

Thinking Biblically about the Qur'an: An Exploration of Qur'anic Self-Image, Worldview, Hermeneutics, and Christology

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Introduction

There is no question that a knowledge and understanding of the Qur'an is a *sine qua non* (an indispensable condition) in relating meaningfully to Muslims whose worldviews, customs, daily rituals, speech and thought patterns have been indelibly shaped by the Qur'an and its ethos.¹ Knowing Muslim scriptures and their culture hold out the prospect to better communicate the gospel. But how so?

Does the Qur'an contain redemptive analogies that can be used as bridges to present biblical faith?² Or would its direct and tacit subversion of the essential elements of the Gospel deny such and press one to better

¹ Gottfried Oosterwal, Response to Ganoune Diop's Paper "The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?," in *Faith Development in Context Symposium Papers* (ed. Bruce Bauer; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Department of World Mission, 2005), 185. See, Ganoune Diop, "The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?," in *Faith Development in Context Symposium Papers* (ed. Bruce Bauer; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Department of World Missions, 2005), 151-179.

² Diop's questions regarding the status of the Qur'an help orient the issues: 1. Should the Qur'an be used in an effort to communicate the gospel to Muslims?; 2. Does the Qur'an contain redemptive analogies that could be used as bridges to present biblical faith?; 3. Does the content of the Qur'an present similarities to previous revealed scriptures as claimed by the Qur'an itself?; 4. What are the similarities and differences?; 5. How can the Qur'an be used with integrity?; 6. Does the portrait of Jesus in the Qur'an do justice to his claims as recorded in the New Testament?" See, Diop, "The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?," 152.

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present biblical faith?³ Lively conversation continues regarding the legitimacy of using the Qur'an as a bridge to the Bible or not at all.⁴

When I propose thinking biblically about the Qur'an, I do not have in mind the reading of the Qur'an through biblical eyes (the Bible as an

³ Jaques Ellul, *The Subversion of Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 98; Jacques Ellul, *Islam and Judeo-Christianity: A Critique of Their Commonality* (trans. D. Bruce MacKay; Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015). See David Marshall. "Christianity in the Qur'an," in *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (ed. Lloyd Ridgeon; New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2001), 3-29; Sahaja Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2010); Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1991). "Christians hoping to understand how they and their faith appear to Muslims today may helpfully reflect on this relationship between the ideal and the actual in the qur'anic understanding of Christianity. They will find a range of different ways the ideal and the actual serve as lenses through which Christians and Christianity continue to be viewed. To varying degrees Christians will find themselves affirmed as 'People of the Book,' somehow connected to the ideal, the true religion. But to varying degrees they will also find their actual beliefs and practices regarded as distortions of what they should be" (Marshall, "Christianity in the Qur'an," 25). McAuliffe lists three grouping of qur'anic texts relative to Christians and the gospel: direct and indirect criticism charging Christians with being untrustworthy and divisive; directives that marginalize Christians socially and economically; and positive allusions (McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*, 4). Bat Ye'or traces the decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam via Dhimmitude as a strategy of Jihad (Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude: Seventh-Twentieth Century* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). See also, Mark Durie, *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom* (Batemans Bay, Australia: Deror Books, 2010). Works dealing with implications regarding Christianity of the historical trajectory of Islamic expansion include: James Howard-Johnston, *Witness to a World Crisis: Historians and Histories of the Middle East in the Seventh Century* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010); Efraim Karsh, *Islamic Imperialism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁴ Diop, "The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?," 151-179; Gabriela Profeta Phillips, "The Qur'an and Its Biblical Under-text: New Perspectives on Non-Muslim Readings of the Qur'an," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 8, no. 2 (2012): 75-94; Madelyn Mandell, "Islamic Hermeneutics and the Christian Missionary: Does the Interpretive Structure of the Qur'an Apply to Non-Muslim Exegetes?," *ibid.*, 12, no. 1 (2016): 146-155; Syed Bahadar Shah, *What Does the Holy Qur'an Say About the Holy Bible?* (New Delhi, India: Gyan Publishing House, 2014); Petras Bahadur, "Should the Qur'an Be Used in Christian Witness?," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 8, no. 2 (2012): 203-214; Oosterwal. "Response to Ganoune Diop's Paper 'The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?,'" 180-188. The question of Adventist use of the Qur'an is a century old debate: see Andrew Tompkins, "Adventist Use of the Qur'an: An Old Debate," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 17, no. 1 (2021): 130-138.

under-text) in order to unfold biblical gospel themes from the Qur'an for Muslims.⁵ Rather, I intend critical, biblical engagement of the Qur'an's "inner logic" system on the macro hermeneutical level⁶ in order to better use the Bible in gospel work among Muslims.⁷ It assumes that the Qur'an

⁵ As per Phillips who invites non-Muslim readings of the Qur'an and its biblical under-text, which are responsive rather than reactive, so as to lend "biblical eyes" for the Muslim reader in the context of Interfaith Dialogue/Conversation and initiatives, i.e., "qur'anic hermeneutics in conversation with the Bible" (Phillips, "The Qur'an and Its Biblical Under-text: New Perspectives on Non-Muslim Readings of the Qur'an," 75-94.). Both complementing and contrasting Phillip's "biblical under-text" qur'anic hermeneutic is a hermeneutic of how an awareness of Islam and the Qur'an can change how one reads the Bible—including differing analogies for understanding the Bible in relation to the Qur'an (For further information see, Daniel J. Crowther, *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations* (ed. Daniel J. Crowther: Routledge, 2017). Islamic history reveals Muslim exegetes who were interested in what the Bible had to say from an Islamic point of view and or were defenders of the Bible for understanding the Qur'an and Islamic religious thought (see Walid A. Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqā'ī's Bible Treatise* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008); Camila Adang and Sbine Schmidtke, *Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible: Texts and Studies* (vol. Lockwood Press: Atlanta, GA, 2019). See also Neuwirth's discussion of the relationship between the Qur'an and the Bible in Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage* (trans. Samuel Wilder; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 347-417.

⁶ Biblical interpreters relate to three levels of hermeneutical presuppositions/principles: macro-hermeneutical, meso-hermeneutical, and micro-hermeneutical. Macro-hermeneutical presuppositions relate to one's overarching conceptual framework, i.e., core logic. These are the first principles of ontology and epidemiology—understanding God, human nature, the world, etc. Micro-hermeneutical presuppositions operate on the level of individual texts/pericopes including exegesis on the level of the text, i.e., phenomenological. Meso-hermeneutical presuppositions refer to the doctrinal commitments in-between. This study will be primarily macro-hermeneutical, but also include micro-hermeneutical perspectives and referents. For more information see, John Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, Company, 2016), 212-217. See also, Fernando Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 148-149.

⁷ Sources which engage the Qur'an's core logic and worldview in differing ways include: Accad, Martin, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019); Mark Robert Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); John Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011); Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010); Ibn Warraq, *What The Koran Really Says: Language, Text, and Commentary* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002); Abdul Hamid AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A*

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exhibits a core logic. If so, then that inner system inevitably effects the interpretation of its parts. If the Qur'an has no core logic, then its text is open to the confusion of multiple interpretations including Christian *eisegesis*.⁸

The Gospel worker's goal is unfolding Gospel themes from the Bible in relevant ways for his/her listeners. In Muslim contexts, that is best accomplished when he/she understands the Qur'an's core logic. In doing so, they can better imagine the existential impact, which the Qur'an's worldview has on the Muslim soul. We will not know how to use the Bible most effectively in Muslim contexts until we understand the real soul need of a Muslim as nuanced by his/her exposure to the Qur'an—its worldview and ethos. This is a fundamental starting point for mission.

Thus, the question of bridging to Muslims should be reversed: Rather than “How do we better use the Qur'an as a bridge to lead Muslims to the Bible?” we should ask, “How can we better use the Bible as a bridge to lead a Muslim to the Bible?” This requires a deeper understanding of the Qur'an than what biased *eisegetical*⁹ and proof-text approaches—which manipulate the text for missional purpose—can

Springboard for Cultural Reform (Washington, D.C.: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011); Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an in Context (Text and Studies of the Qur'an)* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2011); Ida Glasser, *Thinking Biblically About Islam: Genesis, Transfiguration, Transformation* (Cambria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2016); Muhammed Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (New York, NY: L. B. Tauris, 2011); Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Rick Richter, *Comparing the Qur'an and the Bible: What They Really Say About Jesus and More* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011); Steven Masood, *The Bible and the Qur'an: A Question of Integrity* (Summerfield, FL: ITL-USA, Jesus to Muslims, 2013); Diop, “The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?,” 151-179.

⁸ Regarding the logic of the Qur'an, see Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), 170-174; James Campbell, *The Logic of the Qur'an* (Houston, TX: Strategic Book, 2013), 1-190; Rosalind Ward Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'an: God's Arguments* (New York, NY: Routledge 2014), 25-203; John Walbridge, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 211), 1-203; Zayden Salaam, *Looking for Logic: In the Qur'an's Math Code* (Seattle, WA: Amazon Digital Services, 2019).

⁹ *Eisegesis* (commonly referred to as reading into the text) is the process of interpreting text in such a way as to introduce one's own presuppositions, agendas or biases. For further information see, John H. Hayes, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 12-25.

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enable.¹⁰ It requires also, a deeper understanding of the Bible on its own macro-hermeneutical worldview level.

Our question here, is not whether one uses the Qur'an in Gospel work among Muslims. That is a given. Rather, we ask: Why do we use the Qur'an? When do we use it? How do we use it? Do we allow the Qur'an to speak for itself, or are we manipulating the text via Christian qur'anic *eisegesis*? In what way is the Qur'an advanced as an authority? Is it ethical to create redemptive analogies/bridges from qur'anic phrases and texts which were never intended so in either their immediate context or the Qur'an's core metanarrative? Most of all, how can we nuance biblically relevant theological or soteriological themes from the Qur'an without implying that the Qur'an authoritatively teaches such? At bottom is the question: What hermeneutical guidelines are we bound to when handling Islam's holy text?¹¹

We ask these questions knowing that the Qur'an is positive towards both Jesus and what we today call the Bible.¹² But how so? And can the missional bridge between what the Qur'an means and the truths of the Bible be unwittingly dulled or short-circuited by Christian *eisegesis* of the qur'anic text?

This study asserts that the Qur'an has its own hermeneutic together with a complex labyrinth of interpretive prism and historic precedent. If so, one must first analyze qur'anic concepts within their own historic and literary contexts as well as within the Qur'an's own worldview and interpretative framework (core logic). Only then can one critically analyze qur'anic concepts and their equivalents in both the Old and the New Testaments with integrity—and which, 1) allows the Qur'an to speak for itself and not impose on it a contrived Christian reading or meaning, i.e., *eisegesis*; and 2) enables the Gospel worker to use God's Word wisely and effectively in response.

While asserting such, we explore four aspects of the Qur'an in relation to the Bible: its self-image, worldview, hermeneutic, and

¹⁰ See Mandell's discussion how non-Muslim readers manipulate the qur'anic text for missional purpose, Mandell, "Islamic Hermeneutics and the Christian Missionary: Does the Interpretive Structure of the Qur'an Apply to Non-Muslim Exegetes?," 146-155.

¹¹ See discussion of Christian misinterpretation of the Qur'an, Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide*, 34-73.

¹² See, Shah, *What Does the Holy Qur'an Say About the Holy Bible?*, 145-146; Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008); Anderson, *The Qur'an in Context: A Christian Exploration*, 157.

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Christology. In the process two critical concerns of Gospel work among Muslims are informed: the position and status of Bible in relation to the Qur'an on the one hand, and the person and work of Jesus on the other. Clarity of what the Qur'an does or does not say on these two issues inevitably determines the kind of bridge one can and/or needs to create.

Some orienting principles are helpful as we would think biblically about the Qur'an: 1) the difference between a Muslim and Islam;¹³ 2) the hermeneutical priority of biblically informed worldview and cosmic conflict narrative;¹⁴ 3) the revelation of God's character of love;¹⁵ and 4)

¹³ Our desire is not to escalate conflict or engender prejudice, but to help understand a larger set of issues and values and to know best how to relate to a Muslim as a person. And so, we ask: "What's the difference between a Muslim and Islam and the Qur'an as Islam's foundational document?" Is there a difference? If so, what? More importantly, what difference would any difference make in our understanding of either a Muslim, Islam, or the Qur'an? The Qur'an plays a major role in both—for Islam as a system and the Qur'an as an authoritative document, for a Muslim as a believer. Such distinction allows for objectivity in critically exploring qur'anic worldview from biblical theological and ethical perspectives, while at the same time nurturing genuine respect and love for Muslims as people of faith, piety, and moral values: not to mention implications of disparate Muslim worldviews. Understanding the difference between a Muslim and Islam also enables sensitivity to the very personal existential realities of individual Muslims with respect to the worldview narrative that lay deep within the inner recesses of their self and which provides the presuppositions and foundation on which they live. But even more so this distinction can also help nurture a sensitivity to those existential realities expressed as confusion, uncertainty, insecurity, fear, shame, loss of control, powerlessness, hopelessness, resentment, anger, and/or identity crisis, which Muslims experience in relation to the contemporary issues that confront them. "Islam is the religious ideology and orthopraxy that Muslims generally follow, but it is not them" (Don Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 120. Islam is an entity beyond its people. It exists beyond experience per se. Muslims are not Islam and Islam is not Muslims. "Muslims are adherents of Islam, and Islam is the worldview of Muslims, the two are not the same as may uncritically believe" (Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016], 27.) Recent writers who make this important distinction include (Christian, former Muslim, and Muslim writers): *ibid.*, 25-28; Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices*; Ida Glaser, *Thinking Biblically About Islam: Genesis, Transfiguration, Transformation* (Langham Global Library 2016), 10; AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform*, 59, 60; Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices*, 120. Adventist thought leaders reflecting this critical distinction in their work include Borge Schantz, Ganoune Diop, and Petras Bahadur.

¹⁴ Adventist understanding of God, the Great Controversy, the heavenly sanctuary, Creation, the nature of man, the fall, salvation, ecclesiology, eschatology, etc., are critical in engaging Islam as a historical phenomenon within the great controversy narrative in

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the finality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ.¹⁶ Additionally, there are two assumptions: 1) that the Qur'an is not an inspired document in the biblical sense or in keeping with the Bible's core logic, worldview, values, redemptive trajectory, view of God and finality of God's revelation in Jesus Christ; and 2) that Muhammad is not a prophet of

relation to the emergence of the final conflict between good and evil (Gen 1-3; Job 1:6-2:7; Isa 14:3-21; Ezek 28:1-19; Daniel chapters 2, 4, 7, 10-11; Rev 12:1-17; cf. Rev 9:1-20). In the hidden, spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan the very truth of things is at stake (1 John 4:1-3; 2 Thess 2:5-12; Eph 6:12; 1 Tim 4:1; Rev 16:12-16). This is important in view of the prevalence of self-instruction and evangelical influence that occurs in Islamic Studies and ministry to Muslims. A clear understanding of the distinctives of a biblically informed Adventist worldview and faith is critical to Adventist identity and mission in the world. The numerous bridging—yet surface—values, practices, and beliefs, which Adventists hold in common with Muslims do not adequately plumb the depth of worldview, let alone the radical difference of meanings, understandings, and implications within their differing worldviews. Nor do they touch the heart of a Muslim's deepest orientation, identity, and spirituality. Adventist practitioners must first grasp the biblical implications of their distinctive worldview and faith before they can effectively engage Muslims—either on the level of their internal narrative or their exterior practice. Biblically sound contextualization begins with worldview narrative and faith rather than with culture or cultural practice (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 3:17-21; Col 2:8-15; 3:1-17; Eph 1:3-23; 2:1-22). It is necessary to understand the Islamic and Muslim worldview and faith's understandings of given culture and practice.

¹⁵ Biblical eschatology places the question of the character of God in the forefront of the Great Controversy. This is at the heart of Adventist eschatology. Surprisingly, the question of the character of God is at the heart of Islamic eschatology as well. So the question: "What God?" "What vision of God is to be lifted up for the world to behold?" "God is love," the Bible declares (1 John 4:16). Those words comprise the opening sentence of *Patriarchs and Prophets* and the final words of *The Great Controversy*. The revelation of God's character of love is to be at the heart of Seventh-day Adventist personal life, witness, and mission in the world, a key understanding and element in Islamic Studies and ministry to Muslims. See my discussion, Larry L. Lichtenwalter, "The Biblical Witness of the Character of God in Relation to the Qur'an," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 22, no. 2 (2011).

¹⁶ The Person of Jesus has been at the center of the Great Controversy since it began in Heaven (John 1:1-14; Eph 1:1-23; Col 1:13-29; Heb 1:1-13; Rev 12:1-13). It is a critical issue in Adventist understandings of Islam. The heart of the Everlasting Gospel to all people groups of the world is to invite them to know Jesus Christ, to confess Him as Savior and Lord, and to worship Him. How the Qur'an and Islam testify to Jesus determines its ultimate credibility. The person and work of Jesus is both a bridge and a barrier. Muslims in general have a strong attraction to Jesus. Even the Qur'an's incomplete picture of Jesus seems to whet the appetite of Muslims to know more. Adventist thought-leaders and practitioners need to fully and personally understand these realities and how the more complete picture of Jesus in the Bible can captivate and lead to conversion.

God in the biblical sense. If these assumptions are valid, how then do we relate to apparent biblical truths or values that may be found on the surface level at least in the Qur'an?

Qur'anic Self-Image

The apparent "self-referential" nature of the Qur'an nuances our understanding on a macro-hermeneutical level.¹⁷ The Qur'an is highly self-aware.¹⁸ It observes and discusses the process of its own revelation and reception. First, as a vertical "sending down," *tanzil* (cf. Sūrah 26:192), which simultaneously connotes two things: 1), a descent of something exalted; and 2), a gradual dispensation. That is to say, the Qur'an is exalted "Divine speech that was dispensed in portions over many years, such that it may be easy for people to understand, digest, and put it into practice."¹⁹

Second, as "inspiration," *wahy* (cf. Sūrah 42:51-52), in which there are three kinds of *wahy* revelations. There is *wahy Khāṣṣ*, the "inspiration of ideas into the heart," which is called "inner revelation," that is to say, God speaks to man that is common to prophet and non-prophets alike. Second, there is *min warāi' hijab*, "from behind a veil." In this type of *wahy*, God speaks to man in dreams, visions, or in certain meditative states and trances. The third type of *wahy* is the highest form of revelation, meaning *wahy matluww*, "revelation that is recited in words." This third kind of *wahy* is best explained when Gabriel gave the divine message of the Qur'an to the prophet Muhammad.²⁰

¹⁷ "The Qur'an refers to itself frequently, and those references are often found in passages that explain its nature and source" (Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 12). See also Neuwirth for the Qur'an's self-referentially about the process of its emergence and the information that is given in the early Suras through the depiction of various scenes of its emergence in terms of a vertical "sending down" (*tanzil*) and inspiration" (*wahy*) (Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, 65-71).

