part of God’s plan.³⁰⁰ This theme is expressed in many verses, including *sūrat al-hujrat* (49):13, where the Qur’ān employs the phrase, “O mankind!” And reminds all humanity of their common heritage through Adam and Eve. In addition, *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):64 refutes Jewish claims that God’s hands are tied, that salvation blessings are reserved for them, while stating that God’s hands are open and He bestows blessings where He wills.³⁰¹

The two crucial verses that Tabbara cites are *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):68-9. She states that Mahmoud Ayoub considers these verses the most important in the Qur’ān concerning other religions.³⁰² These verses challenge the People of the Book to follow the revelation given to them by their Lord. Here the Qur’ān clearly acknowledges the merit of the Torah, Gospel and other revelations as well as the necessity to put faith to practice. Of course there are differences between the faiths, these are noted and yet, as with *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):48, the differences should do no more than challenge people to strive to better serve God. Tabbara says it better, “*Les musulmans avec les gens du Livre sont donc invités à vivre ensemble à l’ombre de la générosité et de l’hospitalité divine, en s’accueillant les uns les autres, et en se parant les uns comme les autres de générosité et d’hospitalité à l’image de leur Dieu unique.*”³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Tabbara, *L’hospitalité divine*, 124. Cf. The evolution of the relationship with polytheists from *sūrat al-kafirun* (109):1-6 to *sūrat at-taubah* (9):28 to *sūrah al-Mumtahinah* (60):4-9.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 123. The most important Qur’ānic chapters for this period are from *sūrat al-mā’idah* and *al-hajj*.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 124-133.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 131.

The People of the Book and Beyond

In the process of placing the finishing touches on their arguments for accepting the religious other as part of God's plan Tabbara and Daou expand the Hospitality Divine to include all people of conscience. In the fifth chapter Daou outlines the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding other faiths and their potential for salvation. To begin his argument Daou cites one of the most inclusive, if not ethereal elements of *Nostra Aetate*. This is that the Catholic Church does not reject what is true and good in other religions. This statement is supported by two verses from the New Testament Mark 10:17-18 and John 14:6. The first simply states that Jesus challenged a person who called him good, saying that only the Father is good. Therefore all that is human is in need of God's guidance. In the second verse Jesus proclaims, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."³⁰⁴ This verse is often used to express the exclusiveness of Christian faith. However, Daou, like Dall'Oglio, uses the verse in an inclusivist manner to assert that the eternal word of God is not absent from other religions, even if there are differences in their understanding of God.³⁰⁵

Daou recognises that there is a difference between religion and faith. Religions may contain flaws, but a person's faith in God is separate. Daou humorously likens the idea that other religions are bereft of salvific merit to the Church's historical views on Copernicus. He further draws upon the words of John Paul II who said, "*Toute prière authentique est suscitée par l'Esprit-Saint qui est mystérieusement présent dans le coeur de tout homme.*"³⁰⁶ The fact that God accepts other religions is evidenced above with the examples of the Centurion, the Canaanite and the Samaritan women. It seems that the criteria for salvation is simple: other religions must be consistent with God's design for love and salvation.³⁰⁷

Daou notes that other religions are a positive challenge for the Church. It is necessary to recognise the spiritual experiences of others as religious virtues and that the Spirit of God blows where it wills. The message of John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* 56 states that other religions contain signs of the presence of Christ and the actions of the Spirit. The Qur'ān also contains examples of Christian devotion. In fact, if we keep open minds, Daou posits, it is possible to see that "the presence of the other is the voice of God

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 139. The English translation of the verse is from the ESV, 2007.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 139-140. Here Daou draws upon the teachings of *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptoris Missio* for support.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 141, fn. 143. See also *Lumen Gentium*. 62.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 143.

in our life.”³⁰⁸ Ultimately the question is, what is the purpose of the differences? Daou maintains that we need to allow other religions a role in our theology. This avoids two pitfalls. The first is that by learning of their spiritual experience we avoid locking the other religion into a question of whether or not the other has divine status. The second reflects the need to appreciate the gifts that God bestows on other faiths. Understanding other faiths helps avoid naïve stereotypes. What is required is a theology that chooses to accompany the other through life.³⁰⁹

This is the essence of *theologies in dialogue*. It concerns having the spiritual maturity to accept that no religion has a monopoly on God, or the truth. Both Islam and Christianity share a universal mission in spite of their differences. Just as each individual is on a spiritual journey, so too are Muslims and Christians. Christians cannot abandon their mission to spread the good news of Christ. Yet, Christians need to understand that the mission of the Church is not different from God’s. God is the final destination of faith, not the Church. God desires the salvation of all humanity, and the institution of His Kingdom on earth. The Church is the servant of God’s mission. The Church must be ever mindful of the Spirit of God “*souffle où il veut.*”³¹⁰ It is interesting to consider, Daou reflects, that neither Jesus nor the Gospel ever called for people to change their religion. Rather the call is to follow God’s way.³¹¹

For Daou one of the mysteries of salvation is when Christians can recognise the work of God in the religion of others without losing faith in their own and its role in God’s design.³¹² He agrees in a statement found in *Le Christianisme et le religions*, that Christians today need to learn how to live with respect for religious diversity, a diversity that has its foundation with the love of God for mankind and respect for human freedom. The dialogue is not just between the interlocutors but also with God present.³¹³ By engaging or living in fellowship with Muslims, Christians will find a spiritual solidarity that is based on witness. It is necessary to take a step of faith beyond, perhaps, a purely academic interest, to appreciate the religious other in communion, with all our differences, as on the day when we all stand before God.³¹⁴

Tabbara advocates accepting the authenticity of the beliefs of the religious other, especially Christians and the People of the Book. However, as reflected in the words of

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 143-144. Daou highlights the examples of Sufis and Christian Monastic life.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 143-146.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 146-153. Dall’Oglio also makes this point.

³¹¹ Ibid., 154.

³¹² Ibid., 155-156.

³¹³ Ibid., 156, fn. 118.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 158-159, fn. 125. A rough paraphrase of the sentiment expressed by Christian de Chargé.

Mahmoud Ayoub, history demonstrates that the lessons of the Gospel and Qur'ān that promote the universality of love and mercy are too often transformed into narrow dogma to exclude others.³¹⁵ Interestingly, Tabbara makes the point that the idea that Islamic law abrogates the laws of the People of the Book has never received universal acceptance. Tabbara confirms what this dissertation stated in chapter one, that the promises made to the People of the Book, stand alongside the revelation of the Qur'ān.³¹⁶

Consequently, if religious diversity and cultural pluralism are part of God's plan for salvation, what role is left for Islamic Mission, *da'wah*? Tabbara sees the role of Islam to call people to God in a similar manner as Daou. For support Tabbara calls upon *sūrat fussilat* (41):33 that states, "Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those who bow in Islam.'" ³¹⁷ Most importantly, from the perspective of plurality, Tabbara asserts Muslims are not required to call people to convert to Islam per se, but to call people to God. A prime example for mankind is found in the life of Abraham explained in *sūrat al-mumtahinah* 60:4. Abraham faithfully follows God and separates from his father's community, but rather than live in enmity, says to his father that he will pray for him that he will be forgiven for his transgresses.³¹⁸ In addition there is the example of Muhammad and his community as expressed in *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):143 to be a witness before all mankind. The Qur'ān teaches Muslims to accept religious diversity as God's will and to allow God to be the final arbitrator concerning the issues that divide believers of different religions.³¹⁹ This point is made quite clear by the famous mystique Hallaj, who sees each religion as necessarily contributing to the whole of God's revelation.³²⁰

Hospitality Among the Community of Believers

For Daou and Tabbara *la communion spirituelle* is not just a dream. In our increasingly intertwined world we need to reappraise how we view the religious other, how our worldview makes space for all peoples. Daou, in his conclusions, boldly declares that God

³¹⁵ Ibid., 161, fn. 161. Verses like *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):62 and *sūrat al-maidah* (5):69 that affirm that those who believe and fill their lives with good deeds need not fear the Day of Judgment, are pushed aside by restrictive interpretations.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 161-162. However there are Hadith that mention that if Moses were alive he would have no choice but to follow Muhammad. See chapter 1.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 161-165. The Qur'ān translation is from The Presidency of the Islamic Researches and IFTA, eds., *The Holy Qur'ān*, 1463.

³¹⁸ Tabbara, *L'hospitalité divine*, 165.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 168. For instance *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5): 44-47 and (5):48.

³²⁰ Ibid., 163. "J'ai réfléchi sur les religions en m'appliquant à les comprendre, et j'ai trouvé qu'elles étaient un seul tronc à ramifications nombreuses. Ne demande donc pas à l'homme d'adopter une religion, car elle le détournerait du tronc unique et sûr..."

is greater than the mission of Christ and his disciples. He says, quoting John 14:2 that in my Father's house there are many rooms... Perhaps there is a temptation to create a worldview that allows us to reduce God to what we can understand, who we perceive to be good and who is worthy of salvation. However, the Divine Hospitality envisions a world where not only are there many rooms, but all are made to feel welcome.³²¹

Similarly, Tabbara reminds the reader that one of the divine attributes of God is, *al-wasi*, the Vast. God is beyond limits in mercy and knowledge. Al Ghazali, on the subject of divine attributes, says that through faith, believing Muslims can cultivate space internally for God and His attributes.³²² Tabbara notes that this is not unrelated to Divine Hospitality. In this way the believing Muslim cultivates hospitality in his heart, a place for God where the vastness of God enlarges our capacity to know and love God. Tabbara cites a beautiful *hadīth* on this subject preserved by al-Qudsi that says, "Not my earth, nor my sky can contain me, only the heart of my adoring believer can contain me."³²³ Through this hospitality a space is made for love and knowledge of others.

