

INTERCEDE

VOL. XXXIV, NO. 3

MAY/JUNE 2017



Muhammad's Misrepresentation of Jesus

By Fred Farrokh

Nearly six centuries before the advent of Muhammad, the aged prophet Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and said, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). As it was then, so it is today. Each person's eternal destiny is linked to his or her response, and relationship to, Jesus.

In this essay, I review the options open to the prophet of Islam regarding the positions he could have possibly taken regarding Jesus. I suggest these were:

1. Muhammad against Jesus
2. Muhammad forⁱ Jesus or
3. Jesus for Muhammad

I contend that Muhammad chose the latter, misrepresenting Jesus and transforming Him into his own personal

forerunner. By this strategy, Muhammad created a Jesus who never existed and co-opted him into the Islamic theological agenda which Muhammad was developing. I will provide some contextual background to Muhammad's options regarding Jesus. Then I will review each of the options above.

Background to the Discussion

Formidable questions confront any researcher looking into early Islamic literature, as well as the decisions confronting Muhammad and the early Muslims. The Muslim position, of course, is that Muhammad simply was an obedient mouthpiece for Allah's message. The purpose of this inquiry, therefore, would be considered by them to be irrelevant or even sacrilegious.

The secular school of scholarship associated with John Wansbroughⁱⁱ suggests the early Islamic history handed down by Muslims is likely inaccurate. For the purposes of

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



It was an awkward moment as the young student thought about the question that my wife had just asked him: “What religion do you follow?” Preceding this question the young student had asked Daniela and I if we were Christians – as he thought that most Americans were Christians. We answered in the affirmative and shared that we were raised in Christian families and were followers of Christ. This young international student went on to explain that in his country most people have no religion and that speaking about religion should be avoided.

As you read this issue of the *Intercede* you will discover that Islam and the Quran present a distorted and incomplete

story of Jesus Christ and His mission. Just like our young student friend, Muslims need us to share with them the truth about Jesus Christ. Many non-Christians have some knowledge of the claims of Christ, but through willful suppression of the truth or due to distortion of the truth, they carefully *avoid* Jesus’ claims of deity. It is man’s sinfulness and the resultant avoidance of the truth about Jesus that sends many souls to a Christ-less eternity. Most can accept that Jesus was an ethical person, a great teacher, and maybe even had a divine mission, but refuse to embrace His divinity. If His divine personhood is acknowledged, then His exclusive claims of salvation would have to be followed. This is a great sticking point for most Muslims.

In reviewing the lead article of this *Intercede* I was reminded that the founder of Islam grossly misrepresented Jesus, and especially refused to recognize His divinity. My thoughts raced to the Gospel of John. It is marvelous to see how the Holy Spirit inspired John to reveal a full-orbed picture of the person of Jesus Christ, including His deity. It begins in the first chapter where John provides four human witnesses to the identity of Jesus. John himself declares Jesus to be the Light and the Lamb of God, Andrew declares Him to be the Christ, Philip declares Him to be the one of whom the Law and the Prophets spoke, and Nathanael declares Him to be the Son of God, the King of Israel. Then throughout the remaining twenty chapters of his gospel, John lets Jesus speak for himself through one miracle after another, each displaying His undeniable divine attributes. John also includes Jesus’ dramatic *I AM* statements – statements which his Jewish audience would clearly understand as being a claim to equality with Yahweh.

In John 1:38 Jesus posed the most important question that any of us will ever ponder: “What do you seek?” As you read this *Intercede* I pray that your heart will be broken for the 1.7 billion Muslims. Through the deception of Islam, a willful rejection of the truth, or inadequate knowledge, Muslims have a distorted understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. Like the four witnesses in the first chapter of John, let us declare what we have heard, seen and experienced. For sure, let us boldly declare to the Muslim world that Jesus, the Son of God, wants to be their Savior and Lord!



Muslim World News



US Pastor's Trial Date?

Turkey

Rev. Andrew Brunson was first detained Oct. 7, without warning, and held for two months, mostly in solitary confinement. Then he was jailed for the next three months in an overcrowded cell. But after 23 years of church work in Turkey, all carried out openly, the American Protestant pastor has yet to see any evidence that he's a threat to Turkey's national security.

