

DIVINE PERFECTION

Christianity and Islam on Sin & Salvation



Dr. Osman Latiff

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Dr. Osman Latiff



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¹ Sunan Abī Dāwūd, 4811.

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² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 28, verse 24.

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INTRODUCTION

This book takes its readers on a journey through some of the most important areas of enquiry in Christian-Muslim dialogue. In so doing, it both corrects and challenges contentions about the maximal perfection of Allāh raised by Christian missionaries, philosophers and apologists. This book unravels much. It begins the discussion not from a place of immediate familiarity in Christian-Muslim discourse centring on major theological points of contention, but starts where it most appropriately should, from the very beginning of time, from a point I call the *Adamic conundrum*. It starts here; what emerges later is a consequence of what happened then and there.

This book will help Muslims better understand their own faith and that of our Christian friends. It will help Christians look closer at their faith, not take things at face value, and position their theology in a broader hamartiological (concept of sin) and soteriological (concept of salvation) context. It will also help them to see the Qur’ān in a clearer light, as one that speaks to them directly and anticipates responses of detractors. The Qur’ān is the final revelation of God, an overseer of previous dispensations.

At the heart of this book is a consideration from both faiths of human sin and human salvation. The book does not begin by highlighting any abstracted assertion of God’s love from either perspective without first paying attention to the contexts that produce those assertions. Love, mercy, forgiveness, justice are concepts important to us all and run repeatedly through this book and will enable the reader to see and compare the claims made by both faiths in light of the meaningful things to all of us and most importantly in relation to human salvation.

This premise of this book, centring on sin and salvation, is of the most crucial concern for Muslims and Christians alike, described here by James S.D Langford in his thesis entitled, ‘Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims’:

The doctrine of sin represents the greatest barrier which separates the world's two largest religions of Islam and Christianity. The Muslim's explanation of the origin of sin is very simple: God is the cause of everything including evil as well as good.³ This fatalistic philosophy prevents Muslims from feeling true guilt or remorse in the Christian sense. Therefore the problem of sin, as Christians perceive it, does not exist in Islam. Moreover, salvation and redemption have entirely different meanings. Muslims believe they have no need for a Savior from sin since Islam has no deep conviction of sin.⁴

Langford also cites missionary and Seventh-Day Adventist pastor Erich Bethmann:

Naturally, as there is no deep conviction of sin in Islam, no feeling of an estrangement between God and man, there is no need for reconciliation, no need for redemption, nor for a Saviour from sin, no need for a complete turn in life, nor for being born again in the likeness of the Spirit. And here lies the deepest guilt which separates Christianity from Islam.⁵

The grossly inaccurate comments made above by Langford and Bethmann will be covered in a subsequent section. This book is also a specific response to three of American professor and Christian theologian Dr. William Lane Craig's main assertions about Islamic theism. These arguments have also been made by other Christian missionaries, apologists and orientalist such as Samuel Zwemer, Billy C. Sichone, Gerald McDermott, James Langford and exist in the writings of seventh-century monk and apologist John of Damascus and Dominican friar of the thirteenth-century Thomas Aquinas which will also be considered in this book. For over a decade, Craig has formulated several arguments against Muslim belief. Craig's main arguments question Allāh's⁶ maximal perfection. He maintains that Allāh cannot be maximally holy and omnipotent because the Islamic doctrine of salvation compromises God's holiness and is therefore insufficient in securing Divine favour and redemption. Craig

³ Oster, K. (1979). *Islam Reconsidered*. Exposition Press, p. 90.

⁴ Langford, J.S.D. (1983). *Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims*. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643>

⁵ Bethmann, E.W. (1950). *Bridge to Islam*. Southern Publishing Association, p. 80.

⁶ In the course of this work the name 'Allāh' (lit. The One true God) and 'God' are used interchangeably.

also postulates that Allāh is not maximally loving, therefore the God of Islam is “morally inadequate”. He also argues that Allāh got the Christian conception of the Trinity wrong, therefore and by logical implication, Allāh is not maximally knowing.

Such arguments are found in video podcasts, articles and debates and are referenced in the book

Chapter 1

SETTING THE SCENE

At the outset let it be remembered that Muslims believe that both faiths originate from the same divine source. It is the same divine voice speaking in both religious dispensations though the Qur’ān explains that Christians left much of what they had been commanded with: “We also took a pledge from those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember...”⁷ Both Jesus and Muḥammad (upon them peace) were God’s prophets. There is much that we share, our ontological and teleological and even eschatological premises are rooted in similar discourses. The Qur’ān addresses our Christian friends primarily as fellow humans on this journey of life together with the rest of all of us, and specifically holds them to consider their own place in the historical legacies that precede them. In their worldview and our worldview is the great place of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. In Arabic it is ‘Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary) who is also identified as the Messiah in the Qur’ān. Intertwined in his remarkable life are other important personages, namely his mother Maryam (Mary), her mother too, identified as the wife of ‘Imran; Zakarīyya, John the Baptist (Yahya) and the *ḥawāriyyūn* (disciples) of Jesus. The Qur’ān underlines a connectedness between all of the Prophets of God. One seamless message spelt out in the annals of differing demographics, nations and cultures. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ showed that closeness in his words: “Both in this world and in the Hereafter, I am the nearest of all the people to Jesus, the son of Mary. The prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their religion is one.”⁸

The Qur’ān also calls us to be both conscious of our temporalities and human vulnerabilities and to be vigilant of misguiding forces that permeate our environments. The Arabic root of *ḍalāla* (deviation/straying/misleading) occurs nearly two hundred

⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 14.

⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 3443

times in the Qur’ān to remind life’s traveller to be on guard, calling instead the faithful to observe *taqwā*. Linguistically, *taqwā* comes from the verb *waqāya* (WQY) and has the meaning of protection and taking precaution. The Qur’ān reminds its hearers: “Satan is your enemy—so treat him as an enemy”⁹ Straying from good takes on many forms and is the result of many factors too. To this end the Qur’ān lays much emphasis on the state of one’s heart and its relationship with truth. Pride, it highlights, is turning away from the truth and the Qur’ān describes a number of individuals and nations who each exhibited such pride as to render them deserving of divine chastisement. The Prophets who were sent to such nations were ridiculed for breaking with tradition and disturbing the existing state of affairs. The Qur’ān describes such Prophets as bringing forth a radical message of monotheism to their peoples, together with messages of individual, social and political change.

The questions raised in this work are of the utmost importance. From a spiritual perspective, adherents of Christianity and Islam both seek to draw close to God and rely on, and refer to, the paradigms of God’s maximal perfection. In Islam it is God’s divine love that is the essence of His creation, and love becomes the source of our yearning towards Him. The perfection of God draws us to seek closeness to His Mercy and a synergy also exists between divine love and the challenges and trials that we face in life. The anticipation of trials and tribulations appears as a central theme in the Qur’ān and with positive implications.¹⁰ The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: “Great reward comes with great trials. When Allāh loves a people, He tests them.”¹¹ The famous eighth-century ascetic Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya was instrumental in stressing on the relationship of love between the divine and human reality,¹² expressing in one of her odes: “And my Beloved is with me always, For His love I can find no substitute” Another reads: “I love you with two loves:/With longing and a love because You are worthy of it./As for the longing,/It involves my remembering You and none else./As for the love of which You are worthy, /It involves Your lifting of the curtains, and my adoring gaze./But I have no praise in the one or the other;/The praise for them both belongs to You.”¹³ As 14th century theologian Ibn Taymīyya explains, “the believers

⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 35, verse 6.

¹⁰ Rouzati, N. (2015). *Trial and Tribulation in the Qur’ān: A Mystical Theodicy*. Gerlach Press.

¹¹ as-Silsilah as-Sahīḥah, no. 146

¹² Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. University of North Carolina Press, pp. 39-40.

¹³ Saqr, A-B. (1967). *Sha’irat al-‘Arab*. Al-Maktab al-Islami, p. 126.

make their religion purely and sincerely for Allāh, and the origin of religion is love for Allāh.”¹⁴

Love is the foundation of the Islamic dispensation. One’s obedience, worship and character are manifestations of that love, a point noted by thirteenth-century jurist Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīyya.¹⁵ “Allāh must be the greatest source of love for the servant, more than anything else. And Allāh must be the greatest for him, more than anything else. Only complete submissiveness and love is shown to Allāh.”¹⁶

Love is to want to know about Allāh, to know of His divine names and attributes, to long to meet Him, to be content with His decree. His love is the pleasure, life and serenity of souls, and the strength of hearts, the light of minds, the comfort of eyes. Hearts and souls do not have peace and contentment, nor minds purified with anything more beautiful, pure and blessed than the love of Allāh. Ibn al-Qayyim cites a righteous man who once said, “If the people of heaven experience what we do of the love of Allāh they must be in real bliss”. The heart therefore has no success, no blessing, no sweetness, no contentment and no peace except with worship of and love of its Lord. As Ibn al-Jawzi writes, “let all your thoughts centre round your Creator.”¹⁷ Conversely, in one’s occupation and joy in sin that love of God is veiled from an individual, reduced or removed altogether. If the tree of love is planted in the heart and watered with sincere devotion with following the beloved Messenger the tree will come to fruition since its roots are firmly rooted in the heart.¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī describes the intrinsic importance of the love of God, “Allāh alone is deserving of love. Whoever loves something besides Allāh and not with regard to his relationship with Allāh, that is from his ignorance and deficiency in knowing Allāh Almighty. Love for the Messenger ﷺ is praiseworthy, as it proceeds from the love of Allāh Almighty. Likewise is the love of the scholars and the righteous, as those loved by the Beloved should be loved... None is beloved in reality, for those with insight, except Allāh Almighty. None deserves love besides Him.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibn Taymīyya. (2018). *The Principle of Love and Desire*. Authentic Statement Publishing, p. 94.

¹⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim. (2005). *Maḥabbat-Allāh ‘azza wa jall*. Dar al-Yamama, p. 91.

¹⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim. (2005). *Maḥabbat-Allāh ‘azza wa jall*. Dar al-Yamama, p. 32.

¹⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi. (2006). *Sins and their evil effects*. Darul Ishaat, p. 86

¹⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim. (2005). *Maḥabbat-Allāh ‘azza wa jall*. Dar al-Yamama, pp. 97-98; 104.

¹⁹ al-Ghazālī. (1980). *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* vol. 4. Dār al-Ma’rifah, p. 301.

One of the running themes in this book is the overarching manifestation of divine love shown through forgiveness and mercy, beginning with Allāh’s forgiveness shown to Adam and his wife. It is a love that emanates from God, is shown by God and any human reciprocation of that love is a reflection of His love. Primarily however it is not what emanates from Islam’s soteriology that is of the most important concern but the pleasure of knowing Allāh which creates the most meaningful love-evoking pleasure. It is the most venerated and worthy type of *‘ilm* (knowledge) and no other knowledge is higher than it. The soteriology of Islam is reflected well in the Qur’ānic verse: “He loves them and they love Him”²⁰ It is the result of His divine love that creation comes to experience love and is able to worship God with love. The Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم taught the faithful to pray in the following words:

“O Allāh, provide me with Your love and the love of those whose love will benefit me with You. O Allāh, whatever you provided to me of the things that I love, make them a source of strength for me in pursuing what You love. O Allāh, and whatever You kept away from me of the things that I crave, make their absence free up time that I can devote to whatever You love.”²¹

That is, His knowledge, love, forgiveness and justice are to the highest degree possible without any deficiency and flaw. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that “the love of God must take precedence over all other loves in his life, so that if this love and the love of something else presented themselves to him, the love of God would come first and his actions would follow this order.”²²

Knowledge is a cure to our ignorance but a little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing too. It is sufficient to note that the misconceptions our Christian friends harbour may simply be a result of long-held presumptions or even stereotypes and a hitherto reluctance and failure to engage with the Islamic faith sincerely. The Qur’ān calls its listeners to use their minds and to approach the text with a sincere heart. It highlights how many resisted the message of Prophets to uphold the practice of imitation of their forefathers. Letting go of long-held traditions and beliefs was too much for them and they were instead resolute in their opposition to the truth.

²⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 54.

²¹ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3413

²² Ibn al-Qayyim. (2000). *The Invocation of God: Al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib min al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib*, trans. Michael AbdurRahman Fitzgerald and Moulay Youssef Slitine. The Islamic Texts Society, p. 6.

Sometimes what held them back were existent financial incentives, sometimes social standing and oftentimes their love of ease, sin or an unwillingness to change corrupt beliefs and practices they had held and might have assumed to be true: In fact, they say, “We found our forefathers following a ‘particular’ way, and we are following in their footsteps.”²³ Similarly, whenever We sent a warner to a society before you ‘O Prophet’, its ‘spoiled’ elite would say, “We found our forefathers following a ‘particular’ way, and we are walking in their footsteps.”²⁴

Critical thinking involves the analysis and evaluation of a particular issue. The Qur’ān is full of verses that encourage and display critical thinking which assert that there needs to be a rational and reasonable basis for what we believe about God. Knowing who God is, what His nature is, what His attributes are, what His relationship with us is are subjects of crucial importance. The Qur’ān here likens good foundations with correct belief to that of a healthy tree:

Do you not see how Allāh compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches reach the sky.²⁵

always yielding its fruit in every season by the Will of its Lord. This is how Allāh sets forth parables for the people, so perhaps they will be mindful.²⁶

And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree, uprooted from the earth, having no stability.²⁷

Allāh makes the believers steadfast with the firm Word ‘of faith’ in this worldly life and the Hereafter. And Allāh leaves the wrongdoers to stray. For Allāh does what He wills.²⁸

According to European scholar and translator of the Qur’ān Muḥammad Asad, “In its wider meaning, the term *kalimah* (“word”) denotes any conceptual statement or proposition. Thus, a “good word” circumscribes any proposition (or idea) that is intrinsically true and - because it implies a call to what is good in the moral sense - is

²³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 43, verse 22.

²⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 43, verse 23.

²⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 14, verse 24.

²⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 14, verse 25.

²⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 14, verse 26.

²⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 14, verse 26.

ultimately beneficent and enduring; and since a call to moral righteousness is the innermost purport of every one of God's messages, the term "good word" applies to them as well."²⁹ Thus, in Islam "a new sociopolitical order as well as a new ontology of the reason was established."³⁰ Spiritual guidance enlightens the faculties of reason and urges us to use them in acquiring a deeper insight into the reality of things. It warns against blind imitation of ancestors and underscores people's ignorance of themselves and their failure to contemplate as glaring examples of negligence and a lack of observance, "the Qur'ān uses every means to arouse human hearts from their dulled senses and monotonous familiarity, in order to witness the signs of the Lord in the heavens and on the earth with alertness and enlightened insight."³¹ The Qur'ān "itself is a strong persuasive testimony to its divine origin. In fact, it is conceivable that any human being could not compose discourses on different subjects under different circumstances and on different occasions, then its collection grows into a coherent homogeneous and integrated work, no component of which is discordant with the others. Therefore, the Muslim's mind (‘Aql) accepts the revelation and consider it the highest source of knowledge, because it is from the Absolute Reality (God) which is beyond the mind and matter, without any contradiction with logical analysis as, according to the Qur'ān, our mind is innately capable of performing the two functions: Logical analysis and intuitive knowing."³²

God's insistence on contemplative, critical thinking carries great importance for Christians too. The major themes of this book – on who God is, on the place of sin in relation to God's Majesty – has a bearing on two fronts: one, in relation to what the sin generates in human relationship with the divine and the second in relation to who it is that forgives our sins and on account of these what impression we are to have of God Himself. The Qur'ān questions its readers about human salvation in relation to

²⁹ Asad, M. (1984). *The Message of the Qur'ān: Translated and explained by Muḥammad Asad*. Dar al-Andalus, p. 376.

³⁰ Abdel-Maguid, T.E., & Abdel-Halim R.E. (2015). *The Qur'ān and the development of rational thinking*. Urol Ann, 7:135.

³¹ Badri, M. (2007). *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual study*. The International Institute of Islamic Thought, p. 59.

³² Abdel-Maguid, T.E., & Abdel-Halim R.E. (2015). *The Qur'ān and the development of rational thinking*. Urol Ann, 7:135.

what the human impression of the divine is: “What then do you expect from the Lord of all the worlds?”³³

Willam Lane Craig and his views on Allāh

Muslim love and reverence for Jesus Christ as one of the greatest Messengers of Allāh is unquestionable. Upon him Muslims send peace and salutations, and so too to his mother. His magnificent life, miracle bearing and teaching should not however be a means to his worship. The Qur’ān stresses that such individuals were noble servants of the One true God who alone deserves worship: “And they say, “The Most Compassionate has offspring!” Glory be to Him! In fact, those ‘angels’ are only ‘His’ honoured servants.”³⁴

William Lane Craig’s contentions with Islam – in the areas of the nature of God, Islamic theology, soteriology and history – are described on his website Reasonable Faith. In a response to the following question: “Do Muslims, Jews, and Christians worship the same God?” Craig presents his views in the article ‘Concept of God in Islam and Christianity’³⁵ on the aforementioned website. These arguments are not in any way new but promulgated by other missionaries as well, as mentioned above. This book will consequently address similar arguments made by Gregory McDermott in his piece ‘How the Trinity should govern our approach to world religions’; Samuel Zwemer in his work ‘The Moslem Doctrine of God’; ‘Islam and the Trinity’ by Billy Sichone; Langford’s work on ‘Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims’ and others.

Trinity is misrepresented in Qur’ān

Craig, Zwemer, Costa, Langford and others argue that the Qur’ān’s denunciation of the doctrine of the Trinity is a misunderstanding of the trueness of that doctrine and that the Prophet therefore believed in a mistaken Trinity of God, Mary and Jesus, which they assert is the Qur’ānic conception of the Trinity. Such apologists thereafter

³³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 37, verse 87.

³⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 21, verse 26

³⁵ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

cite particular verses from chapter 5 verse 117 and chapter 6 verse 102 to substantiate his claim.

Muslim doctrine of salvation compromises God's Holiness

Craig positions his theological defence of Christianity in the frame of 'Perfect Being theology'. "God is by definition" he explains, "the greatest conceivable being. If you could conceive of anything greater than God, then that would be God!" What follows is a recognition that God must be perfect and without imperfection and such perfection must entail love. He contends: "Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being." From this premise, Craig holds that Islam's conception of God is not perfectly loving, since He does not love sinners, and therefore His love is construed as qualified, impartial, and conditional.

Allāh is not maximally loving and is morally inadequate

Craig asserts that the trinitarian conception of God positions Him as eternally loving since He gives Himself away in love, that is, it is in His very essence to love and thus "must be giving Himself in love to another". This, he contends, reveals how God is perfectly loving by His very nature. God, he asserts, is held by followers of both faith traditions to be "all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present ... morally perfect" and that moral perfection would necessitate that God be all-loving. However, he holds that the God of Islam does not love sinners and cites several Qur'ānic verses to illustrate his point (Chapter 3, verse 33; chapter 2, verse 277; chapter 3, verse 58; chapter 4, verse 37; chapter 5, verse 88, chapter 6, verse 142, chapter 6, verse 142; chapter 8, verse 59). Craig comments that the God of the Bible "sent His Son to die for them!", meaning such sinners, and that contrary to the Qur'ān this reflects His all-loving nature. Additionally, Craig contends that the Muslim concept of God is morally defective in contrast to the God of the Old and New Testament, who is "an all-loving God, whose love is universal, impartial, and unconditional, while the God of Islam is not all-loving,

but loves only Muslims and whose love is therefore selective, partial, and conditional.”³⁶

³⁶ Craig, W.L. #459 Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?. Retrieved January 8, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god/>

Chapter 2

PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS: HAMARTIOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

The biblical view is that the wicked deserve punishment (Rom 1.32; Heb 10.29) and ascribes to God retribution (ekdikēsis; avtapodoma) for sins (Rom 11.9; 12.19), so that God’s justice must be in some significant measure retributive.³⁷

In this section, I will introduce the concept of maximal perfection, outline the Islamic and Christian conceptions of salvation (soteriology) and sin (hamartiology), and highlight how the Islamic conception is a true reflection of maximal Divine holiness, forgiveness and love, and that the Christian conception falls short of this.

Christians maintain that God’s omnipotence and holiness is of such a degree that human sin estranged mankind from God. This in turn necessitated the atonement of the cross as the only means of reconciling the sins of mankind with their Creator: “‘Atonement’ is thus the reconciliation of God and humanity. In theology it is used ‘to denote the work of Christ in dealing with the problem posed by the sin of man, and in bringing sinners into right relation with God.’”³⁸

This point is further confirmed by the late Lehman Strauss, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, Bristol, Pennsylvania, from 1939 to 1957 and pastor of Highland Park Baptist Church. He outlines in his article, *The Atonement of Christ*, a doctrine which comes to render the mercy of God as contingent on the need for a sacrifice - to pay the

³⁷ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p. 68.

³⁸ Morris, L. L. (1997). Atonement. In I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*. IVP, p. 102.

penalty of sin. Though the love and mercy of God, he argues, “are infinite and matchless, still the penalty for sin must be paid”.³⁹ One might wonder what it says about the supreme majesty of God, Lord of all the worlds, that His temporal, limited, weak creation has any bearing, let alone such a bearing so as to restrict and deem unfeasible – His very power and ability, and willingness – to show mercy on that weak and dependent creation?

Craig explains that Paul viewed Jesus’ death as one delivering us from the judgement and wrath of God, referencing Romans 3:25, “whom God put forward as a hilastērion in his blood,”⁴⁰ (hilastērion; connoting atonement or redemption. Craig discusses at length the etymology of atonement, as well as its appropriation in the Old Testament. What lies at the centre of the discussion is the idea that God requires a blood sacrifice; animal sacrifices, for example on the Day of Kippur (atonement), were propitiatory sacrifices, and this comes to be fulfilled in Jesus who figures as a propitiatory sacrifice to amend the sinful state man fell into. Christians hold that Christ’s death shelters them from God’s eschatological wrath, since God’s wrath was vented on Jesus. Incidentally, it was Paul who taught that “the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴¹

Theories of Atonement

In Christianity, the theory of atonement is predicated on man’s estrangement from God. Christian scholars and philosophers have proposed varying philosophies to try and explain what atonement is and what reconciling with God means in a Christ salvific sense. One early theory was **the devil-ransom theory** postulated by Irenaeus (c.130 – c.202 AD):

The powerful Word, and true man, [ransoming] us by his own blood in a reasonable way, gave himself a ransom for those who have been led into captivity. And since the Apostasy [i.e. Satan] unjustly held sway over us ... [Jesus] acted justly even in the encounter with the Apostasy itself, ransoming from it that which was his own ... By his own blood then the Lord redeemed us, and gave his life for our life, his flesh for our flesh; and

³⁹ Strauss, L. The Atonement of Christ. Retrieved on January 8, 2022 from <https://bible.org/article/atonement-christ>

⁴⁰ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p.15.

⁴¹ Romans 6:23

he poured out the Spirit of the Father to bring about the union and communion of God and man.⁴²

For Irenaeus, the devil had kept humanity captive. Both Irenaeus and Origen before him, provide early statements of the devil-ransom theory, expressing ideas associated with sacrifice, ransom, substitution and redemption with the idea that the ransom is paid to, or made from, the devil. Of the Greek Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa (c.335 – c.395 AD) is also attributed with upholding the devil-ransom theory. Significantly, Anselm of Canterbury challenged the long-running theory and proposed a different outlook on atonement. He questions his interlocutor Boso:

As to what you say of his coming to vanquish the devil for you, with what meaning dare you allege this? Is not the omnipotence of God everywhere enthroned? How is it, then, that God must needs come down from heaven to vanquish the devil? These are the objections with which infidels think they can withstand us.⁴³

Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became Man) provides a satisfaction theory of the atonement.⁴⁴ For Anselm, it does not befit God to forgive sins by compassion alone and to “pass over anything in his kingdom undischarged.” God is therefore owed the price of sins committed since there is a payment of the honour taken from Him. Anselm details in Chapter XII, ‘Whether it were proper for God to put away sins by compassion alone, without any payment of debt’:

He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. Moreover, so long as he does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away. For as one who imperils another's safety does not enough by merely restoring his safety, without making some compensation for the anguish incurred; so he who violates another's honor does not enough by merely rendering honor again, but must, according to the extent of the injury done, make restoration in some way satisfactory to the person whom he has

⁴² Irenaeus (1967). *Adversus haereses*. In H. Bettenson (ed.) *Documents of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, pp. 30-31.

⁴³ Anselm of Canterbury. *Cur Deus Homo* St. Anselm (Preface and Book). Retrieved January 8, 2022 from <http://web.mit.edu/aorlando/www/SaintJohnCHI/Church%20History%20Readings/Anselm%20Cur%20Deus%20Homo%20Pref-Bk%20I.pdf>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

dishonored. We must also observe that when any one pays what he has unjustly taken away, he ought to give something which could not have been demanded of him, had he not stolen what belonged to another. So then, every one who sins ought to pay back the honor of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God.⁴⁵

Christians hold that the incarnation of Christ played a crucial role in effecting the reconciliation of mankind back with God. The relationship between incarnation and the Christian outlook on soteriology is the crucial point of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Quinn explains that according to Anselm, what is due to God from humans is perfect obedience and that sin is to fail to obey perfectly God's will. Since sinners have defaulted on a debt they owe to God and restore honour that they owe him, they as a consequence owe God recompense.⁴⁶ Critics of such a theory question the place of God's forgiveness in this paradigm, and about the person of Adam from whom sin emerges; whether Adam was God-like and thus inhibited from sinful temptations or instead bound by a temporal and free-will that would instead render him predisposed to sin. God, of course, maximally omniscient, knew full well the limitations and proclivities with which Adam was created. Quinn puts forth a series of considerations for Anselm's satisfaction theory, proposing that "a sacrifice that God made to himself on behalf of sinful humans would not be payment of a debt, since God owes no debts to himself; nor would such a sacrifice be recompense for a debt on which God had defaulted, since God, being without sin, is without any fault. Hence, such a sacrifice would be supererogatory and could count as making vicarious satisfaction for the faults of human sinners."⁴⁷ It is without surprise that one of the more patent objections Quinn raises is in relation to the injustice in the crucifixion narrative and the question of God's mercy: "But it also seems plausible to claim that God could waive that right without doing or permitting any injustice. Since the original debt is owed to God alone, it appears that he could mercifully waive his claim to full recompense without wronging anyone else or violating another person's rights."⁴⁸

Further to Anselm's satisfaction theory is the theory of substitution – proposed by John Calvin (1509 – 1564):

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Quinn, P.L. (1986). Christian atonement and Kantian justification, *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 3 No.4, p. 441.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 443.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 444.

Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself, and bore what by the just judgment of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this basis founded peace between God and men.⁴⁹

As argued here, the proposition that a human action, any human action, has the ability to lessen God's honour and upset the very nature of His Being, is demonstrative of a physically and morally inadequate God. Any question hereafter pertaining to God's love and mercy is irrevocably bound up by this very inability, in fact contingent upon it. Quinn also outlines that repentance would have an obvious bearing on atonement models. One who sins and one who does not are not the same and such claims of God's love as unconditional, universal, and impartial do not hold good ground. There is still an emphasis on repentance for one's sins, the undergoing of baptism, a conversion to Christianity – and rejection of other 'Christian' heresies. Quinn questions why such repentance would even be required however, if Christ has paid for our sins in full: "Christians who are quite sure that Christ has atoned for their sins nevertheless think it incumbent on them to pray to God to forgive their sins. If what we owe God has been amply paid, why then do we pray to God to pardon us? Or, as Boso asks Anselm, "Is God unjust, that He demands, a second time, what has already been paid?" (I, 19; p. 105). Moreover, if Christ has in this way made full recompense to God for all human sins, then no one is ever justly punished in hell."⁵⁰

In Islam, God's mercy is related to sincere repentance on the part of the sinner. This also means repairing wrongs if someone has been transgressed against, like returning property in the case of theft or apologising in the case of words wrongly spoken. There is thus some compensation required from the one who sins. In Islam reconciliation is always preferable to retaliation: "...but whosoever forgives and makes amends, his reward is upon God."⁵¹

In Christian theology, God is held to be perfect and incapable of sin (Matt.5:48; 1Pet.1:15-16). It follows, as explained by Robert Luginbill in his work 'Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin', that since God is perfect, then so too was the universe He

⁴⁹ Calvin (No date) *Institutes of the Christian Religion* translated by Henry Beveridge Esq. MacDonald Publishing Company 2.6.2, p. 262.