Tabbara ends by recalling the theme of *A Common Word*: love of God and love of neighbour. Through the Hospitality Divine, the other's fears, thoughts and comprehension of their relationship with the world and with the Divine becomes part of our spiritual being, in spite of, and in respect, of our differences. This Hospitality Divine within necessitates changes in our perspective, enlarges our compassion and comprehension, leaving behind the comforts of our own community to move towards and with the other.³²⁴

5.3 Conclusions

Inspired by the *Common Word* Christians and Muslims have continued to meet and exchange ideas relating to the social and theological challenges and opportunities as believers *vis-à-vis* modern society. Some Christian scholars are sensitive to the limitations and theological implications of *ahl al-kitāb*. They prefer to draw on more nuanced terms like *People of Faith*, *People of the Word*, *People of God*, *Children of Abraham*, or *People of the Prophets* in order to create what they consider to be a more equitable basis for dialogue.

³²¹ Ibid., 179-180. For Daou, where the believers are made mutually welcome, there is God.

³²² Ibid., 181, Cf. fn. 181.

³²³ Ibid., 181-182, Cf. fn. 182.

³²⁴ Ibid., 182-183. Here Abraham defends the people of Lot.

Madigan acknowledges that the term *ahl al-kitāb* affords Christians and Jews a special status in Islam. Intrinsic with this status however, are certain limitations that insist that Christians have in some way falsified their revelation. As a result, Madigan considers the term *ahl al-kitāb* limiting. He suggests that Muslims and Christians should focus on what they have in common as *People of the Word*. As People of the Word, Muslims and Christians share a common task of discerning the relationship between God and his Word. Muslims, Christians and Jews respect that through God's Word, *wa-yomer/kun fa yakûn...* things happen.

Interestingly, Madigan discusses the idea that Christians through the use of *only begotten* and *father* are trying to express the relationship between God and his Word. These expressions indicate that God and his Word share the same nature; the Word is not God's creation, but is his self-expression, *kalām nafsi*. Most profoundly, Madigan suggests avoiding the polemic by novel means. By not defending the Christian creedal tenets of begetting and fatherhood Muslims are invited to explore other means of defining the relationship between God and His Word together with Christians. What Madigan is trying to avoid is limiting the perception of Christians as *ahl al-kitāb* to people who are preoccupied with the Gospel books. Another limitation that Madigan draws attention to is the fact that for Christians, Jesus is more than a prophet with a message. Jesus is the message, God's Word incarnate.

From a socio-political perspective Madigan draws attention to the importance of Muslims and Christians living in peace. Madigan seems to find the condition, set out in *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):8 whereby Christians do not attack Muslims as challenging and suggests that Muslims and Christians both need to stop fighting and begin a dialogue of repentance. However, in this air of *mea culpa*, Madigan regrettably refrains from outlining any concrete steps to demonstrate how this could be advanced.

From a Middle Eastern perspective Dall'Oglio acknowledges that the People of the Book are to be respected since God established these communities. He contrasts this ideal with the totalitarian and imperialist attitude of his Roman Catholic Church. In spite of Dall'Oglio's admiration for the term he is not averse to pointing out its shortcomings, i.e., with regard to marriage and conversion. For these reasons Dall'Oglio employs more neutral terms like *People of the Prophets*, or *People of God*, or even calling on the merits of citizenship in modern evolving pluralist society to foster an environment, whereby civil rights can be used to counter the apparent inequalities he sees in the implementation of Islamic teachings.

As a missionary Dall'Oglio is ahead of his time. On the one hand, he wishes to inculcate the Church towards Islam in order to make the Church more assessable to Muslims. His philosophy aspires to bring the daily lives of Muslims and Christians closer together so that they can bear witness and come to a better understand of one another. On the other hand, he encourages Christians to read the Qur'ān as an inspired text through the hermeneutics of interpretation. His idea of conversion is not conventional. Like Siddiqui, he wishes to refrain from formal conversion and is quite content for Muslims and Christians to move towards each other in rather vague terms, as perhaps Dall'Oglio feels reflects his own circumstance. Furthermore, he does not see the traditional understandings of the cross and crucifixion as issues worth labouring over for Muslims who come to encounter Christ. He is quite content that Muslims who find Christ act as a bridge between the two faiths with their new perspective.

Dall'Oglio, like Daou and Tabbara, encourages Muslims and Christians to re-examine the Biblical personages of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael to witness that in their stories lies a rich means of understanding Islam as the fulfilment of promises made to Abraham as the model of faith. Hagar and Ishmael's relationship with God is blessed. God never abandoned or chastised them. They have a role to play in bringing the children of Ishmael back into the fold. Tabarra identifies the faith of Abraham as simple submission to *fitra*, thereby linking submission, *islām* to all believers regardless of whether they follow Muhammad, or not. They, we, are all *Muslim* in the non-reified sense.

Dall'Oglio and Daou both advocate that Christians should accept Muhammad as a prophet. In so doing they do not outline a rigid argument of how this should be reasoned, but rather advocate that the Church should promote a positive image of Islam and Muhammad as perhaps, an ex-Biblical prophet. This is a challenge for Christians since Muhammad taught against many tenets of faith. Nevertheless, there are areas of commonality that are often overlooked as areas providing opportunities for greater understanding. For example, Muslims believe that Jesus is the Messiah and anticipate his return at the end of time to manifest God's Kingdom. With regard to the crucifixion of Jesus, Tabbara insists that there has never been consensus on the subject of the death of Jesus. Yet arguing over the crucifixion detracts from the fact that the Qur'ān states that all mankind must come to believe in Jesus. This is an area Tabbara says is in need of much further exploration.

From a socio-political perspective, for a church moving towards Islam and for Christians learning to share their lives with Muslims there are important implications. On

the positive side, Dall'Oglio, like Siddiqui and Ramadan in the previous chapter, sees that Christians striving to keep religion relevant in society will find ready allies with Muslims. Their stalwart faith in contrast with the secularisation of Christianity is perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come. Just as Siddiqui pointed out earlier, however, the West in general often projects an anti-Islamic bias that it is reluctant to admit. This bias is discernable during times of conflict when European nations side with 'other' nations pursuing political agendas. This is an area that will challenge Christians to choose between political pragmatism and spiritual solidarity.

L'hospitalité divine encourages Muslims and Christians through the practice of *théologies en dialogue* to understand from their own tradition that God's plan of salvation includes the religious other. *Théologies en dialogue* encourages better understanding of the religious other as two people sharing a long journey. This concept shares much with Paolo's *Amoureux de L'Islam*. Daou understands the concept of the People of the Book, but he does not rely on it to promote better understanding of Islam by Christians. This he develops through the teachings of Christ, through the theological teachings of his own creedal tradition and through terms that encompass the religious other like *People of God*.

By considering how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan and Canaanite women, as well as the Centurion, Daou presents to Christians that for Jesus, faith in God is more important than membership of the 'correct' religion. Examining the teachings of the church regarding the different types of alliances between man and God, the way is open for Christians to make a leap of faith to consider that religious diversity is part of God's plan. Like Dall'Oglio, Daou asserts that all humanity benefits from the sacrifice of Christ regardless of if they are Christian or not. In this regard God's promises of salvation are not linear, whereby one set of promises abrogate the former. Daou, like Dall'Oglio, maintains that through greater familiarity with Muslims, Christians should be able to recognise and respect the faith of Muslims.

Tabarra, like Ramadan, makes the point that reading the Bible and Torah may inspire Muslims to attain a deeper appreciation of their own faith. She suggests Muslims consider that the traditional accusations of falsification are primarily down to interpretation and not within the texts themselves. Her exploration of the evolution of the relationship between Islam and the People of the Book through a close examination of the stages of revelation of the Qur'ān highlights an interesting trajectory. She identifies three phases that progress from an exclusivist view, to a more inclusivist view, whereby Muslims are encouraged to reach out and be a witness to all humankind. One of the most important

points she makes concerns the use of the term, *kufṛ*. She astutely observes that the term is reserved for individuals and not to the collective.

Both Daou and Tabarra expand the concept of *théologies en dialogue* to explain that even some exclusivist verses can be accepted as including the religious other. Daou, through examination of *Nostra Aetate* and *Redemptoris Missio* suggest a new understanding of John 14:6 whereby all who believe and follow their conscience are accepted as following in the way of Christ. This is true even if people believe differently since religions may be flawed but not faith. The eternal Word of God is not absent from other religions. In fact Daou sees the role of the Church much like Dall'Oglio, as a servant of God, calling people to faith not to the Church as the final destination. For Tabarra exclusivist verses like *sūrah Āl-Imran* (3):19 can include all people of faith since submission to God is the same for all faiths. Moreover, the revelation of the People of the Book remains salvific alongside the revelation of the Qur'ān. She feels Muslims are required to encourage all people to move closer to God, because conversion is to God, not necessarily to Islam *per se*.

Through *théologies en dialogue* Muslims and Christians, as well as all other people, can experience *la Communion Spirituelle*. Here the religious other and their faith becomes our companion through life. Christians and Muslims need to take this bold step towards each other to ensure that they have correct knowledge of the other, letting the other's faith have a voice in each other's theology so that people can avoid naïve and dangerous stereotypes. For both Muslims and Christians this is a difficult challenge, but one that people of faith must rise to. Today, more than ever, the world needs people of faith to create a narrative that respects all people.

Part III of the thesis examined the modern usage of the term *ahl al-kitāb* by a selection of Muslim and Christian scholars. Each of the scholars demonstrates a high regard for the traditional understanding of the People of the Book. The Muslim scholars acknowledge that Christians are an integral part of the Islamic narrative. Yet, there are both positive and negative associations in the term *ahl al-kitāb*. Nevertheless, the scholars assert that the more difficult verses that criticise *ahl al-kitāb* are generally associated with quite specific

contexts. The overall trajectory, or *sense large*, of the Qur'ān encourages Muslims to live in peace with the People of the Book for the betterment of society and to please God.

For Christian scholars there is a reluctance to embrace the traditional understanding of the term People of the Book, since there are social and theological implications that potentially prejudice social relations and dialogue. Nevertheless, these scholars understand with the special status afforded to the People of the Book there are numerous challenges and opportunities. In order to overcome the limitations associated with the theoretical construct of *ahl al-kitāb* some of the scholars suggest other more equitable appellations such as People of the Word, People of God, People of Faith and People of the Prophets.

