

## DID MUHAMMAD DENY THE INCARNATION OR PAGANISM?<sup>4</sup>

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### Arabia Prior to Islam

Prior to the introduction of Islam, the people of the Arabian Peninsula were largely nomadic and principally polytheistic.<sup>6</sup> In the midst of this polytheism, however, there existed a monotheistic minority known as the *Hanifs*. Within some scholarly circles it is believed that the *Hanifs* were a codified group or movement of neo-Abrahamic monotheists entirely independent of Judaism.<sup>7</sup> However, it must be admitted that details from this period of history are scant to say the least and any proposition based upon the known data is ultimately conjecture rather than established fact. It is interesting to note that Khadijah, Muhammad's first wife, had a cousin named Waraqa ibn Naufal who was reported to be a *Hanif*.<sup>8</sup> Further,

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<sup>4</sup> This article is adapted from Mr. Hartman's original paper written for Answering Islam entitled, Did Muhammad Deny the Trinity or Paganism? You can view Mr. Hartman's original paper along with many other articles written by various authors by visiting the Answering Islam website: [www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org).

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<sup>6</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *A Short History of Islam* (Boston, MA: OneWorld Oxford Publishing, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Winfried Corduan believes this monotheism represents Arab vestiges of original monotheism. Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 79. Cf. Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p. 143.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad* translated by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 99. Interestingly enough the Qur'an refers to Abraham as a true Muslim *Hanifa*. See Surah 3:67.

Al-Bukhari reports that Muhammad personally encountered a few professing *Hanifs*.<sup>9</sup> In addition, according to Al-Bukhari it was Waraqa, a *Hanif*, who convinced Muhammad that he was not demon possessed, but rather was a true prophet of Allah.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is quite possible (and in fact very likely) that this pre-Islam, monotheistic group had a direct effect upon Muhammad's theology; a group that, interestingly enough, eventually had three of its four named adherents find their way to becoming professing Christians.<sup>11</sup>

A great deal of difficulty exists in concretely describing the indigenous religions of the Arab people during Muhammad's time. While it is known that the Arabs indulged in a mixture of polytheism and animism, their exact level of adherence to these systems is uncertain.<sup>12</sup> The central shrine in Mecca, the *Ka'bah*, was ruled by the supreme god, Allah; however, it also contained a number of idols dedicated to various other deities.<sup>13</sup> While some during this period recognized Allah as the supreme god, there was an overall tendency to view other deities as intercessory beings.<sup>14</sup> This fact is implied by the Qur'an in Surah 29:61-65. The text states that, while many acknowledge Allah as supreme in times of need, they would ultimately return to their polytheism during times of peace.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the face of paganism a supreme deity, Allah, was recognized.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 7, Book 67, Number 407. This text was retrieved from this Answering Islam: [http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/first\\_muslim.htm](http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Contra/first_muslim.htm).

<sup>10</sup> *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 1, Book 1, Number 3. See previous link.

<sup>11</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman Group, 1979), p. 263.

<sup>12</sup> Watt, *A Shorty History of Islam*, p. 9. According to Samuel Zwemer, pre-Islamic poetry portrays Allah as a supreme god. Samuel Zwemer, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith* (New York: Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1907), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Tennent, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Surah 10:19; 39:3.

<sup>15</sup> Watt, *A Shorty History of Islam*, p. 50. Surah 29:61-65 "If indeed thou ask them who has created the heavens and the earth and subjected

During this period, there were various Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Christian (largely outside the bounds of historic orthodoxy) settlements within Arabia.<sup>17</sup> According to some scholars many of the known Christian settlements of the period were mostly comprised of Nestorians and Monophysites.<sup>18</sup> The Nestorians taught that "... two persons as well as two natures in[dwelted within] Christ."<sup>19</sup> This would mean that "... when Christ sacrificed His life on the cross, it was not the person who is also divine, the Son of God, who died for us."<sup>20</sup> The Monophysites, on the other hand, denied that Christ possessed a fully human and a fully divine nature. This belief went against the orthodox teaching that the two natures existed alongside one another, undiminished and unmingled. According to some sources, these settlements held positions of influence, albeit to a small degree, on the Arabian Peninsula. As a result, their theological positions were known