⁵⁰ Quinn, P.L. (1986). Christian atonement and Kantian justification, *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 3 No.4, p. 446.

⁵¹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 42, verse 40.

originally created. Sin then, an act of opposing God's will, could only come into being with the creation of finite creatures who possessed a free will:

God, in all three Persons, existed in perfect divine bliss before He brought the finite universe into being, and just as He had no need to create the world, so also He was under no necessity to make finite creatures to populate it. Nevertheless, God in His infinite wisdom, love, and mercy, did bring into being an entire host of creatures to fill His universe, angelic creatures who, in a finite but significant way, all possessed the means of self-determination.⁵²

From Luginbill's explanation it is held that everybody is bound by inevitable sin since everyone has that independent will to disobey God and the blame is entirely on the sinner. God is holy, cannot sin, nor tempts to sin, and nor is He responsible for sin. Man, because of his sinful nature cannot be in the holiness of God:

Having sinned, and facing the inevitable end of temporal life, eternal death (or "the second death") was the inescapable sentence now hanging over their heads (Rev.21:8; cf. Rev.2:11; 20:6; 20:11-15), an outcome inevitably and inexorably approaching – except for their acceptance in faith of God's solution in the Person of the promised Seed.⁵³

Craig presents Christ as the antitype of the first man, Adam. Whereas Adam was the initial transgressor Christ emerges as the universal redeemer. (Rom. 5:18-19). According to John MacArthur, "sin entered the world through one man...his one sin doomed the race. God only gave Adam one prohibition but it was enough to cause selfishness to rise in his heart and he disobeyed as the God appointed representative of man. The immediate effect was to produce a degeneration in Adam's nature, a change in his constitution. Death hit him...His fall took down the entire human race into corruption." His sin "flooded the entire human stream and everyone was polluted."⁵⁴ Righteousness was conferred upon the human race by Christ's atoning death, subsequent to the chasm in the divine-human relationship. Christianity holds that the initial sin was so consequential that Adam and Eve were forever stranded. Luginbill explains that the sin engendered in Adam three layers of death: spiritual, physical and eternal: "As a consequence of their spiritual death, Adam and Eve were alienated from

⁵² Luginbill, R.D. Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://ichthys.com/3B-Hamartio.htm>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ MacArthur, J. [Grace to You]. (2016, April 7). Through Adam, Death [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sngFHtIK_Q

the life of God.”⁵⁵ The Bible in Genesis describes of eating from the forbidden tree: “fro when you eat from it you will certainly die.”⁵⁶ According to Luginbill, they were “already condemned”, were to endure “eternal death” and an “inescapable sentence”.⁵⁷ They were “already condemned”, were to endure “eternal death” and an “inescapable sentence.”⁵⁸ Murray and Rea in their work on Philosophy and Christian Theology underline the same point about man’s separation from God: “Traditional Christianity maintains that human beings are subject to death and eternal separation from God as a result of their sinfulness, but that they can be saved from this condition somehow as a result of what we might refer to as “the work of Jesus”, which work includes at least his suffering and death on the cross, and perhaps also his sinless life, resurrection, and ascension.”⁵⁹ Christian philosopher Kevin Timpe explains the role of fourth-century theologian and philosopher Augustine of Hippo in developing the idea of original sin and its connection to Adam, and yet how this was contended by fourth-century theologian Pelagius and his supporter Caelestius, who denied that humans inherit original sin from the initial sin of Adam, and drew emphasis on the role of good works for human salvation.⁶⁰

Craig explains that such discussions concerning atonement were not popular with the early Church Fathers. Early debates centred more on the person of Jesus. No ecumenical council was held to deliberate on the matter of atonement and in the subsequent centuries Christian theologians formulated a series of theories in an attempt to explain the concept and what it meant in a salvific sense. He comments, however, that there are allusions the Fathers made that connect with atonement motifs.

There are different ways Christian theologians have attempted to explain the Fall. Second-century Greek bishop Irenaeus of Lyons proposed a ‘**recapitulation theory**’ in which Adam and Eve are tempted not by pride, but by impatience to have what God had not wanted them to have at that stage before they had reached to full maturity. In Irenaeus’ recapitulation theory all of humanity comes to be summed up in

⁵⁵ Luginbill, R.D. Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://ichthys.com/3B-Hamartio.htm>

⁵⁶ Genesis 2:16-17.

⁵⁷ Luginbill, R.D. Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://ichthys.com/3B-Hamartio.htm>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Murray, Michael J. and Michael Rea. (2020). Philosophy and Christian Theology. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/christiantheology-philosophy/>>.

⁶⁰ Timpe, K. (2014a), *Free Will in Philosophical Theology*. Bloomsbury.

Jesus who comes as the Second Adam. Jesus' function is intrinsically salvific as outlined in Book 1, Chapter 10 of Irenaeus' 'Against Heresies': "The Church, though dispersed through our the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation..."⁶¹ This is part of one of the earliest credal statements. For Irenaeus it was about Jesus living a life of obedience to God in contrast to Adam who disobeyed God. He positions Adam's life, and not just the Fall, but his entire life as a contrast to that of Jesus. Where Adam made all the wrong choices, Jesus made the right ones. From Adam comes sin and death and from Jesus comes obedience and life. As theologian Gustaf Wingren explains, for Irenaeus "if man is to be saved, it is necessary that the first man, Adam, be brought back to life, and not simply that a new and perfect man who bears no relation to Adam should appear on earth. God, who has life, must permit His life to enter into 'Adam' the name who truly hungers and thirsts, eats and drinks, is wearied and needs rest, who knows anxiety, sorrow, joy, and who suffers pain when confronted with the fact of death."⁶² Where Adam was presented as impatient for the promise of God, resulting in him eating from the tree, for Irenaeus, "the Son's effective counter to Adam's disobedience is to remain in a condition of receptivity throughout his entire life, to wait on God where Adam did not."⁶³

The outline of Gregory of Nyssa's concept, known as the '**fish-hook theory**', is that because of Adam's sin, he had sold himself and all of humanity into the power of the devil. Mankind has lost its freedom and the devil has a right to demand a ransom from God. It would be unjust for God to demand a ransom and so He chose Jesus as the ransom, but since He was God-incarnate, Jesus' Godhead was veiled and the devil didn't know. In the resurrection the devil would learn that he had been mistaken since Jesus is not any man, but God himself. Jesus was freed from the devil's grip, releases mankind from his grip, and is free to return to heaven. The devil is in turn deprived, receiving no prisoner and no ransom. In this theory therefore, the devil came to be deceived by the humanness of Jesus and by consuming his mortal body in death thought himself victorious. Far from being human however, Christ was God and his resurrection represents a conquering of death and thus a defeat of Satan. Christ, the

⁶¹ Irenaeus, I.10.1.

⁶² Wingren, G. (2004). *Man and the Incarnation: A Study in the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*. Wipfand Stock Publishers, p. 95.

⁶³ Vogel, J. (2007). The Haste of Sin, the Slowness of Salvation: An Interpretation of Irenaeus on the Fall and Redemption. *Anglican Theological Review* 89:3, p. 442.

Son of God, the God-man, is thought of as having deceived the deceiver, explained here by Gregory of Nyssa in his Catechetical Discourse:

Since it was not in the nature of the opposing power to undergo the unveiled manifestation of God, the deity was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the deity might be gulped down along with the bait of the flesh. ... In this way, he who practiced deception receives the very same in return. He who first deceived humanity by the bait of sensual pleasure is himself deceived by the presence of the human form. And whereas the enemy wrought his deception for the ruin of our nature, the wise one used his plan of deception for salvation.⁶⁴

This ‘*Christus Victor*’ theory’ which postulated that Jesus’ death released mankind from bondage to the devil persisted for about 900 years. Craig explains that such early discussions had in their ideas a kind of conflict between God and Satan, that the Fathers “often emphasised God’s desire to triumph over Satan, not by sheer power alone, but by just means that respected Satan’s “rights.” The metaphoric imagery Gregory of Nyssa used in his theory is held to have some biblical foundation in Job 40-41; Ps 104:26 (LXX 103:26); and Isa 27:1, but it has received much criticism. From those who looked at his theory with disdain were English philosopher and Anglican priest Hastings Rashdall who deemed Gregory’s theory “childish and immoral,”⁶⁵ and J. A. MacCullough who held it to be “perverted and repulsive.”⁶⁶ Others such as Lutheran theologian Gustaf Gustaf Aulén found it “highly objectionable, disgusting and grotesque.”⁶⁷ Russian Orthodox priest and theologian George Florovsky deemed it “self-contradictory, inconclusive and inappropriate.”⁶⁸ Yet, another problem with the theory, is that the ransom was not paid to the devil who held mankind captive in sin, but was paid to God Himself. It was God’s anger and not the devil’s that was put into effect on the cross.

⁶⁴ Constat, N.P. (2004). The Last Temptation of Satan: Divine Deception in Greek Patristic Interpretations of the Passion Narrative Source. *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 97, No. 2, pp. 143-144; Cat. Disc. 24, 26; ed. E. Mitihlenberg, Gregorii Nysseni Oratio catechetica (GNO 3.4; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 62, lines 3-10; and 65-66, lines 21-25, 1-3; reprinted with a French translation, introduction, and notes by Winling, R. (2000). *Discours catichitique*. SC 453. Cerf, 2000), pp. 254-64.

⁶⁵ Rashdall, H. (1925). *The Idea of Atonement*. Macmillan, p. 364.

⁶⁶ MacCullough, J.A. (1930). *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine*. T&T Clark, p. 205.

⁶⁷ Aulén, G. (1931). *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*. Macmillan, p. 47.

⁶⁸ Florovsky, G. (1987). *The Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century*. Notable and Academic Books, p. 195.

Many other atonement theories took their place in Cristian theology as well, listed here by Steven Porter: “Athanasius’s mystical theory, Augustine’s ransom theory, Abelard’s moral-influence theory, Anselm’s satisfaction theory, Scotus’s acceptilation theory, and Calvin’s theory of penal substitution, to name only a few of the historical stand-outs. Since the Reformation, divergent views of the atoning work of Christ have ballooned all the more, with the typical battle line drawn between objective and subjective theories.”⁶⁹ The Satisfaction theory espoused by Anselm in his *Cur Deus homo*,⁷⁰ advocated instead that such a theory as the *Christus Victor*, is quite inadequate in explaining the true reason behind Jesus’ redeeming purpose. Aside from defeating Satan, the price of sin argued Anselm, had to be compensated (*satisfactio*) through the incarnation and suffering of Christ that man’s sins no longer besmirch the holiness of God. This becomes necessary due to the justice of God, since to overlook the sin would be unjust and go against God’s very nature of being just. The dishonouring of God through sin cannot be annulled simply by God’s compassion, instead the sin needs to be punished “since it is not right [recte] to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then it is passed by undischarged” (I.12). For Anselm compensation is “voluntary payment of the debt” (1.19), arguing that humans themselves can never pay back to God the debt of sin requiring God to become a man and pay it back himself for our salvation. For Anselm it becomes a necessity upon God Himself that He punishes sin, this he holds is supreme justice and part of the “Divine character”, and “it does not belong to his liberty or compassion or will to let the sinner go unpunished” (I.12) and God cannot be inconsistent with himself.

The twelfth century theologian Peter Abelard (1079–1142 C.E.) contends the reasoning provided in the ‘*Christus Victor* theory’ - that Satan has some kind of sway over human beings that God is obliged to respect. He also challenged Anselm’s satisfaction theory, that Christ’s death is compensation to God: “How very cruel and unjust it seems that someone should require the blood of an innocent person as a ransom, or that in any way it might please him that an innocent person be slain, still less that God should have so accepted the death of his Son that through it he was reconciled to the whole world!” (Commentary on Paul’s Epistle to the Roman, Bk. 2). Abelard’s theory centres instead on moral self-improvement, that atonement is a reflection of God’s love and ought to inspire His love within the faithful and thus

⁶⁹ Porter, S. (2004). Swinburnian atonement and the doctrine of penal substitution. In *Faith and philosophy: journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*.

⁷⁰ Anselm. *The Catholic Primer’s Reference Series: Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Anselm%20of%20Canterbury%20-%20Cur%20Deus%20Homo.pdf>

effecting a path of righteousness. Abelard actually favoured Islamic ethical theories and philosophies which he became acquainted with under the guise of ‘naturalist ethics’. His ideas were influenced by eleventh-century Ibn Bajjah, also known by his Latinised name Avempace.⁷¹ Though some Christians might dismiss Anselm and his theory of satisfaction, most Protestant evangelists have all held to some form of Anselm’s satisfaction atonement theory including Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism. John Calvin was himself a proponent of the penal substitution theory,⁷² as well as other Reformers: Luther, Zwingli, and Melancthon.⁷³

This ‘**theory of penal substitution**’ is highly popular and one that perhaps most apologists today hold to. In this theory, it is believed that Christ voluntarily bore the suffering in the crucifixion to atone for the sins of mankind. In the penal substitution theory, punishment that was rightly due to mankind is removed. God’s wrath is appeased through the death of Jesus and justice has been established. Craig furthers his discussion on atonement by suggesting his readers consider the idea of imputation of sins, the idea that Jesus, though not guilty of any sin, has mankind’s sins imputed on him to satisfy God’s divine justice and to appease His wrath. Craig explains that there have been many who contend such an idea, arguing that it is conceptually impossible that God punish Christ for our sins, since Christ did no wrong, and thus the punishment of Christ “would not express condemnation or censure.”⁷⁴

Others have attempted to make better sense of penal substitution by suggesting that Christ was instead ‘penalised’ by mankind’s sins and not punished. Craig draws on legal cases (in a secular context) and court documents to demonstrate that there are punishments that do not necessarily carry with them disapproval or harsh treatment, such as punishment for violation of federal laws against marijuana possession.⁷⁵ Yet others, such as Murphy, have shown that the idea of imputing of sins onto another does not “find an analogy in our system of justice”,⁷⁶ which Craig reasons is because only God is in such a position as to impute the sins of one onto another.⁷⁷ Craig thus considers ‘legal fictions’ on the premise that our wrongful acts were imputed to Christ: “On this view, although Christ did not himself commit the sins in question, God chose

⁷¹ Luscombe, D.E. (1971). *Peter Abelard’s Ethics: an edition with introduction, English translation and notes by D. E. Luscombe*. Clarendon Press.