The way forward offered by Tabarra and Daou involves Muslims and Christians striving together through life as companions on a shared journey. Together Muslims, Christians and potentially all other people of faith are called to find a place for the text and teachings of the religious other in their own faith as a means of honing our understanding of God. Through submission to God and seeing the religious other as a companion, the lines between membership to a particular faith become less important, while conversely, conversion to God and striving together to face the challenges and opportunities of life for the betterment of humanity becomes all the more important.

Chapter 6. Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

6.1. Introduction

These conclusions review the findings of this thesis and suggest areas where further research might be pursued. The primary thesis question sought to identify the challenges and opportunities created by the Qur'ānic representation of Christians and Christianity as *People of the Book*, for interfaith dialogue and religious plurality. This thesis' argues that the Qur'an and traditional commentary (*tafsīr*) of the Islamic concept of *ahl al-kitāb* is epistemologically insufficient for the Islamic understanding of Christians and Christianity as well as for comparative theological purposes. This is due to the fact that the traditional commentary does not adequately describe the nuanced Christian self-understanding. Therefore the study of *ahl al-kitāb* (methodologically) requires significant expansion into nascent socio-cultural, historical and interreligious theological terrains, in order to more comprehensively appreciate the concept of the People of the Book and recognize the possible challenges and opportunities it contains for contemporary Muslim-Christian dialogue and religious plurality.

6.2. Summary of the Thesis' Explorations

The Islamic Science of tafsīr

The first chapter introduced the Islamic science of *tafsīr*. Understanding the exacting requirements of *tafsīr* offers an important opportunity for meaningful interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Through *tafsīr* Christians can avail of an authoritative means of understanding the Qur'ān while at the same time avoiding naïve interpretations based on literal, or esoteric readings, without knowledge of the context. In addition, understanding how *tafsīr* works opens up opportunities for understanding the complexities involved in the science of interpretation, appreciating the accepted variance of opinion from the earliest days of Islam. The methodology of *tafsīr* is a fairly closed science, relying heavily on knowledge of the Qur'ān, Muhammad's *sunnah* and *hadīth*. To venture an opinion without due regard for *tafsīr* is to enter the field of *ijtihād*, independent reasoning, and run the risk of being accused of *ra'y*, offering a mere personal opinion and *bida*, offering heretical innovation. There are however, areas where further study may respectfully contribute to the science of *tafsīr* and help to build upon the tradition. Here

this author has in mind the possibility of expanding the knowledge of the occasion of revelation, the *asbâb an-nuzûl*. Increasing understanding of the social and anthropological context of the Qur'ân strengthens the science of *tafsîr*. The science of *tafsîr* offers Christians an opportunity to engage with Muslims using an authoritative system of discourse independent of other methods of reasoning, including for example, Aristotelian logic, or modern social concepts of citizenship.

The exegesis of the four verse groups by four esteemed Islamic scholars confirms the existence of a theoretical construct concerning Christians and Christianity identified by McAuliffe. The theoretical construct is a composite reflection of the facts. The theoretical construct is open to challenge on the basis that it does not capture the essence of Christian belief, since the theoretical construct does not distinguish denominational creedal formula, but rather speaks only in general terms. In brief, the theoretical construct asserts that following the revelation of the Qur'ân the only true Christians are those who accepted the prophethood of Muhammad and converted to Islam when hearing the message of the Qur'ân. In this manner Christianity is seen as only a temporary stage in the evolution of faith that finds its finality in Islam. Pre-Qur'anic Christians were in a sense Muslims, *muslimûm*, since they followed and submitted, made *islâm*, to what was then correct belief, before the revelation given to Muhammad. In this way all the prophets, including Jesus and his followers could be called *Muslims* and followers of *Islam*. Some modern Islamic scholars especially Esack, Ramadan and Tabbara hold this non-reified understanding of *muslimûm* and *Islam*. In general, those who remain Christian after exposure to the message of the prophet Muhammad are considered as following in a tradition, *taqlîd* that is corrupt in some way, *tahrîf*; meaning that which is taught concerning the pure message of Jesus and possibly the Gospel. Nevertheless, the text of the Gospel retains enough fidelity to the pure message for a willing reader to discern the coming of *menahhemana*, Muhammad, as the Paraclete.

Although this thesis concurs with the research of McAuliffe with regard to the general thrust of the theoretical construct, this thesis parts company with McAuliffe with regard to the salvific value of Christianity. Al-Tabari, from the classical period, and Rida, Esack and Tabbara from the modern era, challenge the idea that without acceptance of the prophethood of Muhammad the deeds of Christians, the People of the Book, or anyone else are unacceptable since they do not conform to the message of Islam. Through the *tafsîr* of *sûrat al-baqarah* (2):62 al-Tabari and Rida reflect the possibility that letting one's life speak is more important than membership to a religious community, including reified

Islam. Al-Tabari asserts that, "...God has not specified the wage of righteous action together with faith for some of His creatures rather than others..."³²⁵ In support Rida cites *sūrat an-nisa* (4):123-124, "Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book...If any do deeds of righteousness...and have faith, they will enter heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them."³²⁶ How and why people reject Muhammad is of immense importance to the question of salvation.

The Qur'ānic representation of Christians and Christianity, as the People of the Book, offers many challenges as well as opportunities. *Sūrat an-nisa* (4):171 alone attests to the Messiahship of Jesus and his position as God's messenger, Word and Spirit while also challenging mainstream Christianity's central beliefs in the Trinity and Sonship. The opportunity for greater dialogue concerning the nature and role of the Messiah in Islam are immense. Mujahid ibn Jabr contemplates the importance of the Qur'ānic Jesus just as Tabbara does in the 21st century when citing *sūrat an-nisa* (4):159 "...all will come to believe in Jesus before they die."³²⁷ The challenge for Christians and an area open for further research and exploration concerns the meaning of Messiah in Islam through a discussion of concepts such as Trinity, Sonship, Word of God and Spirit of God in contrast to *tawhīd*. Islam sees its role as protector of true belief, *muhaymin*. What is not clear however, is the degree to which the teachings of Jesus are either *muhkam*, firmly established, or *mansukh* abrogated by the teachings in the Qur'ān. This again underlines the need to understand the concepts of *muhkam* and *mansukh* and the importance of *tafsīr*.

The cluster of verses surrounding the *sūrat al-maidah* (5):48 are replete with guidance for relations between Muslims and the People of the Book. In fact, it is difficult to exaggerate the importance of *sūrat al-mā'idah* as a subject for interfaith dialogue. This is the last *sūrat* revealed. In general, what is proscribed here and what is allowed abrogate all that has come before. Knowledge of *sūrat al-mā'idah* affords Christians the opportunity for a "one-stop-shop," where they can focus on the import precepts discussed therein. A non-critical reading of the verse (5):48 suggests that God has created different religions and that these different ways are essentially equal, subject of course, to the performance of good deeds in accordance to their religion. In addition, the way, or *shari'ah*, given to each community may be relative, since the basics of religion are the same: belief in One God, submission to God and filling one's life with righteous deeds.

³²⁵ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, Vol. 1:359, 364.

³²⁶ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 1-2:278.

³²⁷ Mujahid, *Tafsir Mujahid*, 296.

However, the *tafsīr* of the verse suggests that the revelation of the Qur’ān is superior to all previous revelation, keeping safe, or guarding over, *muhayminam*, that which is true in previous revelations. The revelation of the Qur’ān, according to the exegetes is therefore for all mankind and for all time. Verse 49 warns Muhammad against the temptation of reverting to judgement by previous revelation and to remain faithful to the teachings of the Qur’ān. The last verse in the cluster warns Muhammad that those who reject the Qur’ān prefer the judgement of the Days of Ignorance, *al-Jāhiliyya*, or the perennial problem of humanity rejecting God’s guidance in preference to their own vain desires. The *tafsīr* of the verse 51 turns the literal meaning on its end. What appears to be a command not to take Christians or Jews as friends is, in fact, refined to those non-believers who try to weaken the resolve of Muslims. The context is important in early Islam since those who had recently converted may not have had the support of family and friends. Non-Muslims may have tried to weaken the resolve of recent converts in favour of old tribal loyalties. Yet, Muhammad, Rashid Rida informs, never shied away from Jews and Christians, and many remained his friends. It would appear then that Muslims needed to practice discernment, keeping vigilant to those who seek to weaken their faith and resolve in constant striving in moral perfection, *ihsān*.

Sūrat al-mā’idah 5:82-83 gets to the heart of the image of the *theoretical construct* of praiseworthy Christians. Here in strongest terms Christians are described as the nearest to Muslims. The reasons have to do with the message of Jesus that predisposes Christians to humility and mercy. Here Ibn Kathir draws upon other verses namely *sūrah Āl-‘Imrān* (3):199 and *sūrat al-qasa* (28):52-55 to support the idea that pre-Qur’ānic Christians were in effect *Muslims* before the arrival of Muhammad and who were more sympathetic to the teachings of Muhammad. Those Christians who do not convert to Islam in the time of Muhammad are understandably not praised, but neither are they condemned. The examples of Cyrus the Patriarch of Alexandria and the Emperor Heraclius are retained as examples of otherwise respectable Christians, who accept the authentic mission of Muhammad, yet, for personal reasons, remain faithful to their own religion. Their reasons according to Rashid Rida, have more to do with earthly interests, or inappropriate fidelity to *taqlīd*, than to theological concerns. *Taqlīd* in this sense acts very much like socialisation, whereby social conformity influences the willingness of people to openly adopt new values. The underlying mood of the verse suggests that peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims are desired. Rashid Rida captures this sense with his warning, “May the curse of

Allah be upon those who provoke animosity and hatred among the servants of Allah in utter self interest or to please their masters.”³²⁸

Exploration of the Pre-Islamic Context

The second chapter examines social and historical pre-Islamic Arabia, the *asbâb an-nuzûl* of the Qur’ân. This is an area that would benefit from in-depth research since the *asbâb an-nuzûl* is a formal aspect of *tafsîr* that is not very well understood. In fact the people of pre-Islamic Arabia, by and large, remain something of a mystery to the modern scholar of inter-faith relations. Information provided in a typical exegesis may give the names and communities involved, in the context of the revelation of a verse, but this information hardly does justice to the complexities of the individuals and cultures concerned. Their reaction to the revelation of the Qur’ân is in part a product of their culture in a given place and time.