Even his Turkish lawyer, who was finally granted access to Brunson, only after he was sent to prison, on Dec. 9, 2016, cannot access the confidential file of Interior Ministry allegations against the 49-year-old Christian. Turkish authorities still have not unsealed the case documents against Brunson, to enable his lawyer to defend him in a court trial.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim commented publicly for the first time about Brunson's case, telling American journalists that Turkey will consider "accelerating" the trial process of the jailed pastor. Until Turkish authorities release the confidential legal file against Rev. Brunson, it is unclear how much longer his incarceration and legal rights will remain unresolved. – *World Watch Monitor*

Justice Delayed in Murder Case

Pakistan

Six years on, justice for the murdered Pakistani Christian federal cabinet member Shahbaz Bhatti remains elusive, as does the social equality for which he gave his life. The Christian community says the Pakistani political leadership is not doing enough to ask the police and the judiciary to ensure his killers are brought to justice.

Bhatti, a Catholic, was killed leaving his home when gunmen peppered his car with bullets, hitting him several times on March 2, 2011. Before leaving, the assassins scattered leaflets that called him a "Christian infidel", and stated he was killed for heading a committee set up to review Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which forbid insulting Islam.

After the assassination, the *Deccan Herald* noted that Bhatti had also been targeted for supporting Asia Bibi, a mother of five who was convicted of blasphemy against Muhammad and handed a death sentence in November 2010.

Asia Bibi remains on death row, the blasphemy laws still create fear, and recently Pakistan's *Dawn* newspaper quoted religious affairs minister Sardar Mohammad Yousuf as saying the federal government would reject any reform of the legislation. – *World Watch Monitor*

Bail Denied Over Kaaba Blasphemy

Pakistan

A Pakistani Christian boy accused of blasphemy for "liking" and "sharing" a Facebook post which "defamed and disrespected" the Kaaba in Mecca – the building at the centre of Islam's most sacred mosque – has been refused bail.

Lawyers for Nabeel Masih, 16, argued that he should be granted bail as he has no prior convictions and is still a juvenile. However, a magistrate's court in Kasur rejected the application on Feb. 7. Masih was arrested on Sept. 18, 2016, after a complaint had been filed with the police. The complainant, Akhtar Ali, said Masih had 'liked' and shared on Facebook a defamatory photograph of the Kaaba – the building at the centre of Islam's holiest site in Mecca. – *World Watch Monitor*

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this essay, I do not seek to conclude how the Islamic message was revealed and codified. Whether “Muhammad” was actually Muhammad acting alone, or whether he was aided in whole or in part by later editors, is not considered in this article. In other words, I do not here seek to answer how the Islamic revelatory content has come to be. I simply assess that content at face value.

A second significant question in this discussion is the situation at Mecca regarding any expression of Christianity at the time of Muhammad. It has been suggested that the cousin of Muhammad’s first wife Khadija was himself a Christian priest. This mysterious figure, Waraqa ibn Nawful, is at least thought to have been a *hanif*, a pure monotheist. Speculation abounds as to what influence Waraqa may have had on Muhammad, since Muhammad married Khadija when he was 25 but did not have his first revelation until he was 40.

My own speculation is that Waraqa was not a Christian priest or pastor, since the Islamic historical narrative does not mention any established churches in Mecca at the time of Muhammad. We simply hear that Meccans were idolaters and the Kaaba was inundated with idols. It is more likely that Muhammad interacted with Christians (and Jews) on his caravan missions to the Levant in the employ of his wife. Once again, from the orthodox Islamic perspective, these speculations regarding influence on Muhammad and his message are irrelevant, since Muslims believe he received his message from Allah via the Angel Gabriel.

Having addressed these initial contextual questions, I turn now to Muhammad’s options regarding Jesus.

Muhammad Against Jesus

The “Muhammad against Jesus” position seemed the most likely option for Muhammad, yet he did not choose it. According to Islam, Muhammad considered ridding the world of idol worship to be a major component of his message. He was pained by the idolatry of his kinsmen in Mecca, which he rightly rebuked. He ultimately made associating partners (Arabic, *shirk*) with Allah, as the unpardonable sin in Islam (Sura 4:116).

There is some indication that Muhammad was aware of Mariolatry, since he egregiously places Mary in the Trinity in Sura 5:116 (text follows). Some Christian missionaries and scholars feel Muhammad was exposed to primarily

non-orthodox forms of Christianity. Geoffrey Parrinder, a Methodist missionary to West Africa, stated, “It has often been thought that the Quran denies the Christian teaching of the Trinity, and commentators have taken its words to be a rejection of orthodox Christian doctrine. However, it seems more likely that it is heretical doctrines that are denied in the Quran, and orthodox Christians should agree with most of its statements.”ⁱⁱⁱ Whether Muhammad was interacting with orthodox or heretical forms of Christianity does not excuse him for failing to present a message that coincides with the Bible, especially regarding Jesus.