⁷² Calvin, J. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Princeton University Press, II.12-17.

⁷³ MacDonald, H. D. (1992) Models of the Atonement in Reformed Theology. In Donald K. McKim, ed. *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*. Eerdmans, pp. 117-131.

⁷⁴ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p.56.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 58-59.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 61.

to treat Christ as if he had done those acts.”⁷⁸ However, Craig’s view does not pass the test of Ockham’s razor: the simplest way for God to forgive mankind is to forgive them, without requiring the crucifixion of His incarnated Self.

Craig asserts that it is not that penal substitution is fiction only that – as Craig’s subsection on ‘Imputation of Guilt and Vicarious Liability’ explains – God imputes to Christ, not the wrongdoing itself, but humankind’s guilt of wrongdoing. The guilt is not removed from the faithful, it comes to be “replicated in Christ, just as, according to the doctrine of original sin, Adam’s guilt was replicated in me, not transferred from Adam to me.”⁷⁹ Craig cites the example of vicarious liability of employers, of an employer bearing the guilt of an employee, wherein the employer might be held responsible for failing to properly supervise an employee who makes a mistake or commits a wrong. It is the guilt by punishment that is removed in the theory of penal substitution. Again, for each of these theories there are critics, and detractors of this theory argue that it violates the idea that God is Just, that He would allow the innocent to suffer as a result of the guilty. Keith Ward, for instance, represents a fairly common stance, “One must therefore reject those crude accounts of Christian doctrine which ... say that Christ has been justly punished in our place so that he has taken away our guilt and enabled God to forgive us. Almost everything is ethically wrong about these accounts.”⁸⁰ It is argued however that in consequentialist theories of justice such a suffering may be justified, since the outcome of human salvation is of greater consequence. Yet again this is contended by those who instead favour a retributive theory to satisfy God’s justice. Distinguishing between negative retributivism which holds that God punished the innocent Jesus, positive retributivism is instead about God punishing the guilty, and though He cannot punish the innocent, “still He reserves the prerogative to punish an innocent divine person, namely, Christ, in the place of the guilty. This extraordinary exception, he argues, is a result of His goodness, not a defect in His justice.”⁸¹

The penal substitution theory has many problems. If Jesus bore on himself the sins of the world during the crucifixion it would mean that he, at that point, had the most sins conceivable on his person. Yet it was the single unforgiven sin of Adam which generated the multitude of future sins. Jesus, believed by Christians to be fully God, chose not to forgive Adam’s transgression at the beginning of time because of the magnitude of what sin represents, yet at this later stage chose to be burdened by

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 61.

⁷⁹ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p. 64.

⁸⁰ Ward, K. (1970). *Ethics and Christianity*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd, p. 240.

⁸¹ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p. 71.

everyone's sins. The anomalous proposition is further problematised by the great continuity of sin post-crucifixion. Perhaps the greatest problem however, is that Jesus took on the sins of the world to pay the price of those sins back to Himself. In the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, it is Him - God - restoring honour back 'onto himself' through a blood sacrifice.

This section has provided a very short glimpse of the great difficulties Christian theologians and scholars have in establishing and explaining the different theories of atonement. Whilst so vital to Christian soteriology, atonement theories are precisely an attempt to provide reason to the Christian belief of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The essential dilemma of the atonement is stated by Anselm of Canterbury himself in *Cur Deus Homo?*: "If God could not save sinners except by condemning a just man, where is his omnipotence? If, on the other hand, he was capable of doing so, but did not will it, how shall we defend his wisdom and justice?"⁸² For Anselm, despite God's omnipotence it was morally impossible for him to save sinners without the satisfaction of Christ. For more contemporary scholars such as Richard Swinburne, God could have forgiven the sins of humanity in various ways, but the life and death of Jesus became the preferred way.⁸³ Porter defends the theory of penal substitution by drawing on the voluntary nature of Jesus' death on the cross, that Jesus voluntarily paid the price for sins. Coupled with such physical punishment, "It seems fair to say that Christ experienced on the cross the loss of the good gifts and opportunities of human life in friendship with God. These are the rights and privileges we abused, and it seems that they are the rights and privileges Christ gave up on the cross in our stead."⁸⁴ So, Jesus voluntarily gave up his closeness to God and friendship with Him because that is what we as sinners deserve due to our sins. Was it Jesus the God who suffered on the cross (in which case it makes little sense to hold that He gives up friendship to Himself) or Jesus the man who was instead crucified, (in which case it was not the incarnated God who suffered and died for us)? Porter speaks of the punishment "we deserve" and what is "owed to God", and while repentance, remorse and personal transformation are considered essential in securing salvation, the idea that a sacrificial death, the spilling of His son's or His own blood, would appease His anger

⁸² Anselm (1998). Why God Became Man. In Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*. Oxford University Press, p. 275/I.8.

⁸³ Porter, S. (2004). Swinburnian atonement and the doctrine of penal substitution. In *Faith and philosophy: journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*.

⁸⁴ Porter, S. (2004). Swinburnian atonement and the doctrine of penal substitution. In *Faith and philosophy: journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*.

is not only about a substitutionary punishment, but about a satisfying of God's anger only appeased through the blood and torture of somebody else.

What stands out in the context of the present discussion when turning to Islamic theology, is its repudiation of the idea that God would require blood as a payment. Sacrificial acts are purposed as a means of praise and thanks to God for the provision God provides, and also as a means of benefitting the poor and needy. God explains in chapter 22 of the Qur'ān:

It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches God but your piety. He has subjected them to you in this way so that you may glorify God for having guided you. Give good news to those who do good.⁸⁵

The Islamic paradigm on sin and salvation

In the Islamic theological tradition, all humans are born pure with inherent goodness, in a state of *fiṭra* - with the proto-knowledge that God is reality, that He is worthy of worship, and that humans are imbued with a fundamental level of goodness: “No child is born but upon *fiṭra*”, denoting a pure innate, monotheistic disposition.⁸⁶ God explains in the Qur'ān:

Can there be any doubt about God, Creator of the heavens and Earth?⁸⁷

So be steadfast in faith in all uprightness 'O Prophet'—the natural Way of Allāh which He has instilled in 'all' people. Let there be no change in this creation of Allāh. That is the Straight Way, but most people do not know.⁸⁸

Furthermore, at many points in the Qur'ān, God reminds us that He is Just and does not do anything unfair or unjust to His creatures. This is a repeated Qur'ānic motif:

...for never does Allāh do the least wrong to His creatures!⁸⁹

...and because Allāh is not ever unjust to His servants.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 22, verse 37.

⁸⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2658 d.

⁸⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 14, verse 10.

⁸⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 30, verse 30.

⁸⁹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 182.

⁹⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 8, verse 51.

It will be said], ‘This is for what you have stored up with your own hands: God is never unjust to His creatures.’⁹¹

Whoever does good does it for his own soul and whoever does evil does it against his own soul: your Lord is never unjust to His creatures.⁹²

The judgment passed by Me shall not be altered; but never do I do the least wrong unto My creatures!⁹³

The reminder is poignant in outlining the basis of Islam’s view on the human project — on hamartiology (the place of sin) in Islam, and Islam’s doctrine of salvation (soteriology). God is Ever-Near (*al-Qarīb*) to His creatures, makes clear to them the way of guidance and the dangers of misguidance, and calls on them to be mindful of earthly and spiritual trappings. The human is naturally cognisant of God, is created in a pure state with a natural predisposition to affirm God, and is further imbued with the capacity to do both good and evil. Life is thus a test of i) an individual’s recognition of God ii) of belief in and adherence to His Messenger iii) recognition and gratitude for His blessings, iv) of the individual’s love and devotion to God, v) and of the way such God-centric focus inspires good conduct with others.

Islam delineates that man is weak, prone to error and that He will find a merciful and understanding God, who is willing to forgive and pardon wrongdoings when a person turns sincerely to Him and commits himself to positive transformation.

But indeed, I am the Perpetual Forgiver of whoever repents and believes and does righteousness and then continues in guidance.⁹⁴

This does not mean that sin does not have consequences. It does, and it indeed did for Adam, shown through his being removed from heaven. Sin surely distances us from God’s divine pleasure and from His blessings, both earthly and heavenly. An individual can exhibit goodness that can become corroded by the effects of sin. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: ‘A man is deprived of provision because of the sins that he commits.’⁹⁵ Christian apologists and missionaries have often grossly misrepresented the Islamic position on sin. Bethmann had written, (cited earlier), that there is “no deep conviction of sin in Islam, no feeling of an estrangement between God and man.”⁹⁶ It is the greatest of all sins in fact, of polytheism (*shirk*) that the

⁹¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 22, verse 10.

⁹² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 41, verse 46.

⁹³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 50, verse 29.

⁹⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 82.

⁹⁵ Ibn Majah, 4022.

⁹⁶ Bethmann, E. W. (1950). *Bridge to Islam*. Southern Publishing Association, p. 80.

Qur'ān incidentally warns Christians of committing through their worship of Jesus. To hold that Allāh has an equal, and to worship another with Him, whether it be a stone, tree, sun, moon, prophet, or anything else is the greatest sin mentioned by Allāh: "They have certainly disbelieved who say, "Allāh is the Messiah, the son of Mary" while the Messiah has said, "O Children of Israel, worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord." Indeed, he who associates others with Allāh - Allāh has forbidden him Paradise, and his refuge is the Fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers."⁹⁷ The estrangement that Langford and Bethmann speak of is precisely known in its truest sin in relation to what the Christians are doing by heralding Jesus as deity.

What makes Langford's and others' analysis of Muslim hamartiology so off the mark, is that Muslims see themselves as inherently prone to sin. In the Qur'ān we are told: "Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be, and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God!"⁹⁸ All the sons of Adam are sinners, the Prophet informed us, "but the best of sinners are those who are given to repentance."⁹⁹ Bethmann's comment about "no deep conviction" and "no feeling of estrangement" is again utterly unfounded. The Qur'ān highlights the exact opposite. But for now, one out of the plethora of verses will suffice, and that same verse will show exactly where the Christians are going wrong with this and why such apologists and missionaries need to downplay Islam's concept of sin. The verse in question is the following in relation to the three who stayed behind in the Battle of Ṭabūk: "And 'Allāh has also turned in mercy to' the three who had remained behind, 'whose guilt distressed them' until the earth, despite its vastness, seemed to close in on them, and their souls were torn in anguish. They knew there was no refuge from Allāh except in Him. Then He turned to them in mercy so that they might repent. Surely Allāh 'alone' is the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful."¹⁰⁰ As Ibn al-Qayyim explains, "a sin causing submission is preferable in the sight of Allāh than a good deed which causes pride."¹⁰¹

The first half of the verse is an exact response to the Christian apologists and missionaries and the second half upends the entire premise of Christian soteriology. The verse tells us that the feeling the men experienced from their sin was as if "the earth, for all its spaciousness, closed in around them" and further still that "their very

⁹⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 72.

⁹⁸ Al-Qur'ān, chapter 91, verse 7-8.

⁹⁹ Mishkāt al-Masābīh, 2341.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 118.

¹⁰¹ Ibn al-Qayyim. (2004). *Al-Fawa'id (A collection of wise sayings)*. Umm al-Qura for translation and distribution, p. 106.

souls closed in around them.” From the consequences of sin, Ibn al-Qayyim enumerates: “lack of success, invalid views, absence of righteousness, corruption of the heart, failing to praise Allāh, wasting time, avoidance of other creations, separation between the servant and his Lord, supplications not being answered, constriction of the heart, decaying of blessings in subsistence and age, prevention of attaining knowledge, humiliation, Insults from enemies, a constricted breast, evil friends that will spoil one’s heart and waste time, sadness and grief, a miserable life and disappointment. All that results from sins and neglecting to praise Allāh, as plants grow by being watered but are consumed by fire. The opposite of the above are the consequences of obedience to Allāh, the Almighty.”¹⁰² Sin creates constriction and emptiness for those who turn away from God:

But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment.¹⁰³

He will say, My Lord, why have you raised me blind while I was once seeing?¹⁰⁴

(Allāh will respond), It is so, just as Our revelations came to you and you neglected them, so Today you are neglected.¹⁰⁵

Ibn Kathir explains: “meaning, his life will be hard in this world. He will have no tranquillity and no expanding of his breast (ease). Rather, his chest will be constrained and in difficulty due to his misguidance. Even if he appears to be in comfort outwardly and he wears whatever he likes, eats whatever he likes and lives wherever he wants, he will not be happy. For verily, his heart will not have pure certainty and guidance. He will be in agitation, bewilderment and doubt. He will always be in confusion and a state of uncertainty. This is from the hardship of life.”¹⁰⁶ In light of the preceding verse, “then whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray nor suffer”¹⁰⁷ Ibn Kathir said, “not going astray in this life” and “not suffering in the next life.”¹⁰⁸

But the second half of the aforementioned verse (Chapter 9, verse 118) is a precise clarification of the Christian error. Where Marsh ascertains that “Unless and until a

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁰³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 124.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 125.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 126.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Kathir. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*. Dar al-Ma’rifa, p. 1027.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 123.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Kathir. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*. Dar al-Ma’rifa, p. 1027.