An investigation of various contemporary source material help provide a glimpse into the cultures of pre-Islamic Arabia. These materials include Biblical and Islamic sources, extra-canonical sources like the *Rabbanan d’Aggadta*, the *Mu’allaqat* or pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyya* poetry, as well as social, anthropological and historical sources from Arabia, Ethiopia and Yemen. Against this multi-faceted study, there is the stereotype created by some modern scholars and social movements that the period was one of barbarity and ignorance and so earned the name *al-Jāhiliyya*, the Time of Ignorance.³²⁹ A closer look reveals the situation to be more nuanced. Barbarity and ignorance certainly existed, but so too did genuine people of faith who sought God’s guidance.

An important aspect of the culture of pre-Islamic Arabia is the narrative that connects them with Biblical entities like Shem, Abraham and Moses. Therefore the concept of monotheism is not strange or new, but part of the story of these disparate people. Most importantly, especially for tribes around Mecca, is the connection with Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael. Their story weaves in and out of the narrative found in Genesis and tends to be overlooked by most Christians and Jews as an unimportant subplot to the story of Abraham’s relationship with Isaac and his descendents. Dall’Oglio, Daou and Tabbara, however, appreciate the potential of this narrative as one that might help build a bridge between the People of the Book and Islam.

³²⁸ Rida, *Tafsir Al-Manar*, Vol. 7 & 8:10.

³²⁹ ‘Abdil-Wahhaab, *An Explanation of Aspects of the Days of Ignorance*, 13, 285, 303-284.

The pre-Islamic poetry, the *Jāhiliyya* poetry, boasts of all things Arabian. The verse of ‘Amru Ibn Kalthum, from the Christian tribe of Banū Taghlib, Imr al-Qais’ from the Christian Kinda tribe and the teachings of the moralist Zuhair Ibn Abu Salmā describe the settled and nomadic life. Here the culture relishes in the celebrated ideals of loyalty and honour, chivalry and fidelity, as well as some unsavoury cultural traits such as blood lust, banishment, intertribal warfare and infanticide. These however, are romantic odes to the past that perhaps provide some backdrop to the context of later reformers, who made rather disparaging commentaries of verses such as *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):50, “Do they then seek the judgment of (the days of) ignorance (*jāhiliyya*)...?”

The story of Judaism in Arabia is multifaceted. From the beginning of Biblical times Judaism maintained a connection with Arabia. They were an advanced people culturally, commercially and agriculturally. They chose to build towns along the caravan trails and in locations where water was readily available. They had an education system for male family members, which no other community seems to have had at this time. Zaid ibn Thābit and Abdullah b. Mas'ud, two very influential personalities in early Islam, both benefited from this education system.

The Jews of the Hijaz as well as the Jews of Himyar were not averse to proselytising. They promoted Judaism, for instance, as the indigenous alternative to Christianity. They expected a messiah of sorts, with whom the community of Yathrib often threatened their enemies. In fact, several of the tribes living in and around Yathrib made sure they were on good terms with Muhammad before his *hijrah* to Yathrib, just in case he became an implement of wrath for the birthright Jews.

Yet relations between the new *ummat al-mu'minin* and the Jews of Yathrib/Medina never settled. The would-be leader of Yathrib, Ibn Ubayy, and the other tribal leaders did not seem to know what to make of Muhammad's mission to replace the traditional alliances in favour of the Treaty of Medina. Perhaps the rise and fall of Yusuf Dhū Nuwās weighed heavily on their minds. Instead of a leader that would assert the supremacy of Judaism they found in Muhammad a leader who would demand paradigm shifts in theology, with the acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. The influence of the expectation of a Messiah might have had on the willingness of the Jews of Medina to accept Muhammad is an area open to further research. Another area in need of investigation concerns the apparent unwillingness of the Jews of the Hijaz to engage with, or seek the support from the Jews outside of Arabia when relations soured with Muhammad.

The Christians of Ethiopia are one of the most important communities in the development of early Islam. Faith in the one God of Abraham in Ethiopia and the Axum Empire can be traced back to the Queen of Sheba. Christianity in Abyssinia arrived in waves from as early as Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. More is known concerning the two Syrian captive brothers, Aedisius and Frumentius from the fourth century. Under the tutelage of the Egyptian Coptic Church, beginning with Patriarch Athanasius, the church's mission in Abyssinia grew from strength to strength. The Ethiopian Church receives further encouragement and influence from nine Syrian monks, known as the *Tsadkan* (the Righteous Ones). These men fled the turmoil of the fifth century Church Councils and helped mould the Ethiopian Coptic/Syriac Tawahedo Trinitarian expression.

According to the exegetes, the Christians of Abyssinia, under the leadership of Ashama ibn Abjar, could not have provided a greater contrast to the Jews of Medina. They epitomise the exemplary Qur'ānic Christians discussed in *sūrat al-mā'idah* (5):82, who follow God's guidance from revelation to revelation and recognise the truth when they hear it. Even when they fail to convert to Islam, Muslims anticipate better relations with them. This is the land that earned the reputation of *dar al-hiyād*, the realm of neutrality and received Muhammad's command, *utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum*, "Until the Abyssinians attack you, do not attack them." This guidance is similar to that echoed in *sūrat al-mumtahinah* (60):8 found in *A Common Word*. Contact with nascent Islam began with the arrival of a number of refugees from Mecca. Interestingly, since the Ethiopian are strong Trinitarians, the basis for good relations would appear to be the willingness of the people to respect each other and the mutual security it afforded, rather than any substantial theological commonality, thus leaving the way open for any future communities to adopt their model of coexistence.

The Himyar/Yemen southern region of the Arabian Peninsula was once the base of the Axum Empire. Its transition, therefore, from Sabeanism to Judaism to Christianity is very similar to Abyssinia with just a few significant deviations. According to tradition, monotheism in the region stems from Noah's son Shem. Another legend describes the Aslam tribe as descending from Ishmael because they were noted archers. Judaism arrives in the region through the King of Yemen, Tibān As'ad Abū Karib, a proselyte to Judaism in the early 5th century.

In contrast to the Jewish and Christian tribes of Arabia there appears to have been an incredibly high degree of sectarianism in the region. The Abyssinian appointee Lakhnī'a Dhū Shanātīr's decadent and tyrannical rule may have inspired Yusuf Dhū

Nuwās to drive Christianity from the land through a campaign of violence and forced conversion. Yet the dialogue between Habsa, the daughter of Hayyān, and Dhū Nuwās portrays further acts of sectarianism against the Jewish population thus providing a possible further pretext. In addition, there were competing Christian creedal formulations between Tawahedo, Nestorians, Arians and Melkites for the hearts and minds of the Christian population. A further example of the sectarian nature of the region includes General Abreha's attack on Mecca in the Year of the Elephant, circa 570 CE.

In any case, Muhammad and the early Muslim community did not hold the attack on Mecca against the delegation from Najrān. These Christians, that included many nobles and Bishop Abū Harithā, are responsible for more than 80 verses of the Qur'ān including *sūrah Āl-Imrān* (3):64, employed in a *Common Word*. During their stay in Medina Muhammad encouraged the delegation to pray in Masjid al-Nabawi. The visit allowed the Christians an opportunity to defend their beliefs and to assert that they too considered themselves *Muslims* (i.e., those who submitted to God). In spite of their differences the delegation returned home on amicable terms with Muhammad to live in peace and practice their faith according to their conscience.

Exploration of the Post-Conquest Christian Theological Response

The third chapter considers how post-conquest Christians of the Levant adapted to the challenges of the Islamisation of their culture and to accusations from the traditional Qur'ānic commentary of 'excesses' in religion discussed in chapter one.

The military advance into the Levant ushered many changes in the extent social and political landscape. Contrary to popular opinion, the conquest of the Levant did not require conversion by the sword. Although the dominant Chalcedonian creedal formulation could no longer wield political sway over smaller non-conformist denominations, the conquest instituted a degree of religious toleration for members of the People of the Book, in stark contrast to previous historical conquests exemplified by both Christian and Jewish armies just a few years before. For Jews, the Covenant of 'Umar heralded a period of tolerance and stability, inspiring some to see Islam as a harbinger of the Messianic era.

The Islamisation of the culture and the emergence of Arabic as the *lingua franca* inspired Christians to rethink how they expressed their faith, since the now dominant culture found the theological expressions of Sonship, Incarnation and Trinity heretical. From as early as the later half of the eighth century, during the first Abbasid century,

Christian scholars began to write in Arabic. The emerging literature first attempted to strengthen the resolve of the indigenous Christians, many of whom began to convert to Islam. The second genre of literature sought to defend the tenets of Christian faith more directly. The earliest existing text of this genre is the anonymous *On the Triune Nature of God*. Its blend of Biblical and Qur'ānic verse attempted to demonstrate to Muslims the soundness of Christian beliefs; “Ye have said that ye believe in God and His Word and the Holy Ghost, so do not reproach us, O men! That we believe in God and His Word and His Spirit: and we worship God in His Word and His Spirit, one God and one Lord and one creator...”³³⁰

Around the time that Christian scholars began to write in Arabic, Muslims scholars developed a profound interest in the Greek translation movement, ushering in the Golden Age of Islam. Under the patronage of the Abbasid Caliph, Hunayn Ibn Ishaq's developed his school of translation *bayt al-hikma*, *The House of Wisdom*. Although the translation movement was based in Baghdad translation houses existed throughout the Caliphate. Beginning with the translation of Aristotle's *Topics* (On the Art of Argumentation) in the mid-eighth century and continuing until the end of the tenth century, scholars translated almost every known Greek text of note including treatise on mathematics, geometry, medicine, astrology, botany, wisdom sayings and all the works of Aristotle.

