

Title: B. Cultural

You can also research and write on Christ as he is seen and viewed from the eyes of ONE of the Asian Religions. You will need to include:

- How is Jesus seen in this religion?
- What is his role or work as seen in this religion?
- What points of contact / difference with orthodox Christianity?
- In what ways is this relevant to the practice of our faith in Asia / Malaysia today?
- Practical steps / application

(1500 words)

Course: Christology & Soteriology

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Programme: MCM, 2022

Word Count: 1482 words

Date of Submission: 31 Aug 2022

DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

Introduction:

Islam as one of the world's major religions is most often associated with the Middle East and Africa. However, historical inroads into Asia via conquest and missions have made it home to the majority of Muslims today – hosting around 70 percent of the world's Muslim population.¹ It thus can truly be considered an 'Asian religion' alongside such faiths as Hinduism or Buddhism.

Islam claims to be an 'Abrahamic religion'² – nomenclature that some would hotly dispute³. Within the pages of Islam's holy book the Quran appear many items which – at first glance – appear to be parallels to details found the Bible. For example, the Quran purports that Jews, Christians and Muslims all believe in the same one God (Sura 21:22), who created everything (Sura 7:54), whom alone is to be worshiped (Sura 16:1-3 & 51:56) and whom forbids idols (Sura 16:20-21). It describes how this Almighty communicated with Abraham and other Biblical characters to guide humanity (Sura 14), such as by bringing written revelation in the Torah (Sura 5:44) and Gospel (Sura 5:46).

Promotion of Islam (*dawa*) is therefore often targeted at local Christians by appealing to such similarities found between the faiths. However, properly examining each instance will quickly reveal substantial differences between the Islamic portrayals and the Biblical truths – and this is nowhere more apparent than for the person of Jesus.

A Jesus Other Than the Jesus We Preach

In Malaysia and elsewhere across the world, Muslims will often attempt to make inroads with Christians by extolling the honour that Jesus is given in the Quran^{4 5 6}. Jesus is described as having the

¹ Douglas P. Sjoquist, "The Demographics of Islam in Asia", *Association for Asian Studies* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/the-demographics-of-islam-in-asia/>

² Arthur G. Gish, *Muslim, Christian, Jew* (Ore./USA: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012) Perlego Edition, Introduction.

³ Michael Knowles, "The Galatian Test: Is Islam an Abrahamic Religion?" *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 92, No. 1039, May 2011, 318-321. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43251518>

⁴ Street Dawah Malaysia, *Facebook* (accessed 24-Aug-2022): <https://www.facebook.com/StreetDawahMalaysiaOfficial/posts/pfbid0DVq6yEkLxVJJuqwt5V4pQBKJ6DYw7az3TYbLLXe3rCwfbYc4SPKZFx8zvhQVy9Uql>

⁵ Sumayyah Meehan, "Muslims Love Jesus Too! That's What Made Me Love Islam", *AboutIslam* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://aboutislam.net/reading-islam/my-journey-to-islam/muslims-love-jesus-thats-made-love-islam/>

⁶ DawahIsEasy, "Christian becomes Muslim - Street Dawah-'Live'", *DawahIsEasy* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gZOxddqjjw>

role of a prophet (Sura 6:84-87), bringing signs for the people (Sura 3:46-51), and sent to affirm the earlier divine revelation (Sura 3:48-50). As far as this goes, Christians can cautiously agree.

However, Islam differs in its portrayal of Jesus by specifying that He was *only* a prophet – an ordinary human who is not God in the flesh. In Sura 3:59-60 & 4:171 Jesus is portrayed as a mere created human, ontologically no different from Adam. In Sura 5:17, Allah is stated to be able to destroy Jesus on a whim. In Sura 9:30 & 19:35, Jesus is not even permitted to be *Son* of God. The fundamental differences from orthodox Christianity should therefore be readily apparent to any Christian worth his salt.

Perhaps an even more glaringly obvious contradiction is the Islamic insistence that Jesus was *not* killed by crucifixion (Sura 4:157-158) – and consequently was not resurrected, as that implies needing to have first been dead. In doing so, the very central point of Christianity is denied (Matthew 20:28, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8) and all hope for Christ’s believers is lost (Isaiah 53:5, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19, Colossian 2:13-15, 1 John 2:2).

