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Understanding Muhammad's Interaction with the Church

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A good reason for Christians to study Islam is out of respect for the world's largest religion.¹ In addition, the Qur'an and Muhammad claim to be successors of the Holy Books and prophets (the *Taurat* [Torah], the *Zabur* [Psalms], and the *Injeel* [Gospels]) and thus, it is incumbent for the honest Christian to see what this new revelation is about.² If Islam is true (justified true belief), then Christians should turn to Islam for salvation. However, this paper will be arguing that Muhammad was misinformed about the orthodox Christian Church (its rightful members [i.e., Jesus' true disciples], and their scriptures), and is therefore inadequate to be an authority or a refuter of orthodox Christianity.³

Centuries after Muhammad, there was this notion that early followers of Jesus corrupted his message and either formulated their own false gospel or corrupted the authentic gospels, so that the Gospels used today are unauthentic, not trustworthy, and not inspired.⁴ Early Muslim scholars "implied that the text itself remained unaffected by time, Christian interpretations had distorted its true meaning and laid over it doctrines that a proper reading could not sustain."⁵ Thus they often tried to show how the Gospels, when read without presuppositions, actually

¹ Contrary to what the polls say, not all who claim the name of Christ are Christian as defined in this article. Examples of such groups are Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, New Agers, etc. (see Matthew 7:21-23).

² Italicized is Arabic for the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, and the Gospel of Jesus. Though, Christians widely believe that the canon is complete in the modern Bible and that prophecy of new scripture has ceased (except for Mormons and other heretics in the Christian community which are not truly Christian. I hope I make this point clear).

³ Orthodox in this sense means "conforming to established doctrine," i.e., right-belief, not to be confused with the Eastern Orthodox Church denomination.

⁴ Surely Muhammad had to either believe the latter view and was familiar with this claim or was altogether ignorant of the canonical Gospel's content. If Muhammad rejected these Gospels, then why accept apocrypha sources? Perhaps he only saw those gospels that did not contradict the Qur'an as reliable and authentic history. The dilemma with that view is than what is surah 5:46-48a referring to? The New Testament Gospels, non-canonical gospels, or as some might suggest, just the oral preaching of Jesus? If Muhammad was ignorant of the New Testament Gospel's content then he just did not know better, but that would not excuse the all-knowing *Allah* (Arabic term for "God") who revealed the revelation to Muhammad. Note, "In the Qur'an only Jews, not Christians, are accused of corrupting the scripture." Quote from David Thomas and Barbara Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, 600-900* (Leidan, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 25.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

avored a qur'anic view of Jesus and God, and pointed to Muhammad and the Qur'an.⁶ Other Islamic scholars dismissed the Gospels altogether and rote it off as corrupt often blaming the Apostle Paul for perverting Jesus' original message and inventing Christianity.⁷ During Abbasid times (750 A.D.) Muslims "had established on the basis of the Qur'an that the scriptures currently held by Christians and Jews were not the original messages revealed to Jesus and Moses but corrupt forms of these."⁸ An early Islamic scholar and commentator of the Qur'an says Constantine "distorted the Torah and the Gospel."⁹

Muhammad was born in 570 A.D. While praying in a cave near Mecca, in 610 A.D., at the age of 40, he received his first revelation from the Angel Gabriel. Since he and his followers were being persecuted in Mecca, they took flight to Medina in 622 A.D., where he later died in 632 A.D. Thus, Muhammad lived 62 years of age and his ministry lasted for 22 years. During Muhammad's ministry, he kept receiving revelations from "God" which written down became the Qur'an. Muhammad is warned against the Christian's treachery and refutes the doctrine that Jesus is God. The main doctrines Muslims refute has been the trinity and the divinity of Jesus. This dates back within the first three centuries of Islamic history. Since Muhammad's day a Trinitarian was understood as a polytheist and/or an associationists, one who associates partners with God's divinity. A *Mushrik* are "those who give companions to God" referring to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 15. This was more than a century after Muhammad's death. Christians had since then presented the argument against this claim "pointing out that the wide geographical distribution of the texts of their scripture... prohibited any centralized conspiracy to make changes, but to little avail." Quote from *ibid.*, 15-16.