¹⁸ See Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 3-52; Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 13; Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute Of Islamic Thought, 2012), 401.

¹⁹ Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'an, the Word of God," in *Voices of Islam: Voices of Tradition* (ed. Vincent J. Cornell; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2007), 47-61, at 48.

²⁰ For further information see, Erik Baldwin and Tyler Dalton McNabb, *Plantingian Religious Epistemology and World Religions: Prospects and Problems* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2019), 232-235. Sūras 17:1-6; 26:192-193; 39:1, 2; 41:2-4; 46:2; 53:2-14; 69:38-51; 97:1; 56:80; 18:27; 10:37, 64. The Qur'an holds that it is a verbally mediated

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The third *wahy* asserts its own authority and claims its place within the history of revelation.²¹ It maintains kinship with revelations to Christians and Jews,²² mostly in terms of bringing the same message of the need to repent and to turn to the One God (Sūrah 29:46; 10:94).²³ In doing so, the Qur'an assumes that the God it speaks of/for is the God of

heavenly message that was communicated to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel (2:97-98). Muhammad reveals nothing of his own will (53:2-14). God's words are unchangeable (18:27; 10:64). Its 114 Sūras/chapters and roughly 6,300 *āyāts*/verses (about the size of the NT) reflect a gradual, piecemeal unfolding in installments over a period of approximately 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic journey as God purportedly responds to various situations Muhammad faces, 609-632 CE (17:106; 25:33). The night in which the Qur'an began to be revealed is referred in the Qur'an as the blessed night or the night of power/decreed (44:2; 97:1). It is the speech of God (3:58). Uncreated. The prophet is God's mouthpiece—seemingly reciting in serial form (2:53). The revelatory process is that of God's "sending down" his messages suggesting that the messages were in their final form when Gabriel mediated them to the prophet (Sūrah 2:174, 176, 213, 231). Surah 96 is considered the first revelation, which begins with the word "recite" (*iqra'*) stemming from the Arabic root *QRN* as *qur'an*: "Recite! In the name of your Lord who created. He created humanity from a clinging form. Recite! Your Lord is the noble One. Who taught by means of the pen. Who taught humanity what it did not know" (Sūrah 96:1-5). Qur'an means "recitation" or "reading." See Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 156-159; Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 35; Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 13-52; Carole Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective* (Thames and Hudson, 2015), 59, 60; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an in Context (Text and Studies of the Qur'an)*, 65-80.

²¹ 6:83-90.

²² Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 13, 23, 45; Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali. "The Fourth Source: Isrā'īliyyāt and the Use of the Bible in Muslim Scholarship," in *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations* (ed. ed. Daniel J. Crowther; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 112; Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 400. See (Sūras 2:4, 5; 3:3; 4:163; 5:44, 46; 17:55; 38:29; 6:83-90). This includes the Torah (*Tawrat*) of Moses, the Psalms of David (*Zabur*), and the Gospel of Jesus (*Injeel*) as well as earlier prophets including Solomon, Elijah, Abraham, Jonah, Job, Joseph, Isaac, etc. (Sūrah 6:83-90). Altogether "the Qur'an names twenty-three biblical characters as Muhammad's predecessors, claiming that they all brought the same basic message" (Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 142). For detailed discussion see, Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 122-146.

²³ Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 69; Marshall. "Christianity in the Qur'ān," 7, 8, 18-21.

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the Bible. It does not however, claim to be textually dependent on earlier scriptures.²⁴

While the Qur'an assumes that it contains the same message that was given to previous prophets and messengers, its concerns are not the same as the earlier revelations which it references. It sees itself not so much as a completed book but as an ongoing process of divine "writing" and "rewriting."²⁵ This includes *confirming* and *completing* earlier monotheistic revelations as THE final revelation, which both subsumes and supersedes them.²⁶ Orality is central.²⁷ So also communal formation through proclamation and liturgy.²⁸ Yet the Qur'an does see itself as comprising the last of a series of books that communicate God's will for humanity.²⁹ It asserts and reflects the heavenly prototype—"Mother of Book" (*Umm al-Kitāb*), i.e., the source of all revealed Scriptures among Abrahamic monotheistic religions (Sūrah 13:39; cf. Sūras 4:7; 43:4; 85:21-22; 56:77-78).³⁰ Ultimately, the Qur'an lives not on paper, but in the hearts of the "unlettered" to whom Muhammad was sent.³¹

²⁴ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 23. On the issue of "intertextuality" of the way the Qur'an is related to previous revelatory texts, Madigan notes: "In its claim to kinship the Qur'ān mirrors for us the role those other scriptures played and the status they enjoyed within their own communities at the time and place of Islam's emergence. So our task is to read from the Qur'ān what Muhammad and the Muslims were learning *from* the scripted people with whom they had contact, not to read *into* the Qur'an what we have learned about those scriptures" (ibid.). In other words, there is no linear relationship implied as if the Qur'an were modeled on them or drawn from them so that those who know the earlier revelations in detail could or should scour the qur'anic text for recognizable echoes.

²⁵ Ibid., 45.

²⁶ Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 60. Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 148. See (Sūras 3:3; 5:48).

²⁷ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 3. "To devout Muslims, the recited Qur'an is the word of God revealed to the prophet Muhammad; its divine origin accounts for its hold over the listener" (Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007), 1.

²⁸ Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, 163-345.

²⁹ Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 13.

³⁰ Ibid., 13, 14. See also Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 28, 65-77.

³¹ Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture*, 18. See also, Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 84.

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The Qur'an reflects familiarity with many biblical characters, though with only a sketchy core of their stories and with a different perspective.³² Most if not all the prominent biblical stories and characters found therein have been significantly edited or altered.³³ Major defining portions of some biblical narratives have been deleted. New material has been added to the text/story line of others. Narrative details are systematically changed and/or corrected by the qur'anic version. A given biblical narrative or Bible character's focus and meaning have been altogether eclipsed or changed with a new application or meaning in relation to Muhammad as a spokesman for God or Islam as a whole.³⁴ Bible characters and references to the coming Messiah are applied to the person, work, and existential struggles of Mohammad's prophetic journey.³⁵

The Qur'an addresses multiple themes that are significantly expanded in the Bible.³⁶ On four occasions it invites readers to go to these expanded, earlier revelations for confirmation of its own message.³⁷ These referrals to earlier revelations however, do not imply any independent authority status on their part as much as they allow Muhammad to posit his message as consistent with what has been revealed before. Intentionally however, "The Qur'an often plugs biblical words, concepts and narratives into its own very different theological grid, giving them very different meanings,"³⁸ something only alert and biblically informed readers catch. It appears that Muhammad drew

³² Ayman S. Ibrahim, *A Concise Guide to the Quran: Answering Thirty Critical Questions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 115.

³³ Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 5-7. Lodahl places the biblical and qur'anic texts side by side providing the reader with comparison of text, context, worldview assumptions, meaning, and interpretation (Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 9-24, 40-41, 50-51, 59-63, 82-84, 91-94, 103-109, 116-119, 138-141, 154-157, 163-166, 177-179, 192-200.).

³⁴ See examples in: Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 27-49; Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*.

³⁵ Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 169-179. This is quite subtle and tacit within the qur'anic text itself but more obvious in the *Hadith* and *Sira* (the way or the path).

³⁶ I. e., God, creation, spiritual beings, Satan and evil, man as an individual, life and death, holiness, Jesus and His Second Coming, the oneness and sovereignty of God, eschatology and the day of Judgment, the people of the book and the diversity of religions, human behavior and the law of God, prayer, love for neighbor, revelation/inspiration, eternity, etc.

³⁷ See (Sūras 10:94; 16:43-44; 17:101; 21:7; 43:44-45).

³⁸ Anderson, *The Qur'an in Context: A Christian Exploration*, 55.

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largely from Jewish and Christian non-biblical oral tradition, rabbinic lore, and literature with very little accurate biblical text or biblical language.³⁹

Nowhere however, does the Qur'an itself (or even Muhammad for that matter) overtly criticize earlier revelations.⁴⁰ The Qur'an is always positive of such. So also, Muhammad. However, the Qur'an is otherwise ambiguous on its relationship to them.⁴¹ Understanding this nuance is important in utilizing the Qur'an accurately when bridging Muslims toward the Bible.

Our concern though, is not that the Qur'an consistently looks favorably on earlier revelations, which we call the Bible, but rather:

- 1) What the Qur'an really has in view when it refers to these earlier revelations: Is it the Hebrew Scriptures in their textual entirety? Or is it non-Scriptural Rabbinic literature, oral tradition, legends? Is it the New Testament Scriptures in their textual entirety? Or is it apocryphal Christian literature and/or their perceived errancies?
- 2) How the Qur'an actually handles and utilizes these earlier revelations: Does it do so in a way that is consistent with the Bible's own context, meaning, and purpose? How does it position these earlier revelations in relation to itself [the Qur'an] and to Muhammad?
- 3) What is it that the Qur'an confirms, clarifies, protects: Is it the biblical text in terms of its content and intended meaning, or is it Muhammad's (and the Qur'an's) corrective interpretation of these earlier revelations?

³⁹ Any knowledgeable Jew of the day would know the difference and call Muhammad into question. This becomes obvious when Muhammad transitioned from Mecca to Medina, as Medina included a significant Jewish population, some of which would be knowledgeable of the Hebrew Scriptures. The same would be true for informed Christians, but for different reasons. Both groups were highly textual. Yet, while the Qur'an in reality incorporates and consistently misinterprets and misapplies distorted references to the Old and New Testament Scripture and/or narratives, it accuses the People of the Book (mostly Jews) of being the ones who do so. See Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 62, 233, 238, 245-246. The Qur'an incorporated a wide range of popular culture which made it accessible to the masses including Arabian, biblical and Talmudic folklore. See Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 89.

⁴⁰ See, Shah, *What Does the Holy Qur'an Say About the Holy Bible?*, 157; Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*.

⁴¹ Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 157.

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These are important questions. Ultimately, what the Qur'an actually does with these earlier revelations—the Bible—is quite revealing.

First, the Qur'an appears to assume that the earlier revelations are part of an eternal heavenly prototype, i.e., the “Mother of Book” (*Umm al-Kitāb*), which is the source of all scriptural revelations, and which now through the Qur'an, provides corrective completion.⁴² This heavenly archetype is the perfect original Qur'an, an other-worldly copy of the text (Sūrah 85:21, 22). As such it exists in eternity with God, or in God's mind, as a whole and complete Book; the Qur'an states, “With Him [God] is the original of the book” (Sūrah 13:39).⁴³

This heavenly book is seen as the “Mother” or origin of any and all revelations that God communicates to human beings—reflecting a Heavenly Recitation (Qur'an) that is the eternal archetypal source of all divine revelation. The implication is that all of God's revelation throughout all of history and through all the prophets has been essentially the same message and within the umbrella of the Mother Book. This is flawless communication from God. It simply means that earlier revelations (Tawrat, Zabur, Injeell)⁴⁴ are part of the *Umm al-Kitāb* (Mother of Book) and that the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book, i.e., Jews, Christians and Sabeans) are essentially viewed in relation to the

⁴² “It is He who has revealed to you the Book, with verses which are precise in meaning and which are the *Mother of the Book*, and others which are ambiguous. As those in whose hearts there is vacillation, they follow what is ambiguous in it, seeking sedition and intending to interpret it. However, no one but Allah knows its interpretation. Those well-grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it, all is from our Lord’; yet none remembers save those possessed of understanding!” (Sūrah 3:7). See also, (Sūrah 13:39; cf. Sūras 4:7; 43:4; 85:21-22; 56:77-78). Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 13, 14.

⁴³ Ibid., 14. The idea of an eternal heavenly book has sparked debate among Muslim theologians over whether or not the Qur'an is created. The debate turned coercive and violent during a period of 9th century AD Islamic Inquisition known as *Mihna* (literally means “trial,” “ordeal,” and “test”). The existence of eternal realities apart from Allah's essence challenges Islamic monotheism, which focuses on the absolute unity of God—*Tawhīd*. The doctrine of *Tawhīd* teaches that Allah is absolutely one. If the Qur'an has existed with God from eternity, it is uncreated (Ash 'arite position). If it is not co-eternal with God, then it is a created entity which is dependent upon the divine will for its existence (Mu 'tazilites position). The Ash 'arite position has become the dominant interpretation—the Qur'an is uncreated and co-eternal with God. It exists in eternity past alongside Allah. See, *ibid.*, 15; Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 67-77; Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah or Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 49-52.

⁴⁴ Torah of Moses, book of David, Gospel given to Jesus, respectively.

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Qur'an as an overarching paradigm and not respective texts per se.⁴⁵ In effect, one is only truly a “People of the Book” when they accept the Qur'an and believe in Muhammad (Sūras 3:110; 4:136).⁴⁶

The implications for earlier revelations—the Bible—in relation to the Qur'an can be visualized in the following figure:

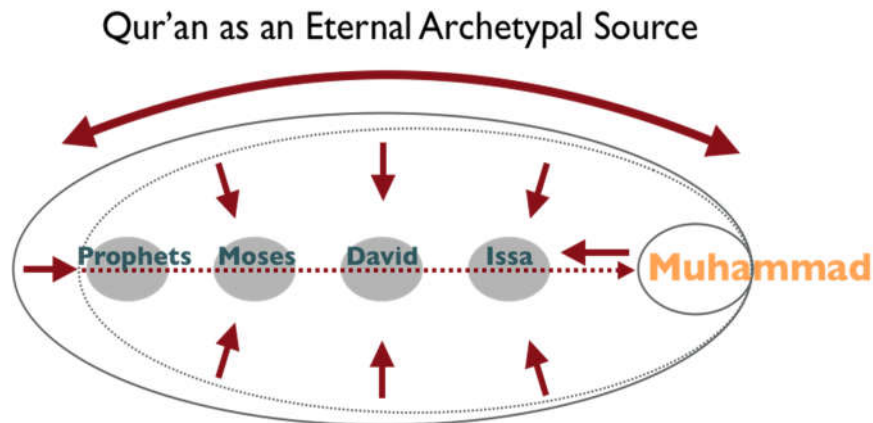


Figure 1: The solid elliptic represents the encapsulating revelation of the Qur'an of which earlier revelational periods enumerated in the dotted elliptic are envisioned. The final smaller solid elliptic reflects the emergence of the Qur'an as a recited and completed whole of the “Mother Book” in the life of Muhammad.

⁴⁵ Surah 13:38, 39 reads: “For each period is a Book (revealed). Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book.” I.e., for each age, according to God's wisdom, His Message is renewed. “This is the Glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved!” (Sūrah 85:21, 22). In other words, God's Message endures forever. That Message is the “Mother of the Book.”

⁴⁶ The Qur'an refers to different believing communities (Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magians) each having their own respective texts. It is only natural to wonder what book is it referring to when it refers to “The People of the Book”? It can be shown that most of the verses, stories, and chronicles that are taken from the “People of the Book” are not appropriate to the canonical Bible—but rather the Talmud, Jewish lore/legends, and Christian apocryphal gospels. Therefore, the Qur'an's “People of the book” are not the faithful people of the Bible, but rather faithful to the different Jewish, Christians books that are not recognized as canonical. For further information regarding the “People of the Book,” see Youssry Guirguis, “Ahl al-Kitāb, ‘The People of the Book:’ An Historical Investigation,” in *Class Notes: Module RELP 395 Creative Christian Contextualization* (ed. Asia-Pacific International University; Muak Lek, Thailand, 2020), 1-23.

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Second, the Qur'an appears to assume that Muhammad (and Islam) are the intended focus of previous revelatory segments: "*Those who follow the Messenger [Muhammad], the unlettered prophet, whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them, who enjoins them what is right, and forbids them bad things . . . those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light that has been sent down with him; it is they who shall prosper*" (Sūrah 7:157).⁴⁷ It is in this sense—i.e., the former revelations point to Muhammad and Islam—that the Qur'an is the "confirmer"⁴⁸ and "protector"⁴⁹ of the earlier revelations:

"He sent down the Book [Qur'an] upon thee in truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as a guidance to mankind. And He sent down the Criterion" (3:3);

"He it is Who has sent down the Book [Qur'an] upon thee; therein are signs determined: they are the Mother of the Book" [Qur'an] (3:7);

"And we have sent down unto thee the Book [Qur'an] in truth, confirming the Book [Torah, Gospel as part of the Qur'an] that came before it, and as a protector over it. So judge between them in accordance with what God has sent down" (5:48).⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Suggesting that the qualities which identify and describe Muhammad are mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel. Elsewhere, Jesus says that he brings "*glad tidings of a Messenger to come after him whose name is Ahmad*" (Sūrah 61:6)—a name used of Muhammad. Following this qur'anic nuance, Islamic Hadith and exegetical scholars went on to include prophecies about the decedents of Ishmael (cf. Gen. 16-17) and Jesus' reference to a spiritual "comforter"—the Paraclete (John 16:7-14). So also, Moses' prophecy: "*I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him*" (Deut. 18:18, 19). The implication is that whoever truly believes in the Bible and its intended/real meaning will also believe in Muhammad and accept Islam.

⁴⁸ The Qur'an is described as "confirming" earlier Scriptures in Sūras 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 6:92; 35:31; 46:30. Arabic *muṣaddiqan* from the root SDQ, which focuses on their truthfulness or veracity, and in this context, truthfulness in relation to the Qur'an, Muhammad's prophethood and ultimately Islam. Elsewhere the Qur'an refers to the Gospel as confirming the Torah, which had come before it (Sūrah 5:46).