Muslim, or anyone else for that matter, sees himself in God's eyes as a sinner, he will never seek a Savior from sin,"¹⁰⁹ the verse following on from describing the earth and self's constriction as a consequence of sin explains that it is God who forgives. There is no saviour since it is God Alone who forgives, as the men realised that "the only refuge from God was with Him"¹¹⁰ The Christian position concerning sin is predicated on Jesus. The sin has to be one that God cannot forgive so easily since it is Jesus who must come as a saviour. The sin is too great. For Muslims, God is greater. God's forgiveness and mercy are greater than our sins. Where Christian apologists are maintaining that for Muslims, sin is not as important as it needs to be, because the saviour Jesus needs to pay the price for the sins in order for us to reconcile with God and thus validate the incarnation of God into Jesus and his salvific function. In Islam, one's piety and righteousness reconcile us and one's access to God is forever available and bound by His Ever-nearness and Mercy.

Ibn al-Qayyim describes the way sin causes a person to become distant from Allāh, that sin can result in anxieties and sorrow and further the sinner's spiritual demise and loss of blessings. Sin can grow until it becomes habitual, a hardening of one's heart and a depriving of the knowledge and consciousness needed to successfully return to Allāh in repentance.¹¹¹ The Qur'ān explains:

And be not like those who forgot Allāh, so He made them forget themselves. Those are the defiantly disobedient.¹¹²

Christians may posit that the sin committed by Adam was *essentially* intolerable because of the One who was offended against. As shown, Islam also has very clear teachings about the severity of sin, about the sense of betrayal of choosing sin over God's grace as explicated in Prophet Ibrahim's address to his father – "Father, do not worship Satan- Satan has rebelled against the Lord of Mercy."¹¹³ The Qur'ān describes that "Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred."¹¹⁴ Despite the severity of the sin and its consequence on the human soul and condition there is divine wisdom behind the existence of sin and even its consequences. Ibn al-Qayyim discusses thirty wise purposes and secrets associated with the existence of sins. These include: "leading to the believer (1) repenting, which is pleasing to God; (2) recognizing his need for God's

¹⁰⁹ Marsh, C.R. (1975). *Share Your Faith with a Muslim*. Moody Press, pp. 93-4.

¹¹⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 118.

¹¹¹ Ibn al-Qayyim. (2004). *Al-Fawa'id (A collection of wise sayings)*. Umm al-Qura for translation and distribution, pp. 158-160, 235.

¹¹² Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 59, verse 19.

¹¹³ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 19, verse 88.

¹¹⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 20, verse 121.

protection and help; (3) supplicating; (4) becoming more humble; (5) avoiding arrogance and pride; (6) discounting his own good deeds; (7) carrying more good deeds in order to make amends for his sins and to become closer to the Holy Lord after feeling distant due to his sin; (8) being kind and gentle with others when they make mistakes due to recognition that he has sinned and erred himself; (9) focusing on improving himself thus making him avoid blaming or criticizing others; (10) recognizing that salvation from the Hellfire will only occur if God forgives and has mercy on him; (11) allowing him to allot the occurrence of any hardship as a recompense for his own sins and errors; and (12) appreciating God's blessing upon him to a greater degree since he recognizes himself to be inadequate, among others listed by Ibn al-Qayyim.¹¹⁵

Interestingly, Adam's disobedience was a topic of discussion in an interchange between Prophet Moses (Mūsa) and Adam himself. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: "Adam and Mūsa (Moses) debated, and Mūsa said to him: 'O Adam, you are our father but have deprived us and caused us to be expelled from Paradise because of your sin.' Adam said to him: 'O Mūsa, Allāh chose you to speak with, and he wrote the Torah for you with His own Hand. Are you blaming me for something which Allāh decreed for me forty years before He created me?' Thus, Adam won the argument with Mūsa, thus Adam won the argument with Mūsa."¹¹⁶ Adam argued with Mūsa that he had repented of his sin, and can no longer be blamed though there were consequences his offspring faced by being on Earth and not in the garden. Allāh had already decreed that Adam and his progeny would eventually be on earth. We are not here because of Adam's sin and nor here because of Adam. We are here because of God's plan for the human creation, and all that we face on earth, the highs and lows are not because of Adam's sin, but because of God's divine decree for human creation. Bilal Phillips explains: "Allāh deliberately created man with an inclination to do wrong, because pardoning those who turn repentant is a channel through which Allāh's divine attribute of Mercy and Forgiveness are made manifest."¹¹⁷ Adam rebuked Moses therefore for blaming him, saying: "Are you blaming me for doing something that Allāh had decreed"? Adam already had repented from his sin. Allāh said: 'And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so went astray. Then his Lord chose him, and relented toward him,

¹¹⁵ Tallal Zeni. (2018). The Divine Wisdom in Allowing Evil to Exist: Perspectives from Ibn Al-Qayyim.

Retrieved January 10, 2022 from https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-divine-wisdom-in-allowing-evil-to-exist-perspectives-from-ibn-al-qayyim#ftnt_ref24

¹¹⁶ Al-Bukhari 6414 and Muslim 6912

¹¹⁷ Phillips, A.B. (1995). *Salvation through Repentance: An Islamic View*. International Islamic Pub. House, p. 3.

and guided him.”¹¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī explains that that divine justice was met upon Adam and his wife in that they were removed from the garden they were in.¹¹⁹

The Islamic message also resonates with the notion of great hope for the sinful. Consider the Muslim intellectual Guy Eaton’s explanation of the significance of the word *Rahma* (mercy) used in the Qur’ān: “In Arabic the three consonants RHM, from which the word *rahma* (mercy) and its derivatives, *al-Rahmān* (the Merciful) and *al-Rahīm* (the Compassionate), are formed, have the primary meaning of ‘womb’, which indicates very clearly the maternal character of mercy, nurturing and protecting the helpless human creature in its gentle embrace.”¹²⁰ Prophet Noah was thus keen to advise his community that if they sought forgiveness from God they would also enjoy many heavenly as well as earthly benefits:

I said, ‘Ask forgiveness of your Lord. Indeed, He is ever a Perpetual Forgiver’.¹²¹

He will send down abundant rain from the sky for you.¹²²

And give you increase in wealth and children and provide for you gardens and provide for you rivers.¹²³

‘What is amiss with you that you cannot look forward to God’s majesty’¹²⁴

Humanity’s salvation however, is not predicated on an external unjust suffering, rather it is based on their direct relationship with God and on God’s forgiving and loving nature. God warns of punishment for the rejecters of faith, the obstinate and wicked – if they persist in their evil and proudly rebuff the turning to God in repentance. Notwithstanding, God does not want anyone to be misguided or to be punished. He prefers belief for His servants, we choose eternal punishment over a loving Lord. In the Christian viewpoint however, “The love of God is in fact fully understood only in the light of the cross.”¹²⁵ Lane explains, “In the cross we see “the reality of wrath, which is yet in some way a subordinate reality, and the far more

¹¹⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 121-2.

¹¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān)* vol. 1. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 304.

¹²⁰ Eaton, C.L.G. (1984). *Islam and the Destiny of Man*. State University of New York Press, p. 68.

¹²¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 71, verse 10.

¹²² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 71, verse 11.

¹²³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 71, verse 12.

¹²⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 71, verse 13.

¹²⁵ Lane, T. (2001). The Wrath of God as an aspect of the Love of God. Retrieved January 10, 2022 from <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/god/the-wrath-of-god-as-an-aspect-of-the-love-of-god>

overwhelming reality of the love of God.” The love of God is in fact fully understood only in the light of the cross. If God’s love is seen simply as a general truth it either loses its holiness or becomes limited by it.”¹²⁶ In the Islamic paradigm, such a rift between the love of God and the holiness of God as that described by Lane does not exist, and cannot exist since the attributes of Allāh are perfect and complete in themselves. In respect to how He deals with His creation we are continuously reminded, as the aforementioned verses underline, that He does no wrong to any of His creation: “...but never do I do the least wrong unto My creatures!”¹²⁷

Craig explains that “one of the most interesting features of the Christus Victor theory espoused by the Church Fathers is their widespread conviction that Christ’s incarnation and death were not necessary for man’s redemption.” Augustine is cited, Augustine asserted bluntly: “They are fools who say the wisdom of God could not otherwise free men than by taking human nature, and being born of a woman, and suffering all that he did at the hands of sinners.”¹²⁸ Debates amongst Christian advocates of these different atonement theories reveal a hermeneutical problem in seeking to understand something entirely crucial to the Christian soteriology. It is held that salvation is dependent on believing that Christ paid the price for our sins, yet the disagreements – about what such a payment is, to whom it was due, how it is taken, and to what ends and purposes – is a matter of such internal differences that it lacks coherency and is unreasonable as a tenet for human salvation.

Craig has explained that Christ represented us before God so that his punishment became our punishment and divine justice was satisfied. Christian theologians have long questioned however whether: Jesus voluntarily died for our sins or not? was he punished or not? was the punishment to soothe God’s temper? was a ransom paid to the devil, so mankind would be free from the bondage of sin? Was it instead paid to God? Did Jesus take mankind’s punishment or, was it a voluntary sacrifice? The question of guilt is also one of some concern. Craig argues that Jesus paid the price for our guilt, that he took on mankind’s guilt. Is the guilt here a standardised guilt based on God’s expectations of guilt? In Islam repentance is a personal ‘returning’ to God following personal guilt, renunciation of sins and a commitment to not return to the sin. The trueness of each person’s guilt however is relative to that person’s sincerity. Twentieth-century philosopher and theologian Philip L. Quinn also elucidates the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 50, verse 29.

¹²⁸ Augustine. (1865). “De Agone Christiano [On the Christian Struggle].” In J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* 40. Paris: Garnier fratres, cols. 289–310. http://www.augustinus.it/latino/agone_cristiano/index.htm; Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p. 31.

problem entangled in the soteriological model: “A righteousness not our own could never become our righteousness, for our righteousness is something we must earn by our own efforts to obey the moral law. And so even if Christ, who is without sin, has accumulated in heaven’s treasury a surplus of moral merit by voluntarily submitting to his passion and death, this can be of no help to human sinners, for it must forever remain his moral merit and can never become ours.”¹²⁹

Further to this, even though God in Christ is believed to pay the price for our guilt, Craig explains the views of the Genevan-Italian Reformed scholastic theologian François Turretini who held that “though Christ’s punishment was not infinite as to duration, he did not suffer eternal damnation as we shall in hell if we reject God’s grace.”¹³⁰ He explains:

Nevertheless, Christ’s suffering was equivalent to eternal damnation on account of the infinite dignity of the person who was suffering. Christ not only suffered a violent and bitter end on the cross but more fundamentally he was forsaken by God the Father by withdrawing from Christ the beatific vision, meaning the vision of God in all His majesty and goodness, and suspended the joy and comfort and sense and fruition of full felicity. The law required no less than this to answer to the demands of justice.¹³¹

It seems clear here that there are two actors, the Father and Christ. The God who is Christ has his Godly vision and majesty suspended by the God who is the Father “in order to answer to the demands of justice” of both of them. If our sins become imputed to Christ, then they are imputed to God Himself if Christ is believed to be God. If Christ pays the price for those sins then God Himself pays that price, for sins He could not forgive and which initially besmirched His holiness.

Dr. Craig has stated that since God does not act from duty, He is free to make exceptions. This is important since Craig also maintains that retributive justice is necessary since God must punish the sinful. The question that is to be asked is why God is unable to show forgiveness as an attribute of His divine love and mercy? At the centre of the discussion of soteriology and hamartiology from Christian and Islamic perspectives lies the case of Adam. Adam is the ‘type’ in Christian thinking for which

¹²⁹ Quinn, P.L. (1986). Christian atonement and Kantian justification, *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 3 No.4 October, p. 456.

¹³⁰ Craig, W.L. [ReasonableFaithOrg]. (2017, June 3). Doctrine of Christ Part 17: The Work of Christ (10) - Penal Substitution Theory [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjDHqbh9nyU>

¹³¹ Ibid.

Jesus becomes his contrast, an ‘anti-type’¹³² whereas Adam is that paradigm in Islamic thought, the servant who sinned and was met with God’s divine grace and forgiveness.

¹³² Beck, W. (2017). *Discovering Jesus in the Old Testament*. Xulon Press, p. 146.

Chapter 3

MAXIMAL PERFECTION

It has been the interest of philosophical theologians to adopt methodological strands to understand God in light of a *perfect being theology*.¹³³ Both Christians and Muslims agree that the perfection of the Divine is absolutely intrinsic to the themes of our discussion. C. A. Campbell once put it in his Gifford lectures that:

Theism in general proclaims that God is wholly perfect; and, as is entirely natural, it interprets this Divine perfection in terms of ‘the highest we know’ in human experience; applying to God accordingly, such concepts as those of goodness, wisdom and power in their highest manifestations.¹³⁴

Simply put, a deficient deity is not worthy of worship and is not ‘God’. For Christians this has been at the crux of their grappling with the place of Adam’s sin in the cosmic scheme of things and with the place of Jesus in Christian soteriology. Anselm of Canterbury’s proclamation, for example, in the first chapter of his *Proslogion*, a philosophical argument for the existence of God, has as his first premise: “For we believe that You are that than which a greater cannot be conceived.”¹³⁵ Craig too uses this as a premise in his discussions on atonement.

In our discussion on the soteriological and hamartiological differences between Islam and Christianity, we can question which hypothesis would make God greater. According to Murray and Rea, the Anselmian formula is useful in that it “provide[s] us with a rule or recipe for developing a more specific conception of God.”¹³⁶ For sure adherents to different worldviews and faiths would each propose their conception of

¹³³ Wainwright, W.J. (1987). Symposium Papers and Abstracts: Worship, Intuitions and Perfect being Theology, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1987 A. P. A. Central Division Meetings (Mar., 1987), pp. 31-32; Nagasawa, Y. (2017). *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism*. Oxford University Press.