⁹ Ibid.,41. There exists a mass library of the Bible's content dated prior to the 4th century. If Constantine did pervert the Bible, it is not the copy the church is using today nor throughout Church history. Where is the evidence of a perverted Bible from Constantine? Constantine, the Roman Emperor, reigned from 312-337 A.D.

Trinitarians.¹⁰ The term is associated with polytheists and idolaters. G. Lüling says “Qur’anic references to Mushriks should be read as criticizing the Trinitarians.”¹¹ There existed then (and still present) a misunderstanding of Jesus, the early church, and their canon.

Jaakko Hameen-Anttila, a scholar in Christians and Christianity in the Qur’an says, “Read synchronically, the Qur’an seems remarkably undecided as to how to view Christians.”¹² Compare the historical context of *surah* (“chapter” in the Qur’an) 2:62; 5:82 of the Qur’an with *surah* 9:29, 31-34. Both are revelations given at Madinah during Muhammad’s last ten years of ministry.¹³ *Surah* 2:62; 5:82 are positive references towards Christianity, while *surah* 9:29, 31-34 are negative references towards Christianity. These *surahs* are likely between seven to ten years apart suggesting that Muhammad had a positive view of Christianity entering Medina, but later took a harsher view of the church.¹⁴

It is very important that Christianity and the church be defined. Defining the Christian faith is important for obvious reasons: 1) to guide the church in reflecting and practicing the faith, 2) to help communicate the Christian faith to outsiders, and 3) to protect the church (as well as outsiders) from believing and teaching heresy. The true New Testament orthodox Church is one who believes the following: 1) Jesus is the one and only true God in essence, in which God essentially is three persons in one being—Jesus being one of the three persons of God; 2) Jesus is fully human who died on the cross for our sins; 3) Jesus, being fully God and fully

¹⁰ Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam: Being a Cyclopedic of the Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs, Together With Technical and Theological Terms, Of the Muhammadan Religion*, 1885. Reprint (Chicago: KAZI, 1994).

¹¹ Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 27.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³ Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam*, see under “Qur’an; The Divisions of the Qur’an”.

¹⁴ This is interesting to note, did the all-knowing Allah drastically change his view of the church as if his knowledge was progressing? Or was Allah referring to different groups of Christians with fundamentally different views about God?

human, was raised from the dead; 4) Humanity is deprived of moral perfection and are in need of God's saving grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love; and 5) Jesus is Lord, and being God, God alone should be worshipped and followed for eternal salvation. A mark of this universal church has been the ability to identify what Scriptures have supreme authority in matter of faith and practice—the canon of the Church—the inspired Word of God.¹⁵ This definition of the true New Testament orthodox Church serves as a guide in what is to follow in this paper. For a more detailed account, and since it is the historic orthodox Church advocated here, references will be made to the Chalcedonian creed throughout this paper.¹⁶

The early Muslim population at large surrounding urban areas possibly had daily interactions with Christians.¹⁷ The phrase “people of the book” in the Qur’an refers to Christians and Jews (cf. Qur’an 3:65)¹⁸ –those whom possess the inspired word of God according to the Qur’an (5:46-48).¹⁹ Terms denoting Christians in the Qur’an are traditionally dated to the Medinian period, surahs traditionally dated to the Meccan period hardly mentions the Church.²⁰ Now take a look at surah 2:62: “The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the

¹⁵ E.g., the Church's rejection of the Book of Mormon, The Watchtower Magazine, etc.

¹⁶ Chalcedonian Creed, “We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the unity, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning him, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.”

¹⁷ Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 5. Supposedly the cousin of Muhammad's wife was a Christian though little is known about her cousin. See I. Shahīd, “Islam and Oriens Christianus: Makka 610-622 AD,” in *The encounter of eastern Christianity with early Islam*, ed. E. Grypeou, M. Swanson and D. Thomas (Leiden, 2006), 9-31.