An important by-product of the translation movement is the science of theological dialogue, *ilm al-kalām*. *Ilm al-kalām* enabled Muslims and Christians to apply Greek philosophical methods of reasoning to discuss concepts of faith, just as Islamic scholars from the Mu'tazilite and Ashrite traditions sought to consider the implications of absolute *tawhīd* vis-a-vis God's Divine attributes, *sifāt Allah*. Christians also began to define God according to His attributes, as found in the *al-asmā al-husnā*, the Divine Names. These Divine attributes, Christians argued, could be reduced to three primary hypostases of existence, *mawjūd*, living, *hayy* and speaking *nātiq*.

The three scholars examined in chapter three lived in different places and times. It is difficult to say to what degree their arguments reflect their social and political context, but this surely had an influence. Abū Qurrah was a prolific 9th century writer and debater. This was a period of relative stability for the People of the Book living in *Dar Islam*. His works respectfully employ logic, grammar, as well as Biblical and Islamic idiom to defend tenets of the Christian faith. Abū Qurrah's rational defence is based on differentiating between the “nature” of something and the number of something. Applying logic Abū Qurrah posits

³³⁰ Anonymous, *An Arabic Version*, 6.

that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons with one nature. If you count them, you must not predicate number of the name “God,” which is the name of their nature. If you do, you cause their single nature, to which the name “God” refers, to be different natures and fall into manifest error.”³³¹ He further employs a brilliant analogy whereby he says, “The Father is God, but God is not the Father; the Son is God, But God is not the Son; the Spirit is God, but God is not the Spirit.”³³²

Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī lived in the 10th century during the reign of the Abu ‘Ali Mansur Tāriq al-Hākīm, the Mad Caliph. Sulaymān was a prolific writer of theological tracts and *dīwān*, poetry. Most of his writings encouraged Christians not to emigrate to the West during this time of persecution. Sulaymān’s scriptural defence in *The Faith of the Orthodox Christian Community* is economic, instead relying heavily on reason. He suggests to his readers, both Christian and Muslim, that orthodox faith should be discernable from one’s deeds, echoing James Epistle, “Because knowledge without works is like the spirit without the soul.”³³³ While Sulaymān insists, “As for the healthy spirit it knows there is no validity except through works of the flesh...”³³⁴

Employing reason Sulaymān asserts that God is a substance, that is self-existing and is not subject to accident nor is God’s unique essence changeable. He names the unique essence of the self-existing creator Father, His speech, Son, and His life, Holy Spirit, while openly admitting that the concept is difficult. He suggests that hearing leads to an understanding by the heart, which in turn is gradually understood by the mind. This idea possibly borrows from an Islamic concept that purports that hearing the recitation of the Qur’ān eventually leads to understanding.

It is thought that Paul of Antioch was writing towards the close of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century, possibly between the third and fourth Crusade. His *Letter to a Muslim Friend* employs Biblical and Islamic idiom, as well as reason. Paul’s style of writing is cavalier, perhaps a convention of the time. Although Paul exhibits an in-depth knowledge of the Qur’ān, his use of this knowledge is often inciteful rather than helpful, as when he insinuates that Muhammad is the author of the Qur’ān. On the one hand he quotes the Qur’ān to support his argument that God works through His spoken Word as in *sūrat al-ghafir* (40):68 and that the Spirit of God strengthens Jesus as in *sūrat al-mā’idah* (5):110, yet on the other hand Paul brazenly suggests that the meaning of the

³³¹ Lamoreaux, *Abū Qurrah*, 183.

³³² *Ibid.*, 183, fn. 171.

³³³ Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 38.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

mysterious *muqatta`āt* letters, *alif, lam, meem*, appearing at the beginning of *sūrat al-baqarah* is an anagram for *al-Masīh*.³³⁵ In addition Paul cites *sūrat al-balad* (90):1-3 as proof that the Qur`ān also speaks of the relationship between God and Jesus as begetter and the begot. Paul's rational defence of Christianity is similar to Abū Qurrah and Sulaymān yet with an interesting defence of the rational concept of God as a self-existing substance. In support of his argument he cites *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):255. "God, no other God than He, living, *self-existing... (al-qayoum)*."³³⁶ On other occasions Paul compares the Trinity to the Islamic phrase, "In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful..."³³⁷ In addition he cites *sūrat al-isra* 17:110, where it says, "Call upon God, and call upon the Compassionate One; whatever you call Him, His are the most beautiful names."³³⁸ Where Paul's otherwise clever arguments both scriptural and rational fall short, however, is in his closing remarks. Whereas Paul begins by comparing the Law of Moses to Grace through Jesus Christ, He ends by deriding Islam as offering nothing to Christians, thus closing the door to amicable dialogue.

Yet, as rational as these arguments were in defence of the Trinity, the three authors examined in chapter III could not overcome the basic difference between Muslim use of reason to augment traditional *tafsīr* and Christian use of reason as faith seeking answers. In spite of the common language created by the translation movement Christians did not factor the importance of *tafsīr* into their *ilm al-kalām*. Interestingly Pope Benedict XVI made the same mistake in Regensburg in 2006.

Each author's defence of Christianity touches on their experience of faith. This experiential defence is an area for future research. In addition, although each author demonstrates knowledge of Islam, they do not directly address the science of *tafsīr*, which remains far more authoritative for Muslims seeking to remain credible within their own community than the application of Greek reasoning. Yet without a doubt *ilm al-kalām* represents an important chapter in Muslim/Christian relations. Here a common goal provided a neutral language from which to engage in sincere discourse concerning contentious issues that present interlocutors would do well to examine closely, even if other modes of commonality like citizenship and human rights may now be to the fore.

³³⁵ Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan*, 83-89. Al-Tabari discusses the *muqatta`āt* letters here.

³³⁶ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, ¶ 29, 177. Arabic 69.

³³⁷ Ibid., 178. Arabic 71. Griffith, "Paul," 227.

³³⁸ Khoury, *Pual D'Antioche*, 178. Arabic 71. Griffith, "Paul," 227. Cf. fn. 83.

Contemporary Muslim and Christian use of the term ahl al-kitāb

Chapters four and five examine the modern usage of the term *ahl al-kitāb*. For Muslims scholars, interaction with Christians in all facets of life is still based on the traditional understanding of the term. Christians, as People of the Book, are an integral part of the Islamic narrative. The Muslim scholars examined in these chapters accept the authority of *tafsīr* even if they argue, like Esack, that the present state of the world is so far removed from the *asbāb an-nuzūl* that terms like *Muslim*, *belief*, *Christian* and *kāfir* need to be reappraised in order to be faithful to the subsumed meanings of the terms when they were first employed. The work of Al-Qaradawi acts as a classic standard juxtaposed to the voices of Siddiqui, Esack, Ramadan and Tabbara. These voices reflect the gradual shift in authority in the world of Islam away from the Middle East to wherever Muslims reside today.

So, what are the lessons for today's world? Of primary importance is for Christians to recognise that the science of *tafsīr* remains authoritative in spite of the presence of other important catalysts for dialogue, including philosophical reasoning, alternative terms to "People of the Book," or secular debates regarding human rights and citizenship. These alternatives, though important in their own right, miss the opportunity to progress together as fellow believers, each coming to understand themselves and the religious other better, as on a faith journey through life and in service to God. Further, the alternatives discussed lack the theological authority found in *tafsīr*. Therefore, it is this author's opinion that attempting to coax Muslims away from *tafsīr* is counterproductive. It would be better for Christians to embrace *tafsīr* so that when difficult theological issues are discussed Christians are not asking their Muslim counterparts to be less Muslim, no more than Christians should be expected to be less Christian.

Since religion is largely deterritorialised, especially amongst developed nations, has the time not come to attempt the swim across the Sea of Uncertainty? If so, what would this swim entail? From among the scholars examined, it appears that conversion in the literal sense is not a high expectation. From Siddiqui to Tabbara, Madigan to Daou the common denominator appears to be better understanding, respect for the beliefs of others and cooperation on social issues of mutual concern. Perhaps unexpectedly, the strongest criticism of Christianity in the 21st century is not related to belief in Jesus as the Son of God, the Incarnation, or the Crucifixion and Resurrection, but rather poignantly, that Christians need to bear witness as Christians in today's world, (as expressed in *sūrat al-maidah* (5):68-9).

Dall'Oglio offers a model of inculturation to bring Christians in the Middle East closer to Muslims.³³⁹ This is an excellent model whereby the example of the Hospitality of Abraham inspires greater contact and cooperation between Muslims and Christians, as well as revisits the importance of the overlooked healing narrative of Hagar and Ishmael. In the West the church, or Christianity, *vers Islam* would of course take a different shape. Any change in direction will require a paradigm shift in recognition of the religious other and their sacred text as integral to our theological and spiritual future. The Faith of Abraham is a three-volume set, with each text an essential component of the whole. This shift in understanding requires strategies that will bring Muslims and Christians closer together. Daou and Tabbara offer *théologies en dialogue*. This method of life and dialogue provides a promising model for the future. This represents a huge challenge to the way in which people receive their religious education concerning the religious other, whereby the religion of the other is seen as sufficient for salvation on its own merits and offering its own wisdom for those seeking God's guidance.

In light of the *Common Word* document and the willingness of Muslims to be seen as on the side of Jesus and not against him, perhaps Christians could reciprocate by boldly stating in some way that they accept Muhammad and the Qur'ān are divinely inspired.³⁴⁰ Perhaps Christians could suggest that they wish to be considered like those of historical Abyssinia or referred to in *sūrat al-maidah* 5:82, *sūrah Āl-ʿImrān* (3):199 and *sūrat al-qasa* (28):52-55. This is something both Muslims and Christians will need to resolve in the coming generations. The scholars have stated that the common goal of both Islam and Christianity is to call people to God, and in so doing come closer to accepting each other in a new covenant of believers. This concept revisits the missed opportunity offered by Muhammad to the People of the Book in Medina all these centuries ago.