Muhammad was undoubtedly aware that Christians worshipped Jesus and considered Him divine. Several verses highlight Muhammad’s attacks on this Christian position:

4:171: O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, “Three”; desist – it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Extended is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.

5:57: They have certainly disbelieved who say, ‘Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary’ while the Messiah has said, ‘O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.’ Indeed, he who associates others with Allah – Allah has forbidden him Paradise, and his refuge is the Fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers.’

5:116: And [beware the Day] when Allah will say, ‘O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people, ‘Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?’ He will say, ‘Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right. If I had said it, You would have known it. You know what is within myself, and I do not know what is within Yourself. Indeed, it is You who is Knower of the unseen.

9:30: The Jews say, ‘Ezra is the son of Allah’, and the Christians say, ‘The Messiah is the son of

presentation of Jesus

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Allah.' That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?

These verses provide proof that Muhammad was aware of claims of the divinity of Jesus, and that Christians worshipped Jesus. Given Muhammad's anti-idol emphasis, it would have appeared simpler and cleaner for Muhammad to have rejected Jesus outright as a self-deifying imposter. This would have set up the "Muhammad against Jesus" paradigm. If Muhammad had chosen this route, Jesus would not have appeared in the quranic listings of bona fide prophets (eg. Sura 2:136). His name would not be revered by Muslims to this day, who add "*alaihi as-salaam*" ("upon him be peace") when they mention the name 'Isa' (Jesus). In short, Muhammad could have excommunicated Jesus from the blessed family of prophets, since Jesus claimed to be God. Muhammad, cleverly, did not choose this option.

Muhammad for Jesus

The second option for Muhammad regarding Jesus was that Muhammad could have become a Christ-worshipper himself. If Muhammad was indeed being led by God, this is the option – the true option – he would have chosen.

While I have mentioned it is unclear what type or types of Christianity Muhammad may have observed in his lifetime, the Quran does give a narrative in the third sura (*al-Imran*) in which a delegation of Najrani Christians, including their bishop Abu al-Haritha, visited Muhammad in Medina. During this post-Hijra time period, many tribes came to Medina to seek terms of peace with Muhammad.

Sura 3:1-80 describes this meeting. Gordon Nickel^{iv} provides an excellent English-language treatment of Islamic commentaries regarding this meeting of the Najrani Christian delegation and Muhammad. The summary is that the Najrani Christians offered to pledge their political support to Muhammad if he would accept Christ and worship him as God's son. The Najranis gave what they considered proofs of Jesus' divinity: the many miracles He did and that He did not have a human father. Muhammad countered (3:59) that Jesus was no more divine than was Adam, who likewise did not have a human father (Muhammad accepted the Virgin Birth of Christ). The negotiations broke down at this point, based on this theological impasse. Muhammad, having re-

jected the Najrani invitation to worship Christ, then insisted on a cursing ceremony (3:61) to dramatically seal the impasse. Though Muhammad cursed the Najrani Christians, they did not reciprocate.

Muhammad indeed cursed the doctrine of the divinity and Lordship of Jesus Christ. The quranic material confirms this was his position. Muhammad had the opportunity to submit himself to the Lordship of Jesus in his lifetime, but he refused to do so. The story of the Najrani Christians has provided a template of harshness for Muslims in their dialogue with Christians, especially when the Muslims have had the upper hand politically and militarily. In short, Muhammad could have become a Christian and a disciple of Christ. If he had truly been led of God, this is the path he would have chosen. He could have become "Muhammad for Jesus," yet he refused.

Jesus for Muhammad

The third option is the one Muhammad ultimately chose. Instead of serving Jesus as Lord, Muhammad tried to turn Jesus into his own personal servant. Muhammad reduced Jesus to a herald and forerunner by claiming that Jesus prophesied that a prophet named Ahmad (a literal cognate of "Muhammad") would follow him (Sura 61:6). By re-creating Jesus as a mere mortal prophet, Muhammad fabricated a Jesus who never existed, one who bears little resemblance to the historical Jesus.