¹⁸ May also refer to one with the exclusion of the other.

¹⁹ In the Qur’an 5:47, the phrase “the people of the Gospel” directly refers to the Christians only.

²⁰ Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 22.

Sabians- all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good- will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.”²¹ The word for Christians here is *nasārā* in the Arabic. The term probably derives from the Syriac *Nasrāyē* (i.e., Christians) or was associated with Nazareth.²² This surah of the Qur’an is dated circa, but no less than, 622 A.D. according to Sir William Muir (1819-1905), an Islamic scholar.²³ It should be noted that Muhammad settled in Medina at this time. This Qur’anic *ayat* (verse) alone suggests that there existed Christians knowable to Muhammad during his ministry in Medina. Note also that this verse is a positive reference towards Christianity. Some may take this verse to teach that Christianity is a viable path to Heaven according to the Qur’an.²⁴ As mentioned earlier, Muhammad’s view of Christianity drastically changed which makes one speculate why such a drastic view was adopted by Muhammad at all.²⁵ This verse and many others in the Qur’an lead Islamic scholars like J. Wansbrough to believe that “the polemical style of many passages in the Qur’an shows that the text was born in an environment professing Christianity (and Judaism).”²⁶ Based on Qur’anic evidence alone, it does not seem likely that there is much of a church presence in Mecca where Muhammad spent the first half of his ministry.

In 615 A.D., to escape persecution, Muhammad and his followers fled from Mecca to Abyssinia (i.e., modern day Ethiopia).²⁷ He choose Abyssinia because its king “was a pious

²¹ Abdel M. A. S Haleem, trans.

²² Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 22.

²³ Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. “Qur’an.”

²⁴ However, this view is not favored.

²⁵ Either we credit Muhammad for the change of view towards Christians and reject the interpretation that the Qur’an is the literal word of God, or we credit God for the progressive understanding of Christianity making him out to be finite and having incomplete knowledge. Another view may be that the Qur’an is referring to different groups of Christianity with fundamentally different and opposing beliefs (especially about God).

²⁶ Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 26.

²⁷ Jenkins, Jr., *The Muslim Diaspora*, 11.

Christian” (Abyssinia was famous for being a Christian town).²⁸ Was this king a true Christian in the orthodox sense? According to the *Síra*, a Muslim recited surah 19 to the King and his guards.²⁹ Then the king was moved to tears and said, “Of a truth, this and what Jesus brought have come from the same niche.”³⁰ On the next day, the king had ask Muhammad’s followers about them teaching that Jesus is (just) a creature (literally a slave).³¹ When the Muslims answered that Jesus is a prophet, the slave of God, the king replied saying, “Jesus... does not exceed what you have said,” and blessed them saying, “not for a mountain of gold would I allow a man of you (Muslims) to be hurt.”³² The Abyssinians later assembled and said to the king that he had left their religion (i.e., Christianity). Unlike the apostate king, the Abyssinians believed that Jesus is the Son of God.³³ The king of the Abyssinians denied Jesus’ deity. Three things are for sure if these sources are to be trusted.³⁴ One, the king did not believe that the Christian canon of scripture was complete; two, he believed that surah 19 was from God; and even more revealing he denied that Jesus is God on several occasions. No, this king was not a true Christian in the orthodox sense, and therefore was not a good Christian witness to Muhammad.³⁵ Notice again, that Muhammad and his followers early on in Muhammad’s ministry (610-622 A.D.) had a positive attitude towards Christians (e.g., here, the Church in Abyssinia).

²⁸ Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad*, 150-157.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 152. Surah 19 sees the “Son of God” terminology as a literal offspring of God and thus mocks the impossibility of such ever occurring (19:91-92). Therein is a reference (whether explicit or implicit) to Christian doctrine. It is not for sure whether select verses or the whole chapter was read.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 152-53.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 155. Not literally, but the metaphorical-biblical sense of the term.

³⁴ The reliability of this source at times is questionable. Some scholars would content that Muslim literature is untrustworthy.