The above rejections of basic Christian doctrine make clear the role that Jesus plays in Islam: “The Jesus of the Quran is a one-dimensional person; He basically is a walking argument for monotheism and the prophet Muhammad.”⁷ To this end, the character of Jesus in the Quran is made to utter statements that reject Christian beliefs in favour of Islamic doctrine.

For example, in Sura 5:116 Jesus denies ever allowing people to worship Him (in contradiction to many Bible passages such as Matthew 4:33 & John 9:38) and professes ignorance of what God knows (in contradiction to passages such as Matthew 12:25, Luke 6:8, John 16:30 & 21:27, Revelation 2:23).

In Sura 33:40 Jesus is surpassed by Muhammad as the final messenger from God (whereas Jesus is our final revelation as per Hebrews 1:1-2), including as the moral example for all humanity in Sura 33:21 (whereas Jesus is our great example as per 1 Corinthians 1:11, Hebrews 4:15, 1 John 2:6 and many more).

⁷ James White, “Jesus of the Quran is an Argument”, *Little Light Salt* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnQiF2_Pd80 [1:53 to 2:04]

And it is not only in these examples of outright contradiction that the Islamic picture of Jesus deviates – for there are other, more subtle errors if one knows to spot them.

Because They Do Not Know the Scriptures

Although the Quran claims to be the culmination of a line of revelation from the same One True God who gave the Law and Gospel (Sura 3:3), the author of the Quran shows no understanding of the context and meaning of much of what it refers to. Indeed, the Quran contains no actual citations from the Old or New Testaments – while *misidentifying* Talmudic commentary on Genesis 4⁸ as genuine Scripture.⁹

Due to this lack of understanding of the actual contents of the Bible, the Quran tends to use terms and phrases that seem superficially unproblematic – but upon closer examination, contradict arguments the Quran makes elsewhere!

For example, the Quran calls Jesus the Word of Allah (Sura 3:45 & 19:34) – a title of Christ that is well known from John 1:1-14. Yet to do so while simultaneously rejecting Christ's divinity is not just a denial of John's opening thesis¹⁰, but also of the well-established implications of Word and Memra. For example, in the Old Testament the Word of YHWH often signifies the visible and even physical embodiment of YHWH – He appears in a vision or appearance (1 Samuel 3:1 & 3:21), and in one vision even takes Abraham outside (Genesis 15:1-5).

Meanwhile in the Targums (Aramaic paraphrasing and expansion of the Tanakh) the Memra is cast as “an actual divine entity, or mediator”¹¹ and “a second divine person in the Godhead”¹² – for

⁸ Rabbi Natan, “Genesis 4:10”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 28-Aug-2022):

<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.4.10?lang=bi&with=Talmud&lang2=en>

⁹ David Wood, “Taqiyya at the Oscars: The White Helmets vs. the Quran”, *David Wood Videos* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8m9nm26exI> [2:13 to 4:47]

¹⁰ “...if the term Logos here stands for the Holy Name of God, the Memra, there is an all-embracing *inclusio* around the entire gospel, whose purpose is that ‘believing, you may have life *in his name*’ (20.31).” John F. McHugh, *John 1-4: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary (International Critical Commentary) 1st Edition* (NY/USA: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2009), 10.

¹¹ Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the prologue to John”, *Harvard Theological Review* 94(03):243-384 (July 2001): 221-266. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/231982610_The_Gospel_of_the_Memra_Jewish_Binitarianism_and_the_prologue_to_John_255

¹² Rogers, “THE “HEAVENLY” & “EARTHLY” YAHWEH: A PROTO-TRINITARIAN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 19:24 Part I,” in *Our God is Triune*, 47-48.

example in Genesis 1:4¹³, Genesis 3:8¹⁴, Genesis 16:13¹⁵ and Genesis 19:24¹⁶. It is this divine association that John intends by calling Jesus ‘the Word’, as Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin explains:

The conclusive evidence for the connection of the Targumic *Memra* and the *Logos* of John appears in the Palestinian Targumic poetic homily on the “Four Nights,” ... when the Lord was revealed above the world to create it. The world was unformed and void and darkness was spread over the surface of the deep; *and through his Memra there was light and illumination* [italics added], and he called it the first night. This text matches the first verses of John’s Prologue, with its association of *Logos*, the Word, and light.”¹⁷

In Sura 3:49 & 5:110, Jesus is portrayed as bringing a clay bird to life – an obvious borrowing from the Infancy Gospels¹⁸. Yet the Quran adds a detail not found in the apocryphal tale – Jesus is said to *breathe* life into the clay. This actually echoes how YHWH created humanity by breathing life into dust (Genesis 2:7)! It also gives Jesus the lifegiving prerogatives of YHWH (Deuteronomy 32:39, 1 Samuel 2:9, Job 33:4, Psalm 104:29-30 & Nehemiah 9:6) when elsewhere the Quran tries so hard to remove such divine identification.