⁴⁹ Arabic *muhaymin* which testifies to the validity of the meaning of earlier revelations in relation to the "Mother of the Book" (Qur'an) together with Muhammed and the trajectory of his prophethood. The Qur'an serves as their trustee, keeper, and guardian.

⁵⁰ Quotations cited from Seyyed Hossein Nasr ed. *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed.; New York, NY: Harper One, 2015).

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Thus, the Qur'an presents itself as confirming the validity of previous Scriptures and its unchanged message in keeping with the ethos of the "Mother of the Book." In doing so, it guards the true meaning and interpretation of earlier revelations. In effect, it provides the true meaning and an additional interpretation of the Bible.⁵¹ It is for this reason that Muhammad would rail against Jews who allegedly were misinterpreting or hiding passages about him from the earlier revelations.⁵²

However, the Bible and the Qur'an reflect different revelatory origins, historical contexts, and narrative. While the Qur'an came into being within the historic and cultural context of one supposed prophet and within a single generation, some forty (40) different divinely inspired prophets/authors spanning more than fifteen (15) centuries and multiple cultural contexts penned the Bible. This is a significant differential with reference to the question of progressive revelation and foundational truth.

The Bible testifies to a progression of God's revelation of Himself to humanity (Heb 1:1, 2). Divine revelation was given in stages (Rom 16:24, 25; Heb 1:1, 2). God did not reveal the fullness of His truth in the beginning—yet what He revealed was always true. The progressive character of divine revelation is recognized in relation to all the great doctrines and themes of the Bible. What at first is only obscurely intimated is gradually unfolded in subsequent parts of the sacred volume, until the truth is revealed in its fullness. Each portion of the Bible builds on the previous one(s). Earlier revelations, while accurate are incomplete. Later revelations, while providing further and fuller information, in no way contradict or abrogate what has come before.

⁵¹ "Islam claims to be in unison with the original messages of the prophets Moses and Jesus, but finds fault with the historical Judaic and Christian notions of deity. The Hebrew Bible's anthropomorphic conceptions of Yahweh (God) and Christianity's belief in a triune God, are both unacceptable to Islam for they are viewed as having compromised God's transcendence and unity. The Islamic Scripture, the Qur'an, on one level, is believed to have been revealed as a corrective measure, to rectify not only the polytheistic conceptions of God but also to clarify and amend Jewish and Christian compromises with regards to God's transcendence" (Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 400).

⁵² See (Sūras 2:42, 58, 69, 75, 79, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71, 78, 187; 4:46; 5:5, 13, 41; 6:91; 7:162, 165). For discussion on how Jews incorrectly preached and or misinterpreted the Tawrat (Torah), see, Shah, *What Does the Holy Qur'an Say About the Holy Bible?*, 21.

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Nor do they stand alone, independent of what has been revealed by God before. Rather, later revelations clarify and amplify the things previously revealed. In this context, from a biblical perspective, the ultimate revelation of God is understood to be found in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospels.⁵³

Progressive revelation assumes a God who does not change.⁵⁴ It assumes, too, theological/moral correspondence and coherence, foundational truth and enlargement, prophetic anticipation and fulfillment.⁵⁵

Furthermore, within the biblical context, it is the earlier, fragmentary and incomplete revelation—what comes before—that is foundational and which confirms and checks the validity of later revelation (Isa 8:10; Lk 24:27, 44-45). In keeping with God’s progressive revelation, the centuries unfolded an expanding, coherent resource of inspired light, thought, and guidance, which became *THE* theological foundation for critique and/or confirmation of subsequent revelation—especially so with the close of the biblical canon (Isa 8:20; 2 Tim 3:16, 17).

How the Qur’an and Islam testify to this biblical phenomenon of progressive revelation with its [the Bible’s] “fullness” in Jesus Christ determines their ultimate credibility. The Qur’an asserts its own message as the final confirming, protecting, and corrective revelatory criterion of God (Sūras 5:48; 3:3). But it appears to do so at the expense of earlier revelations as reflected in the biblical canon. The Qur’an essentially marginalizes the fullness of the New Testament gospel witness in general and the finality of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ in particular. Rather than being confirmed by earlier revelations as per the Bible’s ethos, the Qur’an positions itself as confirming the integrity and content of all earlier biblical revelations.⁵⁶

⁵³ The following Bible verses confirm the idea (cf. Heb 1:1-4; Jude 3; John 1:1-14, 18; Col 2:2-3, 8-10; 1 Cor 1:30).

⁵⁴ See (1 Sam 15:29; Ps 110:4; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:12; 7:21).

⁵⁵ See (Isa 8:20; Luke 24:27, 44-45; Act 18:28; Rom 1:2; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3, 4; Heb 1:1-4; 8:1-10:23).

⁵⁶ Two potential exceptions are Sūrah 10:94 and Sūrah 16:43—both late Meccan revelations—where Muhammad is told to question those who read the Book if he has doubts about what has been revealed to him; cf. Sūras 49:15; 7:158; 42:15. It should be noted that from an Islamic perspective a “revealed book alone does not make a perfect guide and that a teacher is needed who, by his superior spiritual knowledge and practical example, should lay bare its hidden beauties and excellences” (Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, *The Holy Qur’an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (London, UK: Islam International, 1988), 3: 1296).

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In keeping with its *Umm al-Kitabi* (Mother Book) perspective as per above, the implications for earlier revelations in relation to the Qur'an can be illustrated from the figures below:⁵⁷

Biblical Progressive Revelation

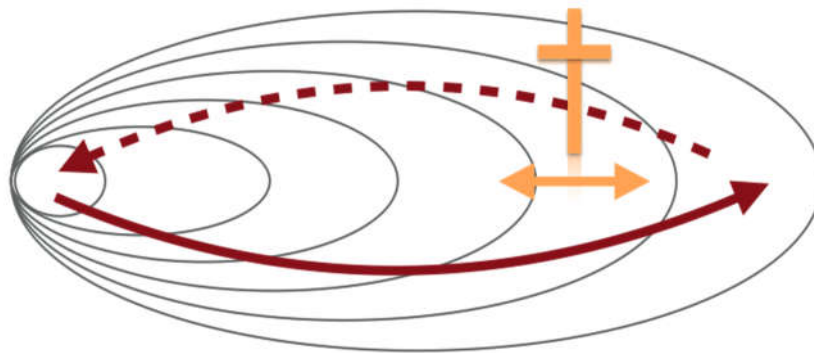


Figure 2: Each expanding elliptic includes the core of the earlier, both expanding earlier meaning and looking back to its truths for confirmation. The person and work of Jesus Christ assumes the past and unfolds the meaning of the future.

A comparison of the implications for biblical and qur'anic revelatory foundations and authority are revealing. For biblical revelation, the past illumines and defines the meaning of the present, while for qur'anic revelation, the present illumines and defines the meaning of the past.

⁵⁷ One would expect if the Qur'an signaled the dawn of the climax of God's revelation, that the best in the former revelations would be referred to and then surpassed. When compared with the Bible's breadth of revelation regarding God and human moral life however, the Qur'an however appears to take large steps backwards rather than forward. It offers a truncated Arabic edition of the Bible which comments on and critiques the views of the People of the Book or others in its own rhetorical style and within the horizon of its own concerns. The Qur'an (and Islam) may have brought light and guidance in its immediate historical context of seventh-century paganism in the Arab peninsula, but such light pales at best in comparison to the breadth of revelation regarding God's love, mercy, and grace as well as the plan of salvation unfurled in the mystery of the Gospel and in the person of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; Heb 1:1-4; Jn 1:18; Eph 1:9, 10, 17, 18; 3:8-11, 18, 19). See Diop, "The Use of the Qur'an in Sharing the Gospel: Promise or Compromise?," 170.

Comparing Progressive Revelation

The past illumines and defines the present

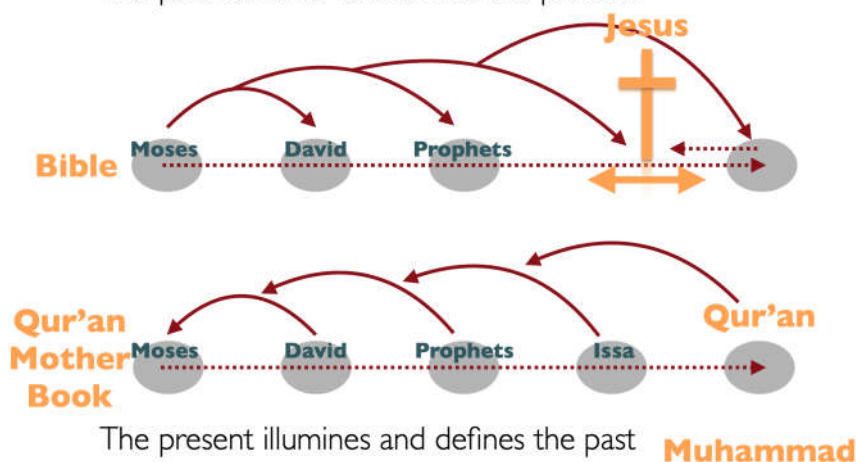


Figure 3: For progressive revelation in the biblical perspective, the past illumines and defines the present, while in the qur'anic perspective, the present illumines and defines the past.

Qur'anic Worldview

The Bible and the Qur'an generate unique worldviews.⁵⁸ Sacred writings generate worldviews in keeping with their respective meta-narrative, reasoning, and symbolism. The assertions which each worldview both presuppose and project about God, reality, the world, and human beings profoundly affect one's identity, spiritual experience, and ethics.⁵⁹ Because the biblical and qur'anic worldviews are largely

⁵⁸ Lichtenwalter, "The Biblical Witness of the Character of God in Relation to the Qur'an," 105-110; Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 53-203; Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 1-24; Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*; Richter, *Comparing the Qur'an and the Bible: What They Really Say About Jesus and More*.

⁵⁹ Worldview themes include: 1) the visible/invisible realms—unseen world(s), spirit/spiritual entities, spheres of reality; 2) God's existence, power, nature, proximity, character, etc.; 3) origins—causality (person, quality, power, agency), i.e., natural, supernatural, human, deterministic, religious ritual/magic, eternal God; 4) human Nature—body/soul, person/group, status/role, male/female; 5) Ethics—foundations, norms/authority, moral agency, freedom, rights; 6) Time/Event—kinds of time

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defined by a vision of God, there is need to explore the qur'anic witness of Allah in relation to the biblical witness of the being and character of God. Their different historical contexts, revelatory content, moral themes and ethics, views of human nature, soteriology, and spiritual life—which these two books each narrate differently—likewise need consideration from the macro-hermeneutical perspective.

This study does not propose to compare the biblical and qur'anic worldviews in detail, but will simply note that despite numerous surface similarities and themes, “the two worldviews are profoundly different.”⁶⁰ This profound difference inevitably nuances hermeneutics and the interpretation of their respective texts. Their specific content and context become key factors in determining meaning. With reference to the Qur'an, no matter what individual qur'anic texts may seem to say or affirm on a phenomenological level with reference to analogous concepts with the Bible, there is need to allow their respective worldview and theology to guide our understanding of what they really mean.

While much can be said about the qur'anic worldview,⁶¹ three defining themes permeate and dominate: 1) the oneness and transcendence of Allah;⁶² 2) the nature and purpose of the Qur'an;⁶³ and

(biological, personal, physical, metaphysical, micro, sacred, profane, past/present/future, history, prophecy); 7) Space/Material World—space (proxemics, i.e., intimate, personal, gender, social, public, spiritual); 8) theodicy and the problem of evil; 9) hope & destiny.

⁶⁰ Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 43.

⁶¹ Anderson engages the following qur'anic worldview themes: God's immanence and transcendence; God's justice and mercy; creation of human beings and divine-human analogy; measuring Adam's fall and the nature of sin; divine grace and deferred judgment with Adam and Eve; sin and salvation; prophets, scriptures, revelation; spirituality, community, and politics (ibid., 51-203). Ruthven's qur'anic worldview includes: the language-centric nature of Qur'an which was revealed in Arabic, which in turn prevents diffusion of Muslim Scripture into the surrounding cultural landscape and maintaining an common Arab identity, as well as a language built on verbs; the Qur'an's structure of mixing the sublime and the mundane, intentional repetition and oral transmission; the nature of God; the speech of God; the unseen world of ultimate and unknowable reality; human nature and destiny; submission and faith; ethics; the problem of suffering and punishment; eschatology; human freedom; and the negation of the division of the world into profane and spiritual spheres (Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 80-121). See also, Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.

⁶² God's transcendence takes precedence over everything else and constitutes the major difference between the Bible and the Qur'an. The Qur'an also implicitly rejects the biblical metaphors pointing to our ability to know God personally (see Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 53-81). However, Allah can be considered “personal” when He reveals Himself to humans when they are in need or in distress. For

3) the person and work of Muhammad in relation to both Allah and the Qur'an.⁶⁴

Muslim devotion begins with the Shahada: "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God." One does not find this precise formula anywhere in the Qur'an (the concept however, is enforced in Sūrah 112). Nevertheless, "the Qur'an clearly attests that there is no God but God, even as it witnesses to his having sent down his revelation to his prophet or messenger, Muhammad."⁶⁵ Allah, the true Reality "is historically revealed through the mission and prophethood of Muhammad. The Prophet "Muhammad is the embodiment of the divine message and not a reflection of the divine Person."⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Qur'an "unequivocally urges obedience to both God and Muhammad, which is the creed's practical import."⁶⁷ Obeying God and the prophet Muhammad is one of the Qur'an's top ethical priorities.⁶⁸ At times the

further information, see Pamela Christian, *Examine Your Faith! Finding Truth in A World of Lies* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2013), 39.

⁶³ As an ideal, a constant in terms of eternal values, a moral/spiritual guidance and light. See AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform*, 64.

⁶⁴ Muhammad embodies (models) the Qur'anic ideal in the real, i.e., a tacit *imatio* Muhammad. "As for the role of the Messenger of God as the final Prophet, it lay in being the model who provides definitive evidence that the Qur'an is not a book of fanciful, idealistic conceptions or dreams, but rather a message of guidance to be applied to the rough-and-tumble of everyday life and practices . . . His mission was to apply the values embodied in the message he had been given. In this way, he demonstrated that the guidance he had brought was directly relevant to the reality of people's lives . . . Sound application of Islamic values and concepts within the context of particular times and places requires wisdom, knowledge, and discernment. Hence, the ways in which the Prophet . . . applied the values and concepts of the Qur'an to his particular circumstances offer a model for others as they seek to reapply these values and concepts to their own changing evolving times and places" (ibid.). "It should be remembered that love for the Prophet is part of love for God—since through his morals, his character, and his behavior, the Prophet served as the supreme human expression of what love for God means" (ibid., 32).

⁶⁵ 3:18; 4:166; 6:19. Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 165.

⁶⁶ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 453. See also, Rais Siddiqi, *Islam: Faith, State and Law* (New Delhi, India: Anmol Publications, 2005), 49; M. K. Zeineddine, *Ali Bin Abi Taleb (Reflection of A Prophet)* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al Kotob Al Ilmiyah, 2016), 56.

⁶⁷ Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 165.

⁶⁸ 3:32, 132; 4:13, 59, 69; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 9:71, 80; 24:47-56; 33:33; 49:14; 58:13; 64:12.

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distinction between God and the prophet Muhammad blur.⁶⁹ Additionally, the prophet Muhammad's "night journey" to Jerusalem and then on to heaven (17:1) positions him in a cosmic dimension unifying the horizontal and vertical spheres of heaven and earth.⁷⁰ Thus, the Qur'an "centers Muslim life in obedience to both God and Muhammad."⁷¹ To obey the Qur'an is to obey both God and Muhammad the prophet. The Qur'an provides the ideal, a constant in terms of eternal values, a moral/spiritual guidance and light, while the prophet Muhammad provides example of the real, the praxis of what it means to be Muslim.⁷² This places the prophet Muhammad in a unique relation to both God and the Qur'an. Muslim reactions to criticism of Muhammad are very strong and passionate.⁷³

Within this worldview, reality is divided into two generic realms: God and non-God in which God "remains forever transcendental Other

⁶⁹ 3:32, 132; 4:79, 114; 8:20; 24:54, 63; 58:8; 59:7. The Qur'an asserts that obeying God's Messenger is tantamount to obeying God Himself, thus placing obedience to the prophet Muhammad alongside obedience to God. Obeying the Messenger is part of obeying Allah since Allah commands that the prophet Muhammad be obeyed. True obedience is obedience to Allah's command and therefore obedience to His prophet.

⁷⁰ It is said that during his miraculous travel during the "The Night Journey" (al-Isrā') the prophet Muhammad moved from Mecca to Jerusalem, then on to the seventh heaven and finally returned back to Mecca (17:1). While in heaven he is said to have met Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and God (53:9). The Qur'an though, provides little detail in relation to pages of colorful discussion of this tradition found in the Ibn Ishaq's biography of the prophet Muhammad. For further information, see A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishāq's Sirat Rasūl Allāh* (trans. A. Guillaume; Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 181-187. This horizontal and vertical travel provides a powerful unifying spatial/geographic worldview paradigm for Muslims with regard to sacred territories (Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, particularly the Beit Allah (Meccan Kaaba) and the Beit Al-Mamur (heavenly Kaaba). El-Sayed El-Aswad writes: "The sanctified narrative, accentuating the cosmic significance of the Prophet, indicates that the sacred geography eradicates what seems to be divided geography. The Prophet's miraculous travel, suspending the natural laws of time and space, from Mecca to Jerusalem and back, spatially horizontal in nature, linked two sacred places, which his ascension to the heavens, spatially vertical, mediated between natural and spiritual or celestial worlds. By passing with his soul and body through the divine and lucid levels of heaven, the Prophet was assured that heaven and earth are undivided geographically" (El-Sayed El-Aswad, *Muslim Worldviews and Everyday Lives* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2012), 29.).

⁷¹ Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 163.

⁷² AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform*, 64.

⁷³ Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 49.

