

## **Jesus in the Koran**

We cannot embark on a mission among Muslims until we know the crucial differences between Islam and Christianity. Islam vehemently denies the major truth claims of Christianity. The greatest obstacle in a discussion with a Muslim about the Gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

When we compare the Koranic Jesus with the Biblical Jesus, we soon discover the Koran's distortion of Biblical revelation. George Fry claims that Islam "is the most dangerous and most durable deviation from Orthodox Christianity to appear in history. Muhammad, whether intentionally or not, has become the world's most celebrated re-interpreter of the Gospels."

Who is the Jesus of the Koran? He is not the Christ, the Son of living God. The Koranic and other inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock, one of the earliest Muslim edifices outside Arabia, built in Jerusalem between 691 and 692 A.D. include a number of anti-Christian polemics which clearly express Islam's view of Jesus: "Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner," and "He is God, one, eternal. He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and he has no peer."

Jesus is named ninety-seven times in the Koran. He is given more honour with titles and references than any other prophet before Muhammad. Muslims utter "praise be upon him" each time they mention Jesus' name. Michael Youssef observes, "Many, I think, would be shocked to learn that Mohammed thought very highly indeed of Jesus ... Mohammed affirmed, for example, His virgin birth. He called Him the Spirit of God, the work of God. He believed that Jesus raised people from the dead and was a miracle worker. The Quran called Jesus pure and sinless." Muslims view Jesus as prophet, teacher, healer, mediator, and miracle worker with great power. Even shrines are named after Him.

### **The Word and Spirit of God**

Jesus' special mission to the world is also recognized. Surah lvii:27 declares: "Then We caused our messengers to follow in their footsteps: and We caused Jesus, son of Mary to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him." The two most significant titles assigned to Jesus are the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Surah iv: 171 asserts "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was not only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him."

When the angels announced Jesus' birth to the Virgin Mary, they said, "O Mary! Lo! Allah gives thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah)." (Surah iii: 45) But in Islam there is no connection whatsoever, as in Christianity, with Jesus the Son of God or with the incarnation of Jesus being the Word

who becomes flesh (cf..John 1) Muslims scholars believe that the Word means the command of Allah. Yet the Koran says that John the Baptist was the one who came to proclaim the Word. The angels told Zechariah: "Allah giveth thee glad tidings of (as son whose name is) John, (who cometh) to confirm a word from Allah, lordly, chaste and a Prophet of righteousness." (Surah iii:39)

This Koranic description of Jesus may well serve as a point of contact to show Muslims that Jesus is God's eternal Word of redemption rather than another prophet. The word Spirit in connection with Jesus is used seven times in the Koran. George Braswell notes that Jesus is confirmed by the Spirit of Holiness or the Holy Spirit. "Not only at his birth but while Jesus was in the cradle and as a youth and adult," says Braswell, "the Quran reports that He was supported by the Holy Spirit. Later Muslims authors have written of Jesus as the Spirit and the Spirit of God. Tradition reports that Muhammad said that Jesus the Son of Mary was the Spirit of God and His Word which he cast to Mary the virgin." But the Spirit mentioned in the Koran is not identical to the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures. Since Islam denies the Trinity, it does not accept the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. Yet pioneer missionary to Muslims, Dr. Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952) believed the Koran's description of Jesus as the "Word of God" and "The Spirit from God" offer "the greatest hope for leading Muslims into the depth of the (Christian) faith."

### **The Virgin Birth**

Popular talk-show host Larry King was once asked whom he would choose, if he had the choice to interview one person across history. He replied that he would like to interview Jesus Christ and that he would ask Him just one question: "Are you indeed virgin born?" The answer to that question," said King, "would explain history for me." Jesus Christ, the virgin born Son of God, did change history. The virgin birth is a crucial Biblical doctrine. We confess with the ancient Apostles' Creed that we believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, our Lord, "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary."

Muslims also believe in Jesus's virgin birth. Furthermore, Islam tradition does not only teach the immaculate conception of Mary, but also of her mother. The annunciation as told in the Koran bears many similarities to the Biblical narrative. The Koran says: "And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above (all) the women of creation. O Mary! Be obedient to the Lord, prostrate thyself and bow with those who bow (in worship) .... O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary .... She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: so (it will be). Allah createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! And it is. And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel." ( Surah iii: 42f.;45-48)

But from this Koranic version of the virgin birth, we cannot derive the deity of Christ. Muslims focus on His humanity, His creaturely nature. Surah iii: 59 clearly stress this point: "Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him

out of dust, then he said unto him. Be! And he is." Ravi Zacharias comments in his book *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message that Islam*, while defending the virgin birth, has never been able to break free from a contradiction of its own making on the matter of Jesus' sonship. And he points out that if Muslims have already granted the virgin birth, then they have acknowledged that God, in His infinite power, can initiate life without sexual union.