³⁵ More precisely the first Muslim community. However, the church in Abyssinia could have very well been a good Christian witness. It is a wonder at this point if the Muslim refugees ever read the Gospels in the New Testament while in Abyssinia.

There is the story of Muhammad’s encounter with Bahira the monk. Allegedly, Muhammad at the age of 25 (595 A.D.), while traveling through Syria stopped south of Damascus where he was told by a Christian monk named Bahira that he was to become a prophet.³⁶ The monk is said to be well versed in Christianity and received his knowledge from Christian books in his possession.³⁷ Was Bahira the “Christian” monk truly a Christian in the orthodox sense? Well first thing considered, Bahira was already looking for a new prophet after the Christian canon of scripture had been complete with the Apostles of Jesus—Paul being Jesus’ last apostle. Furthermore, according to Ibin Ishaq in the *Síra*, there was something about Muhammad’s sleep, habits, general affairs, and the mole between his shoulders that were descriptors of a future prophet according to the monk’s “Christian books.”³⁸ Now there is no known reference of these descriptors in the Christian Bible as signs of a prophet. Bahira the monk must have been misguided and had apocrypha sources.³⁹ His mission should have been on sharing the gospel of Christ to his visitors instead of looking for another prophet.⁴⁰

In general, there are few people groups identified as Christians in early Islamic history. Note that there exists early Islamic traditions outside Qur’anic evidence that used the term ‘Nazarenes’ to identify Christians in a very broad sense.⁴¹ According to Claude Gillot, an Islamic scholar, “The Christianity known among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times was largely of the Syrian

³⁶ Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad*, 79. Again, if the early traditional Islamic biographies of Muhammad are to be trusted.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 80.

³⁹ The terms “apocrypha” and “non-canonical” are used interchangeably here in this paper. By these terms is meant specifically those with Christian influence amongst various Christian sects.

⁴⁰ This is especially so when one realizes that God himself came down from Heaven as the last and final prophet. Also, in Christian eschatology the two prophets who shall come are returning prophets who already came. “Prophets” in this sense means one like Moses (Deut. 18:15-19).

⁴¹ Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 628, on Q 19:37 and i, p. 112. Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, x, p. 482, on Q 5:73., cited in Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 44.

type, whether Jacobite or Nestorian.”⁴² Interestingly, according to Muqātil, “The Nazarenes divided into three groups over Jesus: the Nestorians said that he is God’s son, the Jacobites that he is God, and the Melkites ‘God the third of three’ (Q 5:73).”⁴³ On first hearing, an orthodox Christian may not be sure what the difference is because orthodox Christianity affirms the theological language used here.⁴⁴ Though with further study, Claude Gilliot points out that according to tradition, the Melkites believed that “Allah is God, (Jesus) is God, (and) his mother is God.”⁴⁵ The Melkites here are guilty of heresy and are not truly Christian in the orthodox sense.

In addition, according to the Sīra, Christians from the “Byzantine rite” went to visit Muhammad in Medina (probably from the Christian town of Najrā).⁴⁶ These Christians, writes Ibn ishaq, argued for Jesus’ deity based off of miracles not recorded in the Christian canon, but in apocrypha sources.⁴⁷ Also noteworthy, it is said in the Sīra that these Christians believed in a Melkite Trinitarian view noted above (i.e., God the father, His son Jesus, and Mary make up the Divine) which as aforementioned has been defined as unorthodox and heretical. This understanding gives clarity to surah 5:116, “God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?’” This is a heretical view of the

⁴² Claude Gilliot, “Christians and Christianity in Islamic Exegesis,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, 600-900*, eds. David Thomas and Barbara Rohhema (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 32.

⁴³ Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, ii, p. 628. Al-Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, x, p. 482, cited in Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 44. See also, Q 19:37.

⁴⁴ Though the meaning attributed to these terms may very well differ. The first Muslims misunderstood the meaning *orthodox* Christianity gave to these theological terms. For “God,” “God’s Son,” and “God the third of three,” could all be used as descriptors of Jesus Christ. However, the theological view held by the Melkites is unorthodox and has been deemed heretical by early church councils.