¹³⁴ Campbell C.A. (1957). *On Selfhood and Godhood*. George Allen and Unwin, p. 307.

¹³⁵ Anselm of Canterbury. (2000). *Proslogion*. In *Complete philosophical and theological treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson. The Arthur J. Banning Press, p. 93.

¹³⁶ Murray M. & Rea, M. (2008). *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. Cambridge University Press, 8.

the divine and what perfect being theology means to them. It is essential nonetheless in the frame of this discussion, in which the reference points are Christianity and Islam, reach a common point of understanding. Both would agree that God is an absolutely perfect being, omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent. It is held that a perfectly good being has the best desires that a being can have, the best attributes, and acts in the most excellent way. This excellence is understood as *moral* excellence.¹³⁷ God then has a *morally unsurpassable* agency where *agency* is understood as the traits and attributes of the divine.

Murphy deliberates on some vital points that can be considered here in relation to moral goodness. Craig would well assert the consequentialist theory of justice, to justify the seemingly immoral suffering of Jesus for the greater outcome of human salvation; not contending then that God is indeed morally good. The question of moral goodness as a constituent of perfect being theology is unquestioned but disputable, in so far as moral goodness is relative to our human consideration for what moral goodness means. It can be agreed, as Murphy espouses here:

...it is assumed that morally good beings treat the welfare of humans and at least some other sentient beings as practically relevant considerations, so that, other things equal, morally good beings favor the promotion of well-being and disfavor setbacks to it. So it is taken for granted that perfect moral goodness cannot involve opposition or indifference to the flourishing of sentient beings; the claim that perfect moral goodness might be so different for God than for humans that God's perfect moral goodness might involve God's being indifferent to the suffering of creatures would be taken as a rejection of the claim that God must be perfectly morally good, not a gloss on it.¹³⁸

Both Christians and Muslims agree that God is loving, that He forgives sins, that he rewards the faithful. Though Christians would point to the atoning death of Jesus as an example or the main example of God's love, this work argues that the Christian conception of perfect being in light of God's loving nature, falls short. The discussion of soteriology is crucial here in providing us a framework with which we can consider a formative impression of God in His revealed scripture. Rogers outlines the need to

¹³⁷ Morris, T. (1989) Duty and Divine Goodness. In Thomas V Morris. 1989. *Anselmian Explorations*. University of Notre Dame Press, pp. 26–41.

¹³⁸ Murphy, M. (2013). Perfect Goodness, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved January 10, 2022 from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/perfect-goodness/>.

consider the transcendent perfection of God and His concern for creation,¹³⁹ a point also noted by Murphy: “the content of moral goodness must involve a positive agential orientation to human well-being as well as to that of other sentient beings.”¹⁴⁰ In the Islamic tradition, God is far above any human conception of Him. He is Supreme, absolute Unity. We can do nothing to lessen Him. God is fully aware, maximally loving and forgiving and not challenged by anything. God is not merely good, but maximally good in what befits His majesty and honour. It is a goodness far surpassing anything we know of goodness, a love far surpassing what we know of love. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ would pray: “I cannot fully praise you ‘O God’, for you are as you have praised yourself.”¹⁴¹

Yujin Nagasawa in his analysis takes the discussion away from an over-focus on Anselm. Though it will be generally agreed that God is the perfect being, Nagasawa positions his Omni God Thesis as one that stresses on three of God’s most essential attributes: that God is necessarily omniscient, necessarily omnipotent and necessarily omnibenevolent.¹⁴² Another way of looking at it is in light of what Oppy describes as the ‘excellence assumption’, that “One property of a thing is its overall excellence. The overall excellence of a thing depends upon further properties of that thing: its particular excellences. The overall excellence of a thing is determined by whether or not it possesses - and, at least in some cases, the extent to which it possesses particular excellence.”¹⁴³ That being said, there will be countless differences amongst theologians on the ideas of perfect being theology, its branches and sub-branches. Morris concludes by both reminding us and questioning, “Is man the measure of all things, including things divine? No, man is not the measure of all things, God is. In particular, God is the measure of perfection. And that is just as it should be.”¹⁴⁴ The overriding question here then is to ascertain whether our Creator’s love and mercy extends itself to the forgiveness of our sins and whether the Islamic outline of God’s relationship with His first human creation, Adam, is a far superior example of God’s maximal perfection.

¹³⁹ Rogers, K.A. (2000). *Perfect Being Theology*. Edinburgh University Press, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Murphy, M. (2013). Perfect Goodness, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved January 10, 2022 from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/perfect-goodness/>.

¹⁴¹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 486

¹⁴² Nagasawa, Y. (2017). *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism*. Oxford University Press, p. 80.

¹⁴³ Oppy, G. (2011). Perfection, near-perfection, maximality, and Anselmian Theism. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. 69:2, 120.

¹⁴⁴ Morris, T. (1987) A. P. A. Central Division Meetings || Symposium Papers and Abstracts: Perfect being Theology.

Muslims hold that God is above any shortcoming and that absolute perfection belongs to Him. Allāh described Himself with attributes of perfection, that “the Most Beautiful Names belong to Allāh”¹⁴⁵ He states that none of His creation is like Him, “There is nothing like Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer”¹⁴⁶ The holiness of Allāh is never compromised or challenged by anything that His creation does. One of His names is Al-Quddūs (The Most Holy, The Most Pure, The All-Perfect): “Whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth glorifies Allāh, the King (of everything), the Holy, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise”¹⁴⁷ Allāh describes Himself as *Al-Salām* (the One Free from all defects): “He is Allāh beside whom none has the right to be worshipped but He, the King, the Holy, the One Free from all defects.”¹⁴⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim explained the divine attribute of ‘*Al-Salām*’ by noting that to “Him belongs absolute perfection in all aspects, that *Al-Salām* implies that His deeds are free from idleness, wrongdoing and anything contrary to wisdom; that His attributes are free of any similarity to the attributes of created beings; and that His Essence is free of any shortcomings or faults; and that His names are free of any blameworthy meanings. So the name as-Salaam implies an affirmation of all perfections and a negation of all shortcomings in His case.”¹⁴⁹

Some Qur’ānic chapters begin with such a declaration of Allāh’s Perfection. The use of the Infinitive/Ism form (*subḥān*) for example in the opening verse of chapter 17 shows permanence and timelessness, meaning Allāh’s perfection is not bound by His creation. Even if there was no creation, Allāh is all Perfect and His Perfection is still declared. Creation and our acknowledgment of Allāh’s perfection therefore does not affirm His perfection, rather with or without us, He is Perfection. Ibn Taymīyya explained:

Perfection is something that is affirmed with regard to Allāh. In fact what is established is the utmost perfection, to the extent that there is no perfection that is free of any shortcomings but it is affirmed and established that the Lord, may He be exalted, is deserving of it, as His Essence is sanctified. As that is confirmed and established, this implies the negation of the opposite in His case. So affirmation of the divine attribute of life implies negation of death; affirmation of the divine attribute of knowledge implies negation of ignorance; affirmation of the

¹⁴⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 180.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 42, verse 11.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 62, verse 1.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 59, verse 23.

¹⁴⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya. (2009). *Aḥkām Abl adh-Dhimmah vol. 1*. Maktabat al-Assrya, pp. 413-414.

divine attribute of power implies negation of helplessness. This perfection is affirmed and established in His case on the basis of rational evidence and certain proof, in addition to the proofs mentioned in the texts of revelation which prove that.¹⁵⁰

The texts outlining theological positions of Islamic creed make these same affirmations. One such early text of Sunni creed by ninth-century theologian Abū Ja'far al-Ṭahāwī, the *al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwīya* draws on many articles of faith concerning Allāh's maximal perfection, some of which include: "There is nothing like Him"; "There is nothing that can frustrate Him"; "There is nothing worthy of worship but Him"; "He does not resemble any created being"; "He has existed with His timeless attributes before His creation, which added nothing to His essence that was not already among His attributes. As His attributes were before creation, so will they continue forever". In his commentary, fourteenth-century Muslim scholar and jurist Ibn Abī al-'Izz explains, "one conceives the attributes of the created beings on the pattern of Allāh's attributes is guilty of the blasphemy which the Christians commit."¹⁵¹ It is Allāh who "is the First and the Last"¹⁵² The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ stated, "O Allāh, You are the First, there is nothing before You. You are the Last, there is nothing after You."¹⁵³ The Islamic creed teaches that Allāh is not to be conceived in a way analogous to His creation. Eighth-century Sunni theologian and jurist Abū Ḥanīfah explained this by stating: "Allāh is not like any of His creatures, nor is any creature like Him... His attributes are different from their attributes. He knows but not as we know; He acts but not as we act; and He sees but not as we see."¹⁵⁴

In Islam there is inherent consistency in the notion of God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence. Allāh is not to be understood only through these three attributes however. As Ibn Abī al-'Izz explained, "Allāh is qualified from eternity with attributes of perfection." More than two dozen times in the Qur'ān for example, is Allāh referred to as both All-Knowing and All-Wise,¹⁵⁵ as both All-Forgiving and

¹⁵⁰ Ibn Taymīyya. (1996). *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 6. Majma' al-Malik Fahd, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Ibn Abī al-'Izz. (2000), *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwīya* (Commentary on the creed of al-Ṭahāwī), trans. Muḥammad 'Abdul-Haqq Ansari. Imadat al-Baḥth al-'Ilmi, p. 24.

¹⁵² Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 57, verse 3.

¹⁵³ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2713.

¹⁵⁴ Abū Ḥanīfah. (1984). *Al-Fiqh al-Akbar* (commentary by Mullah 'Ali-Qari). Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 24.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 4, verse 26; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 8, verse 71; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 15; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 28; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 97; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 106; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 110; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 60; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 12, verse 6; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 22, verse 52; Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 24, verse 18; Al-Qur'ān, chapter 24, verse 59; Al-Qur'ān, chapter 49, verse 8.

All-Appreciative¹⁵⁶ and there are countless such examples. God is omniscient, He is All-Knowing and there is nothing that escapes His knowledge. For Rogers His omniscience entails “direct knowledge of all objects, states of affairs, propositions and possibilities.”¹⁵⁷ The Qur’ān explains:

No calamity ‘or blessing’ occurs on earth or in yourselves without being ‘written’ in a Record before We bring it into being. This is certainly easy for Allāh.¹⁵⁸

Luqmān added, ‘O my dear son! ‘Even’ if a deed were the weight of a mustard seed—be it ‘hidden’ in a rock or in the heavens or the earth—Allāh will bring it forth. Surely Allāh is Most Subtle, All-Aware’.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Al-Qur’ān, chapter 35, verse 30; Al-Qur’ān, chapter 35, verse 34.

¹⁵⁷ Rogers, K.A. (2000). Perfect Being Theology. Edinburgh University Press, p. 71.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 57, verse 22.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 31, verse 16.

Chapter 4

CRAIG'S FIRST ARGUMENT: THE TRINITY IS MISREPRESENTED IN THE QUR'ĀN

Craig makes an oft-repeated charge in relation to what the Qur'ān contends about the Trinity, stating that “Mohammed evidently thought that Christians believed in a Trinity composed of God the Father, Mary, and their offspring Jesus. It's no wonder that he regarded such a ridiculous doctrine as blasphemous!”¹⁶⁰ As stated, Craig was not the first to put forward such an idea and it is likely he was influenced by the writings of earlier Christian apologists, like American missionary Samuel Zwemer who put forward the same argument.¹⁶¹ Billy Sichone¹⁶² and James Langford¹⁶³ also put forth the same argument. Like Craig, they reference Sūrah 5:117:

God will say: ‘Jesus Son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: “Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?”’ ‘Glory be to you,’ he will answer, ‘I could never have claimed what I have no right to.’¹⁶⁴

In light of Craig's and the other Christian apologists' argument, there is much that is unfortunately missed in their part-selection of Qur'ānic verse(s) - from the very verses they cite to prove their point. This part-selection is in Craig's, Zwemer's, Sichone's and Langford's works. The verses are repeated in full here:

¹⁶⁰ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 11, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>; Craig, W.L. [drcraigvideos]. (2011, May 3). A Critique of Islam (William Lane Craig) [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSLSfatyeqo>

¹⁶¹ Zwemer, S. (1905). *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay on the Character and Attributes of Allāh According to the Koran and the Orthodox Tradition*. American Tract Society, p. 80.

¹⁶² Sichone, B.C. (2020). *Islam and the Trinity* 6/1. Kērussōmen, pp. 120-122.

¹⁶³ Langford, J.S.D. (1983). *Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims*. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects 643, pp. 32-37.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 116.

When God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?’ he will say, ‘May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say- if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen’.¹⁶⁵

I told them only what You commanded me to: ‘Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things.”¹⁶⁶

And if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.¹⁶⁷

One can discern the great problem with the partial selection of the verses cited. The verses which continue further to Craig’s, Zwemer’s, Sichone’s and Langford’s citation are essential in underscoring the very problem the verses are intended to delineate and appeal directly to Christian digression from the monotheism that Jesus taught and conveyed to his community. The term “god” is the translation of the word ‘*ilāh*’ used in the verse not only implies a creator or “God” in the sense that is conveyed in the English language, but also includes concepts such as intercession, the one beseeched, revered like unto God. Ibn al-Qayyim explained, “The Ilah is he to whom the hearts are inclined to out of; love, reverence, penitence, honour, glorification, fear, hope and trust.”¹⁶⁸ Similarly, his contemporary Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali said, “Ilah is the One Who is obeyed and not disobeyed out of; His majesty, reverence, love, fear, hope, trust, asking from Him and directing prayers to Him.”¹⁶⁹ Craig’s leap in stating that the Trinity is God, Jesus and Mary in the aforementioned verse does not consider the concept of God through the Qur’ānic framework. These verses here explain the way ‘*ilāh*’ (God) is used in the Qur’ān: “Have you seen the one who takes as his god (*ilāh*) his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him?”¹⁷⁰

Eleventh-century Qur’ān exegete al-Baghawī explains that this means that one can take his own whim as an idol, and he worships what his soul desires.¹⁷¹ The Prophet’s

¹⁶⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 116.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 117.

