

2018 Research Week Proposal

Abstract:

My research focuses on understanding Muhammad's (the Islamic prophet) interaction with what he perceived to be the Christian church in order to find out why his understanding of Biblical narratives and theology is incorrect. With this information, Christians should reintroduce Christian scripture and theology to Muslims since the Qu'ran's rejection of Christian doctrine is based on associating wrong texts as authoritative Christian teaching. The following questions that shape this research are: Who was Muhammad? What possible sources did Muhammad use to learn about biblical narratives and themes? What did the first Muslims think about the canonical gospels of Jesus? How did early Muslims view the teachings of the Christian church? What constitutes orthodox Christian belief? Using the Qur'an, the Sira, and the Hadith, I examine Muhammad's interaction with the King of Abyssinia, Bahira the Monk, the town of Najran, the Nestorians, Jacobites, Melkites, Manichaeism, and those from the "Byzantine rite." I examine likely sources of the Qur'an such as the Diatessaron, the Protoevangelium of James, the Arab Infancy Gospel, and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. The key results of this research are (1) Muhammad used apocryphal literature as reliable history and consequently had a misunderstanding of orthodox Christian doctrine; (2) Muhammad had a positive outlook on Christianity while in Mecca, however, at the end of his ministry in Medina where there existed so called Christians his outlook became negative; and, (3) despite the Qur'anic command to *read* the Gospel of Jesus (referring to it as divine scripture), early Islamic scholars, two centuries after Muhammad, said either the Bible or Christian interpretation of the Bible was corrupted. The results of this research imply that since Muhammad's various confessions on the Christian

church contradict one another, there is a lot of room to doubt the authority and truthfulness of much of his (or Allah's) statements on the biblical narrative and theology of the Christian church. Muhammad is inadequate to be an authority or a direct refuter of orthodox Christianity because he was misinformed. Overall, this research implies that early Muslims may have been more open to the Chalcedonian Creed than the false Christian creeds they originally encountered. In order to explain why the 7th century Arabian church was largely cultic, I suggest a theory that Christian cults from the Byzantine, Syrian, and Persian empires in pre-Islamic times, fleeing persecution, migrated to the Arabian Peninsula. Future work connected with my findings would be to better understand who possessed the pre-Qur'anic sources. Exactly what texts were Arab Christians using? There is an underpinning that this research leans on: the answer to the question, what is the authentic gospel message of Jesus Christ? The answer would help us understand the context of *surah* 5:46-47, and also to test the hypothesis that the Qur'an is divine revelation from God with various philosophical, historical, and theological proofs.

Proposal

Title: Understanding Muhammad's Interaction with the Christian Church

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