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devoid of any resemblance, similarity, partnership and association.”⁷⁴ He is true Reality, true Being. He stands alone: absolutely transcendent.⁷⁵ This view of reality concerning the belief in one God nurtures “a commitment to radical transcendental monotheism.”⁷⁶ To embrace this truth is to enter into the life of a community of faith, namely, Islam. It “occupies Muslim thought and action and polarizes the thought of Islam into real and non-real.”⁷⁷

Theologically, writes Shah, that God posits a

strict uncompromising ethical monotheism, signifying the absolute Oneness, Unity, Uniqueness and Transcendence of God, in its highest and purest sense, and which formally and unequivocally eliminates all notions of polytheism, pantheism, dualism, monolatry, henotheism, tritheism, trinitarianism, and indeed any postulation or conception of the participation of persons in the divinity of God.⁷⁸

Corporeal notions and anthropomorphic images of God’s being are avoided.⁷⁹ For that reason, Ahmad Gunny states that “Muslim theologians insist that anthropomorphic terms applied to God were to be taken vaguely, without specifying literally or metaphorically.”⁸⁰ God is nowhere comparable to anthropomorphic images for such may lead the believer to natural theology.⁸¹ God is not in things and creation is other than God.⁸² For Sūrah 22:18a says, “Do you not see that to Allah bow down in submission [i.e., prostrate, all beings submit to His Will].”

⁷⁴ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 451.

⁷⁵ Semantically, Allah, the Arabic word for God, is the highest focused word in Qur’anic (and Islamic) vocabulary. Islam is theocentric to its core. Divine transcendence is “the essence” of its message. See Sayed Khatab and Gary D. Bouma, *Democracy in Islam* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 82.

⁷⁶ Peter J. Awn, “Faith and Practice,” in *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community* (ed. Marjorie Kelly; Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1984), 3-28.

⁷⁷ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 454.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* See also Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side*, 9-24.

⁸⁰ Ahmad Gunny, *Images of Islam in Eighteenth-century Writings* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2008), 110.

⁸¹ John Hedley Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion* (Bloomsbury, UK: A&C Black, 2000), 144.

⁸² Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 16.

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Metaphysically, the Qur'an's radical monotheism implies correlation between the Oneness of God and the oneness of existence—*Tawhīd*. It rejects dualistic dichotomy and allows “the sacred to dissolve and overcome the profane, merging life into a God-centered whole, suffusing every aspect with a consciousness of the divine.”⁸³ “It unifies material life with the spiritual realm and gives conceptual framework and meanings to this worldly life so much so that the transformation of time and space become an urgent matter, of great concern to man here and now.”⁸⁴ This Oneness of God and the oneness of existence effectively eliminate boundaries between religion and politics.⁸⁵ It was Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240), who expounded on the doctrine of Being and who first formulated the belief of Oneness, Unity and Unicity of God forms the essence of the Islamic vision of reality.⁸⁶

While merging all of life into a God-centered whole, the ontological hierarchy of being implied in Islam's divide between God and non-God asserts however, that the order of time-space, creation and of experience remain in a realm in which God is both distinct and distant from His creation.⁸⁷ True Reality (Allah) is historically revealed through the

⁸³ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 402. See also, Iqbal S. Hussain, *Islam and Western Civilization: Creating a World of Excellence* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2009), 160.

⁸⁴ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 422.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 402. See also, Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam is Reshaping the World* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 30, 32, 54, 67; Hichem Djait, *Islamic Culture in Crisis: A Reflection on Civilizations in History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 29-48; Asma Afsaruddin, *Contemporary Issues In Islam* (ed. Carole Hillenbrand, Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 17, 21.

⁸⁶ Rafael Ramon Guerrero, “Ibn ‘Arabī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muḥyiddīn,” *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy Between 500 and 1500*:482. The Islamic unitarian formula—“your God is One God: there is no god but He” (Sūrah 2:163; cf. Sūras 3:2, 18; 2:255)—occurs 41 times in the Qur'an along with numerous other forms that negate godhead or divinity. See also, Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 454.

⁸⁷ Robert Crotty, “Human and Religious Values in Society: A Relativistic Perspective,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values* (ed. James Arthur and Terence Lovat; New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 258; Ron Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century: Changing Nations Through the Power of Serving* (Clearwater, FL: Frontline Communications, 1989), 163. See also, Shah,

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mission and prophethood of Muhammad, not through anything God Himself might do.⁸⁸ God is essentially unknowable in His self-sufficiency and unicity.⁸⁹ His existence, for the Qur'an, is strictly functional.⁹⁰ While intensely theocentric to the core, the Qur'an is not about God per se, but on revealing the commands of God.⁹¹

In the words of Kenneth Cragg,

The revelation communicated God's Law. It does not reveal God Himself . . . the genius of Islam is finally law and not theology. In the last analysis the sense of God is a sense of Divine command. In the will of God there is none of the mystery that surrounds His being. His demands are known and the believer's task is not so much exploratory, still less fellowship, but rather obedience and allegiance.⁹²

Within this paradigm, God is essentially timeless. Respectively, the insistence upon God's absolute transcendence and perfect unity has unique implications for questions about the nature of God, free will and predestination, the relationship of good and evil, and of reason to revelation.⁹³

The foregoing vision of *Tawhīd*—including visible/invisible spheres where the transcendent invisible bestows meaning to the visible and where Allah is the singular, ultimate, invisible, unseen and unknowable divinity—implies a tacit Middle Platonism. Greek philosophical presuppositions—both Platonic and Aristotelian—have had a significant influence (directly and indirectly) on Islamic thought.⁹⁴ In a milieu

Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable, 451-452.

⁸⁸ 'Alī Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṣallābī, *The Noble Life of the Prophet* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2005), 181.

⁸⁹ Aydoğan Kars, *Unsayng God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 12-13; Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 458.

⁹⁰ Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 1.

⁹¹ Ibid., 3; Norman L. Geisler, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross (Updated & Revised)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 103.

⁹² Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2009), 55, 57.

⁹³ Shah, *Anthropomorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Jusaic, Christian and Islamic Traditions Representing the Unrepresentable*, 464.

⁹⁴ Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not A Muslim* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003), 1-3, 261-275; Robert R. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide*

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already saturated with Plotinus and Aristotle thought,⁹⁵ it occurred unintentionally at least during Islam's formative years as Muhammad both engaged and absorbed Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian religious thought.⁹⁶ The metaphysical beliefs of the pagan environment and Bedouin culture of Muhammad's day likewise shaped philosophical and epistemological understandings in keeping with Platonic perspectives.⁹⁷ Ultimately, Platonic influence would become more nuanced as Islam conquered Alexandria a century later (642CE) becoming overt and

Created the Modern Islamist Crisis (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2017), 11-39; Andy Byng, "The Influences of Neo-Platonism and Aristotelianism on Early Islamic Thinking," (2010). Reilly notes that "Almost without exception, they [Muslim philosophers] were supporters of neo-Platonic notions of emanationism, materialistic pantheism, the eternity of the universe, and the immortality of the soul, but not of the body" (Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis*, 38). Some Muslim scholars suggest that the phenomenon of Neoplatonist influence on Islam became a reality only after the time of Mohammad and the four rightly guided Caliphs and represent a regression of Islam from its purity (AbuSulayman, *The Qur'anic Worldview: A Springboard for Cultural Reform*, 120-130). Rahman asserts that the Qur'an nowhere indorses the doctrine of radical mind-body dualism of Greek philosophy: "The Qur'an does not appear to endorse the kind of radical mind-body dualism found in Greek philosophy, Christianity, or Hinduism; indeed, there is hardly a passage in the Qur'an that says that man is composed of two separate, let alone disparate, substances, the body and the soul (even though later orthodox Islam, particularly after al-Ghazali and largely through his influence, came to accept it). The term *nafs*, frequently employed by the Qur'an and often translated as 'soul,' simply means 'person' or 'self'" (Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, 17). These positions however, overlook how much the Qur'an drew from Rabbinic literature as well as Christian apocryphal literature, both of which are steeped in Neoplatonist thinking of the day. Hellenization had an incredible influence on both Jewish and Christian philosophical and theological endeavor. Likewise, these positions overlook the Qur'an's descriptions of judgment in hell where people do not die, descriptions of God in relation to time and space, as well as God's knowability and unclear and tacitly denied personhood. See Larry Lichtenwaller, "Rhetorical Strategy of Terror and Desire in Islamic Eschatology: God, Life and Death, Resurrection and Judgment, Hell and Paradise—Implications for Adventist Mission," in *God and Life after Death: Hell, Punishment, Resurrection, Heaven* (ed. Jiri Moskala and John Reeve: Pacific Press Publishing, 2021). See also, Lodahl for implications regarding anthropomorphic language and one's view of God, Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 9-24.

⁹⁵ Ian Richard Netton, "Neoplatonism in Islamic Philosophy," *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. By then, also both Jewish and Christian religious thought had absorbed Platonic thinking: the former through Philo and Hellenistic influences via LXX, etc.; the latter as Augustine incorporated Platonic philosophical categories into his theological apologetic of Christianity.

⁹⁶ Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 18-22.

⁹⁷ See Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 15-49.

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systematic during the Abbasid Caliphate in 9-10th century Muslim scholarly projects.⁹⁸

Surprisingly, and almost contradictorily, an underlying animistic belief system (worldview) replete with tacit spiritual power-related implications exists in the Qur'an.⁹⁹ This underlying animistic worldview system includes fear, power and magic. There are evil powers: ghosts, jinn (literally hidden or concealed), demons, evil eyes, curses and sorcery.¹⁰⁰ Two Sūras (113, 114) are "used by Muslims to this day for protection from many evils, including the evil eye and the casting of spells."¹⁰¹ This Qur'anic spiritual cosmology is further nuanced by

⁹⁸ Nicolas Laos, *The Metaphysics of World Order: A Synthesis of Philosophy, Theology, and Politics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 37-39.

⁹⁹ I use animistic in its broad meaning of spiritual-powers related belief systems which include supernatural power in the other-worldly realm. It reflects one of the three foremost worldview paradigms—Fear/Power as opposed to Honor/Shame and Innocence/Guilt.

¹⁰⁰ Undoubtedly, animistic notions and practice is inconsistent with orthodox Islam's radical monotheistic stance, which eschews any such notion. Yet, beneath this theological/orthodox veneer is a world of power(s): power people, power objects, power places, power times and power rituals. See Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions*. (Macmillan, 1920), 1-21, 43-66, 146-162; Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 53-88; Gene Daniels. "Conclusion: Learning From the Margins," in *Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts* (ed. Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah; Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 211-212; Robin Dale Hadaway, *The Muslim Majority: Folk Islam and the Seventy Percent* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2021), 1-53; Warren Larson. "Ordinary Muslims in Pakistan and the Gospel," in *Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts* (ed. Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah; Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2018), 84-85; Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 19-36; Bill Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2003), 167-178; Phil Parshall, *Bridges to Islam: A Christian Perspective on Folk Islam* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 61-104; Bill A. Musk, *Touching The Soul of Islam: Sharing the Gospel in Muslim Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2004), 221-246; "The Influence of Animism on Islam," (<http://www.message4muslims.org.uk/islam/folk-islam/influence-of-animism-on-islam/>: Message for Muslims, 2016).

¹⁰¹ Nasr ed., *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed.), 1581. They reflect Muhammad's belief that his enemies used magic and charms in order to kill him, make him ill, or drive him mad, or that Satan was among the men and the jinn who whispered evil into the hearts of the people against him and the Qur'an. Of interest is that they reveal "an incident in which the Prophet was stricken with an illness as a result of a spell put on him by a sorceress, a practitioner of black magic. The Angel Gabriel is said to have told him the location of the knotted string upon which the sorceress had whispered her spell and then revealed the two Sūras as a means of undoing the spell. The

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numerous references to Jinn.¹⁰² Muhammad's recitation of the Qur'an is associated with the presence of jinn.¹⁰³ While the *Sūrat Al-Jinn* asserts the submission of all spiritual entities, including the jinn, to God, they nevertheless exist as intermediate beings with good or bad powers. One's only protection is to seek the aid of Allah, charms, good magic and other powers. Undoubtedly, this is inconsistent with Orthodox Islam's radical monotheistic stance, which eschews any such notion. Yet beneath this theological veneer is a world of power(s): power people, power objects, power places, and power times, i.e., Folk Islam.¹⁰⁴ Animism believes in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests.

Ritual similarities between the pre-Islamic pagan (*Jahiliyyah*)¹⁰⁵—“Time of Ignorance”—the Kaaba and the Muslim *Hajj* regimen at the Kaaba suggests the resilience and adaptation of Bedouin animistic customs that were heathen in nature,¹⁰⁶ some which Muhammad modified, or repurposed when he cleansed the Kaaba of its many idols and categorically rejected polytheism. While Muhammad may have cleansed the Kaaba of its idols, the fundamental philosophical and cultural core of Kaaba power-related worldview and ritual remain.¹⁰⁷ Despite Islamic Orthodoxy, this animistic heritage underlies much of

Prophet sent Alī ibn Abī Tālib to obtain the string and whisper over it these fourteen verses which would undo the fourteen-knot spell” (ibid.).

¹⁰² See (Sūrah 7:38, 179).

¹⁰³ See, (Sūras 46:29-32; 72:2-7). El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn*, 62-66.

¹⁰⁴ Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, 19-38.

¹⁰⁵ *Jahiliyyah* is an Islamic concept referring to the period moral and spiritual ignorance and otherwise pagan state of affairs in Arabia before the advent of Islam in 610 CE. For further information, see Jerome Constantine Godfrey, *Jahiliyyah! Before They Knew God* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2017), 14-36.

¹⁰⁶ “Bedouin cultic practices were animistic, involving the worship of idols, stones, and trees, and the Bedouin would run and walk around (circumambulate) these sacred objects a prescribed number of times” (Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 25). See Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions*, 146-162; Phil Parshall, *Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 84. This includes the Hajj and ritual of circumambulating the Kaaba naked.

¹⁰⁷ Brinda Mehta, *Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 85-87; Daniels. “Conclusion: Learning From the Margins,” 211-212; Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions*, 1-21, 43-66, 146-162.

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what Muslims actually believe and do.¹⁰⁸ This can be said of Christians as well. However, unlike the biblical worldview, Islam's sacred sources (the Qur'an and *Hadith*) together with the prophet Muhammad's own practice unwittingly fosters belief in spiritual beings, practices or sacred objects capable of helping or harming human interests.¹⁰⁹

Suffice to say, the Bible presents an altogether contrasting worldview. A cosmic conflict metanarrative (warfare worldview) provides the conceptual backdrop for understanding God, evil, the human predicament, freedom, judgment, redemption, destiny.¹¹⁰ Its monotheism asserts the relational triunity of God.¹¹¹ Its anthropocentric

¹⁰⁸ Larson, "Ordinary Muslimis in Pakistan and the Gospel," 84.

¹⁰⁹ Hadaway, *The Muslim Majority: Folk Islam and the Seventy Percent*, 5; Larson, "Ordinary Muslimis in Pakistan and the Gospel," 84-85; Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions*, 162-165. "Some Muslim folk practices originate from within Islam itself, as the Quran and the Hadith (الحديث) provide rich material for the development of nonorthodox beliefs" (Hadaway, *The Muslim Majority: Folk Islam and the Seventy Percent*, 5). "Qur'anic Islam follows the formal teachings and the letter of the law embedded in the Qur'an. Folk Islam tends to combine Qur'anic Islam with other beliefs and practices of a particular culture" (George W. Braswell, *Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 285). "In no monotheistic religion are magic and sorcery so firmly entrenched as they are in Islam; for in the case of this religion they are based on the teaching of the Koran and the practice of the Prophet . . . the book itself, as we have seen has magical power" (Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam: An Account of Popular Superstitions*, 163.) For further information, see Merlin L. Swartz, *Studies on Islam* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan, 2010), 14-17. See also, Joseph Henninger, "Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion," in *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam* (ed. F. E. Peters; New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 109-128.

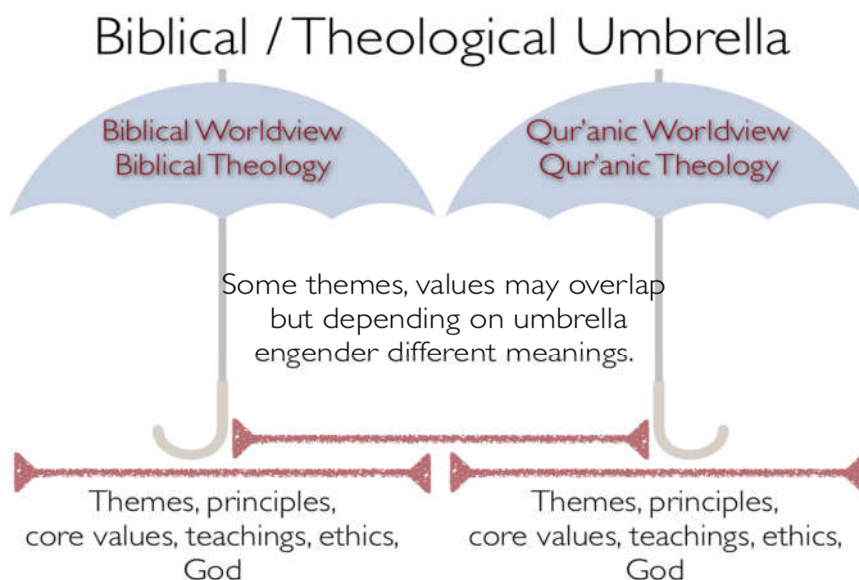
¹¹⁰ See (Gen 1-3; Job 1:6-2:7; Isa 14:3-21; Ezek 28:1-19; Daniel chapters 2, 4, 7, 10-11; Rev 12:1-17; cf. Rev 9:1-20). This includes the reality that the person of Jesus has been at the center of the cosmic conflict since it began in Heaven (Gen 3:15; Rev 12:1-10; Luke 3:22; 4:3, 9, 14-30). See Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 2002), 35-37.