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the sun and the moon (to his Law), they will certainly reply, "Allah". How are they then deluded away (from the truth)? Allah enlarges the sustenance (which He gives) to whichever of His servants He pleases; and He (similarly) grants by (strict) measure, (as He pleases): for Allah has full knowledge of all things. And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, they will certainly reply, "(Allah)!" Say, "Praise be to Allah." But most of them understand not. What is the life of this world but amusement and play? but verily the Home in the Hereafter,- that is life indeed, if they but knew. Now, if they embark on a boat, they call on Allah, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him; but when He has delivered them safely to (dry) land, behold, they give a share (of their worship to others)!" Cf. Surah 23:84-89. All quotations from the Qur'an are taken from Yusuf Ali's translation.

<sup>16</sup> Watt, *A Short History of Islam*, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 79. Such Christologies would be officially condemned as heresy by the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.

<sup>18</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), p. 274.

<sup>20</sup> Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 274.

by at least some throughout the region.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars believe that the existence of such groups potentially impacted the development of Islamic theology, as well as Muhammad's understanding of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> However, in light of the Muslim understanding of the Qur'an's origination, it would not matter who Muhammad came into contact with from within the outskirts of Christendom, because the Qur'an as Allah's direct word by its very nature necessitates an accurate account of orthodox Christian belief entirely untarnished by Muhammad's faulty understanding of Christian theology.

In addition to these Christian settlements, there were a number of Christian slaves living on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>23</sup> Those who opposed Muhammad, accused him of deriving many of his beliefs regarding Allah from these Christian slaves. Nevertheless, the evidence for such a charge remains scant. Therefore, the charge cannot be either confirmed or denied.<sup>24</sup> Despite this lack of evidence, Muslim tradition does preserve accounts concerning several Meccan Arabs who possessed knowledge of Jewish and Christian scriptures who had close relations with Muhammad and even affected his spiritual development.<sup>25</sup> Whether directly influenced by "Christian" heretics or by Muslims who received second-hand information pertaining to the biblical text, it is plausible that Muhammad's conception was likely influenced by those acquainted with a variety of Christian theological positions. Yet, it should be noted that even if Muhammad's understanding of Christian doctrine was delivered via second-hand information or through

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<sup>21</sup> William Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford, 1965), p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Anderson (ed.), *The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Ghada Osman, "Foreign Slaves in Mecca and Medina in the Formative Islamic Period" in *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 16 No. 4 (October 2005), p. 345. Cf. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Osman, "Foreign Slaves in Mecca and Medina in the Formative Islamic Period," p. 345.

<sup>25</sup> Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 21.

theologically sub-biblical positions, this does not provide an adequate explanation for the Qur'an's misrepresentation of what orthodox Christians actually believe. Even if Muhammad was unaware of what the Christian Scriptures actually teach regarding the nature of God, surely Allah would have known. Therefore, regardless of the potential influences upon Muhammad's understanding of Christian belief, if the Qur'an is truly settled in heaven and originates from Allah, it should have accurately recounted what Trinitarians themselves profess to be true.

Muhammad was a member of the Quraish tribe and was born near Mecca in A.D. 570. After being orphaned as a child, Muhammad's merchant uncle, Abu Talib, became the young boy's guardian. By the time Muhammad began his career as a prophet in A.D. 610, he had spent more than fifteen years in the caravan trade. It is quite probable that during his travels, Muhammad encountered various monotheistic movements, including the aforementioned theological schools of Christianity. In his biography of Muhammad's life, Ibn Ishaq records an encounter between the prophet and a Monophysite monk in Syria.<sup>26</sup> In addition, Ibn Ishaq proposes that Muhammad was briefly under the influence of an Ethiopian Christian while living in Mecca.<sup>27</sup>