Returning to McCarthy's analogy, part of the problem is that the shared journey, or swim, may not provide any definitive answers to questions which separate Muslims and Christians. Perhaps Madagan's suggestion that Christians share theological problems with their Muslim counterparts is the solution, not just for the relationship between God and his Word, but also *al-tahrīf* and the requirement for all to believe in Jesus, without expecting definitive answers soon. Reflecting on this model calls to mind the story of the two

³³⁹ This is a fine example for this region and one that this author experienced years ago in Gabes, Tunisia, as a Peace Corps volunteer attending religious services held by Fr. Dominique Tommi-Martin M. Afr., However, some aspects of inculturation may run foul of the desire of Muhammad to differentiate his community from Muslims, see areas of dying hair and beards, circa p90-95, lawful and prohibited, since resembling a person may bring on affection... true for al-Ghazi and Dall'Oglio.

³⁴⁰ In reference to Mark 9:40 and Luke 9:50.

disciples travelling together on the Road to Emmaus; perhaps this time the disciples are two friends, one a Muslim and the other a Christian. Along the way they meet Jesus and Muhammad, but do not recognise them. So, they proceed to discuss the issues separating their communities. During the meal the disciples gradually recognise their guests. The Messiah then turns to the disciples and says, “The solution to your problems is actually quite simple...”

6.3 Systematic Results and Contribution of the Research

This thesis explores and expands the knowledge of the foundations of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, as *ahl al-kitāb*, based on a re-examination of the origins of their relationship and through an exploration of a selection of verses from the Qur’ān employing the hermeneutical tool of Islamic *tafsīr*. This thesis advocates the use of the hermeneutical tool of *tafsīr* by Christians as an authoritative hermeneutical tool to understand how Muslims understand the Qur’ān. This thesis explores how the Qur’ān discusses Christianity through close textual analysis of primary and secondary *tafsīr* material from the formative, classical and modern periods including direct use of *Tafsīr Mujahid*, the oldest complete existing *tafsīr*.

Through the use of primary and secondary research materials, this thesis expands the knowledge of *tafsīr* by exploring the nascent socio-cultural and historical terrain of pre-Islamic Arabia, referred to as *al-jāhiliyya*. Here the thesis investigates the different communities inhabiting Arabia and its surroundings, the development of monotheism and its relationship with the children of Abraham. In addition, it explores the sectarian rivalry between Judaism and Christianity for the hearts and minds of the Arabs. A greater understanding of the period of *al-jāhiliyya* and the context of the revelation of the Qur’ān contributes to the ability of scholars to engage in responsible *ijtihād* and challenge uncritical *taqlīd*.

In addition, this thesis further investigates the post-conquest Levant, following the death of Muhammad, as Muslims strive to consolidate the Qur’ān and develop the *hadīth* and *tafsīr* tradition. The thesis explores the response of the People of the Book to the rule of Islam, especially in Jerusalem, where there is a stark contrast between the Islamic conquest and previous conquests by Persian and Byzantine armies. In the post conquest period, this thesis explores the voice of Arab-speaking Christians as they challenge aspects of the theoretical construct of the People of the Book. Christians develop a unique Islamo-

Christian perspective in an effort to strengthen the resolve of their own community and to engage directly with their Muslims counterparts. This thesis examines how Arab speaking Christians employed the Qur'ān and *tafsīr* to defend their own beliefs, through the texts of three Arab speaking Christian scholars, including Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī's, *Defence of the Trinity and Incarnation*.³⁴¹

The final part of this thesis examines how a selection of modern Muslims and Christian scholars employ the term People of the Book. The primary research materials examined reflect the challenges and opportunities in our more integrated world. The thesis notes a shift in authority taking place among Muslims living in the west, in their ability to interpret the requirements of Islam for their own contexts. Christian scholars of Islam, on the other hand, are moving towards acknowledging the Qur'ān as well as Muhammad as divinely inspired. As part of an exploration of how Muslims and Christian coexist in the Lebanon and Syria this thesis explores two paradigms used to foster changes in Christian understanding of Islam and the mission of Muhammad.

It is hoped that this research will encourage Christians to engage with *tafsīr* as an authoritative means of interpreting the Qur'ān, particularly for those verses that are perceived as problematic. Through an exploration of the post-conquest response to Islam from the Arab speaking Islamo-Christian tradition, this thesis hopes to introduce a genre of theological discourse that merits much further attention by scholars interested in comparative theology. An exploration of the use of the term 'the People of the Book' by a selection of modern scholars, demonstrates the importance of traditional Islamic exegesis as a resilient influence effecting relations between Muslims and Christians today. Finally, this thesis offers the author's personal perspective of the challenges and opportunities that exist today for interfaith dialogue and religious plurality based on an Islamic concept that acknowledges the common unity of the People of the Book and Islam.

³⁴¹ Richard Kimball translated this text into English from the Arabic. Spisa, *Sulaymān ibn Hasan al-Ghazzī T52*, 31. The title long version, *wa la mqāla radi Allāh ahna fī mahni ahtqād alnsāri al-ārthksia fī wahdānia al xhālq jal isma wa n'fī ilthma al qbiha iltī yrmwhm bhā idhdādhm bghir al haq.*

6.4 Prospects of Future Research

The key underlying theme of this thesis is the resilience of *tafsīr*. One of the most obvious ways to advance the use of *tafsīr* by Christians is to make *tafsīr* literature more available to non-Arabic speaking scholars. For instance, two of the four texts used in this research exist only in Arabic; *Tafsīr Mujahid* by Mujahid ibn Jabr and *Tafsīr al-Manar* by Rashid Rida.³⁴²

Mujahid's *tafsīr* is very interesting since it is the oldest existing intact *tafsīr*. The primary Islamic criticism of his work is that Mujahid discussed the meaning of the Torah and Gospel with the People of the Book themselves. To his credit Mujahid was a student of several companions of the prophet. He engaged in interfaith discussion at a time when other Muslims focused on recording the Islamic narrative without outside influence, which I believe only reified the theoretical constructs discussed above. However, the danger of contaminating pure *tafsīr* has long since past. Now is an opportune time to revisit Mujahid's commentary.

The *tafsīr* of Al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-Qur'an* exists in many Arabic editions and a very short abridged French edition. In 1987 three Oxford scholars, John Cooper, Alan Jones and Wilfred Madelung, published an abridged English volume. This was intended to be the first of a five-volume set. Unfortunately, the translator, John Cooper, passed away after it published with the result that the project came to a halt. The first volume covers up to *sūrat al-baqarah* (2):103. At the time of writing this author is in contact with the two surviving co-editors of the project to see a renewed interest in translating the remainder of the *tafsīr* can be rekindled.

Interestingly, *Tafsīr al-Manar* attracts a following among radical Muslims. This research however, finds that Rashid Rida appears to express more interest in reforming corrupt Muslim governments than causing harm to Christians. In fact, he expounds support for the opinion that Christians may obtain salvation based on faith and deeds just as well as any Muslim. I believe that his more radical statements are often taken out of context. This would be less possible if his *tafsīr* were readily available to the non-Arabic speaking world.

Another way of advancing *tafsīr* is to have greater research into the period of *al-jāhiliyya*. This is important in general terms in order to separate reality from the construct. While researching this area two further questions were raised that merit further research.

³⁴² An excellent translation of *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr was employed in this thesis.

The first concerns the reaction of the Jews of the Hijaz to Muhammad as a prophet and their subsequent revolt against his political leadership. This decision was to sound the death knell for Judaism on the Arab Peninsula. Very little research attempts to understand why these Jews reacted the way that they did. The Qur'ān and *tafsīr* offer less than flattering explanations for their actions and almost no socio-political context. The fact that a Jewish army under the leadership of Nehemiah ben Hushiel (in collaboration with the Persian General Shahrbaraz), captured Jerusalem in 614 CE, but this event does not appear to impact on the Jews of the Hijaz in anyway begs explanation. How can it be that the victorious Jews of Jerusalem did not come to the aid of their fellow Jews in their hour of need and neither did the Jews of Hijaz seek to make *aliyá* to Jerusalem? Why did they pursue such an isolationist policy?

The second area concerns the idea that Christian alliances with nascent Islam were due more to congeniality and pragmatism than creedal sympathies. In contrast, an area that this thesis does not examine is the possible long-term impact the Wars of Apostasy may have had on the willingness of the early Caliphate to coexist with the People of the Book on the Arab Peninsula. Whereas it would seem the willingness of Islamic lead communities to coexist with the People of the Book is quite broad, damaged relations can have long lasting repercussions that are difficult to rebuild.

The area of Arab Christian history and their theological response to Islam also merits further investigation. I personally found this chapter very helpful to my own struggle with use of the terms Son of God, Incarnation and Trinity. Although my questions have not all been resolved, I am comforted to learn how these Arab Christian scholars approached the questions with their Muslim interlocutors. This genre of theological writings is in need of further research in order to help contemporary western Christians see how relevant the earliest Arabic speaking Christians defences of its creedal positions fare today, in light of Islamic theological challenges.

Finally, Muslims and Christians throughout the world need to challenge the stereotypes that insist Islam and Christianity are incompatible. Further research is required to understand how the Western news media, social media and Hollywood present negative depictions of Islam and Muslims. This is a very dangerous form of racism that should not be tolerated by anyone, irrespective of social, political or religious background. More research is required to investigate and promote projects were Muslims and Christians can come together. In this regard, the scholars examined in chapters four and five come to mind. The deceptive march of secularism as a neutral and inclusive philosophy for the

future needs to be met by People of the Book with Muslims, as People of Faith, in order to promote the values of the Kingdom of Heaven, even if we do not always agree on the details. I'd like to end with a few words from *surat al-maidah* (5):48,

To each among you We prescribed a Law and an Open Way. If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: So strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.