¹¹¹ Christian experience is envisioned as one with the Triune God. It means—from the standpoint of the Godhead. It includes Triune atonement (Heb 9:14; 10:29-31); Invitation to know the Triune God (Acts 2:38-39); Trinitarian salvation (Rom 5:5-6; 8:9, 11; Eph 2:18, 21-22; 1 Pet 1:2); Trinitarian witness of salvation (1 Cor 6:11; Heb 2:3-4), and Trinitarian assurance of salvation (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:3-6; 4:6). Four kinds of New Testament biblical material express this triune God (Trinitarian) mindset—where there are two, the third is assumed: passages that include: **1) Jesus and the Father** (Matt 1:23; 2:15; 7:21; 10:32-33; 11:27; 27:43; Mark 14:36; John 1:1, 14, 18; 5:17-18; 6:40, 47; 8:18-19, 38; 10:15, 36; 11:4; 13:3; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 2 Thess 1:2, 12; Phlm 3; Heb 1:1-8; 2 Pet 1:2, 16-17; 1 John 1:2-3; 2:22-24); **2) Jesus and the Spirit** (Matt 1:18; 3:17; 12:28; Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:1-14, 18; 10:21-24; 11:13, 20; 12:11-12; Jn 1:32-33; 7:37-39; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-15; 20:21-

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analogies unabashedly reveal God as personal in relation to human beings and all His creation. The person and work of Jesus Christ displays God's character of love. In His person and work Jesus brings the fullness and finality of God's redemptive revelation in human history as well as the centrality of Jesus over all.¹¹² God is eternal rather than timeless. History is the arena of God's activity in human affairs. He is not only transcendent Creator, but immanent Father, Redeemer, Sustainer. Jesus' incarnation reveals God's action in both human time and space.

The following figure of Worldview Umbrellas helps to envision the implications of overlapping worldview themes and how real meaning is determined by the Worldview Umbrella under whose influence they reside.



23; Acts 2:33; 10:38; Rom 8:2; 9:1; Gal 3:14; 5:5-6, 22-24; Eph 1:13-14; 3:5-6; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:11); **3) the Father and the Spirit** (Matt 10:20; Luke 11:13; 24:48-49; Acts 1:4-5; Rom 5:5; 8:27; 15:13; 1 Cor 2:4, 5, 10-14; 3:16; 6:19; 14:2; 2 Cor 5:5; Eph 6:17; 1 Thess 4:8; 2 Pet 1:21); **and 4) all three persons** (Matt 1:20-23; 28:19, 20; Luke 1:35; 24:49; John 1:32-34; 20:21-22; Acts 1:3-5, 7-8; 28:23, 25; Rom 1:1-4; 15:30; 2 Cor 1:4-6; 13:14; 1 Thess 1:3-5; 5:18-19; Heb 3:7-12; 6:1-5; 10:15-22, 29-31; Jude 19-25; Rev 1:4-6; 4:1-5:12; 14:6-13; 22:1-17).

¹¹² For further information, see (John 1:1-14; Eph 1:1-23; Col 1:13-29; Heb 1:1-13; Rev 12:1-13).

Figure 4: Like an umbrella, a worldview engenders meaning which includes defining themes, principles, core values and logic, teachings, ethics, and a view of God. A given worldview may intersect with another worldview in which some themes or values overlap phenomenologically, nevertheless each respective worldview may engender different meanings on the deeper macro hermeneutical level.

Qur'anic Hermeneutics

We have asserted above that the Qur'an has its own hermeneutic together with a complex labyrinth of interpretive prism and historic precedent.¹¹³ It is a given that "many passages are obscure, and cannot be understood without reference to the substantial body of exegetical literature, derived from the oral *hadith*-traditions which came to be selected and written down around the third century of Islam."¹¹⁴ We have also asserted that one must first analyze qur'anic concepts within their own historic and literary contexts as well as within the Qur'an's own worldview and interpretative framework in relation to that of Islamic thought and life. Only then can one critically analyze qur'anic concepts and their equivalents in both the Old and the New Testaments with integrity. "Biblical studies is often invoked as a methodological parallel in discussing the Qur'an."¹¹⁵

While the Qur'an is increasingly being subjected to analysis by the instruments and techniques of biblical criticism, "the parallel is dismissed and an appeal is made to the singularity of the Quran as a piece of Arabic literature and therefore a need for a distinct methodology."¹¹⁶ Three approaches have emerged as dominant in

¹¹³ This interpretive labyrinth includes: 1) **Qur'anic Text** itself—words, phrases, vocabulary, Arabic (language centric); 2) **Hadith**—sayings of Muhammad; 3) **Sira**—the life of Muhammad, what he did and experienced; 4) the **Occasions**—when and why certain revelations occurred; 5) **Tafsir**—Muslim exegetical and theological commentary on the Qur'an; 6) **Shar'iah**—the preponderance and trajectory of Islamic Jurisprudence in applying the Qur'an to everyday life and its exigencies; 7) **Abrogation**—the adaptability of the Qur'an for new context, the Qur'an is living revelation and not static; 8) **Metanarrative**—the Oneness of God, Muhammad as the seal of the prophets, the Qur'an as final corrective revelation in keeping with the "Mother of the book." See Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*, 16-19.

¹¹⁴ Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 85.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Rippen, "Qur'anic Studies," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies* (ed. Clinton Bennett; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015), 61.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62. See also Chase F. Robinson, "Reconstructing Early Islam: Truth and Consequences," in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origins* (ed. Herbert Berg; Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 101-136.

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contemporary Qur'anic studies: semantic studies, literary structural studies, and historical-contextual studies.¹¹⁷

The historical-contextual studies approach includes reading the Qur'an chronologically. It assumes that a chronological reading of the Sūras (chapters) of the Qur'an, supplemented with Muslim commentary literature and biographical materials of the life of Muhammad, provides the clearest context for understanding the Qur'an—although not every Sūrah fits nicely into this rubric. This approach places the Qur'an in a broad historical/cultural context and milieu—**Early Meccan** > **Medina** > **Second Meccan** periods of Muhammad's prophetic career.¹¹⁸ It allows

¹¹⁷ Erik S. Ohlander, "Qur'anic Studies," in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms–Methods–Trends* (ed. Albrecht Classen; Berlin, Germany: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 81-92; Rippen, "Qur'anic Studies," 62.

¹¹⁸ These periods are observable and provide historical markers and hermeneutical insight for the attentive reader. They include: **The Early Revelations 609-612 CE**: These chapters in order from earliest to latest are: (Sūras 96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, and 1). Generally speaking shorter chapters are older and are grouped at the end of the Qur'an.; **The Middle Meccan Period 613-614 CE**: These are in approximate order of revelation, (Sūras 54, 37, 71, 44, 50, 20, 15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, and 27); **The Late Meccan Period 615-619 CE**: It was a period of crisis that moved Muhammad from the role of religious teacher gradually into the role of political and military leader. About 21 chapters were revealed during this period comprising about 25% of the verses of the Qur'an. These Sūras can be grouped in two segments: the first which include 32, 41, 45, 16, 30, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28 and 39; and the second which include (Sūras 29, 31, 42, 10, 34, 35, 7, 46, 6, and 13) in that relative order.; **The Early Medina Period 620-622 CE**: This includes one of the most important Qur'anic surahs, (Sūrah 2:1-286) as well as (Sūras 8, 64, 62, 98, and 47). Historical context is the battle of Badr.; **The Middle Medina Period 623-624 CE**: Five chapters were written during this period, 3, 61, 57, 4, 33, 59 and 65. Historical context the battle of Uhud and the slaughter of the Banu Qurayza and victory of Khandag.; **The Late Medina Period 625-630 CE**: Five chapters (Sūras 63, 24, 58, 22, 60) seem to reflect the period when Muhammad no longer felt threat in Medina and began concentrating on a return to Mecca. Interestingly the "People of the Book" virtually vanish in these chapters.; **The Return to Mecca 630 CE**: This is the final period of the Qur'an. Important Sūras include 48, 66, 110, 49. Sūras 5 and 9 are the final two chapters of the Qur'an. While the Qur'an has been far from a peaceable book up to this point it ends with a clarion call to establish God's kingdom on earth by means of coercive violence. Chapter 9 contains the so-called "sword verse) which according to some abrogates many other moderate Qur'anic verses and essential constitutes a declaration of war on the non-Muslim world. These two Sūras roundly condemn both Jews and Christians who do not confess Muhammad as the Prophet of God. See Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 19-23; Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*; Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices*

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the reader to trace Muhammad's evolving religious viewpoint based on his trajectory of conflicts with pagan, Jewish, and Christian audiences. The reader can observe too, how much Muhammad borrowed Jewish lore and Christian mystic oral traditional/apocryphal materials as evidenced in the qur'anic text and explanatory Hadith.¹¹⁹ A chronological read allows macro-hermeneutical reflection as worldview, philosophical, and theological assumptions/assertions surface across the developing historical spectrum.

While the purpose of the above qur'anic study approaches is for the Qur'an to speak for itself, a further systematic critical engagement of the Qur'an on the macro-hermeneutical level is essential. This qur'anic macro-hermeneutical perspective is an essential first step when relating to the book's worldview and the intended meaning of its words, patterns of thought and existential import. No matter how individual qur'anic passages, words, phrases, referents or rhetoric may seem phenomenologically parallel with biblical concepts, the Qur'an's own

in Historical Perspective, 61; Carl W. Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, With Select Translations* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 44-50; 72-75.

¹¹⁹ This approach allows one to explore from the qur'anic text and Islamic history how Muhammad's inaccurate and anachronistic rendition of Jewish traditional literature ensured that the Jews would reject him as a prophet. One can observe Muhammad's evolving relationship with both Jews and Christians, which culminated in his call to Jihad against all non-Muslims, including Jews and Christians who refused to acknowledge his prophet-hood. Zeyd, Muhammad's trusted follower, began the idea of *Jihad* while evangelizing. "He struck a person with a camel goad and drew blood." Marvin Yakos, *Jesus, Jews and Jihad* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2006), 131. One can identify threads of these historic details within the larger qur'anic corpus spanning the early Meccan-to-Medina-to-second Meccan periods towards understanding the Qur'an's breadth of context, content, purpose, message, and moral/spiritual import. One can ask whether the Qur'an articulates universal and timeless principles, which apply to every age, people, or context? If so, what are they and how would they resonate with our contemporary world?

We assert that Muhammad drew largely from Jewish (and some Christian) oral tradition, lore, and literature with very little accurate biblical text or biblical language. Any knowledgeable Jew of the day would know the difference and call Muhammad into question. This becomes obvious when Muhammad transitioned from Mecca to Medina, as Medina included a significant Jewish population, some which would be knowledgeable of the Hebrew Scriptures. The same would be true for informed Christians, but for different reasons. Both groups were highly textual. Yet, while the Qur'an in reality incorporates and consistently misinterprets and misapplies distorted apocryphal references to the Old and New Testament Scripture and/or narratives, it accuses the People of the Book (mostly Jews) of being the ones who do so. Muhammad often railed against Jews who allegedly were misinterpreting or hiding passages about him from the earlier revelations (Sūras 3:110; 3:78; 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 41, 68).

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overarching worldview and theology must first be allowed to surface as a guide toward understanding of their intended meaning. Exegetes and interpreters know that words find and/or are given meaning within specific literary contexts. Worldview reflection as expressed in literary contexts nuances the meaning of words, turn of phrases, figures of speech and rhetoric. Once such has been observed with the Qur'an, critical biblical theological engagement on this macro-hermeneutical level becomes appropriate.

I assert that this biblical macro-hermeneutical assessment best begins with the Qur'an's early Sūras, which are brief, pithy, poetic and existentially engaging, and foundational to qur'anic thought.¹²⁰ These early revelations open up rich worldview perspectives. Foundational themes relating to the nature of reality, God, ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and the human being emerge. Many read like the biblical Psalms with themes and rhetoric and turns of phrases that engage the reader existentially.¹²¹ These early Sūras are a fruitful first source for exploring the Qur'an's tacit worldview as well as the theology and moral themes that are expressed, hinted at, assumed, or nuanced in its individual texts and passages. These foundational worldview premises thread their way through the book, nuancing the meaning of the later and longer Sūras. The book's early Sūras thus provide a philosophical backdrop of understanding to its subsequent passages, some which phenomenologically may appear to yield overlap of meaning with biblical thought—simply because they touch on similar themes of thought as the Bible, and yet, with subtle and profoundly divergent views of reality, God, and the human being.

At this step in the process, sound hermeneutical principles followed in biblical studies can be utilized toward understanding not only a specific qur'anic text on the micro level, but its implications and meaning from the macro level as well. This includes word studies, semantics, historical/cultural contexts, literary contexts as well as the chronological read of the book towards observing the book's theological development. As far as possible, the Qur'an must be allowed to be its

¹²⁰ As per above, the Qur'an's "Early Revelations 609-612 CE" include: (Sūras 96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114).

¹²¹ See Sells' provocative introduction to the rhetorical power which the Qur'an's early Sūras exhibit in engaging worldview matters on an existential level for the reader, Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*.

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own interpreter. The Qur'an must be read for itself, apart from Islam's developed hermeneutical dependency on other sources of authority (the Hadith, Sira, Occasions, Tafsir, Shariah, etc.). We must allow for a kind of "sola Qur'an," a "Qur'an as its own interpreter," a "tota Qur'an" which asserts the fullness of its text to determine its meanings. Doing so allows the reader to observe patterns of thought and rhetoric, and to sense the book's own agenda and be guided by it.

In this process, qur'anic concepts together with their equivalents in both the Old and the New Testaments will then need critical comparison and analysis. The interpreter will observe more naturally the tension between qur'anic and biblical thought—sensing that on a surface level at least, there is not much difference between their respective vision of God, human beings, moral accountability, and eternity. However, and phenomenologically, the seemingly similar spiritual/moral concepts and their ostensible agreement within differing worldviews and spiritual/moral contexts should not be assumed. Ultimately, the goal is need to learn the language of the Qur'an and to learn how to reframe its issues and values within a biblical context so as to communicate Spirit empowered biblical truth to a Muslim's heart. This reframing relates more to the existential impact of the Qur'an's worldview and theology on a Muslim's heart more than it does the details of these core values and truths themselves.

Ultimately, our Adventist understanding of the nature of biblical revelation/inspiration provides the hermeneutical context for determining the true nature of the Qur'an and how one relates to and utilizes the echoes of the biblical truth found therein. While we must allow the Qur'an to be its own interpreter and voice of authority, it is not the Adventist's ultimate authority. All Scripture is inspired by God.¹²² Scripture is its own interpreter.¹²³ It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience is to be tested.¹²⁴ Scripture provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture. The primacy of Scripture includes: *sola Scriptura* (the Bible only), *tota Scriptura* (the totality of the Bible), and

¹²² See (2 Tim 3:16, 17; 2 Pet 1:19-21).

¹²³ See (Luke 24:27, 44-45; 1 Cor 2:13; Isa 28:10-13; cf. Heb 1:5-13; 2:6-8, 12, 13).

¹²⁴ See also (2 Tim 3:16-17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30:5, 6; Isa 8:20; John 17:17; 2 Thess 3:14; Heb 4:12).

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analogia Scripturae (the Bible is its own interpreter), and *Spiritualia spiritualiter examinatio* (the role of the Holy Spirit in interpretation as spiritual things are spiritually discerned).

Thus, the biblical canon provides the hermeneutical context for evaluating both itself and everything beyond—including the Qur'an. There is need to uphold the Bible as the final and ultimate source of authority. It is the Bible, which establishes that God takes the initiative in restoring all things back to Himself, and who reveals Himself in a multiplicity of ways and most perfectly through Jesus Christ. How the Qur'an and Islam testify to Scripture determines their ultimate credibility—especially as nuanced by numerous Qur'anic deletions, additions, or abrogation of the biblical text, narratives, and truths, which are affirmed by Islam's Hadith, Tafsirs, and Ulama (see Isa 8:20; 1 Thess 5:19-21). Most importantly, how the Qur'an testifies to Jesus—to whom all Scripture points¹²⁵—likewise determines its ultimate credibility.

When it comes to biblical doctrine, we do not base our understanding on a single verse, or a couple verses for that matter. Nor do we allow an obscure verse to determine the meaning of something when other very clear verses tell something different. Rather, we build understanding from many passages. We use simple, more easily understood verses to unlock the meaning of difficult one. Biblical hermeneutics assumes the essential unity, coherence and continuity of Scripture. Any so-called abrogation is unacceptable.

Qur'anic Christology

The Qur'an's Christology can be summed up neatly in a single 'āyah (verse):¹²⁶

O People of the Scripture [the Book]! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three" - Cease! (it is) better for you! - Allah is only One Allah. Far is it removed from His Transcendent

¹²⁵ See (John 5:39; Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; 1 Pet 1:10-12; Mark 1:14, 15).

¹²⁶ John Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, T & T Clark, 2018), 76. References to Jesus in the Qur'an include: (Sūras 2:87, 136, 253; 3:45-59 (esp. 3:52, 55, 69), 84; 4:157, 163, 171; 5:46, 47, 72, 75, 78, 110, 112, 114, 116; 6:85; 9:30, 31; 19:27-34; 23:50; 33:71; 42:13; 43:57, 63; 57:27; 61:6, 14).

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Majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth (Sūrah 4:171; see Marmaduke Pickthall).¹²⁷

In addition to that of “Messiah,” three other designations for Jesus unfold from this defining qur’anic passage: Jesus was a “messenger” of God; he was God’s “word;” and he was “a spirit” from God. Elsewhere, the Qur’an refers to Jesus as “servant of God,”¹²⁸ “prophet” (Sūrah 19:30, 31),¹²⁹ a “sign,”¹³⁰ a “witness,”¹³¹ a “mercy” for us (Sūrah 19:21), an “example” or “parable,”¹³² an “eminent one” (Sūrah 3:40, 45) and “one brought near” (Sūrah 3:40, 45).¹³³ Jesus also is said to play a role in God’s plan following the future resurrection.¹³⁴ But it is the designations outlined in Sūrah 4:171 that are the most prominent with regard to the Qur’an’s core Christology and are grist for Christian *eisegesis*. But as for the foregoing discussion of hermeneutics, the meaning of the individual names—“Messiah,” God’s “word” and “a spirit” from God—is both defined and limited by the passage’s clear context and meaning. How so? Their immediate (and larger) context disavows both Jesus’ divinity and His Divine sonship¹³⁵—and by extension the biblical doctrine of the triune God.¹³⁶ This is the perspective from which we are to understand the Qur’an’s understanding of Jesus as “the Messiah,” “a messenger of God,” God’s “word” and “a spirit from” God.

¹²⁷ Marmaduke Pickthall, *Meaning of the Glorious Quran, The-Marmaduke Pickthall* (London, UK: Independently Published, 2020), 190.

¹²⁸ See (Sūras 4:170, 172; 19:30, 31; 43:57-61).