The deeply religious Muhammad eventually developed one guiding principle in the midst of his polytheistic context: a single transcendent God must exist. As a result, Muhammad believed that his calling was to restore mankind to the original monotheism of Scripture, a monotheism he understood to be transgressed by many, including Jews and Christians.<sup>28</sup> According to F.E. Peters: "... what distinguished Muhammad from his Meccan contemporaries was (1) his belief in the reality of the Resurrection and the Judgment in both flesh and spirit, and (2) his unswerving conviction that the 'High God' was not only unique but absolute; that the other gods, goddesses, *jinn*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 79-81.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 147.

and demons were subject and subservient to Him...”<sup>29</sup> Through his reflection on the oneness of Allah, and through the reported recitations he claims to have received from the angel Gabriel, Muhammad formulated his theology concerning the divine being. This eventually led to the development of Islam’s central doctrine, *tawhid*.

The central message of Muhammad’s career was the absolute unity of Allah.<sup>30</sup> Thus, it should come as no surprise that the theme of unity and oneness permeates the text of the Qur’an. In Taha Unal’s estimation, “The Divine Unity (*tawhid*) is the highest conception of deity, and is the basic element which gives Islam its essential color.”<sup>31</sup> Unal adds, “*Tawhid* is the source of hope, determination, patience, firmness, and courage, and also of happiness and spiritual satisfaction.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Is Jesus the physical Son of God?**<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> F.E. Peters, “The Quest for the Historical Muhammad” in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 23 No. 3. (August 1991), p. 301.

<sup>30</sup> Abdel Mahmud, *The Creed of Islam* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1978), p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> Taha Unal, *The Crossroads* (Izmir, Turkey: Kaynak House of Publication, 1993), p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Unal, *The Crossroads*, p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that some object to the observations that follow in this section. The claim is that the Qur’an does not misrepresent the Trinity. Rather, some claim that Christians did and do in fact worship the virgin Mary as part of the Godhead. For instance, Dr. Mohar Ali makes the claim that Christians worship Mary as God. However, Dr. Ali fails to note when and where this occurred and with whom it occurred. Further, he fails to note that if any Christians did in fact worship Mary as a god (a tenuous position at best) they did so in direct opposition of the Christian Scriptures, orthodox Christian belief, and virtually all Christian institutions throughout history. In other words, Dr. Ali fails to add anything to the conversation, rather, he is merely regurgitating previously tackled arguments. For further observation you may access his book here: [http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/does\\_the\\_qur\\_an\\_misrepresent\\_christian\\_beliefs](http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/does_the_qur_an_misrepresent_christian_beliefs).

In light of the material presented regarding pre-Islam Arabia, it is no surprise that the Qur'an unabashedly attacks the notion that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The idea that Allah sired Jesus Christ in a physical sense is repugnant to Muslims. In pre-Islam Arabia, tribal people attributed physical wives (Surah 72:3), daughters (Surah 6:100; 16:57; 17:40; 37:149-153; 43:19; 53:27), and sons (2:116; 6:100-101; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 19:91-92; 21:26; 25:2) to a high god. As a result, Muslims currently reject any theological concepts which they believe entail similar relationships with Allah.

The most explicit passage in the Qur'an condemning the Incarnation and the deity of Jesus Christ appears in Surah 5:116, "And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?'" Ibn Taymiyya believes that this passage conclusively shows that Christians attribute a physical wife to Yahweh.<sup>34</sup> The logic behind Ibn Taymiyya's assertion is quite consistent with Muslim assertion that the Qur'an is perfect and originates from the will of Allah. Ibn Taymiyya proposes that in spite of what the Christian Scriptures actually record regarding the nature of God and regardless of what Christians have historically believed about the nature of God, because the Qur'an teaches that Christians believe Yahweh has a female consort, then in the face of all known data, it must be true.