## **Jesus' Deity Denied**

What do you think of Christ? This is still the question that decides our personal destiny and that of the nations of the world. While admitting Jesus' dignity, sinlessness, miracles, and presence in heaven, He remains in Islam no more than a human prophet. For a Muslim the very idea that God can have a son is anathema or simple blasphemy. The Koran declares:

"So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three"-Cease! (it is better for you! - Allah is only one God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heaven and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender." (Surah iv: 171)

In Islam Muhammad is more prominent than Jesus. Zwemer observes:

"The sin and guilt of the Mohammedan world is that they give Christ's glory for another, and that for all practical purposes Mohammed himself is the Moslim Christ .... (Jesus Christ) is supplanted in the heart of all Moslims by Mohammed. They are jealous for his glory and resist any attempt to magnify the glory of Jesus Christ at the expense of Mohammed."

## **The Cross**

The missing link in Islam is the Cross. Christians glory in the cross of Christ for His death is the believing sinners' gain. But this core truth of the Gospel is denounced by the Koran. Yet the crucifixion event itself is not denied. What it does deny is the crucifixion of Christ.

Islam claims that the Jews were not able to crucify Christ. They were deceived, and mistaking someone else for him, they crucified that person. No details are given of how the Jews were deceived about Christ. The Koran says: " And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger. They slew him not nor crucified but it appeared so unto them; and lo! They have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain." (Surah iv: 157) On the basis of this text, Muslim commentators teach that Christ did not die on the cross. They suggest that either Judas Iscariot or Simon of Cyrene was substituted at the last moment.

As for Jesus, Allah came to the rescue and saved Him from His enemies. Although the crucifixion is denied, some passages in the Koran refer to the death of Jesus. He is supposed have said: "Peace on the day I was born, and the day I die, and they say I

shall be raised alive!" (Surah xix:33) Why do Muslims reject Jesus's crucifixion? Because they don't see the need for the sin-bearing-death of Christ on the cross.

They even believe that they give greater glory to God by denying the possibility of the crucifixion. Each human being has to pay for his/her own sins. The Koran states: "Each soul earneth only on its own account, nor doth any laden bear another's load. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will tell you that wherein ye differed." (Surah v1:165) Kenneth Cragg summarizes the reasons for Islam's rejection of the crucifixion in this terse statement: "There is the historical denial of its actuality, the moral refusal of its possibility and the doctrinal rejection of its necessity."

### **The Goodness of Human Beings**

Why are Muslims so vehemently denying the death of Christ? Because they believe in the basic goodness of man. Zwemer, a convinced Calvinist, judged Islam as a religion of works, a faith without a concept of grace, a human search for God, and without hope. In other words, a Muslim can never sing:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

The Muslim scholar Isma'il R. Al Faruqi declared that in the Islamic view human beings are no more "fallen" than they are "saved."

Because they are not fallen, they don't need salvation. And he adds, "They need to do good works, which alone will earn them the `desired' salvation..They are not helpless puppets capable of neither good nor evil. They are capable of both. To `save' themselves is their pride and glory." The Koran reveals an optimistic view of human nature. It says: "So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religions as a man by nature upright -the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. "(Surah xxx: 30).

### **Original Sin**

Islam rejects the Biblical doctrine of original sin. Why is there salvation if all people are born as true Muslims, innocent, pure and free? No human being is born a sinner; sin is not hereditary. It is neither transferable nor communal in nature. Sin is neither acquired nor inevitable. Each human being has a free will to choose right or wrong, and is capable to turn to the right, to do good, and to please Allah. His innate goodness enables him to obey the law.

No one can count the number of sinners from the day of Adam's creation up to the present. How can we know the number of their sins? How then can the supposed death of Jesus atone for all their present and past sins? "In Islam," writes Muhammad Asad, "we know nothing of Original sin; we regard it as incongruent with the idea of God's justice; God does not make the child responsible for the doings of his father; and how could He have made all those numberless generations of mankind responsible for a sin

of disobedience by a remote ancestor? ...And if there is no hereditary sin, there is also no universal redemption of mankind in the teachings of Islam. Redemption and damnation are individual. Every Muslim is his own redeemer; he bears all possibilities of spiritual success and failure within his heart." But the Bible teaches a different path - the way of the cross. (Cf. John 14 :6).

## **Conclusion**

The Gospel of faith and grace alone is for the Muslims a great stumbling block. It is kept from them behind a veil of prejudice and misunderstanding. We may not remain silent and hide the treasures of the Gospel in the safe confines of home and church How do we reach Muslims with the Gospel? Our calling is not to give them more information about Jesus, but to introduce them to the Christ of the Scriptures -the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, crucified on Calvary's cross, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, and returning in glory.