⁴⁵ Gilliot, *Christians and Christianity*, 44.

⁴⁶ Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad*, 271.

⁴⁷ Ibid. The miracle of Jesus making birds from clay and breathing life into them is a story coming from the infancy Gospel of Thomas (Greek A text, 2:1-5). The miracle of Jesus speaking in a cradle as a baby is a story coming from the Pseudo Gospel of Matthew (chs. 20-21, in Elliott, *The Apocrypha New Testament*, pp. 95-96). Both sources are non-canonical (apocrypha) literature.

trinity held by the Melkites of Muhammad's day and is not a tenet of the orthodox Christian faith.

Two centuries before the time of Muhammad the Byzantine Empire split over differences of christologies.⁴⁸ David Thomas writes, "Copts in Egypt and substantial parts of the Christian parts in Syria...professed a miaphysite christology that challenged the two natures formula (of Christ) accepted at Chalcedon in 451 A.D."⁴⁹ Mebratu Kiros Gebru argues that miaphysite christology is the "teaching of the *Ethiopian Orthodox Church*."⁵⁰ This christological view would have definitely been off-putting to the early Muslims. For God cannot suffer nor die—which is what a non-dualistic view of Jesus' nature (affirming only his full divinity but not his humanity) seriously suggests (i.e., that God died). Thus, the formulation of Jesus' nature at the Council of Chalcedon avoids such a categorical mistake and early Muslims may have given the Chalcedonian formulation a better hearing.

Mani, the founder of the religion Manicheism, lived in the third century A.D.⁵¹ Similar to Muhammad, Mani understood himself to be the seal of the prophets and as an equal partner of the *paraclete* promised by Jesus.⁵² Mani identified himself as the Apostle of Christ and adopted Christian jargon like "gospel" and "presbyter."⁵³ He also quoted from canonical as well as apocrypha works.⁵⁴ Mani "adopted the non-orthodox early-Christian doctrine of Christ's docetic

⁴⁸ David Thomas, "Introduction," in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, eds. Thomas and Rohhema, 4. Christians in the Persian Empire were suspicious of being followers of Nestorius (d. 451 A.D.) who taught that Jesus is two persons instead of one, a heresy denounced at the council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.)

⁴⁹ Ibid. Miaphysite Christology teaches that Christ has one *single* nature, not two *distinct* natures.

⁵⁰ Mebratu Kiros Gebru, *Miaphysite Christology: An Ethiopian Perspective* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Werner Sundermann, "Manicheism i. General Survey," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2009, accessed November 16, 2017, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/manicheism-1-general-survey>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

nature, i.e. of his un-born, non-corporeal nature.”⁵⁵ “According to Ibn Abbās, quoted by Ibn al-kalbī, Manicheis was brought to Mecca by Qurayshites who used to go to al-Hira for business and met Christians there” (c. 272 A.D.).⁵⁶ According to Gilliot, “A plausible hypothesis is that Islam’s first appearance was a non-conformist off-shoot of Manicheism.”⁵⁷ Muhammad was deeply influenced by Manicheism (see Figure 1).⁵⁸ Here is more evidence that Muhammad may have been misinformed about the true orthodox Christian Church, concerning their beliefs and scriptures.

	Mani the Prophet (3 rd century AD)	Muhammad the Prophet (7 th century AD)
Self-proclaimed seal of the prophets.	Yes	Yes
Self-proclaimed equal partner of the <i>paraclete</i> promised by Jesus.	Yes	Yes
Used apocrypha works as authoritative and reliable.	Yes	Yes
Adopted Christian jargon like “gospel” and “presbyter.”	Yes	Yes

Figure 1

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Gilliot, *Christians and Christianity*, 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