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Glossary of Terms

'*adhān*, أذان call to prayer.

adrakū Muhammad, أدركوا into the time of Muhammad. They knew, they got to know.

ahl al-dhimma, أهل اذمه protected people.

ahl al-injīl, أهل الإنجيل People of the Gospel, found in 5:47 (only ever used once).

ahl al-kitāb, أهل الكتاب the People of the Book, and the collective Arabic name for Christians. Jews, Sabians and Zoroastrians.

ahl al-nar, أهل النار People of the Fire, those destined to go to hell.

ajruhum, اجرهم Their reward.

aliyá, (Hebrew) Return to the Promised Land.

al-urf, العرف a custom.

'*amala*, عمل he makes, an action.

ām al-fīl, عام الفيل Year of the Elephant. Circa 570 CE. The year the Christians of Najrān marched on Mecca. The year Muhammad was born.

amana, ايماننا found in “those who believed,” or a true belief.

amanu, إمانُ employed in the phrase, “believe.”

ansār, أنصار helpers. Protectors of Muhammad

aqānīm, اقانيم hypostasis.

'*arid*, عرض accident.

asab al-tha'r, اصب الثار revenge duty.

'*asabiyyah*, عصبية the law of cohesiveness of the nomadic tribe.

asbāb an-nuzūl, اسباب النزول occasion of revelation.

ashbāb al-ukhdūd, اصحاب الاخدود People of the Trench.

ashrāf, اشرف More noble, i.e., Aristotelian, see David Thomas, Syrian Christians 212.

aslamā, أسلم submitted to God.

aslamāh, أسلمة Islamicization or Islamification process of a culture becoming more Islamic.

asmā allāh al-husnā, أسماء الله الحسنى the Beautiful Names of God.

āya, آية a sign or verse, i. e., Jesus was a sign, a phrase or sentence from the Qur'an.

Bahīrā, the name of a monk who recognised Muhammad as a prophet when he was just a child.

Beta Israel, (Ge'ez), name for Jews of Ethiopia.

bida, bid'ah, بدع heretical exegesis. A bad idea or introduction of a poor practice.

Bilād al-Sham, بلاد الشام Greater Syria.

dar al-ahd, دار الحد war free zone.

dar al-dawa ارد الدعوة "house of invitation" Where Islam is newly introduced to a country, or just prior to its arrival, as in *al-jahiliyya* Arabia.

dar al-islam, دار الاسلام abode of Islam.

dar al-harb, دار الحرب house/abode of war.

dar al-hiyād, دار لا دحيا realm of neutrality.

dar al-shahada, دار الشهادة abode of testimony.

dar al-ta'ah, دار الطاعة land of obedience to God.

al-daruriyyat, الضروريات the imperative, necessity. The vital ones, as in, the vital ones excuses the forbidden ones. When everything is forbidden everything is allowed.

da'wah, دعوه invitation, as to religious conversion.

deuteros theos (Greek) a second lesser God, a hypostasis like entity.

dhālika al-kitāb, that Book, ذلك الكتب as opposed to *hādhā al-kitāb*, this Book.

dhāt, الذات essence or *tha't*, ذات essence of God.

dhhikr, ذكر recollection

dhimmi, ذمي a person from the People of the Book entitled to protection under Islamic law.

dīn, دين religion.

dīwān, ديوان poetry collection of a spiritual or inspirational nature.

diyah, دية blood money, retribution.

falashas, (Ge'ez) meaning exiles or strangers, referring to Jews who did not convert to Christianity.

farid kifaya, فرض كفايه collective responsibility. فرض عين personal responsibility

fatwa, فتوى legal ruling. Fatawa, pl.

fiqh, الفقه Islamic law and jurisprudence.

fiqh al-aqallihyyāt al-muslima, فقه الأقليات المسلمة the religious law of Muslim minorities,

fiqh al-aqalliyyat, فقه الأقليات the law of the minorities

fiqh al-muwāzanāt, فقه الموازنات or applying a juristic preference to strike a balance in order to weigh the pros and cons of a certain thing in view of an existing situation.

firqa, فرقة a sect, *firāq* pl. فرق

fitrah, فطرة (instinctual nature) Tariq, *fitra*, nature, of a newborn child as an example of a Muslim.

galut, (Hebrew) *Diaspora*

ghazw, غزو invasion, plunder.

ghiyār, الغيار "the law of differentiation."

Gebr/gābr, (Ge 'ez, or Amharic) slave, or servant, is used as a prefix to a name in a manner similar to *Abd-name*, or عبد الله, *servant of God before an Arabic name*.

hada, هاد repented

hadīth, حديث sayings of the prophet, usually concerning the interpretation of the Qur'ān of some aspect of Islam.

haja, حَاجَة need.

Hajj, الحج Pilgrimage to Mecca.

hala istithnaiyya, حله استثنائيه exceptional situation.

hanīf, حنيف *pl. hunafā* حنفاء pure monotheism as practiced by Abraham, also to revert.

Hasan al-Bannā, حسن البنا founder of the Muslim brotherhood, grandfather of Tariq Ramadan

al-hawāriyyūn, الحواريون the disciples of Jesus.

hay, حي alive, *hayyah*, حياة life,

hegira or *hijrah*, هِجْرَة the name given to Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina.

hifaz, حافظ a person who can recite the Qur'ān by heart.

al-hijriyyat, الحجية necessary complimentary, الحاجيات.

hōs monogenous para patros, (Greek) as of a father's only son.

hulūl, حلول indwelling of the divine, similar to *sakina* السكينة.

ibād, اباد a pre-Islamic Christian.

ihsān, إحسان a beautiful word meaning the constant striving for perfection, minimizing pain and conflict. *al-ihsan*, used by Tariq Ramadan for excellence, not forgetting God, (*Western Muslims*, 79) similar to continuous prayer.

ijara, الإجارة traditional tribal protection.

ijmā, إجماع consensus.

ijtihad, اجتهاد independent reasoning, not to be undertaken in religious contexts by non-scholars. See *mujtahid* مجتهد below.

Ikhwān, الإخوان Muslim brotherhood.

‘ilm, علم knowledge.

imān, إيمان faith, belief.

imitizāj, امتزاج mingling of the divine with the human.

In hoc signo vinces, (Latin) “under this sign you will conquer.”

injīl, الإنجيل Gospel, Bible.

Insān, الإنسان human being, humanity.

Inshallah, إن شاء الله essentially meaning “God willing.” The word has a myriad of uses.

Isa, عيسى Jesus

ishārāt, اشارات hinting at a meaning, suggesting a meaning rather than exactly defining,

islām, الاسلام submission to God.

istislah, استصلاح to seek the common good or *maslaha* مصلحة public interest.

ittakhadha nafsa, اتخذ لنفسه to take to oneself.

al-jāhiliyya, الجاهلية the Time of Ignorance.

al-jāhl, الجاهل ignorance.

Jacobites, Syrian Orthodox Christians.

jawhar, جوهر similar to *ousia* (Greek) substance, essence.

jiyya, جزية A tax paid by the People of the Book in lieu of military service in Muslim countries.

jism, جسم body.

juma al hazīni, الحزنيه جمعة Good Friday.

Juz', جزء a section, chapter or part of the Qur'ān. pl. *ajzā'*, أجزاء The Qur'ān is divided by 30 *ajzā'* and 114 *sūrah*.

kāfir, كفر unbeliever, *kufaar* pl. كفار

kalām, الكلام (dialogue), speech.

kalām nafsī, الكلام نفسي God's eternal self-expression

kenosis, in Christian theology, *kenosis* (from the Greek word for emptiness *κένωσις*, is the 'self-emptying' of one's own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will.

Keturah, קטורה (Hebrew) incense. According to Parash 25:1 this is the name given to Hagar when she remarried Abraham.

Khalaqa, خلق to create, *akhluqu*, اخلق create, *takhluqu*, تخلق you create.

Al-khalil, الخليل friend, as in friend of God.

khamr, خمر alcohol.

Kharaj, الخراج agricultural tax.

kitāb, كتاب book

kufr, كافر disbelief

lā ilāha illa Allāh, لا اله الا الله There is no god, but God.

libs al-ghiyār, لبس الغيار distinctive dress, policy of differentiation between Muslims and the People of *the Book*.

Logos, λόγος (Greek) reason and word. Acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ)

Ltif, لطيف subtle.

ma'ānī, معاني referents, having to do with divine attributes.

mahadth, محدث originator.

Majus, مجوس (Zoroastrian).

mansukh, المنسوخ abrogated.

maqasid, مقاصد objective (s) مقصد pl. Usually referring to the purpose of Islamic law.

ma'rūf, معروف that which sound human nature regards as good. As opposed to *munkar*, منكر which sound human nature rejects as evil.

masalik, مسلك caravan trails, King's road.

al-masīh, المسيح *masīhī* the Messiah, Jesus.

Masjid al-Nabawī, المسجد النبوي the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina.

Maslaha, مصلحه the common good, three types: *mawlā*, مولى whereby non-Muslim individuals gradually become adopted into an Arab Muslim tribe and eventually convert, thus escaping *dhimmīs* status.

mawlūd, مولود begotten.

mawjūd, موجود existing.

menahhemana, in Aramaic, *paráklētos* in Greek, comforter, consoler

mihrāb, محراب a small semicircular area that indicates qibla, direction of Muslim prayer.

millet, مِلَّة the system of governing the People of the Book as *dhimmi*.

minbar, منبر pulpit for Friday prayers.

minhaj, منهج a pathway, like shari'ah as a path to God, God's way.

mu'ahid, معاهد a dhimmi, or pagan that entered into treaty with Muslims after a war, their lives must be protected as dhimmi.

Mu'allaqat, معلقة pre-Islamic poetry.

al-muamalat, المعاملات the social teachings of the Qur'ān.

mubāhala, مباحلة mutual invocation, or the ordeal of fire with regard to the delegation of Najrān or the introduction of Judaism to Himyar.