¹⁶⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

¹⁶⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya. (2010). *Igāthat al-lahfān min maṣāyid al-shayṭān* vol. 1. Dār ‘Ālam al-Fawā’id, p. 27.

¹⁶⁹ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī. (1977). *Kalimat’ul-Ikblās wa taḥqīq ma’nahā*. Al-Maktab al-Islami, p. 23.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 25, verse 43.

¹⁷¹ Al-Baghawī. (1970). *Tafsīr Al-Baghawī: Ma’ālim al-Tanzīll*, vol. 6. Dār al-Ṭayyibah, p. 245.

companion Ibn Abbas said: “Desires is a ‘god’ (*ilāh*) that is worshiped besides God.”¹⁷² Twentieth-century Qur’ān scholar Al-Sa’dī also commented on this verse, “Is there anything more misguided than he who makes his desires his god?”¹⁷³ Qur’ān commentator Al-Baghawī explains that it concerns a polytheist who worshipped stones, gold and silver and if they then saw a stone or something better than it, they discarded the first and took the other and worshipped it. Ibn Abbas said: “What do you think of the one who abandons the worship of God and his Creator, then falls into a stone and worships it?”¹⁷⁴ The explanations all point to the way people can take entities as ‘god’ based, not on proof and reason, but on their desires, relevant to the social and cultural traditions of the day or simply on whim. Ibn Abbas said that it refers to a disbeliever who took his religion “without guidance from God nor proofs.”¹⁷⁵ Other similar verses read:

Have you seen him who takes his own lust (vain desires) as his *ilāh* (god), and Allāh knowing (him as such), left him astray, and sealed his hearing and his heart, and put a cover on his sight. Who then will guide him after Allāh? Will you not then remember?¹⁷⁶

They have taken other gods, instead of Allāh, seeking strength ‘and protection’ through them.¹⁷⁷

Still they have taken other gods besides Allāh, hoping to be helped ‘by them’¹⁷⁸

And We did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves. And they were not availed at all by their gods which they invoked other than Allāh when there came the command of your Lord. And they did not increase them in other than ruin.¹⁷⁹

And do not invoke with Allāh another deity. There is no deity except Him.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷² Al-Qurṭubī. (2001). *Mukhtaṣar Tafṣīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 3. Dār Al-Kotob Al-ilmīyah, p. 286.

¹⁷³ Al-Sa’dī. (2018). *Tafṣīr al-Sa’dī (Tafṣīr al-karīm al-manān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur’ān)* vol. 7. International Islamic Publishing House, p. 35.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Baghawī. (1970). *Tafṣīr Al-Baghawī: Ma’alim al-Tanzīl*, vol. 6. Dār al-Ṭayyibah, p. 85.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafṣīr al-Ṭabarī (Jamī‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān)* vol. 25. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 155

¹⁷⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 45, verse 23.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 81.

¹⁷⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 36, verse 74.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 101.

¹⁸⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 28, verse 88.

These verses show that the Arabs used to address their prayers to those whom they regarded as their deities, invoking them in times of distress and grief and for the fulfilment of their needs, believing they were able to aid them in their troubles. These deities included jinn (spirits), angels, as well as dead humans. Returning to the aforementioned point about Craig's partial selection of verses, the uncited verses in fact underscore the very root of the deviation – the idea that from the sin of Adam and mankind's separation from God it was Jesus who was sent to pay the price for that sin and redeem mankind for their sins – since it is Jesus declaring unto God that it is only God who can punish and forgive. In the Qur'ānic narrative, God showed His forgiveness to Adam in the beginning. Christians hold that there is no salvation without the deity of Christ¹⁸¹ though it is Christ who affirms that God alone can secure someone's salvation - "if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise."¹⁸² The verse negates the very thing Christians came to believe about him – that salvation is only through him.

Furthermore, the central point of Craig's assertion – that the verses cited above are verses that denote the Trinity (which the Qur'ān further denounces elsewhere) – is incorrect, though Qur'ānic commentators al-Zamakhsharī¹⁸³ and al-Bayḍāwī on 4:169 did view the verse as suggesting a tri-theism of God, Jesus and Mary, this view is generally unrepresentative in the tradition. In fact, a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is nevertheless still suggested by al-Zamakhsharī: "The story received among Christians is that God is one in essence and three persons, (*akanim*) the person of the Father, the person of the Son and the person of the Holy Spirit. And they verily mean by the person of the Father, the Being, and by the person of the Son, knowledge, and by the person of the Holy Spirit, life. And this supposes that God is the third of three, or, if not, that there are three gods."¹⁸⁴ Geoffrey Parrinder denies that there is a Qur'ānic inference that Mary is part of the Trinity in this verse, commenting that "Christian commentators have often seen in the verse an indication that the Trinity was conceived as Father, Mother, and Son, a divine family. But the Quranic verse need not mean that: it is a simple rebuttal of a practice that is repugnant to any monotheist."¹⁸⁵ William Montgomery Watt also asserts that the criticism of the Christian Trinity contained in the verse is predominantly directed toward a Christian

¹⁸¹ Swinburne, R. (1988). The Christian Scheme of Salvation. In Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*. Univ. Of Notre Dame Press, pp. 13-30.

¹⁸² Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

¹⁸³ Al-Zamakhsharī. (2006). *Al-Kashāf*, vol. 1. Dar al-Fikr, p. 585.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī. (2006). *Al-Kashāf*, vol. 1. Dar al-Fikr, p. 585.

¹⁸⁵ Parrinder, G. (1977). *Jesus in the Qur'ān*. Oxford University Press, pp. 134-135.

heresy, rather than the Trinity. All the main forms of Christianity would deny worshipping three Gods, though popular practice may come near to doing this. Christians worship God, who is one, and yet also in some sense three”.¹⁸⁶

The Qur’ān elsewhere, wherein the Trinity is mentioned, does not draw on such a point either, nor makes mention of Mary, except in reference to being Jesus’ mother:

O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allāh save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allāh, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allāh and His messengers, and say not ‘Three’. Cease! (it is) better for you! Allāh is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allāh is sufficient as Defender.¹⁸⁷

Those who say, ‘Allāh is one in a Trinity,’ have certainly fallen into disbelief. There is only One God. If they do not stop saying this, those who disbelieve among them will be afflicted with a painful punishment.¹⁸⁸

These verses, for example, make the following assertions. 1. That the Christians have exaggerated their claims about Christ 2. That Jesus was a messenger of God born of a woman 3. That there is a saying of ‘three’ (Trinity) that infringes upon the Oneness of God which God warns Christians about 4. God is independent- the ascription on sonship here is remarkably set in the context of Lordship and dominion – “everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him”. Thus, God does not have anyone who shares in His power. The verse uses the phrase *سُبْحَانَهُ* (utterly remote is He, in His glory) - from having a son): “Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allāh is sufficient as Defender.”¹⁸⁹ The thirteenth-century Cordoban jurist al-Qurṭubī, explicates the above verse by commenting: “They [Christians] say: ‘The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one deity and they don’t say that there are three gods – which is the real meaning of their doctrine –but necessary for them to say there is only one God.’”¹⁹⁰ He also writes concerning chapter 4, verse 171: “The Christians

¹⁸⁶ Watt, W.M. (1967). *Companion to the Qur’ān* London. George Allen & Unwin, pp. 74-75.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 171.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 73.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 171.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Qurṭubī. (2001). *Mukhtaṣar Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 2. Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiyah, p. 62.

and their sects are unanimously agreed on the Trinity and say: God is one essence and has three persons; they make each hypostasis a god.”¹⁹¹ The verse underscores the inherent problem with *shirk* (polytheism), that all of man’s ability, strength, love, hope, admiration instead of being directed to the provider of these remarkable human faculties and abilities is instead directed to someone or something else. And so, God reminds us that He alone is “sufficient as Defender.” He mentions here again, specifically in reference to Christian belief:

Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ have defied God. The Messiah himself said, ‘Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden, and Hell will be his home. No one will help such evildoers.¹⁹²

Divergent beliefs amongst early Christians

Christians assert that the father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God but the three are distinct entities, three persons, which sounds like there are three gods, even though Christians assert there is only one God. Christians have long debated these issues and many have questioned whether what they are actually proposing is tritheism, in their quest to correctly configure the place of the three entities. There is much mystery about this concept of God and such a mystery is well acknowledged by Christians;¹⁹³ would God be the three entities all-together, is each indivisibly God or one-third God? Does the name ‘God’ refer to each of the entities or only to the Father, and are the other two same in status as the Father? New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman draws on the great divergence of opinion in the early centuries of Christian history in relation to major matters of theology, “the diverse manifestations of its first three hundred years - whether in terms of social structures, religious practices, or ideologies - have never been replicated. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the realm of theology.”¹⁹⁴ The Qur’ān calls mankind to a clear truth by showing deviations from the original and natural monotheistic tradition, from rejection of God’s

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p. 591.

¹⁹² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 72.

¹⁹³ Gresham, J.L. (1993). The social model of the Trinity and its critics. *Scottish journal of theology* 46, no. 3, pp. 325-343; Lim, P.C.H. (2012). *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England*. Oxford University Press; 1st edition; Hill, W.J. (1982). *The Three-personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation*. Catholic University of America Press.

¹⁹⁴ Ehrman, B.D. (1993). *The Orthodox Corruption Of Scripture: The Effect Of Early Christological Controversies On The Text Of The New Testament*. Oxford University Press, London & New York, p. 3.

Prophets, and hedonistic ways of living counter to the original prophetic message. The multiplicity of divergent beliefs from the early centuries of Christian history, help us to appreciate more the Qur'ānic focus on the main points of discrepancy from the original message. Ehrman elaborates on these divergent beliefs further:

Christianity in the second and third centuries was in a remarkable state of flux. To be sure, at no point in its history has the religion constituted a monolith. But the diverse manifestations of its first three hundred years - whether in terms of social structures, religious practices, or ideologies - have never been replicated. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the realm of theology. In the second and third centuries there were, of course, Christians who believed in only one God; others, however, claimed that there were two Gods; yet others subscribed to 30, or 365, or more. Some Christians accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as a revelation of the one true God, the sacred possession of all believers; others claimed that the scriptures had been inspired by an evil deity. Some Christians believed that God had created the world and was soon going to redeem it; others said that God neither had created the world nor had ever had any dealings with it. Some Christians believed that Christ was somehow both a man and God; others said that he was a man, but not God; others claimed that he was God but not a man; others insisted that he was a man who had been temporarily inhabited by God. Some Christians believed that Christ's death had brought about the salvation of the world; others claimed that his death had no bearing on salvation; yet others alleged that he had never even died.¹⁹⁵

It is also important to note that the Qur'ānic narrative is not contingent on answering every religious claimant's specific theological tangent. The Qur'ān criticises Paganism with reference to Arab Idolatry, but Muslim scholars understood this Qur'ānic critique to refer to all forms of Paganism. Thus, the Quran's critique of other religions was understood to be a general critique, rather than limited to a specific theological faction or sub-group among a wider paganistic religious matrix. Furthermore, such theological tangents are not agreed upon by all denominations, and are also subject to modifications. Christianity, as shown by Ehrman, has enough of these tangents and these exist till the present day. What the Qur'ān draws on are the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

deviations in previous traditions and how such deviations compromised correct faith and practice.

In relation to our specific discussion Islam of course emerges after Judaism and Christianity, though ‘Islam’ (submission to the will of God) is the universal truth carried by all of God’s prophets and messengers, and came to clarify the incorrect positions preceding nations came to adopt over time:

Say, ‘People of the Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you- they led many others astray and themselves continue to stray from the even path’.¹⁹⁶

In reference to Christianity, the nature of Jesus was one of dispute and disagreement in the early centuries of Christian history and these disputes continue today. Biblical scholars Buzzard and Hunting explain, “The tortuous details of the dispute over the identity of Christ can be examined in any standard textbook of church history. The battle raged over the nature of the Messiah. How could his humanity be reconciled with the now deeply entrenched notion that he was also God? And how, since the Jesus of the Gospels was clearly a different person from his Father, could a charge of resolved polytheism be avoided? The debate, although dogmatically by church councils, has never been laid to rest. Both layman and scholar across the Christian world have continued to be troubled by the apparently contradictory terms of these conciliar decisions, not to mention the jumble of words confusing involved in the discussion. How can two individuals separate (as they obviously are throughout the New Testament records), Father and Son, both fully Deity, constitute in only one Deity? It has reality normally been safer to accept that it just is so.”¹⁹⁷ The Qur’ān, in chapter 5, verse 116,¹⁹⁸ does stress on the deifying of Mary amongst Christians, and though this verse does not speak of the Trinity, it stresses a far greater point. It emphasises a palpable deviation in belief that existed at the time of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, that was in existence before him, and survives until today. A sizeable proportion of Christians today do indeed take Mary as an object of prayer, reliance and over-veneration. The Protestant and Lutheran Reformation against the Catholic Church included their polemical claim that the Catholic Church engaged in Mariolatry, the deification of Mary. Oberman notes that “For the Reformers,

¹⁹⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 77.

¹⁹⁷ Buzzard, A.F. & Hunting, C.F. (1998). *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*. Oxford, International Scholars Publications, p. 300.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 116.