The Quran repeatedly calls Jesus the Messiah (e.g. Sura 3:45, 4:157, 4:171 & 5:17) without any comprehension of the many facets of what this term encompasses – from king (Isaiah 9:6-7), to priest (Psalm 110:4), to divine-yet-human shepherd (Ezekiel 34:15 & 23), to substitutionarily suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12), to very YHWH Himself (Isaiah 52:13’s *high and lifted up* – descriptions that rightly belong to YHWH alone in Isaiah 2:12-14 & 6:1 & 33:10 & 57:15). Directly contradicting Islam’s insistence that Jesus was not crucified (Sura 4:157-158), in the Bible Jesus

¹³ Sefaria Community Translation, “Targum Neofiti 1”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 29-Aug-2022):

https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Neofiti.1.4?vhe=The_Vatican_Manuscript_of_the_Targum_Neofiti&lang=bi

¹⁴ John Wesley Etheridge, “Targum Jonathan on Genesis 3”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 28-Aug-2022):

https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis.3.8?lang=bi

¹⁵ John Wesley Etheridge, “Targum Jonathan on Genesis 16:13”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 28-Aug-2022):

https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis.16.13?lang=bi

¹⁶ John Wesley Etheridge, “Targum Jonathan on Genesis 19:24”, *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 28-Aug-2022):

https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis.19.24?lang=bi

¹⁷ Daniel Boyarin, “Logos, a Jewish Word: John’s Prologue as Midrash,” in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (NY/USA: Oxford University Press, 2011), 546–549.

¹⁸ Julian Charteris, “Parallelism: Jesus Christ and Clay Birds”, *WikiIslam* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): https://wikiislam.net/wiki/Parallelism:_Jesus_Christ_and_Clay_Birds

Himself repeatedly declares that one of Messiah's crucial roles is to die (Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22 & 24:26 & 24:46) – and even some of the Jews of the Second Temple period believed in a Messiah who suffers and dies, Messiah ben Joseph¹⁹.

Sura 19:19 calls Jesus sinless, but doesn't explain the importance of this trait – Christians know that moral perfection is required in order to atone for the sins of the world (Hebrews 9:13-14, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 Corinthians 5:7 cross referenced to Exodus 12:5). Related to this, some Christians consider the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23) a necessity in order that Adam's Original Sin is not transmitted to Christ²⁰ – Sura 19:20-22 mentions the virgin birth with no hint of why it might be of consequence.

Conclusion

It is clear that for all its claims of truth and continued revelation from God, Islam does not know or understand the Bible – hence demonstrating the falsehood of its boast of being the final message of Scripture. It is thus especially important that Christians do not fall prey to the same kind of laxity – we must know our Old and New Testaments intimately in order to know our God and be wary of false Christs (Matthew 24:24, 1 Corinthians 11:3-4).

For Islam indeed demonstrates the spirit of the antichrist – that is, a replacement²¹ for Christ's finished work on the cross (John 19:30, Acts 16:30) and final message (Hebrews 1:1-2) with a works-based religion (Sura 7:8-9 & 23:99-104) and 'new' final messenger (Sura 33:40). We would do well to familiarize ourselves with its tactics and guiles, for only then can we stand firm in our own faith (1 Peter 3:15) and tear down haughty arguments against the Gospel (2 Corinthians 10:5).

¹⁹ Garrett Smith, "Two Messiahs in Judaism: Ben David and Ben Joseph", *Jews for Jesus* (accessed 28-Aug-2022): <https://jewsforjesus.org/learn/two-messiahs-in-judaism-ben-david-and-ben-joseph/>

²⁰ Brandon D. Crowe, "The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ", *The Gospel Coalition* (accessed 29-Aug-2022): <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/virgin-birth-jesus-christ/>

²¹ J. D. Douglas & C. Merrill, *Zondervan Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids/USA: Zondervan, 2009), Perlego Edition, ANTICHRIST.

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