Similarly, Surah 2:116 depicts Christians as holding the belief that Allah physically fathered Jesus Christ. Commenting on this passage, Yusuf Ali writes:

It is derogation from the glory of God—in fact it is blasphemy—to say that God begets sons, like a man or an animal. The Christian doctrine is here emphatically repudiated. If words have any meaning, it would mean

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologians Response to Christianity* (Delmar, NY.: Caravan Books, 1984), p. 260.

an attribution to God of a material nature and of the lower animal function of sex.<sup>35</sup>

The Qur'an, on a number of occasions,<sup>36</sup> condemns the belief that Allah has offspring. However, the greatest condemnation is clearly directed towards Christians who believe that Jesus is the Son of God.<sup>37</sup> The reason for such opposition is because Muslims believe that Christians understand the Fatherhood of God in a physical sense.

Once more in Surah 39:4, the concept of divine paternity is attributed to Christians, and is subsequently condemned. However, this passage offers an alternative to "begetting." The text reveals that, if Allah had wanted a "helper," he would not have needed to sire him in a physical sense, but would instead have created him. If Allah has no wife, as the Qur'an undeniably teaches,<sup>38</sup> then he can have no son. The idea that he would lower himself to the level of creatures for the sake of procreation is entirely blasphemous.

Understanding that prior to the advent of Islam, Arabs believed that Allah engaged in sexual activity, it is not shocking to find that Muslims abhor the concept of "begetting." Undoubtedly, Muhammad perceived this language to mean that Christians believe that God literally engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary, the mother of Jesus. In light of the historical and religious context into which Muhammad was born, it is no surprise that he would object to a doctrine he believed mirrored the pagan "trinities" existing in Arabia. In summary, the Qur'an proposes that Christians believe the following. First, Mary is literally the wife of God. Second, Allah physically engaged in sexual intercourse with Mary and Jesus of Nazareth is the physical offspring resulting from this carnal encounter. Third, the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and

<sup>35</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1989), p. 286.

<sup>36</sup> Surah 16:57; 17:40; 37:149.

<sup>37</sup> Maulana Ali, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 1983), p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> Surah 6:101.

Incarnation resemble paganism, teaching that a high god (Yahweh) took for Himself a wife (Mary) and sired a half-man-half-God son.<sup>39</sup>

### Christian Response

In the Arabic language, two terms are used to express the concept, “son of.” The first is *walad*,<sup>40</sup> which is used to describe offspring resulting from the sexual union of a male and female. The second word, *ibn*, can be used metaphorically. It is utilized to describe a close relationship between persons, or persons to things, without necessarily implying a physical paternal connection.<sup>41</sup> For example, a traveler “... [i]s spoken of as a son of the road” (*ibnussabil*).<sup>42</sup> Yet, such a statement does not imply that a sexual relationship, resulting in a child, has occurred between a human being and the road.

Nearly every passage in the Qur’an that denies the sonship of Jesus Christ utilizes *walad*. The single reference that employs *ibn* to describe Christ’s sonship is Surah 9:30; however, when taken in the context of the entire Surah, it is clear that the reference actually refers to physical sonship.<sup>43</sup> Orthodox Christianity would only use the term *ibn*, in its metaphorical sense, to explain Christ’s relationship to the Father. Therefore, in Arabic the Scriptures call Christ *ibnu’llah*, not *waladu’llah*.

Some older English translations of the Bible utilized the most unhelpful formulation “only begotten.”<sup>44</sup> The phrase

<sup>39</sup> Unal, *The Crossroads*, p. 34. Cf. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable*, p. 146.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (London: MacDonald and Evans, 1961), pp. 1097-98.

<sup>41</sup> Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 249. Cf. Surah 2:215.

<sup>43</sup> Surah 9:30 “The Jews call 'Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!”