The quranic Jesus is an Islamic figure that serves Muhammad and the Islamic theological agenda. Muslim scholar Tarif Khalidi elucidates what is inescapable from a plain reading of the Quran: "Clearly there is *something* about Jesus which makes his Qur'anic image so utterly different from the Jesus of the Gospels...He is the only prophet in the Qur'an who is deliberately made to distance himself from the doctrines that his community is said to hold about him" (2003, 11-12). Muhammad's authoritative sayings make up Islam's extra-quranic hadith literature. One hadith (*Sahih al-Bukhari* Volume 4, Book 55, Number 657) has the Islamic Jesus rebuking Christians upon his 'last days' return to earth because they wrongly promoted him to a status above that of a mortal man. The same hadith narrates Jesus 'breaking the Cross' in his Islamic second coming.

In summary, Jesus's two main purposes in Islam are to
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herald the coming of Muhammad and to rebuke Christians for worshipping him. The Quran also denies Jesus' crucifixion (4:157-158), which becomes a moot point if the one crucified was merely a mortal prophet. In the biblical narrative, Jesus is the central figure. In Islam, Jesus is merely a supporting actor to Muhammad's lead. In the Bible, John the Baptist willingly decreases in importance that Jesus might increase (John 3:30). In the quranic narrative, Jesus decreases in importance that Muhammad might increase.

Since Muhammad opted for the "Jesus for Muhammad" option, especially over the "Muhammad against Jesus" option, this allowed him to say some good things about Jesus while rejecting the most important things. For example, Muhammad affirmed that Jesus was a prophet sent from God, who was born of a virgin. Muslims will feel they love Jesus more than Christians do, because they feel Christians worship an illusion of Jesus. All this flows from the decision Muhammad made about Jesus. Muhammad and his followers betray the Son of Man with a kiss of familiarity.

By co-opting Jesus into the Islamic theological agenda, Muhammad opened the door for further non-historical embellishment of the Jesus figure by Muslims. Sufis tend to seek a more personal relationship with Allah than orthodox Islam will allow. Khalidi describes the Sufi 'veneration' of Jesus: "By the time of Ghazali [died AD 1111]...Jesus was enshrined in Sufi sensibility as the prophet of the heart par excellence."^v He also describes Jesus as the "patron saint of Muslim asceticism."^{vi} A heartwarming picture of this Sufi Jesus may raise the hopes of uninformed Christians that Muslims may come to some type of saving faith in the Muslim version of Christ. However, that is unequivocally not the case, especially since the Islamic Jesus is shorn of his divinity and saving power.

Conclusion

Muhammad, coming 600 years after Christ, needed to interpret and explain the Christ-event: God visiting the earth in the form of Jesus to die on the Cross for the sins of humanity. Muhammad rejected this narrative. Interestingly, he chose not to simply castigate Jesus as an imposter, which I represent as the "Muhammad against Jesus" option. That would have created far less confusion for inter-faith communication as well as for sharing the gospel with Muslims.

Instead, Muhammad chose the "Jesus for Muhammad"

option, in which Jesus is selectively affirmed but only in a way that enhances Muhammad's personal portfolio. This was indeed a clever and even devious innovation by the prophet of Islam. Instead of making Jesus the bad guy, Muhammad was able to blame Christians for corrupting the true portrait of Jesus by wrongly elevating him to divinity. In reality, Muhammad corrupted the biblical portrait of Jesus. The prophet of Islam denied the pillars of the biblical faith: the Incarnation, Divinity, Lordship, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because of his vast influence over more than a billion souls – an influence which has lasted fourteen centuries – I conclude that Muhammad did more to try and diminish the Lord Jesus Christ than any other person in human history. The question the Najrani Christians asked Muhammad at the beginning of their meetings rings true today: "Why do you abuse and dishonor our Master?"^{vii} In conclusion, I recommend that people base their opinion of Muhammad neither on his historical prominence nor his political accomplishments, but on the way he misrepresented and mistreated the Lord Jesus Christ.

**This article is used with permission from www.BiblicalMissiology.org, with minor editing.*

ⁱ By "for" I mean "in support of," "in favor of," "affirming," and "endorsing."

ⁱⁱ See Wansbrough, John. 1977. *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This line of thinking contends that Muhammad, during his own lifetime, may have not fulfilled the role of "Seal of the Prophets" who finalized the Islamic revelation we have today. Rather, he may have been a charismatic warrior-leader upon who prophetic gifts and utterances were later enhanced by his followers. This school rejects the Islamic doctrine of Uthmanic Rescension – that Muhammad dictated the Quran to his disciples, who wrote them down and later canonized them under the third Caliph Uthman, who ruled from 644-656 AD, approximately two decades after Muhammad's death in 632 AD. These scholars instead point to a date of quranic canonization one to two centuries after Muhammad's death. If the narrative of Wansbrough is true. Then, for the purposes of this study, "Muhammad" would actually be the quranic editors responsible for giving us the Quran we have today.