Mudhhab, مذهب name for a school of one of the four major Sunni Imams.

mufasser, مفسر *mufasserūn*, scholar(s) مفسرون.

Muhajirun, مهاجرون those who emigrated with Muhammad from Mecca to Medina.

Muhāgar, مهاجر emigrant, refugee.

Muhaymin, المهيمن guardian, *muhaymina*, المهيمنة meaning guardian over.

muhkam, محكم firmly established meaning. Holding one meaning that is clear and does not need interpretation.

muhkamāt, محكمات easy to interpret, a very clear verse.

mujtahid, مجتهد independent thinker.

Mujtahid fi'l-madhab, المجتهد في المذهب a particular school of religious thought, with Islamic jurisprudence, may differ within its boundaries.

mujtahid fi'l-sharḥ, المجتهد في الشرح a person not obliged or permitted to follow an existing authoritative *madhhab*, i.e., allowed to think independently.

mu'min, مؤمن *mu'minūn*, مؤمنون true believers meaning.

munāfiqūn, المنافقون hypocrites, those who profess belief or allegiance, but do not keep their word.

munahhamanā, a Syriac word that means Muhammad, in Greek, *paraklētōs* (Paraclete) according to Ibn Ishaq, *sīra*.

muqatta'āt letters, مقاطع الحروف These letters form part of the fourteen mysterious that precede several chapters of the Qur'an.

murids, مُريد disciples.

mushrik, مشرك those who associate partners with God.

Mushuf, مصحف early written copies of Qur'ān from oral tradition.

Muslimūm, مسلموم Muslims, singular مسلم

mutakallim, متكلم a person that engages in *kalām*, debate or dialogue. The one who speaks, the good speaker.

mutakallimūn, متكلمون plural of *mutakallim*. The one who can speak, public debater of theological issues.

mutashābihāt, متشابهات difficult to interpret.

mutawaffika, متوفيك cause to die, Cf. (3):55 I will take your soul and cause you to die...

Najāshī, النجاشي The title given to the Abyssinian King.

Najrān, نجران historical town in Southwest Arabia

nasārā, النصارى *al-nasārā*, (*sing nasārī*) Christian.

nasb, النسب descendancy, referring to blood ties.

naskh, نسخ abrogation, replace.

Nāsirah, الناصرة Nazareth.

Al-nāsirī, الناصري Christian.

Nāsirīyūn, ناصريون Nazerene, possible name for Christians.

nātiq, ناطق rational speaking, as written by Sulayman ibn Hasan al Ghazzi. Modern Arabic منطقي.

Nestorians, Church of the East.

Al-niyya, النية intentions, Tariq

Nussāk, نساك general ascetic.

qadeem, قديم primordial.

Qashīda, قصيدة poem.

Qaswā, قسوا the name of Muhammad's favourite camel.

al-qayoum, القيوم self-existing.

qebat, (Ge'ez) fully unified through the Holy Spirit.

qibla, قبلة direction of Mecca.

qissīsīn, قسيسين priests *rahbān*, رهبان monk, *rahbāniyya*, الرهبنة *monasticism*.

qist, قسط equity, as in equal share, *al-muqsit*, المقسط noun name of God.

Qur'ān, القرآن Qur'ānic, Qur'ān.

rahmanā, الرحمن the Beneficent.

rasm, رسم bare consonant form of word, i.e., no *teshkeel*. تشكيل or diacritical markings (*ḥarakāt* الحركات or short vowels, *tashkīl* are supplementary diacritical consonant markings consonant for 'forming'. *i'jām*, إعجام consonant forming).

Rasūl, الرسول sing rasul, or الأنبياء prophet, or messenger.

ra'y, رأي personal opinion with regard to exegesis.

ribā, الربا interest.

ribia al-adawiyya, ربيعة العدوية the need of him. Or a dancer who became Muslim, the love

of God of the Suffi order.

risālah, رساله letter, mission, epistle, tractate, bill or statement, ex, Paul of Antioch's Letter

to a Muslim Friend.

rūh, رُوح spirit (brill).

sāba'a, سابعاً so-and-so came suddenly, convert.

sabab an-nuzūl, أسباب النزول occasion of revelation.

Sābi'ūn, الصابئة considered a religion of the People of the Book.

sakinah, سكينه (calmness and tranquillity) for instance, Sheikh Khalid Sallabi describes the experiences of *sakinah* he felt at a Quaker Meeting for Worship. Cf. *Sufi Sakinah*.

salafī, السلفي righteous ancestors, conservative, radical Islamists. Following the path of Muhammad.

sālihūn, صالحان righteous.

sa'luk, صعلوك tribal outcast.

shahādah, الشهادة Islamic testimony of faith.

sharī'ah, الشريعة laws, road, way, path to God.

sharī'at al-'adl, شري العدله Sharia Justice.

sharī'at al-fadl, شري افضل law of grace.

Shiloh, שִׁילֹה (Hebrew) a messianic figure that the Jews of the Hijaz anticipated.

שִׁילֹה יבא בי ער (Hebrew) “until the *Messiah* to whom the kingdom belongs comes.”

shirk, *mushriks*, شرك, مشرك associating partners with God and a person who associates partners with God.

shubah, شبيعه obscure misguided argument, usually against islam by Christians, Jews or atheists.

shubah lahum, شُبَّهَ لَهُمْ so it appeared to them...

sibhga, صبغ divine anointing, the hue given by God to life.

sifa dhâtiyya, صافه ذاتية divine attributes.

sifāt Allah, صافه الله God's attributes.

sīra, السيرة Biography of Muhammad.

Sost Ledat, (Ge'ez) an adoptionist theory describing the nature of Jesus.

sunnah, السنة the way or the example, *sunnah al-nabi*, سنة النبي the way of the prophet.

sūrah, or *sūrat* سورة a passage from the *Qur'an*, plural *suwar*. There are 114 سُورَ

114 *sūrah* and 30 *ajzā'*, أجزاء parts or chapters in the *Qur'an*.

ta'aruf ف نعار knowing each other, used in 49:13, relating to cooperating for the common good.

Tabā'aiah, طبيعيه natural, normal, normal occurrence.

tābi'a, تابعة or تابع Followers, as in the students from the second generation of followers.

tābi'ūn, تابعون The second generation of Islamic Scholars and students of the Companions.

tafsīr, تفسير tafāsīr, التفاسير exegesis of Qur'ān or hadīth.

tajassud, تجسد incarnation.

at-tajism, التجسيم anthropomorphism.

taghlowah fi deenkum (sp), تَغْلَوْا فِي دِينِكُمْ excesses in the religion.

al-tahrīf, التحريف scriptural falsification.

Al-tahsiniyyat, التحسينيات and kamaliyyat, كماليات enhancing and perfecting.

takfīr, تكفير declaring Muslims to be outside Islam.

taqarub, تقرب (from قرب) nearness, peaceful cooperation, community, from قرب.

taqlīd تقليد uncritical allegiance, imitating a tradition, or the solid foundations of the application of the means of exegesis. *Taqlīd* is sometimes used in this thesis in place of the modern sociological term *altnshah ilajtmahayatun* التنشئة الاجتماعية socialization or social conditioning.

taqwa, تقوى consciousness of God.

tasdiq, تصديق affirmation of the truth of God's existence, dedication to what God expects people to do and opposition to what God forbids.

tashkeel, تَشْكِيل orthographic markings, or diacritic annotation, usually referring to vowels.

tashreed, تشريد deterrence (from Abi Bakf Naji's The Management of Savagery, *idarat al tawahush*).

Tawahedo, (Ge'ez) Union, as described the nature of Jesus subsumed in the Divine.

tawhīd, توحيد the oneness of God.

ta'wīl, تأويل interpretation including esoteric meaning.

al-taysīr fī al-fatwā wa'l-tabshīr fī al-da'wa, "التفسير في الفتوى والتبشير في الدعوة" (facilitation in issuing *fatwās* and promoting Islam through proselytizing).

teshuvah תשובה (Hebrew) repentance.

thālith الثالث *thalātha*, trinity, three.

theotokos (Greek) Mother of God.

Tsadkan (Ge‘ez) the righteous ones.

ummat al-mu'minin أمة المؤمنين the community of believers of Muhammad.

ummataṅ ummataṅ, أُمَّةٌ أُمَّةٌ community by community.

ummataṅ wasataṅ أُمَّةٌ وَسَطًا A middle nation or a balanced nation.

ummatun muqtasidatun, أُمَّةٌ مُقْتَصِدَةٌ a balanced people. The one who saves. They do not waste.

uqnum, اقنوم in one hypostasis, i.e., two natures in one hypostasis

usul, أصول fundamentals of religion.

usul al-fiqh, أصول الفقه law and jurisprudence.

al-walā' wa'l'barā', الولاء والبراء loyalty and disavowal. Loyalty to things that please God.

and disavowal and opposition to things that displease God.

al-wahī al-qur'āni, الوحي القراني inlibration, revelation of the Qur'an.

walia, ولي guardian, common call to God.

al-waqi, الوقي Current state of affairs, context?

wasatī, wasatiyya, وسطيّ وسطي systematic and liberal interpretation of Islamic regulation governing the life of Muslim minorities that seeks to preserve Islamic identity and facilitate Islamization of the West, as opposed to Salafī interpretation of regulations.

al-wasī, الوصي the vast, an attribute or divine name.

Wa-yomer, (Hebrew) “and He said...”

wujūd, وجود existence, existing, being.

al-wujūd wahdat, الوجود وحدة oneness of God, unity of being.

yahūd, اليهودي a Jew.

Yahūda, (Judah) the eldest son of the Prophet Yaquḅ (Jacob).

Zabur, زبور referring to the Book revealed to David, Psalms.

zakaṭ, زكاة tax for the poor.

zinā', زناء This term is used to discuss sexual relations outside of marriage in various forms. *zuhd*, الزهد Muslim ascetic, *nussāk*, نساك general ascetic.