<sup>44</sup> For more information see this article: <http://www.answering-islam.org/Dictionary/begotten.html>.

translated in the King James Version as “only begotten Son” is *monogenes huios*. However, one should not take this in a literal, physically paternal sense. For instance, *huios* (son) has been used metaphorically throughout the New Testament. In Mark 3:17, James and John are referred to as “Sons (*huios*) of Thunder.” Furthermore, in Galatians 3:26 Paul writes that all believers are “Sons (*huios*) of God.” These references are clearly intended to be figurative. The translation of *monogenes* as “only begotten” is in part, a result of the King James translators retaining Jerome’s Latin translation of the term, *unigenitus*, meaning “only begotten.” However, the Latin text existing prior to Jerome’s translation did not use the Latin *unigenitus* when describing God the Son; instead, it utilized the term *unicus*, meaning “only.”<sup>45</sup>

In order for the Greek manuscript to warrant the translation “only begotten,” the Greek term being translated would need to be *monogenetos*. To translate *monogenes* as “only begotten” is, without question, less than precise and it could be argued is incorrect. Commenting on this unhelpful translation, James White noted that:

The key element to remember in deriving the meaning of *monogenes* is this: it is a compound term, combining *monos*, meaning only, with a second term. Often it is assumed that the second term is *gennasthai/gennaō*, to give birth, to beget. But note that this family of terms has two *nu*’s, , rather than a single *nu*, , found in *monogenes*. This indicates that the second term is not

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<sup>45</sup> “In the Cathedral of Vercelli, Italy, is the most notable of the Old Latin MSS, Codex Vercellensis(a), supposedly written in A.D. 365 by Eusebius, Bishop of Vercelli. In this document, which contains the Gospels, with lacunae, the word *monogenes* in John 1:14, is; in 3:16, it is translated with the Latin word *unicus* (only), not *unigenitus* (only begotten). Dale Moody, “God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the Revised Standard Version.” *The Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 72:4 (1953), 214.

*gennasthai* but *gignesthai/ginomai*, and the noun form, *genos*.<sup>46</sup>

The term *genos* means “kind,” or “race.”<sup>47</sup> When the two terms *monos* and *genos* are combined, the reference is intended to convey that Christ is “unique, the only one of his kind.”<sup>48</sup> Additionally, William Mounce explains that *monogenes* can only be understood as stressing the unique nature of Christ; it cannot and should not be understood to imply any type of biological siring.<sup>49</sup>

This metaphorical understanding of sonship is demonstrated in the book of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews refers to Isaac as Abraham’s “only begotten son.”<sup>50</sup> Making use of the same term found in John 3:16 to describe the father-to-son relationship (*monogenes*), the author of Hebrews notes the unique nature of Isaac as the promised child from God. The Muslim reader will readily admit that Abraham had multiple children; therefore, the intent of the text is to stress that Isaac is Abraham’s unique son, not his only son.<sup>51</sup> Craig Keener believes the use of the term *monogenes* in John 3:16 is intended to call to mind the traditional Hebrew understanding of Isaac. Just as Abraham gave Isaac, God the Father has not given merely a son but the unique, beloved Son with whom there is no

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<sup>46</sup> James White, *The Forgotten Trinity* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), pp. 201-202.

<sup>47</sup> D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Cleon Rogers Jr. and Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> William Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), p. 1214.

<sup>50</sup> Hebrews 11:17, “By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.”

<sup>51</sup> Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 31.

comparison.<sup>52</sup> In the same manner, Christ should be understood as the unique, one-of-a-kind, “Son of God.” Christ’s Hebrew contemporaries understood His claim to be the Son of God as an equation with God rather than a statement of biological origin. When Jesus was before Pilate the Jewish authorities charged, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, His sonship declared His full deity, not a biological origination.