¹²⁹ Jesus is often named in company with other prophets (Sūras 2:130-136; 4:161, 163; 5:48-50, 44-46; 6:84f; 19:30, 31; etc.)

¹³⁰ See (Sūras 19:21; 21:91; 23; 52, 50; 3:44, 50).

¹³¹ See (Sūras 4:157, 159; 5:117).

¹³² See (Sūras 43:57, 59; 3:52, 59).

¹³³ See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an* (Oneworld Publishers, 2013), 30-54.

¹³⁴ See (Sūras 3:48, 55; 4:156, 157; 19:34, 33; 43:61).

¹³⁵ The Qur’an’s disavowal of Jesus’ divinity and divine Sonship reflects its core Christology. See (Sūras 4:171; 5:17; 5:72-73; 5:75; 5:77; 5:116; 5:117-18; 9:30-31; 17:111; 19:35-36; 43:59).

¹³⁶ This verse is embedded in a larger discussion that seems to be addressing Christians who not only took Jesus, but also his mother, Mary, to be divine (cf. Sūrah 5:73). While the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity may not be explicitly referenced and the criticism seems directed to those who assert the existence of three distinct gods, it nevertheless reflects the Qur’an’s assertion of what constitutes *shirk* and brings God’s curse (anything that ascribes partners to God). See (Sūras 5:72-73 and Nasr ed. *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed.), 267, 268, 315-317).

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First, this passage is directed to the People of the Book (in this context, primarily Christians) who are exhorted to speak only the truth about God and not to exaggerate things by ascribing divine status to their prophet, Jesus.¹³⁷ The verse thus “asserts the Qur’anic view of Jesus as only a messenger of God, meaning a human messenger like Muhammad and the prophets who preceded him.”¹³⁸ This is the obvious and plain meaning of the Sūrah 4:171 and its immediate/larger context.

The exclusive humanity of Jesus is further nuanced by the text’s designation that He is the “son of Mary,”¹³⁹ a description “naturally taken to underscore Jesus’ true humanity: he is Mary’s son and not God’s.”¹⁴⁰ The Qur’an refers to Jesus twenty-five times, referring to him in the Arabic name of `Īsā.¹⁴¹ On sixteen occasions the name `Īsā is found in combination with the descriptors “son of Mary” and/or “Messiah.” The phrase “son of Mary” is found twenty-three times in the Qur’an, either by itself or in connection with the name `Īsā, the Messiah, or the Messiah `Īsā.¹⁴² By intent, the Qur’an’s frequent use of the designation “son of Mary” underscores the mere humanity of Jesus, which is a central Qur’anic theme.¹⁴³ So also, the Qur’an includes an entire Sūrah titled *Maryam* (Sūrah 19) dedicated to Mary the Mother of Jesus.¹⁴⁴ The focus on Jesus as the son of Mary is explicit denial of the incarnation and the mystery that “Jesus’ truly human existence is not short-circuited or compromised by the divine fullness indwelling him.”¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Ibid., 267.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ See (Sūras 4:171; cf. 5:17, 72, 74, 78, 116; 9:31).

¹⁴⁰ Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side*, 151.

¹⁴¹ See (Sūras 3:42–47; 19:16–29; 4:171; 5:46; 3:45; 66:12; 2:87, 253; 5:110; 5:17, 72–76, 116–17; 19:30–31; 3:49; 43:57, 59; 4:157–58; 61:6). For Muslims, the name `Īsā “emphasizes the Islamic view of the prophet Jesus, as mentioned in the Qur’an,” is tacit distinction between the Isa of the Qur’an and the Jesus of the Bible and the portrayal of Jesus as found in the Qur’an and in the Bible. See, Ibrahim, *A Concise Guide to the Quran: Answering Thirty Critical Questions*, 108.

¹⁴² This is in contrast to the New Testament where the phrase “son of Mary” occurs only once (Mark 6:3).

¹⁴³ Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur’an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 76; Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side*, 151.

¹⁴⁴ See Lodahl’s discussion of the theological significance of the Qur’an’s sustained rhetorical focus on Mary as the Mother of Jesus and the frequent designation that Jesus is merely the son of Mary: Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side*, 137–169.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 148.

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Second, this passage further distances Jesus from any notion of Sonship in relation to God: “*Allah is only One Allah. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son*” (Sūrah 4:171; cf. 19:35). For the Qur’an, Jesus is clearly Mary’s son, and only so. He is not and cannot be God’s son at all. Surely, he cannot be both. This distancing of Jesus from any notion of Sonship in relation to God reflects the Qur’an’s vision of the unity of God as referenced above. The Qur’an’s judgment is that “*it is not fitting for Allah to have a son*” (Sūrah 19:35) and that the only proper mode of relation between God and Jesus is that of Creator and creature. Like any human being, Jesus was born, ate food, would eventually die and in the *eschaton* experience resurrection life (Sūras 5:75; 19:33). As a human being, Jesus shares fully in creaturely existence. The Qur’an leaves the matter there. Anything beyond is considered *shirk*, i.e., associating something from creation with the uncreated deity in a way that compromises the divine unity and warrants a curse (Sūrah 5:73). The Qur’an rejects such ideas (Sūrah 5:17, 72-76) including that the Messiah could be divine (Sūras 5:17; 9:30).

These were the core truths which Christians presumably “exaggerated” or “disputed” (Sūras 4:171; 5:77; 19:34). It is not difficult to discern awareness and dismissal of Christian assertions about Jesus’ identity and nature, or of his mission and work. While this defining Qur’anic passage (Sūrah 4:171) may reflect Islamic push-back on the heretical Monophysite doctrine on the divinity of Christ, which had likely influenced the Najrān Christian delegation who engaged Muhammad in discussion,¹⁴⁶ it is significant that the Qur’an does not offer anything near a biblical corrective. Rather it offers its own monotheistic assertions about the nature of God on the one hand, and on the other, a view of Jesus heavily influenced by non-biblical apocryphal literature.¹⁴⁷ The foremost non-biblical apocryphal literature, which the Qur’an appears to have largely drawn from, include: *The Infancy Gospel*

¹⁴⁶ Nasr, ed., *The Study Qur’an: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed.), 268.

¹⁴⁷ “Jesus-based narratives remained current in and near Arabia and were accessible to Muhammad. As a result, Muhammad presented a Jesus considered unique to his personal religious experiences. This Jesus, however, appears to have developed from non-biblical, pre-Islamic texts and the groups who kept these stories alive . . . Non-Biblical stories about Jesus were kept alive by sectarians who operated outside imperial orthodox constraints or boundaries,” Brian C. Bradford, “The Qur’anic Jesus: A Study of Parallels with Non-Biblical Texts” (PhD Dissertation, Western Michigan University, 2013) ii, 135.

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of James,¹⁴⁸ *The Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*,¹⁴⁹ *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,¹⁵⁰ and *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*.¹⁵¹

Interestingly, Jesus occasionally receives in the Qur'an an even higher position than the prophet Muhammad. Given that some Qur'anic statements describe Jesus as the "word of God," "a spirit of God," and even "Messiah," it seems very intriguing and natural to examine these titles toward their intended Christological meaning. We ask though: To what extent is Jesus singled out in the Qur'an for special esteem, and why? To what extent does Jesus share the general esteem shown to all Qur'anic prophets? Do the epithets applied to Jesus in the Qur'an—a "word" from God, a "spirit" from God and "Messiah"—denote a special place of honor on the prophetic rostrum, or are they simply rhetorical turns of phrase? Do they hint at something deeper—salvific, divine? Do they give tacit nod to biblical (Christian) nuancing/meaning? Finally, what is their origin?¹⁵²

Obviously, these descriptors (titles, epithets, appellations) provide incredible phenomenological overlap with biblical vocabulary. But, do these common words convey common belief? Do they have similar meanings in their respective contexts? Is there a shared lexis or glossary from which the two scriptures draw? Do the titles convey or point toward

¹⁴⁸ Believed to have been written mid-second century and influential in early Marian lore. For more information, see Robert J. Miller, *The Complete Gospel* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1994), 381. For side by side discussion, see Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 139-148.

¹⁴⁹ Known also as *The Book about the Origin of the Blessed Mary and the Childhood of the Savior*, it replicates much of *The Infancy Gospel of James* material along with a prophecy fulfillment motif similar to Matthew's Gospel. For more information, see Willis Barnstone ed. *The Other Bible* (ed.; San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), 394-397. For side by side discussion, see Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 142-148, 217 n. 8.

¹⁵⁰ A second century biography that narrates the life of the child Jesus from the age of five to age twelve, with fanciful, and sometimes malevolent, supernatural events. Thought to be of Gnostic origin. For more information, see J. R. C. Cousland, *Holy Terror: Jesus in the Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Bloomsbury, UK: T & T Clark, 2019), 23-104. For side by side discussion, see Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 151-157.

¹⁵¹ A Gnostic Christology unfolding interpretations of Jesus' death popular among Gnostic Christian sects where a strong soul-body dualism in which spirit of Jesus displaces the human soul of another. For side by side discussion, see Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*, 158-162.

¹⁵² Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11b.

the same intended Christology? Or, do the Qur'an and Bible's contrasting core logic and metanarratives suggest an altogether different meaning and divergent Christology? Would their contrasting inner logic and metanarratives guide a respective reader's perception and interpretation of these overlapping titles?

The Qur'an's Christology thus affords the opportunity to explore the book's core narrative on the one hand, and to provide an example of the implications of macro-hermeneutics in relation to our concerns about Christian *eisegesis* of the Qur'an on the other hand. As per above, the Qur'an's core logic and narrative are fundamental to a more reliable textual exegesis and interpretation. But, what of its phenomenological parallels (words, terms, themes) with the biblical Jesus? Are they simply easy to misread as to their real or intended meaning? Or do they provide tacit invitation and justification for Christian backreading into the text in order to find common ground for inter-faith dialogue?

So, as per the foregoing, in the same passage where Jesus is designated "*Messiah*," God's "*word which He conveyed unto Mary*," a "*messenger*" and "*a spirit from Him*," Jesus is also clearly not in any sense of the word God's "son." Nor is He God in human form. Throughout the Qur'an, the divinity of the "*Messiah*" is categorically denied (cf. Sūrah 5:17; cf. Sūrah 5:72-76).¹⁵³

Beyond its phenomenological similarities with biblical terminology, this Christological passage (Sūrah 4:171) asserts a clear condemnation of core Christian beliefs about Jesus. It repudiates basic tenets of Biblical revelation: that God is triune; the incarnation; the Jesus' relationship with the Father as Son. The literary context together with the Qur'an's larger metanarrative places these appellations ("*messiah*," "*word*," "*spirit*," "*messenger*") within this defining and limiting context. The verse (Sūrah 4:171) refers to the three alleged persons of the Trinity, i.e. the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, and condemns Trinity, declaring Allah alone to be the one true God, and the Messiah and the Holy Spirit as only the servants of God and in no way sharers in Godhead.¹⁵⁴

The Qur'an's very next Sūrah (5, *Al-Ma'idah*) presents an understanding of the notion of a triune God that is not only at odds with orthodox Christian belief, but presents Jesus himself as denying his relation to God as son, any notion of Trinity, as well as His incarnation

¹⁵³ Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 77.

¹⁵⁴ Ahmad, *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, 2:373.

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(Sūrah 5:116, 117).¹⁵⁵ While Jesus Himself is said to repudiate the notion that He is God's son, it is important to keep in mind that He allegedly does so in keeping with the Qur'an's overarching metanarrative about God's essential oneness and unity. Sūrah 5:109-120 asserts that there was nothing of Godhead about Jesus and that all material progress of Christians is due to a prayer of him. In return, Christians have made improper use of the progress of God's revelation, instead of believing in the Oneness of God, they believed in Jesus.

These Christological assertions do not reflect hatred or animosity toward Jesus, Christians, or Christianity per se. They do offer a corrective rebuke to Christians, however. Notions like Trinity and incarnation are at odds with the Qur'an's fundamental assertion of God's oneness and are therefore to be avoided. This is why, from a Qur'anic perspective, Jesus clearly places himself in a position of inferiority to God—to the place where he stresses God's omniscience and asserts his own complete obedience to the divine will in relation to the matter of His sonship with the Father and the Trinity: “*I did not say anything to them except that which You commanded me to say*” (Sūrah 5:117).¹⁵⁶

Jesus is thus “presented as a true believer [Muslim] who has submitted himself fully to the divine will and whose faith coheres with the message that Muhammad will deliver centuries later.”¹⁵⁷ In effect, Jesus is the perfect Muslim whose life ultimately bears witness to the

¹⁵⁵ These 'āyāt (verses) report Jesus' response to God's question: “*O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, 'Take me and my mother's gods apart from God?'*” and implies implicit criticism of the divinization of Mary as she is understood to be the third person of the Trinity as is criticized in the Qur'an (cf. Sūras 4:171; 5:73). Sūrah 9:30-31 offers further insight as to the origin of such notions: “*The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God . . . God curse them! How they are perverted. They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords apart from God as well as the Messiah, the son of Mary, though they were only commanded to worship one God.*” See Nasr, ed., *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed.), 336, n. 116; Joel Richardson, *Antichrist: Islam's Awaited Messiah* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2006), 120-130; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 78.

¹⁵⁶ Ergun Caner, “Islam,” *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics: Surveying the Evidence for the Truth of Christianity*, 278-281; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 78.

¹⁵⁷ Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 79. See also, Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*; Gabriel Said Reynolds, “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 72, no. 2 (2009); Richter, *Comparing the Qur'an and the Bible: What They Really Say About Jesus and More*; Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*.

prophet Muhammad.¹⁵⁸ The same chapter elsewhere asserts that only disbelievers [non-Muslims] would suggest that “*God is the Messiah, the son of Mary*” (Sūrah 5:17; cf. 5:72-76). They are confused. It further asserts that “*there is no god save the one God*” (Sūrah 5:73). No concept of a triune God or the divinity of Jesus is possible within the Qur’an’s overarching worldview of thoroughgoing monotheism.¹⁵⁹

The Qur’an’s denial of the divinity of “*the Messiah*” is unequivocal (Sūrah 5:17, 72). What understanding then, does this description for Jesus convey for its readers?

The title “the Messiah/*al-Masīh*” is found eleven times in the Qur’an, always with the definite article, and in every case, it is used in reference to Jesus.¹⁶⁰ While dozens of Arabic etymologies have been proposed for the word, it is most likely a simple borrowing of the biblical Hebrew term and its Christian use in relation to Jesus. However, the Qur’an does not provide a description of the role of the Messiah/*al-Masīh*, often considering it merely part of Jesus’ name rather than having anything to do with a particular role or a mission (Sūrah 3:45). Nor does it give a meaning for the title. It is possible that the title was adopted due to Christian usage of it without full understanding of its meaning. Nevertheless, the incorporation of the title “Messiah” into the Qur’anic metanarrative effectively neuters its biblical missional, redemptive, and deific meanings.¹⁶¹ While the Qur’an utilizes terminology similar to its biblical counterpart, its macro-hermeneutical and epistemological context strips the concept of Messiah of its original biblical (and etymological) meaning.¹⁶² As Anderson notes: “Given the Qur’an never once describes what the Messiah is or does, we can only conclude that the term functions as an empty honorific.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Anderson, *The Qur’an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 219, 220.

¹⁵⁹ For further information, see Mustafa Akyol, *The Islamic Jesus: How the King of the Jews Became a Prophet of the Muslims* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 2018), 170-180.

¹⁶⁰ See (Sūras 3:45; 4:157; 4:171; 5:75; 5:17, 72; 9:30–31; 4:172).

¹⁶¹ See Kaltner, “Messiah/*al-Masīh*” (Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur’an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 122-123; Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, 30-34.); and Fady Ghafary, “The Meaning of the Name *Isa Al-Masih* in Pre-Islamic, Early Christian, and Islamic Sources: Implications for Adventist Mission” (Middle East University, 2018).

¹⁶² Ghafary, “The Meaning of the Name *Isa Al-Masih* in Pre-Islamic, Early Christian, and Islamic Sources: Implications for Adventist Mission”; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur’an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 122-123.

¹⁶³ Anderson, *The Qur’an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 214.

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What then of Jesus as God's "word"? Jesus is similarly described so in John's Gospel, where he is presented as God's "Word" that became human (John 1:1–18). So also, that for John, the "Word" is simultaneously identified with God (deity) and distinct from God (John 1:1, 2). The Word is the Creator who becomes human (John 1:3, 14). As Kaltner notes: "Although the terminology is the same, the Qur'an's reference to Jesus/Īsā as God's word is different from that of the New Testament, where it is a way of speaking about Jesus'/Īsā's equality with God. Such a view would be inconsistent with Islam's understanding of the deity."¹⁶⁴

Twice, Sūrah 3 refers to Jesus as "a word from God" (3:39, 45), but it conveys far less than what John had in mind in his Gospel opening. Sūrah 3 ends by stating that in God's eyes, Jesus is in the same position as Adam who was animated by God's word: "*Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, 'Be,' and he was*" (Sūrah 3:59; cf. Sūrah 3:45, 47). As Adam came to life from dust by God's word ("Be"), God similarly spoke Jesus into being in Mary's womb (Sūrah 3:45, 59). Jesus is thus a "word" from God—"Be" (Sūrah 3:45, 47, 59).¹⁶⁵ Sūrah 3:45, 59 calls Jesus the *Kalimah*, i.e., a word from God. The verse denies the incarnation of Christ into human flesh because of the distinction that comes from the linguistic aspects in the Arabic language between "Jesus" and the "word." As a proper noun, "Jesus" is masculine in gender, while the "word" is feminine. Hence, since "word" is feminine gender cannot stand for "Jesus" who is masculine. From that perspective, Muslim theologians see no difference between the creation of Adam and Jesus.¹⁶⁶

Sūrah 4:171 implies this when it says that the Messiah Jesus is "*His word which He conveyed unto Mary.*" If this interpretation is correct, the Qur'an's reference to Jesus as "a word from God" relates to his coming into being rather than any specific role or position in relation to God or redemptive initiative.

¹⁶⁴ Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 77.

¹⁶⁵ Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 214; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 77.