ⁱⁱⁱ Parrinder, Geoffrey. 1965. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. New York: Barnes and Noble, p. 133.

^{iv} See Nickel, Gordon. 2006. "We Will Make Peace With You: The Christians of Najran in Muqatil's Tafsir." *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 1-18.

^v Khalidi, Tariq. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, p. 42.

^{vi} Khalidi, *ibid.* p. 34.

^{vii} Nickel, *ibid.*



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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, May 5, 2017. Please pray for

*...Iraqi and Syrian Christians, many of whom have been persecuted by ISIS.
...provision and favor for Cuban brothers and sisters who feel called to minister in Muslim countries.
...for Institute of Islamic Studies classes convening May 1-19 at a major seminary in Asia Pacific. Students and workers from multiple countries will participate.*

Friday, May 12, 2017. Please pray for

*...Adnan (pseudonym), who bravely distributes New Testaments in a 95% Muslim country in the Middle East.
...the 1 million Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar (Burma). Persecution has forced thousands of Rohingyas to flee to neighboring countries. Pray that they will encounter compassionate Christians.
...Christian university students around the world who are practicing friendship evangelism with Muslim students.*

Friday, May 19, 2017. Please pray for

*...safety for workers in North Africa as they provide secret discipleship training for former Muslims who have become followers of Jesus.
...Greek Christians. In the face of complex cultural and political issues, many continue ministering to Muslim refugees.
...Barzan (pseudonym), a former Muslim who recently accepted Jesus at a secret house meeting in Iran. Barzan asks for prayer for “divinely appointed conversations.”*

Friday, May 26, 2017. Please pray for

*...Muslims who will observe 30 days of Ramadan fasting, beginning tomorrow, May 27. For Muslims, Ramadan is the month during which Muhammad began receiving the Quran.
...Brunei, an independent state on the island of Borneo. Of Brunei’s population of 422,000 people, 66% are Muslim.
...protection and fresh anointing for Salman (pseudonym), a key Arab leader involved in a Middle East underground house cell group.*

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV



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Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, June 2, 2017. Please pray for

*...victims of the Boko Haram terror group in Nigeria. Of Nigeria's population of 180 million, 50% are Muslim.
...protection for Christians from a Muslim background in Sudan. Of Sudan's population of 41 million, 90% are Muslim.
...Christian expatriate oil-field workers in the Arabian Gulf as they discreetly share their faith with Muslim workers.*

Friday, June 9, 2017. Please pray for

*...Muslims throughout the world who have now completed the first two weeks of their 30-day fasting month of Ramadan.
...Pakistan. Of the country's 199 million people, 4 million identify as Christians.
...Ahmad (pseudonym), a Libyan Muslim who has chosen to follow Christ. Ahmad has been imprisoned for "proselytizing on social media and denigrating Islam."*

Friday, June 16, 2017. Please pray

*...a "friendship group" in a prominent city in England as it provides English lessons and other services to Muslim Kurdish women. England has approximately 2.5 million Muslims.
...Kariima (pseudonym), a Muslim widow in an Arabian Gulf country. She has heard the gospel explained and is "open to accept Jesus", but until now has not professed Him as Savior.
...Arabic internet "churches", as they share the gospel with Muslim Arabs.*

Friday, June 23, 2017. Please pray for

*...Muslims throughout the world who will conclude their 30-day fasting month of Ramadan on June 25.
...the witness of Christian Filipinos who work in Muslim countries. Many fill key positions in influential royal families.
...protection for Chinese Christian workers in Muslim areas of China.*

Friday, June 30, 2017. Please pray for

*...Ali (pseudonym), a former Muslim Bangladeshi working in an Arabian Gulf country. He has made a profession of faith in Christ, but is fearful of parental rejection when they learn of his decision.
...unreached Muslims in Nepal. Of Nepal's total population of 28 million, 4% are Muslim.
...outreach ministries in Paris that reach out to recently arrived Muslim Soninki children from West Africa.*

Intercede is a bimonthly publication of Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples
P.O. Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801-2730
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