During Muhammad's day Najran was famously a Christian town. In fact, it is believed that the martyred Christians (referred to as believers) in Najran is the context of surah 85:4-8: "damned were the makers of the trench, the makers of the fuel-stoked fire! They sat down to watch what they were doing to the believers. Their only grievance against them was their faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy."⁵⁹ The incident (c. 570 A.D.) obviously predates surah 85 which is believed to be given probably within the first four years of Muhammad's ministry (while in Mecca, c. 613 A.D.).⁶⁰ Notice this surah is a positive reference towards Christianity during Muhammad's ministry in Mecca. It is also noted that there presumably was a presence of Monophysites in Najrān.⁶¹ Monophysitism (or miaphysitism), again, is a doctrine about Christ that teaches Jesus essentially is only one nature (divine) instead of two (divine and human). Remember, this heresy was denounced at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

The stories of former prophets are not told in great length as found in the Bible as to assume that Muhammad's audience was already familiar with them.⁶² So then, did Muhammad have pre-qur'anic sources of the former prophets? Could it be that the audience of the qur'anic revelations did not have access to these sources but were being introduced to the former prophets and Holy Scripture of the past for the first time?⁶³ A problem with that hypothesis for all of Muhammad's audience (i.e., in every context) is that if surah 5:46-47 is commanding

⁵⁹ "The makers of the trench" is referring to the Jewish king of Yemen, Dhū Nu'ās, according to Islamic tradition. See Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 16-18.

⁶⁰ Suleiman A. Mourad, "Christians and Christianity in The Sīra of Muhammad," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, 600-900*, eds. David Thomas and Barbara Rohhema (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 61.

⁶¹ Gilliot, *Christians and Christianity*, 33.

⁶² This becomes clear by the redundant command to remember or recall what would have been known by Muhammad's audience only by reading or hearing parts of "scripture" (used loosely here, not to be confused with divine revelation).

⁶³ It is also likely that Muhammad's audience were being introduced to these stories for the first time, since many converts of Muhammad's message were not formerly Jews or Christians (People of the Book).

Muhammad and his followers to believe in the pre-qur'anic holy books and read them, then how can they if they (or even us today) had no access to them?⁶⁴ So, it seems, there must have been open and free access to these sources in order for the recipients of this verse to fulfill their duties (e.g., surah 5:47, “Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers” and “judge between them according to what God has sent down”).

What about oral traditions of the Biblical narratives? Consider that these oral traditions would have to go all the way back to the holy books themselves or the actual prophets acting in history, or both. If these oral traditions date back to the Jesus of history, then that would mean there would have been 600 years of oral tradition after oral tradition, after tradition—a continuous chain—which there would be serious room to doubt the authenticity of any one tradition. If these oral traditions date back to David or Moses then doubts would only increase. However, as aforementioned, according to qur'anic evidence there was Scripture (Divine Revelation) for Muhammad and his contemporaries to “judge” what was *in it* (like a book).

So, it is very likely that Muhammad had access to a book (i.e., the *Taurat*, the *Zabur*, and the *Injeel*) in which to refer to, given the obvious need to write these oral traditions down and the command from the Qur'an to believe and read them. Did Muhammad have a copy of the New Testament in Arabic? Though it had been argued that there did exist an Arabic copy of the New Testament in pre-Islamic times, according to David Thomas, necessary evidence is still lacking.⁶⁵ If there were Arabic speaking Christians, then how were they made converts without a

⁶⁴ Qur'an, surah 5:46-48a, “We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and confirmation of the Torah already revealed—a guide and lesson for those who take heed of God. So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are lawbreakers. We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down.”

⁶⁵ David Thomas, “Introduction,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, 600-900*, eds. David Thomas, and Barbara Rohhema (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 18.

translation of the New Testament? Perhaps through translated preaching. Why would God tell Muhammad and his community to read the *Injeel* if there was no translated copy in their spoken language? It's possible that God wanted them to translate the *Injeel* in Arabic (or their mother tongue). It could have been that God wrongly assumed that the "Christian" literature available to Muhammad was the *Injeel* given to Jesus (see pg. 2, note 4). But that doesn't sound like an omnipotent God, and so is a view that Muslims would not consent to.