¹⁶⁶ It should be noted that the terms *Kalimatu Allah* and *Kalimaatu Allah* (word of God) are used in the Qur'an in singular and plural forms, and, in turn, express different nuances. However, when it is used as a title for Jesus, it has several meanings. It can mean a prophecy or glad tidings; thus, *Kalimah* is used as a glad tidings not as a name. For further information, see Muhammad M. Abu Laylah, *The Qur'an and the Gospels: A Comparative Study* (London, UK: IslamKotob, 2006), 6-10.

Relatedly, Jesus is called a “*spirit from God*.” Here one is confronted with an interpretive choice—both exegetical and macro-hermeneutical. The question is not only whether the designation conveys a different sense than what it does for Christians when they read it in the New Testament,¹⁶⁷ but whether it should be interpreted in connection with the Qur’an’s description of the conception of Jesus (Sūrah 4:169, 171; 19:17; 21:91; 66:12) or its view of the supportive work of the Spirit in Jesus’ life (Sūrah 2:81, 87, 253, 254; 5:109, 110). The title “Spirit of God” is nowhere applied to Jesus in the Bible. Similar words however, are said about the creation of Adam—“I have formed him and breathed my spirit into him” (Sūras 15:29; 32:8, 9; 38:72)—which also recalls the biblical narrative where “The Lord God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Gen 2:7). The Arabic term used in Sūrah 4:171 is “*ruh*” (breath)—a word that can like with the Bible often be mistranslated “spirit.” The exegetical and hermeneutical question is which Qur’anic meaning is intended? The implications are suggestive: “Just as a spoken word is one with the breath vocalizing it, so when God spoke Jesus into existence in Mary’s womb, Jesus was simultaneously that word from God and the breath conveying it. Jesus was thus animated by God’s breath, as was Adam.”¹⁶⁸

It should be noted however, that the Gospel record does associate the Holy Spirit with the conception of Jesus,¹⁶⁹ the baptism of Jesus,¹⁷⁰ the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness,¹⁷¹ the empowerment of Jesus’ mission,¹⁷² what constitutes blasphemy and Jesus’ power over the demonic,¹⁷³ the sending of another *Paraclete* to testify of Jesus, glorify Jesus, teach truth, be with the disciples,¹⁷⁴ as well as the great commission¹⁷⁵ and the disciples empowerment for mission.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to the Qur’an, which links spirit with a denial of sonship, each of these biblical passages affirm Jesus’ relation with the Father as Son.¹⁷⁷ They

¹⁶⁷ Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur’an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 77.

¹⁶⁸ Anderson, *The Qur’an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 215.

¹⁶⁹ See (Matt 1:18; 20; Luke 1:35; 3:22).

¹⁷⁰ See (Matt 3:16; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 4:3, 9, 22).

¹⁷¹ See (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

¹⁷² See (Luke 4:14, 18-19).

¹⁷³ See (Matt 12:22-32; Mark 3:20-30; Luke 11:17-23; 12:8-12).

¹⁷⁴ See (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-11, 13-15).

¹⁷⁵ See (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49).

¹⁷⁶ See (Matt 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23).

¹⁷⁷ See (Luke 3:22; 4:3, 9, 22).

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link together Jesus' sonship, servanthood, and divinity within the shared redemptive initiative together with the Father and the Spirit as part of the triune God.¹⁷⁸

With these observations in mind, the import of the Qur'an's Christology, as summed up neatly in Sūrah 4:171, essentially negates meanings which any phenomenological links with the Bible may seem to imply on the surface. The person and work of Jesus while celebrated, is nevertheless marginalized, diminished. In particular, it is the sonship of Jesus (with its tacit divinity implications) that is repeatedly denied.

It appears that the Qur'anic Jesus is not the same as the biblical Jesus and that the differences are hard to reconcile.¹⁷⁹ "Despite the deep reverence in which Jesus is held in the Qur'an, certain core truths that are applied to Him in the Bible are explicitly denied."¹⁸⁰ "Jesus is a controversial prophet" whose presence in the Qur'an is "embroiled in polemic."¹⁸¹ He is emphatically not the Son of God. Not part of a divine trio. The Qur'an emphatically refutes such. He is called 'Īsā (rather than Jesus), son of Mary—implying that he is merely human—very much 'flesh and blood.'¹⁸² Furthermore, the Christian concept of redemption is absent. Jesus did not die as a substitute for sinful human beings. Jesus is nothing more than one of God's "messengers," one of the prophets. Yet, he is singled out with special esteem while at the same time sharing the general esteem shown to all Qur'anic prophets.¹⁸³ He confirms the revelations preceding Him. He is the last prophet before Muhammad

¹⁷⁸ Jack Levison, *An Unconventional God: The Spirit According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 6-23, 44-78, 98-114.

¹⁷⁹ See, Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, 137-169; Kaltner, *The Bible and the Qur'an: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, 76-83; Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oneworld Publications, 2013); Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side*; Anderson, *The Qur'an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 207-282; Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, 12.

¹⁸⁰ Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 75.

¹⁸¹ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, 12.

¹⁸² See Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (Bloomsbury, UK: A&C Black, 2010), 230-234; Anwar G. Chejn, *Islam and the West, The Moriscos: A Cultural and Social History* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press), 88-90; Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, 12.

¹⁸³ Zagloul Kadah and Danny Kadah, *Our God and Your God Is One* (Austin, TX: BookPros, 2007), 41; Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, 11, 23; James Safo, *Allah Loves Islam* (Seattle, WA: Amazon Digital Services LLC, 2019).

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who brings good news of the messenger who would follow him—Muhammad (Sūrah 61:6). As such, Jesus is not God’s final revelation. He is a perfect Muslim. True followers of Jesus will eagerly follow Muhammad (not the opposite).¹⁸⁴ It seems that it is the Ascension rather than the Crucifixion which marks the high point of Jesus’ life in the Qur’an.¹⁸⁵

And yet, in spite of all this, the Qur’an piles more honorific titles on Jesus than on any other prophet apart from Muhammad. At the same time, it flatly denies Jesus’ divinity and limits Him to prophethood. It grants Jesus the biblical title of Messiah, but minus its biblical meanings. It reflects the Qur’an’s two-stage approach to Christology: the project of the “deconstruction and reconstruction of Christ’s identity.”¹⁸⁶

Additionally, the Qur’an possibly allows for Jesus’ death as historical,¹⁸⁷ but negates any sacrificial, redemptive purpose, and greatly marginalizes the event so central to the New Testament Scriptures.¹⁸⁸ Ultimately, it’s “not so much the doctrines of the Trinity, Christ’s sonship, or his divinity, in and of themselves” that the Qur’an negates,

¹⁸⁴ See McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis*. “For Qur’anic Christians there was not, nor could there be, any incongruity between the two prophets, Jesus and Muhammad. Those who faithfully followed the former would necessarily be eager to welcome the latter” (ibid., 287). Islamic commentators understand the Qur’an to make a clear distinction between true Christians, a tiny minority, and who have appropriated and prorogated a corrupted form of the religion of Jesus. “The Christian community has been assessed and divided into two unequal components. Of the two, the larger is excoriated, subjected to a broad range of religious accusation and denunciation. Only a small fraction escape the charges and reap the compliments of the commentators” (ibid., 286, 287).

¹⁸⁵ Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, 13.

¹⁸⁶ Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide*, 109-127.

¹⁸⁷ See Michael Eckert, “The Historical Development of the Islamic View of Surah 4:157 and Its Implications for Seventh-day Adventist Mission” (Middle East University, 2019). For further information on the death of Jesus in the Qur’an, see A. H. Matthias Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 15-94; Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, 1-150; Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, 105-121.

¹⁸⁸ The crucifixion “is not a topic central to the Qur’an” (Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, 10). The persistent denying the crucifixion indicates that “the real issue was something other than the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus. Specifically, the issue was Christian theories of salvation” (ibid., 144).

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but rather “the connection of these doctrines with the understanding of salvation.”¹⁸⁹

No matter how highly the Qur'an or Islam places Jesus, His person and His work are either diminished or marginalized. His role as the final Word of God to human beings is competed against and essentially negated. It is not inconsequential that within 60 years of Muhammad's death that key qur'anic inscriptions on The Dome of The Rock in Jerusalem (72 AH/692 CE) unequivocally deny the deity and redemptive work of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁰

The Qur'an presents a devout John the Baptist who endorses Jesus and presents Jesus as sinless in order to establish the sterling credentials on which his unqualified backing of Muhammad rests. John's story in the Qur'an points to his spirituality and his endorsement of Jesus (Sūrah 3; 19).

Mary is highly honored in the Qur'an (Sūrah 3). The most common reference to Jesus is “son of Mary.” This points to: Jesus' noble origins; Jesus' miraculous birth; and Jesus' non divinity: for having a mother means he cannot possibly be God. In the Qur'an, the human and divine are mutually exclusive categories. If Jesus is the son of Mary, He is not and cannot be the Son of God. In the end, the Qur'an carefully limits Jesus' stature in order to assure that He does not eclipse Muhammad.

The larger biblical Cosmic Conflict macro-hermeneutic is helpful as we reflect on qur'anic Christology and what it says about Jesus. The person of Jesus has been at the center of the cosmic conflict since it began in heaven.¹⁹¹ Scripture proclaims Jesus as the final revelation of God (Heb 1:1-4). “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father,” Jesus asserts (John 14:9). Christ's sonship is core to the biblical perspective of

¹⁸⁹ Accad, *Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide*, 131.

¹⁹⁰ The inscriptions on the Dome of the Rock can be rightly called as the “big-daddy” of all the first century Islamic inscriptions. The Dome of the Rock was built by Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik between 687 and 691 CE. For further information, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad's Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 344.

¹⁹¹ See (Gen 3:15; Rev 12:1-10; Luke 3:22; 4:3, 9). See also, White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 35-37. In her only direct reference to Islam, Ellen White asserted that “Mohammedanism [Islam] has its converts in many lands, and its advocates deny the divinity of Christ. Shall this faith be propagated, and the advocates of truth fail to manifest intense zeal to overthrow the error, and teach men of the pre-existence of the only Saviour of the world?” (Ellen White, “Ye Are My Witnesses,” *The Home Missionary*, September 1, 1892). Italics mine.

truth in relation to the spirit of antichrist.¹⁹² According to biblical prophecy history will climax in the universal worship of Jesus: “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10, 11).

And so, we wonder, what (if any) redemptive analogies can serve as bridges with respect to the person and work of Jesus? Can qur’anic assertions about Jesus be made to mean something different than the Qur’an’s own intent and overarching metanarrative?

We assert that the Qur’an was likely responding to a myriad of Christian heresies and its vision of Jesus was an intended corrective of Christian heresies—howbeit a naïve and inadequate corrective. This includes the Qur’an’s use of the term ʿĪsā for Jesus as well as *Nasara* for Christians.¹⁹³

No matter the meaning of some qur’anic texts regarding the death of Jesus (did it happen or not) or how Jesus was received into heaven and when, there is both an underlying denial of any substitutionary death with regards to human need of redemption and salvation and there is a denial of Jesus’ divinity and incarnation. No matter how much one may nuance certain passages (*āyāts*) to finesse implications towards affirming Jesus’ divinity, said allusions must be read within an overarching worldview and theology which denies such. It is not just a matter of the right understanding of a particular Qur’anic word or phrase or *āyāt* in its immediate context. “Rather, one must consider the topic against the background of the entire Christology of the Qur’an.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son” (1 Jn 2:22). According to Easton’s Bible Dictionary, Antichrist means “against Christ,” or an “opposition Christ,” a “rival Christ.” It is any religious system or philosophy that diminishes or marginalizes either the person or the work of Jesus Christ or in some way competes with the supremacy of Jesus Christ. These principles can be applied to Islam as an encapsulating culture and system of belief—but not toward individual Muslims. No matter how highly the Qur’an or Islam places Jesus, His person and His work are either diminished or marginalized. His role as the final Word of God to human beings is competed against.

¹⁹³ Peter Schadler, *John of Damascus and Islam: Christian Heresiology and the Intellectual Background to Earliest Christian-Muslim Relations* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 168. See also, Anderson, *The Qur’an In Context: A Christian Exploration*, 258-260.

¹⁹⁴ Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought*, xi.

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This understanding is our starting point when using the Qur'an in dialogue with Muslims. It informs us how to better use the Bible as we bridge to the human need and existential angst of the Muslim soul. If we begin with the assumption that the Qur'an affirms the divine sonship, deity, death or redemptive work of Jesus in any capacity, we will not be able to fully grasp how deep the need a Muslim has or how direct we may need to be in uplifting the Savior (like first-century believers did).

Summary and Conclusion

This study begins with the question of whether or not the Qur'an contains redemptive analogies that could be used as bridges to present biblical faith? It asks whether the Qur'an's direct and tacit subversion of the essential elements of the Gospel might deny such and/or actually press Christian Gospel workers to better present biblical truth and faith. To answer these questions, we must first think biblically about the Qur'an. This does not mean reading of the Qur'an through biblical eyes in order to unfold biblical gospel themes from the Qur'an for Muslims. Rather, it is thoughtful and critical, biblical engagement of the Qur'an's "inner logic" system on the macro-hermeneutical level in order to better use the Bible in Gospel work among Muslims. There is little doubt that a deeper familiarity with Muslim scripture holds out the prospect to better communicate the gospel. A macro-hermeneutical level understanding of the Qur'an is critical in relating meaningfully to Muslims whose worldview and daily life have been indelibly shaped by the Qur'an and its ethos.

Towards this goal, we have explored four aspects of the Qur'an in relation to the Bible: its self-image, worldview, hermeneutic, and Christology. In doing so, we have assumed that the Qur'an exhibits a "core logic" and that its "inner system" inevitably effects the understanding and interpretation of its individual verses as well as its overall meaning. If the Qur'an has no core logic or inner worldview system, then its text is open to the confusion of multiple meanings and interpretations including Christian *eisegesis*.

An exploration of the Qur'an's Christology—summed up neatly in Sūrah 4:171—affords the opportunity to explore the book's core narrative and inner logic on the one hand, and to provide an example of the implications of macro-hermeneutics in relation to our concerns about Christian *eisegesis* of the Qur'an on the other hand. So also, we gain a clearer understanding of worldview realities which pulse within a Muslim's inner world.

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In the process of this study, two critical concerns of Gospel work among Muslims are informed: the position and status of Bible in relation to the Qur'an on the one hand, and the person and work of Jesus on the other. Clarity of what the Qur'an does or does not say on these two issues inevitably determines the kind of bridge one can and/or needs to create. How can the Qur'an be a divine book if it diverges from the Biblical worldview together with its Christology? An understanding of the Qur'an's core logic and worldview narrative is fundamental to both a more reliable textual exegesis and interpretation of the Qur'an as well as the existential realities, which the qur'anic worldview and rhetoric stirs within a Muslim's soul.

In order to use the Bible wisely and effectively, the Gospel worker needs an accurate, clear understanding of the Qur'an and the worldview it reveals, reflects and validates. The macro-hermeneutic must inform the micro-hermeneutic. Because the differences between the biblical and qur'anic worldview are substantive (but often blurred), there is need for sound interpretive principles that will allow the Qur'an to speak for itself. The failure to do so—to inadvertently or consciously insert biblical meanings into qur'anic passages, i.e., *eisegesis*—is to run the risk of compromising the biblical message which the Muslim listener needs the most. Such a compromise is often created by:

- Assuming that the two texts are expressions of the same divine revelation, thus positioning the Qur'an to affirm the Bible or vice versa.
- Assuming the qur'anic message is sufficient to meet the inner needs of the Muslim believer.
- Failing to introduce aspects of the contrasting, biblical worldview for the Muslim listener to consider.
- Underestimating the high-impact of the Bible alone in meeting the needs of a Muslim's heart, regardless of their belief system.
- Losing the opportunity to share the Bible with the Muslim listener through one's living witness, which the Holy Spirit can utilize in their spiritual journey.

By positioning the Bible and the Qur'an alongside each other as two "holy books," or two forms of a "Word from God," the tendency exists to unwittingly assume similar meanings and intent behind the texts and to conclude that the message of the Qur'an is conceptually similar to the Bible. The end result is: 1) to arrive at an indistinct understanding or misreading of the Qur'an for itself; 2) to assume that the qur'anic

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worldview is similar to the biblical worldview; and 3) to be incapable of articulating the biblical message with the level of worldview implications, conviction and practicality that the listening Muslim deserves.

Ultimately, our goal is unfolding Gospel themes from the Bible for Muslims—and to do so in a relevant way. That is best accomplished when the interpreter understands the Qur'an's core logic. In doing so, he/she can better imagine the existential impact which the Qur'an's worldview has on the Muslim soul. They will not know how to use the Bible most effectively in Muslim contexts until they understand the deeper soul need of a Muslim as nuanced by his/her exposure to the Qur'an—its worldview and ethos. This is a fundamental starting point for mission. It requires a deeper understanding of the Qur'an than what biased *eisegetical* and proof-text approaches—which manipulate the text for missional purpose—can enable. A sound biblically informed macro-hermeneutic, which facilitates such deeper understanding of the Qur'an, is essential.¹⁹⁵ It also necessitates a deeper understanding of the Bible on its own macro-hermeneutical and worldview level.

¹⁹⁵ A biblically informed macro-hermeneutic and worldview analysis of the Qur'an should include the following process: **1.** Analysis of qur'anic concepts within their own historic and literary contexts as well as within the Qur'an's own worldview and interpretative framework. This would include the chronological reading of the Qur'an, which enables a historical rather than a-historical interpretation of its Sūrah; **2.** Exploring key words and concepts of individual passages in terms of their worldview assumptions in the Qur'an's assertions about God, human beings, the human predicament and its solution, cosmology, ontology, reality and nature of evil, evil in the supernatural realm, moral/spiritual themes, i.e., the overarching worldview expressed. This macro-hermeneutical perspective is an essential first step when relating to the book's worldview and the intended meaning of its words, patterns of thought and existential import. The Qur'an's own overarching worldview and theology must first be allowed to surface as a guide toward understanding of their intended meaning; **3.** Asking about the existential impact of the qur'anic worldview and rhetoric on a Muslim's inner world; **4.** Clarifying the role and status of the Bible in the Qur'an's purpose rhetorical strategy; **5.** Identify biblical counterpart to a given qur'anic passage (themes, concepts, words, allusions, echoes, similarities) utilizing similar questions; **6:** Critical comparison, correspondence, and contrast of qur'anic and biblical concepts—how they are similar, contrast, diverge; **7.** Critical analysis of qur'anic concepts, worldview and their equivalents in both the Old and the New Testaments. Note: A chronological reading of the Sūras (chapters) of the Qur'an, supplemented with Muslim commentary literature and biographical materials of the life of Muhammad, provides a clearer context for understanding the Qur'an. It enables the reader to identify threads of these historic details within the larger qur'anic corpus spanning the early Meccan-to-Medina-to-second Meccan periods towards understanding the Qur'an's breadth of context, content, purpose, message, and

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The concern here is not whether to use the Qur'an in Gospel work in Muslim contexts. That is a given. Rather, we ask: Why do we use the Qur'an? When do we use it? How do we use it? More importantly, do we allow the Qur'an to speak for itself, or are we manipulating the text via Christian qur'anic *eisegeisis*? If one does use the Qur'an, in what way or on what level is the Qur'an advanced as an authority? Is it ethical to create redemptive analogies/bridges from qur'anic phrases and texts which were never intended so in either their immediate context or the Qur'an's core metanarrative?