The text of Scripture further demonstrates that the Muslim notion of the New Testament portraying Christ as the biological Son of God is in error. The birth narrative in Luke’s Gospel makes no mention of natural conception resulting from a sexual union. After Gabriel informed Mary that she would carry a Son, she asked, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>54</sup> Gabriel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”<sup>55</sup> The narrative is completely devoid of any sexual interaction between God the Father and Mary; rather, the reader is informed that it is through the working of the Holy Spirit that the virgin conceived. Commenting on this fact, Wayne Grudem states, “Scripture clearly asserts that Jesus was conceived by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit...”<sup>56</sup> Thus, the text of both John’s and Luke’s Gospels depict Christ as uniquely, rather than biologically, the Son of God. Further, Christ is the Son of God not because of conception, but because of His economic relationship to the Father. Therefore, the Qur’an is not rebutting the text of Christian Scripture but is reacting against a

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<sup>52</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), pp. 270-71.

<sup>53</sup> John 19:7.

<sup>54</sup> Luke 1:34

<sup>55</sup> Luke 1:35. Cf. Matthew 1:18-24.

<sup>56</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 529.

misunderstanding of orthodox Christianity at best and more directly Arab paganism.

### **Does Allah have a Son?**

Without question, the Qur'an denounces the idea of Allah fathering a son in the genetic sense. Interestingly, the Qur'an addresses Muhammad's course of action pending the figurative establishment of Allah having a son. According to Surah 43:81, "Say: If the All-merciful [God] had a son, I would be the very first to worship [him]." Some Islamic commentators believe that in this passage Muhammad was stating that, if it could be proven that Allah had a son, he would be the very first to submit unto and worship him.<sup>57</sup> Commenting on Surah 43:81, Yusuf Ali states that, "The prophet of Allah does not object to true worship in any form. But it must be true: it must not superstitiously attribute derogatory things to Allah, or foster false ideas."<sup>58</sup> If one takes the Surah in its context, it would appear that Muhammad made this statement because of his conviction that Allah has no son; yet, if Allah's "fatherhood" could be established he would be willing to accept the son of Allah as God.<sup>59</sup> Chawkat Moucarray, an Arab Christian, notes that famed Muslim commentator Fakhr-ul-Din Razi believes that the preceding interpretation of this Surah is the most viable.<sup>60</sup> For Moucarray, Fakhr-ul-Din's interpretation raises a few questions. He asks, "Is there really evidence that God has no son? If so, where is this evidence? What if the case for God having a son is made? Are Muslims prepared, like the Prophet, to worship and to serve him?"<sup>61</sup>

In continuation, the most famous Surah to reject the idea of Allah having a son was not historically used as a

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<sup>57</sup> Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), p. 187.

<sup>58</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, p. 1279.

<sup>59</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 187.

<sup>60</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, pp. 187-88.

<sup>61</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, pp. 187-88.

refutation of the Christian doctrine of incarnation, but was instead a criticism of Arab polytheism.<sup>62</sup> Surah 112:1-4 reads, “Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.” Moucarray proposes that the use of this Surah as a condemnation of the Christian understanding of the Son of God comes long after it was used against its intended targets, pagan Arabs. It is only after the expansion of Islam that this Surah was understood as a repudiation of Christian Trinitarianism.<sup>63</sup> Moucarray believes that if the Muslim interpreter intends to remain literally and historically grounded in the text of the Qur’an, he must acknowledge this fact.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusion

Muhammad’s knowledge of the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation (which was well established by the sixth century A.D.) is questionable at best. The Qur’an clearly misrepresents what Christians actually believed and still do believe about the trinity of God. However, the Qur’an rightly and accurately condemns the pre-Islam polytheism that permeated the Arabian Peninsula. What Muhammad denied then was the pagan deities of his native peoples, yet he mistook the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation as being nothing more than a Christianized version of pagan belief. Simply put, Muhammad denied the very same doctrines that Christians have denied for over two-thousand years. The difference being that for over fourteen-hundred years Muslims, as prescribed by the Qur’an, have attributed to Christians a belief that no orthodox Christian has ever held to. So, did Muhammad deny the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ? No!

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<sup>62</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189.

<sup>63</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189. It should be noted that even if such a proposition is historically accurate, the Qur’an does explicitly condemn in other passages Christian doctrine as a whole.

<sup>64</sup> Moucarray, *The Prophet and the Messiah*, p. 189.