Probable qur'anic sources are the New Testament, the Peshitta (a Syrian translation of the Bible), the Diatessaron, and Apocrypha sources. Also, according to Ibn Ishaq in his *Sīra* of Muhammad, the Armenian Gospel, the Protoevangelium of James, and/or the Infancy Gospel of Thomas was likely used to compile his sources as well.⁶⁶ The Qur'an's depiction of Mary's birth and childhood is likely from the Protoevangelium of James.⁶⁷ There are several examples of passages in the Qur'an where the Diatessaron appear to be a possible source. J. Van Reeth argued that the Qur'an "witnesses to the tradition of the Diatessaron" with the story of Mary (Q 3:35-48), John the Baptist (Q 19:3), and Jesus (Q 3:37, 19:22-26).⁶⁸ Jesus' self-proclamation of his prophet hood in the cradle (Q 19:29-30) is a qur'anic reference to an earlier apocrypha source (see *The Arabic Infancy Gospel*, 1).⁶⁹ And the story of Jesus making live birds from clay in the Qur'an (3:49) is a reference to the earlier Infancy Gospel of Thomas (see 2:3-6), another apocrypha source. The proper names of the biblical characters in the Qur'an "are given in their

⁶⁶ Compare A. Guillaume, trans., *The Life of Muhammad*, 274-276, with *The Protoevangelium of James*, 3-6. See also the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 1:9; *Arabic infancy Gospel* 1, in Elliot, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 102; and *The infancy Gospel of Thomas*, Greek text A6, B6, in Elliot, *The apocryphal New Testament*, p. 76-77.

⁶⁷ Compare Q 3:35-48 and *The Protoevangelium of James* 7:2; 8:1, and Elliot, *The Apocrypha New Testament*, 60.

⁶⁸ Thomas and Rohhema, eds., *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 34.

⁶⁹ Elliot, *The Apocrypha New Testament*, 102.

Syriac form, coming from the Peshitta, the text of the Bible used in Syriac-speaking areas.”⁷⁰ Ibn Ishaq asserts that the Christians believe something which is found in the Acts of Philip, further hinting to the notion that the “Christians” of Muhammad’s day in Arabia were using apocrypha literature and these non-canonical texts “fell into the hands of Muhammad.”⁷¹ J. Bowman, in order to explain the biblical awareness of the Qur’an, “hypothesizes that Muhammad was in contact with the Jacobites, who used the Syriac Diatessaron together with other texts in addition to the canonical gospels, and that Muhammad freely edited these texts for his own purposes.”⁷²

In conclusion, Muhammad had a false view of true orthodox Christianity. Muhammad “came within the scope of the posterity of Marcion, of Tatian and Mani, all of whom wanted to establish or re-establish the true Gospel, to take hold of its original meaning. They thought themselves authorized to do this work of textual harmonization because they considered themselves the Paraclete that Jesus had announced.”⁷³ From a qur’anic point of view, Christianity and the church are much more inclusive than how the historic orthodox Church defines it in the Apostles Creed, Chalcedonian Creed, and the New Testament. It includes all those who call themselves Christians, uses non-canonical texts for instruction in the matters of faith and practice, and holds beliefs that the historic orthodox Church deems heretical and misguided. Perhaps because of persecution and ostracization, the community of so-called Christians who did not accept the formulations of the Council of Chalcedon and other like councils fled to Arabia where the birth of Islam would take place.⁷⁴ The Chalcedonian Creed may have been better accepted on first contact (see page 9). However, Muhammad was

⁷⁰ Gilliot, *Christians and Christianity*, 33.

⁷¹ Gilliot, *Christians and Christianity*, 47. See *The Acts of Phillip in The New apocryphal New Testament*, trans. M.R. James (Oxford, 1924), 32.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷⁴ David Thomas, “Introduction,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, eds. Thomas and Rohhema, 4.

misinformed about the orthodox Christian Church, its rightful members (i.e., Christians), and their scriptures, and is therefore inadequate to be an authority or a refuter of orthodox Christianity. So, it follows, Muslims need to be reintroduced to Christianity because the Qur'an misleads them into knowing the truth about the historic Faith. This work also poses several theological, philosophical, and historical problems towards the credibility of the Qur'an and its source(s).

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