

JESUS IN THE QUR'AN AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
TO BUILD PROGRESSIVE DIALOGUE
BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

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Introduction

It is perhaps banal to state that the difference of perception concerning the figure of Jesus is the line of demarcation between the believers of Islam and Christianity. Furthermore it is often a stumbling block in the business of dialogue. This article will focus on the potential points about Jesus in the Qur'an, so as to promote a genuine sharing between the respective believers, (belief in Allah's Prophets and Messengers is one of six tenants of Islam.) After all the person of Jesus with his attractive idealism could certainly, despite the challenges, be a unifying figure in the adventure of mutual theology.

Jesus in the Qur'an

Muslims belief about prophets, culminating in Muhammad is one of deep respect. Rejecting or disliking any of Allah's Messengers renders one guilty of disbelief. No discrimination is to be exercised against any prophet (Q.S. 3, 84).¹

Concerning Jesus in the Qur'an, He is one of the greatest prophets of Allah who received from Him the *Injil* (Gospel). Furthermore Isa (Jesus) was the Messiah (Q.S. 5,75) and to perform his task he was strengthened by the "Holy Spirit," (Q.S. 2,87; 5,110) given signs, (Q.S. 5,110; 2,87) and God taught him the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel. (Q.S.

¹ Felix J. Phiri, "Articles of Faith", Dar Comboni 06-02-2014.

3,48; 5,110) Jesus attested the truth of what was in the Torah. (Q.S. 3,50; 5,46; 61,6) He made lawful some of the things that were forbidden to the Children of Israel in his day. (Q.S. 3,50; 5,72; 117; 19,36; 43,64) He warned them that paradise was forbidden to those who ascribe partners to God (Q.S. 5,72) and he cursed those of the Children of Israel who went astray. (Q.S. 5,78) The religion which he was sent to establish was that of Noah, Abraham, Moses and subsequently of Mohammad himself. (Q.S. 33,7; 42,13) The Gospel which was bestowed upon him contained guidance, light and admonition. (Q.S. 5,46) It compared worshippers to seeds which delight the sowers. (Q.S. 48,29) Like the Torah which it confirmed and the Qur'an which was revealed after it, it contained God's promise of paradise to those who gave their lives fighting in God's cause. (Q.S. 9,111) He is also referred to as the 'Word of Allah'. (Q.S. 4,171) Isa's mother Maryam was the daughter of Imran, (Q.S. 3, 35)-- cf the Amran of Exodus 6,20—and the sister of Aaron (and Moses). (Q.S. 19,28) She was fostered by Zachariah (father of John the Baptist) (Q.S. 3,36) and while still a virgin (Q.S. 6,12; 19,19-21) she gave birth to Isa alone in a desolate place under a date palm tree. (Q.S. 19,22ff) Isa spoke whilst still a baby in his cradle (Q.S. 3,46; 5,110; 19,30): He performed various other miracles, including breathing life into clay birds, healing the blind and lepers, and raising the dead. (Q.S. 3,49; 5,111) The Qur'an also has Him foretelling the coming of an unlettered prophet, Muhammad. (Q.S. 61,6; 7,157) Jesus himself brought good tidings of one whose name would be Ahmad. ('more highly praised') (Q.S. 61,6) He summoned his own disciples to be 'helpers' in God's cause and they described themselves as those who 'submitted' and who bore witness. (Q.S. 3,52f.; 61,14)²

Although Christians believe Isa died on a cross, and Jews claim they killed him, for the Muslims he was not killed or crucified, and those who said he was have lied. (Q.S. 4,157) Isa did not die, but ascended to Allah. (Q.S. 4,158) On the day of Resurrection Isa will be a witness against Jews and Christians for believing in his death. (Q.S. 4,159)

The Sahih Muslim has a variant of this tradition: 'The son of Mary...will soon descend among you as a just judge. He will...abolish the poll-tax, and

² Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 3-7.

the wealth will pour forth to such an extent that no one will accept charitable gifts.’³

Moreover, Muslims believe that Isa does not share in the divinity of God. “And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him.”⁴ (Q.S. 2,116) Other verses attest that Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an Apostle of an Apostles of Allah. (Q.S. 4,17) They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three. (Q.S. 5,73) No son did Allah beget nor is there any god along with Him. (Q.S. 23,91)

Jesus Christ and Dialogue Between Islam and Christianity: Hope or Hopeless?

It is a fact that the controversy about the personality of Jesus Christ is the major difference between Islam and Christianity. The Christianity consider Jesus as God or Son of God, as it is written in Creed. The Muslims on the other hand look at Jesus Christ, whom they called Isa Al-Masih, as a great Prophet of Allah and they love and respect him as much as they love and respect Abraham, Moses, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob and Muhammad.

“Say (O Muhammad): we believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and that which was vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.” (Q.S. 3, 84)⁵

Now, let me make a simple analogy regarding dialogue, wherein Jesus Christ can be a matter of inter-religious dialogue. The dialogue is like a house that has two main parts. First part is a ‘guest room’ and an other part is the ‘private room’. The dialogue that is performed in the first part should be to discuss how important questions about life have been answered by different

³ Sahih Muslim 287, see also, Sunan Abu Dawud, 37: 4310.

⁴ Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of The Glorious Qur’an* (Cairo-Egypt: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Masri, / Beirut-Lebanon: Dar Al-Kitab Allubnani, 1972), p. 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.75-76.

religious traditions: Who is our Creator and Benefactor, and how can we serve Him? Whom should we resort to in our moments of vulnerability, and how? Why is there injustice in life, and why doesn't the Creator remove it? Why are moral principles not respected? How should one behave when they get violated? What is going to happen to us after we die? Furthermore, the greatest common ground concerning Jesus between Muslims and Christians as it is written in above verse (*sura al-Imran*) is an available discuss in this part. I am sure that these questions are a common concern of all human beings and because each religious tradition comes up with answers to these questions, inter-religious dialogue can enable the participants from these traditions to know what answers others have to such questions. This could be a learning experience of immense value.

More than that, inter-religious dialogue, in the certain goals can be performed in the second part of house, private room, therein the doers of dialogue can give some explanations about certain doctrine of each religion, for instance Divinty of Christ, Trinitarian, and so on if it is required. Of course, the aim of this dialogue is not to force others in order to recognize the certain doctrine then considering others as pagans (*kufur*). On the contrary, the main intention of this discuss is that enable anyone to open their hearts and mind for respect the diversity of each religion. Harmony can only be maintained if we learn the formula of 'difference management' rather than seeking to eliminate differences. We have to understand that we have no option but to tolerate differences.

Conclusion

As we saw that the Quranic perception regarding Jesus has certain implications for inter-religious dialogue between Islam and Christianity. In my opinion, inter-religious dialogue is important in order to promote peace and harmony in society as a whole. In other words such dialogue helps to establish friendly social relations, peace and harmony between people of

different faiths, enabling them to have a good understanding of each others' points of view.(*Nostra Aetate*, 1-5)⁶

⁶ Austin Flannery (Ed.), *Vatican Council II* (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1984), pp.738-742.