Relatedly, how can we nuance corresponding biblically relevant theological or soteriological themes from the Qur'an without implying that the Qur'an actually authoritatively affirms those truths? At bottom is the question: What hermeneutical guidelines are we bound to when handling Islam's holy text? So also, are we aware of our understanding limits in doing so? So also, that the Qur'an itself is limited in its ability to meet the kinds of inner need Muslim have in relation to the grand themes and issues of the biblical cosmic-conflict metanarrative.

But our opening questions remain: 1) whether or not the Qur'an contains redemptive analogies that could be used as bridges to present biblical faith; and 2) whether or not the Qur'an's direct and tacit subversion of the essential elements of the biblical Gospel might deny such and actually press Christian Gospel workers to better present biblical truth and faith.

We return to these questions now, knowing that the Qur'an is positive towards both Jesus and what we today call the Bible. So also, that Qur'anic conversation with the Bible remains current interest in Muslim contexts.¹⁹⁶ The question of what missional bridges exist between what the Qur'an means and the truths of the Bible is relevant and pressing.

moral/spiritual import. Such reading enables one to observe how Muhammad drew largely from Jewish and Christian non-biblical oral tradition, lore, and literature with very little accurate biblical text or biblical language. See Carimokam, *Muhammad and the People of the Book*, 19-23; Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today: Media, Genealogies and Interpretive Communities* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2019), 131-141; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, 190-199; Kaltner, *Introducing the Qur'an: For Today's Reader*; Hillenbrand, *Introduction to Islam: Beliefs and Practices in Historical Perspective*, 61; Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide, With Select Translations*, 44-50; 72-75.

¹⁹⁶ See Crowther, *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations*; Schmidtke, *Muslim Perceptions and Receptions of the Bible: Texts and Studies*.

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Our exploration of qur'anic self-image, worldview and Christology suggests that numerous terminological and conceptual links do exist between the Qur'an and the Bible, i.e., words, phrases, terms, biblical characters, as well as broad moral, spiritual and theological matters. We could list the person of Jesus, the title Messiah, bodily resurrection in the *eschaton*, eschatological judgment, sanctity of life, God as Creator, human nature, the existence of evil, Abraham's sacrifice of his son and God's provision of a lamb, etc. Some of these may be more conceptual bridges than the kind of redemptive analogies we desire. Yet they offer a place to begin. Furthermore, these varied possibilities reflect only phenomenological parallels rather than the kind of deeper core level meanings which would yield real substance to any bridging concept or create significant redemptive analogies. These conceptual links however, do potentially provide significant points of contact which can open the door for deeper exchange.

While, as we gave seen, the Qur'an unequivocally and uncompromisingly rejects the sonship and deity of Jesus, it nevertheless holds Jesus in high esteem. Accordingly, Muslims in general have a strong attraction to Jesus. Even the Qur'an's incomplete and marginalizing picture of Jesus seems to whet the appetite of Muslims to know more. This in itself affords an incredible bridge and opens the way towards redemptive implications. Ultimately, it is the more complete picture of Jesus in the Bible that seems to captivate and lead a Muslim across the bridge in a worldview shift.

The Qur'an's descriptor of Jesus as "Messiah" further nuances these possibilities for deeper understandings of Jesus and potential redemptive analogies. While based on entirely different conceptual frameworks and meanings, the title "Messiah" is nevertheless terminology shared between the Qur'an and the Bible.¹⁹⁷ It offers one of the strongest points

¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, the title Messiah is the constant referent for Jesus between the Qur'an and the Bible as the Qur'an uses the name 'Īsā rather than Jesus. As per above, the Muslim descriptor for Jesus, 'Īsā, "emphasizes the Islamic view of the prophet Jesus, as mentioned in the Qur'an," and its intentional distinction between the 'Īsā of the Qur'an and the Jesus of the Bible and the portrayal of Jesus as found in the Qur'an and in the Bible. Aware of this name, Christians through the centuries have often used *Yasou'* (from the Hebrew name, *Yashua*) in order to distinguish the Jesus of the Bible from the 'Īsā of the Qur'an. See, Ibrahim, *A Concise Guide to the Quran: Answering Thirty Critical Questions*, 108.

of reference for deepened conversation.¹⁹⁸ The challenge for Muslims comes in unlearning qur'anic concepts (or lack thereof) behind the title and learning biblical ones. Ultimately, it is the Bible's more complete picture of what the title "Messiah" means that becomes critical. Otherwise, the link remains only phenomenological.

Obviously, there are other qur'anic referents to Jesus that could become redemptive analogies: the uniqueness of His birth, His involvement with God in eschatological realities (resurrection, judgment), etc. But again, the truth about these realities is found only in the Bible, not the Qur'an. The Qur'an merely provides a phenomenological referent which allows for engaging deeper conversation. We might ask, what is the meaning of the title "Messiah"? Was it Isaac or Ishmael whom Abraham was willing to offer?¹⁹⁹ What redemptive analogies are possible in the narrative of God's ransoming Abraham's son with a "momentous sacrifice" (Sūrah 37:107)? Any redemptive meaning of these links comes through the biblical perspective alone. The Gospel worker's familiarity with Qur'an enables such conversation and biblical enlargement.

The worldview macro-hermeneutical level perspective is essential when relating to the Qur'an and its intended meaning. No matter what individual qur'anic texts may seem to say or affirm on a phenomenological level with reference to possible bridging concepts with the Bible, the qur'anic worldview and macro-hermeneutic must be allowed to determine the understanding of their real meaning. The macro-hermeneutic must inform the micro-hermeneutic. Again, we cannot know how best to use the Bible as a bridge to lead a Muslim to

¹⁹⁸ See, Ghafary, "The Meaning of the Name *Isa Al-Masih* in Pre-Islamic, Early Christian, and Islamic Sources: Implications for Adventist Mission."

¹⁹⁹ Is it Ishmael or Isaac? The qur'anic narrative (Sūrah 37:100-113) does not mention Ismael at all. Only Isaac's name is mentioned in verses 112,113. If Ishmael is *the son* in question, why does the Sūrah not mention his name? Logically, the son in view is Isaac. See also (Sūras 11:69-73; 15:51-55; 29:31; 51:28-30), which largely follows the Genesis 18 narrative of the promise of a son. This "*glad tidings of a son*" in 15:53 and 51:28 is proved as "*glad tidings of Isaac*" in 11:69, and naturally connected with "*the good news of a boy*" in Sūrah 37:101 and "*the good news of Isaac*" in Sūrah 37:112. The point is that the son who is ready to suffer and forbear (Sūrah 37:101), and was about to be offered in sacrifice (Sūrah 37:102) is not Ishmael, but Isaac. Furthermore, Isaac was the only son of Abraham mentioned in the Qur'an in the early Meccan period in which Sūrah 37 appears. Ishmael does not enter the qur'anic landscape until the Middle Medina Period (Sūras 2:132-133; 3:84, 85; 4:163).

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the Bible unless we first understand just how unbiblical and marginalizing of the person and work of Jesus and His relationship with the Father the Qur'an really is. We will not know how to use the Bible more effectively until we understand the real need of a Muslim lives and breathes qur'anic worldview. This understanding of the Qur'an's core logic and worldview narrative is fundamental to a more reliable textual exegesis and interpretation. It is a fundamental starting point for mission in Muslim contexts. With it is the similar need for a deeper understanding of the Bible on its own macro-hermeneutical and worldview level so as to know how best to use the Bible in leading a Muslim to the Bible.

Missiological Implications

Finally, what missiological implications might arise from the four themes we have highlighted: Qur'anic self-image, worldview, hermeneutics and Christology? The following reflections are meant for the Gospel worker's consideration and praxis not for the Muslim. It is assumed that any approach must come from the viewpoint of values and truths which unite rather than denounce and offend. These shared values/truths may only be phenomenological, nevertheless they can provide windows into a Muslim's heart and open the way for deeper conversation.

Self-Image: Awareness of the Qur'an's *self-Image* in relation to the Bible invites one towards a clearer understanding of how Biblical progressive revelation/inspiration operates by contrast. This awareness can clarify questions regarding the Qur'an's asserted inspiration and dominance as well as why it remains so embedded as an authority within a Muslim's worldview. It can inform too, how and when one might best use the Qur'an when in conversation with a Muslim. It invites one to saturate their own imagination with biblical truths and values which can then flow naturally from their lips together with the influence of their personal life. This includes an intimate witness of a personal God whose character is love. This "Word and witness" can unfold spontaneously and effortlessly and in a way which can touch a Muslim's heart and awaken her/her interest in what more the Bible might have to give beyond the Qur'an. The question is: What do we reveal in our own life and character about the person and character of God? How freely do we speak of Him and how? What do we need to understand more about God in order for our witness of Him to be more life-changing both for ourselves and for those to whom we speak of God? Can we speak of our God as freely and

joyfully as it appears some of our Muslim friends do? Will we ever be able to build credible bridges unless we do or until we have such an exalted vision of God which enables us to capture a Muslim's imagination and heart in an area of which they are already well versed?

Worldview: How the Qur'an's monotheistic *worldview* centers Muhammad in relation to both God and itself provides insight into the Qur'an's inner logic and core emphasis. One can understand better the eclipsing position Muhammad holds in a Muslim's imagination. This is a reality not to be directly challenged, but nevertheless understood in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ as asserted in the Biblical worldview backdrop of the cosmic conflict. Furthermore, noting the tacit Platonic philosophical influence reflected in the Qur'an's monotheistic vision of God can enable one to better understand the role which God plays in a Muslim's faith experience: i.e., *what* God is rather than *who* God is,²⁰⁰ transcendent/unknowable rather than immanent/personal, knowable. It should be remembered that while theologically speaking, the God of the Qur'an (or Islam) may not be personal, the people of Islam are personal and envision Him as such.

Understanding the Qur'an's tacit Platonic backdrop also enables more informed exegesis of Qur'anic verses that touch on the nature of man, death, resurrection, the jinn, eternal punishment, etc. Further noting how the Qur'an—together with the prophet Muhammad's own religious practice—fosters a spiritual cosmology, which inadvertently encourages a Folk Islam experience, can facilitate a deeper understanding of some of the existential burdens and fears which a Muslim may carry. This tacit animism—belief in spiritual beings, practices, sacred objects, talisman, times or places capable of helping or harming human interests—nuances a sense of power/vulnerability, control/fear in keeping with the piety of a Muslim's devotion and religious practice and experience. All the more, there is need to help a Muslim experience the Biblical fear of God which

²⁰⁰ In his discussion of monotheism (Islamic, Judaic, Christian), Ellul asserts the need to move from the question posed by Islam: "What is God?" to the much more radical question: "Who is God?" I am not satisfied only with knowing that there is transcendental truth. It is not enough for me to name it; I must learn who it is. It is here that monotheism explodes! Because if we can agree on the point that God is Unique, we part company as soon as we get any certainty on this 'who.' He is indeed not the same here as elsewhere" (Ellul, *Islam and Judeo-Christianity: A Critique of Their Commonality*, 22).

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eschews the fear of all other asserted or imagined powers that are feared, trusted in, needed (Psa 34:4, 7-9; Rev 14:7).²⁰¹

Hermeneutics: Few will master the complexity of Qur'anic interpretation. Acknowledging that complexity together with one's own limitations though, can foster humility and reserve when analyzing Qur'anic concepts and passages so as not to invest the Qur'an with one's own understanding or force a Christian *eisegesis*. It is respectful of Islam's sacred text to interpret the Qur'an in light of its own text, historical precedent, presuppositions, and the worldview it engenders. It is constructive to ask one's Muslim counter-part about nuances where the Qur'an provides possible phenomenological parallels with the Bible. This might help Muslim readers of the Qur'an to observe more closely the differences between the Qur'an and the Bible and sense what more the Bible may have to offer. So also, how it might also help a Muslim reader clarify their understanding of those Qur'anic nuances and possibilities which might open the way for clearer and further communication.

Suggesting that the Bible is more right or more precise than the Qur'an or that the Qur'an may be wrong in some area risks blocking further dialogue and tearing down the very bridge one is seeking to build. Affirming biblical principles and truths where they can be rightly found or hinted at in the Qur'an is helpful. Where the Bible provides a fuller, richer or more balanced picture of God, showing how the Qur'an possibly hints at such fuller aspects of God could maintain dialogue and invite further study which leads ultimately to the Bible alone. Suggesting how the Qur'an encourages the reading of the Bible—perhaps with such deeper nuances in mind—can open a Muslim's heart to the reading of the Bible as well. As per above, one can learn to utilize the Bible more effectively than imagined. This is an important key together with the influence and power of one's own experience with God and what he/she says about Him.

Christology: The person and work of Jesus is both a bridge and a barrier between the Qur'an and the Bible. The bridge is phenomenological. The barrier is core macro-hermeneutical substance

²⁰¹ “It is significant . . . that the fear of the Lord plays such a central role in the biblical worldview. It is a potent dimension of radical monotheism that if there is truly only one God, then he alone should be the object of our true fear. Then those who live in the fear of the Lord need live in fear of nothing else. Other objects of fear lose their divine power and their idolatrous grip” (Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006], 168.)

and meaning. Bridge beliefs tend to be similar at least thematically between the Qur'an and the Bible on a surface level. As such, no matter how highly the Qur'an places Jesus, both His person and His work are, in effect, marginalized. Every aspect of the Biblical view of Jesus is given an altogether different context or meaning—His sonship, His deity, His incarnation, His death, His relationship to the future.

In particular, Jesus' role in God's final revelation to human beings is competed against by both the Qur'an (as God's final revelation) and the prophet Muhammad (as both the seal of the prophets and in his person best reflecting the values and principles of the Qur'an). Keeping in mind how the person of Jesus has been at the center of the Cosmic Conflict since its inception in heaven, helps place the true message and meaning of the Qur'an within that momentous metanarrative. That fact alone orients one to the deeper issues at play between the respective meanings of the Qur'an and the Bible and ultimately the veracity of the Qur'an. It is a critical issue in understandings both the Qur'an and Islam. How the Qur'an testifies to Jesus determines its ultimate credibility.

Muslims in general have a strong attraction to Jesus. Even the Qur'an's incomplete picture of Jesus seems to whet the appetite of Muslims to know more. There is need to more fully understand this reality and how a more complete Biblical picture of Jesus can captivate and ultimately lead a Muslim to receive Jesus for all what that means in the Biblical sense. As discussed above, the Qur'an's designation of Jesus as Messiah provides the most direct phenomenological link between itself and the Bible regarding Jesus. Jesus as Messiah is a concept that shares the same terminology in the Qur'an and the Bible, and yet they are based on entirely different conceptual frameworks. That title—*Messiah*—invites deeper exploration, conversation, imagination. The challenge for Muslims comes in unlearning qur'anic concepts and learning Biblical ones. The missional challenge is knowing how to positively articulate the Biblical concept—and do so indirectly—so that the Qur'an loses its power altogether in defining Jesus' person and the work of Jesus. There is need to delineate the Biblical Gospel of Jesus Christ and clearly distinguish it from the good news that the Qur'an claims to be.

Spiritual and Existential Needs: Muslims have the same human needs, desires, struggles and many of the same spiritual and existential questions and struggles as Christians do. There is the need to sense and feel this deeper personal need in a Muslim's life and seek to connect with them on that level. There is need to do so personally—mirroring such in

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one's own personal life and spiritual journey. Engaging with Muslims on a personal level can help focus the existential issues and needs around which engagement with the Bible can take place and around which the divine transcendence immanence dialogue revolves. It lends authenticity to one's own witness. This awareness is illustrated in the final figure.

Bridging to Muslims

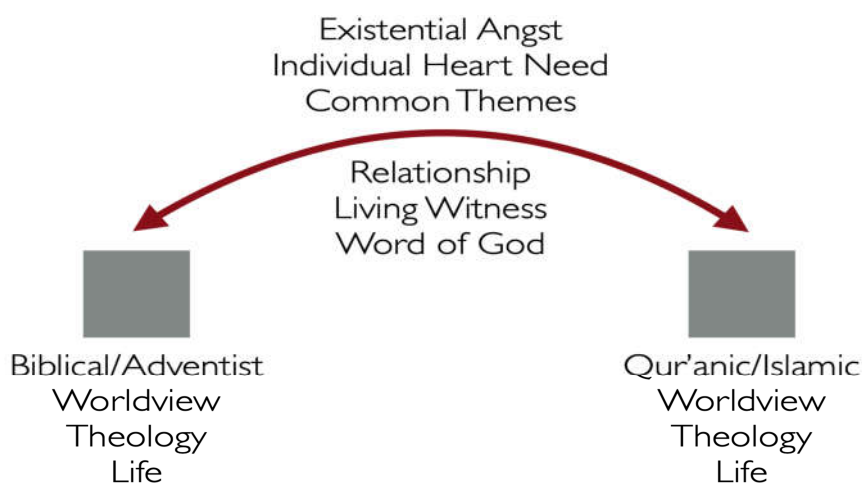


Figure 5: Common phenomenological themes and interests, which might bridge the Qur'an and the Bible, find practical relevance in the midst of the existential angst and longing heart needs of a Muslim. Personal relationships together with the influence of one's own living witness can open the door to the ministry of the Word and the wonderful hope which the Bible brings through its vision of God and His redemptive work through Jesus.

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