Mariology could not possibly be a side issue since it touched so directly on their common main theme, the redemption by God in Jesus Christ.”¹⁹⁹

Where the Qur’ān challenges Christians for their over-veneration of Mary as an affront to the glory and majesty of God alone who deserves worship, Reformers were concerned about what such over-adulation took away from the veneration and faith due to Christ. According to Magos, “Some were very much eager to attribute to her a new title while still others diminish her status. But the surprising thing is that within the context of this eagerness, some would readily cross the dividing line between what is properly human to that of divine. In some sense, it appears that it already compromises the identity and function of her Son. It is in this sense that some Protestant reformers would rant their tirade against the Catholic Church for being unscriptural and for putting Mary at par with her Son.”²⁰⁰ The Qur’ān in turn charges both groups of Christians for taking Mary and Christ as rivals with God. Roman Catholic scholar Elizabeth Johnson provides a summary of the Reformers’ concern about the mediatorial role Mary had assumed during the Middle Ages. She writes: “The first generation of Protestant Reformers, all originally Catholic and thus nourished in a spiritual environment that stressed the cult of Mary, did not abandon Marian devotion completely. They did interpret its excesses critically as deviations from the central gospel message that human beings are saved by Jesus Christ through faith alone. Martin Luther said in later years that he had been taught the prevalent view that Christ was an angry judge and Mary the throne of grace through which redemption was mediated. When confronted with his own anxiety over salvation, Luther had rediscovered Christ as the merciful and sole mediator of salvation...Among Luther, Calvin, and the other reformers, Mary’s role as the Virgin Mother of Jesus continued to be honored, whereas reliance on her mediation and the practice of invoking her help were banned as taking honor away from Christ, who alone mediates salvation.”²⁰¹

Christian liturgy is rife with prayer and beseeching unto Mary in a way that one would expect to be solely afforded to God. The Catechism in fact devotes seventy-four pages to prayer and speaks of the Church’s prayer to the “holy Mother of God.”,

¹⁹⁹ Oberman, H.A. (1911). *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*. Fortress Press, p. 20.

²⁰⁰ Magos, M.J.H. ‘Mary Among the Churches: Revisiting the Ecumenical Potential of Vatican II’s Mariology’, p. 5.

²⁰¹ Johnson, E.A. (1988). Marian Devotion in the Western Church. In *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt. *The Crossroad Publishing Company*, pp. 410, 411.

entrusting the supplications and praises of the devotees to Mary.²⁰² Praying the rosary are also an essential part of Catholic devotion. On the large beads is said the Lord's Prayer four times, but the fifty small beads are for prayers to the Virgin Mary. Mary is thus central to the rosary and the focus of prayer throughout life.²⁰³

The Qur'ān therefore addresses in chapter 5, verse 115 a concrete deviation which is held central to the sacred symbols of Christianity. The verse is both pertinent and accurate. John William Draper writes about these contrasting beliefs, when he explains how:

In the east, in consequence of the policy of the court of Constantinople, the Church had been torn in pieces by contentions and schisms. Among a countless host of disputants may be mentioned Arians, Basilidians, Carpocritains, Collydrians, Eutychians, Gnostics, Jacobites, Marcionites, Marionites, Nestorians, Sabellians, Vallentians. Of these the: Collydrians worshipped the Virgin as a divinity, offering her sacrifices of cakes...²⁰⁴

The emerging cult of Mary is explained by Erich Fromm:

In the Nestorian controversy a decision against Nestorius was reached in 431 that Mary was not only the mother of Christ but also the mother of God, and at the end of the fourth century there arose a cult of Mary, and men addressed prayers to her. About the same time the representation of Mary in the plastic arts also began to play a great and ever-increasing role. The succeeding centuries attached more and more significance to the mother of God, and her worship became more exuberant and more general. Altars were erected to her, and her pictures were shown everywhere.²⁰⁵

What the Qur'ān challenges the Christians with is the putting up of personages and symbols that come to designate a rival with God who Himself alone is deserving of all worship, prayer and veneration. The Qur'ān explains this in several verses:

²⁰² Catechism, 642–643 (2675); Gulley, N.R. (2003). A Biblical Evaluation of Islamic and Catholic Soteriology, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 14/2 (Fall 2003): 150–167.

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 159.

²⁰⁴ Draper, J.W. (1875). *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*. D. Appleton and company, pp. 78-79.

²⁰⁵ Fromm, E. (2015). *The Dogma of Christ: And Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*. Routledge, pp. 62-63. For more information see: Karim, K.K. Trinity: Mary Worshipped As A God? Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://discover-the-truth.com/2013/08/15/Trinity-mary-worshipped-as-a-god/>

Say, 'O Prophet,' 'O People of the Book! Let us come to common terms: that we will worship none but Allāh, associate none with Him, nor take one another as lords instead of Allāh.' But if they turn away, then say, 'Bear witness that we have submitted ' to Allāh alone ' .'²⁰⁶

He would never command you to take angels and prophets as lords. How could he command you to be disbelievers after you had devoted yourselves to God?²⁰⁷

They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners!²⁰⁸

Al-Ṭabarī explains here that worship should only be for the One that creation was commanded to worship, and that "all servants were obligated to obey Him alone."²⁰⁹ In regards to the setting up of false deities, 'ilāhs', as found in the initial verse which Craig brought forward to suggest an incorrect understanding of the Trinity ("When God says, 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, "Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God"?'...²¹⁰) Abū-Alā Maududī commented that "their belief consisted essentially of the concept that they enjoyed some share in the divinity of the Supreme God, that their word carried some weight with Him, and that their intercession could result in some gains or ward off some harm or loss. It was on these grounds that they regarded them as *ilāhs* (deities) besides Allāh and, considering their precept and practice, we may say that it was the belief about someone to have power to intercede with God, the act of addressing of prayers to him for help, the performing of certain devotions indicative of respect and reverence and adoration, and the making of offerings, that constituted in their terminology, the treating of Him as *ilāh* (a deity). And God said: 'Do not make two *ilāhs* (deities); there is but one *ilāh* (deity); So, fear Me alone.' (Quran 16:51)."²¹¹

In the Qur'ān, from its very beginning, in its opening chapter *Al-Fātiḥa* (The Opening) calls on the faithful to pray:

²⁰⁶ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 64.

²⁰⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 80.

²⁰⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 9, verse 31.

²⁰⁹ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān)* vol. 1. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 121.

²¹⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 116-118.

²¹¹ Syed Abū-Ala Maududi. *Four Basic Quranic Terms (Quran ki Char Bunyadi Istalahein)*, p. 20. Retrieved January 12, 2022 from https://islamicstudies.info/quran/four_basic_quranic_terms.htm

It is You alone we worship and You alone we ask for help.²¹²

In Islam, this prayer is repeated in every unit of prayer throughout the entire day emphasising that all hope, veneration, love and beseeching is directed to God alone who alone responds to those who call on Him. Ibn Abbas commented: “Worship is for you alone, and your aid is sought in obedience to you, and in all of life’s affairs.”²¹³ Meaning, I only intend you O God with awe, submission, sincerity and humility. The phrase: “and You alone we ask for help.” does not mention any specific purpose for which help is being sought but generalises the request to cover everything from all acts of worship to all possible worldly or concerns. Supplicating in fact is precisely what worship is, as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ here explained: “Supplication is the essence of worship.”²¹⁴ In reference to The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-15 and Luke 11:1-13 in which Jesus calls on God for forgiveness (“Forgive us our sins, just as we also have forgiven those who sin against us”²¹⁵), nineteenth-century German theologian Ernst von Dobschütz makes an interesting point about Jesus’ prayer to God:

To us it seems fitting that thanksgiving should be included in every prayer (compare 1 Thess. 5 18, Col. 3 17, Eph. 5 B0, 2 Cor. 1 11, etc.), but for Jesus to pray means to ask for something (compare Matt. 7 7-11). Many a theory about prayer will have to be revised, if we take Jesus as our example in praying and adopt the prayer he taught his disciples as a model.²¹⁶

In the Qur’an, God asks:

Who is it that answers the distressed when they call upon Him? Who removes their suffering? Who makes you successors in the earth? Is it another god beside God? Little notice you take!²¹⁷

And when My servants ask you concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So

²¹² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 1, verse 5.

²¹³ Ibn Kathīr. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*. Dar al-Ma’rifa, p. 25.

²¹⁴ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3371

²¹⁵ Matthew 6:9-15

²¹⁶ Dobschütz, E.V (1914). The Lord’s Prayer. In *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 7, No. 3 (Jul., 1914), p. 318.

²¹⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 27, verse 62.

let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided.²¹⁸

Christians therefore disagree on the role of Mary in the history of salvation. She has been a subject of various controversies throughout Christian history, embellished with a number of honorific titles: New Eve, Untier of knots, Mediatrix. Discussions and debates about her ‘mediatrix’ position was no small thing. Mark Miravalle, professor of theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, specialising in Mariology, and president of Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrix for the Catholic Church, led a movement to help define the dogma of the Virgin Mary as Co-Redeemer. The 25 August 1997 Newsweek magazine article about Miravalle’s initiative reads:

This week a large box shipped from California and addressed to “His Holiness, John Paul II” will arrive at the Vatican. The shipping label lists a dozen countries – from every continent but Antarctica – plus a number, 40,383, indicating the quantity of signatures inside. Each signature is attached to a petition asking the pope to exercise the power of papal infallibility to proclaim a new dogma of the Roman Catholic faith: that the Virgin Mary is “Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix of All Graces and Advocate for the People of God.” Such a move would elevate Mary’s status dramatically beyond what most Christians profess. But in the last four years, the pope has received 4,340,429 signatures from 157 countries – an average of 100,000 a month – supporting the proposed dogma. Among the notable supporters are Mother Teresa of Calcutta, nearly 500 bishops and 42 cardinals, including John O’Connor of New York, Joseph Glemp of Poland and half a dozen cardinals at the Vatican itself. Nothing like this organized petition drive has ever been seen in Rome. But then, it isn’t often that Catholics beg a pope to make an infallible pronouncement.²¹⁹

Though Mary (Maryam) receives much veneration in Islam as a righteous woman, the fulfilment of her mother’s aspiration, being selected and honoured for her piety, and chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Qur’ānic narrative in relation to her and all of God’s righteous servants is fundamentally tied to the glory deserving of God:

²¹⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verse 186.

²¹⁹ Woodward, K.L & Murr (1997). “Hail, Mary”. *Newsweek*, vol. 130, Issue 8, 25 August 1997, pp. 48-56.

And ‘remember’ when the angels said, ‘O Mary! Surely Allāh has selected you, purified you, and chosen you over all women of the world.’²²⁰

O Mary! Be devout to your Lord, prostrate yourself ‘in prayer’ and bow along with those who bow down.²²¹

Maryam is the only woman with a Qur’ānic chapter named after her. The message to which she was to become a central part of, forever in blessed memory, is a God-centred one. Even when Mary is met with the angel announcing the good news of the birth of Christ, her initial astonishment is an apt reminder of the place of God and His Ever-Nearness to her: “She appealed, “I truly seek refuge in the Most Compassionate from you! ‘So leave me alone’ if you are God-fearing.”²²²

The conundrum for Christians is that the honour and reverence that Catholics afford her was regarded as idolatrous by Protestants and the sanctity given to her was regarded as only properly belonging to Jesus by Protestants: “While one exalts her as someone ‘above’ and ‘over’ the Church, the other diminishes her and places her as a ‘member’ of the Church.”²²³ In the Qur’ānic verses therefore, the dialogue between God and Christ is perfectly true of what transpired in Christianity after Jesus (as he himself explains to God – “I never told them anything except what You ordered me to say: “Worship Allāh—my Lord and your Lord!” And I was witness over them as long as I remained among them. But when You took me, You were the Witness over them—and You are a Witness over all things.”²²⁴), in that both Jesus and Mary not only became deified, but that each side reproached the other for their over emphasis or under emphasis on one or the other. The Qur’ān charges both sides for taking both Jesus and Mary as deities beside the One True God. Where each one blames the other for not affording the fullest rights of atonement-bearing to either one, in Islam it is God alone who “forgives sin, relieves care, removes woes, makes the broken whole. He enriches the indignant, teaches the ignorant and guides the one who is astray. He directs the confused, aids the desperate and frees the captive. He feeds the hungry, clothes the naked and heals the sick. He pardons the one who has been tried, accepts repentance from the one who repents and rewards the one who does good.”²²⁵

²²⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 42.

²²¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 42.

²²² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 18.

²²³ Magos, M.J.H. ‘Mary Among the Churches: Revisiting the Ecumenical Potential of Vatican II’s Mariology’, p. 1

²²⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 117.

²²⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. (2000). *The Invocation of God: Al-Wābil al-Şayyib min al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib*, trans. Michael AbdurRahman Fitzgerald and Moulay Youssef Slitine. The Islamic Texts Society, pp. 78-79.

The precision in the Qur’ānic account of the questioning of Christ by Allāh is stunning in its revelatory significance. The controversies which emerged after Christ, reflected in his saying: “I never told them anything except what You ordered me to say: “Worship Allāh—my Lord and your Lord!” And I was witness over them as long as I remained among them. But when You took me, You were the Witness over them—and You are a Witness over all things”²²⁶ speaks of the variance between Christ’s clear message of God’s Oneness, His aseity and greatness, and what emerged in time after him. To re-emphasise, it is both Christ and Mary who are the objects of deification in chapter 5, verse 117, and interestingly perhaps many Christians have not properly considered the implications of both being mentioned since each denomination is looking at the other as a deviated group. The Protestants can look at Catholics for idolising Mary and the Catholics can look at the Protestants for limiting redemption to Jesus alone. Professor of theology Lucian Turcescu draws on the differences in attitudes to Mariology. The Qur’ānic verse points to the deification of Mary and Jesus and some Christian denominations may have struggled to see how things look for the other. Turcescu writes: “Most of the Orthodox bibliography I consulted simply ignores the issue of Mary Co-Redeemer and Mediator in the Orthodox tradition or does not want to recognize that it creates difficulties for the Protestants.¹⁰ It is obvious to me that we, the Orthodox, become embarrassed if pressed to explain the above-mentioned expressions about Mary, because we probably have not given them enough thought or do not want to recognize them as difficult even if only at a linguistic level. We would prefer to be left alone or to say, “It’s not us, it’s the Catholics who say that Mary is Co-Redeemer.”²²⁷

The Qur’ānic verses therefore from Chapter 5:116-118 used by Christian missionaries, though never fully cited by them in the examples cited to critique the Qur’ān, is instead a strong proof against their detractions, pushing back against a deifying of Jesus and of his mother, Mary.

The ‘invisible’ Holy Spirit

As shown, the cult of Mary worship was once a strand of Christianity and ironically probably held and holds more sway than the worship of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. Subsequent to the Council of Nicaea in 325 it was in the First Council of Constantinople in 381 that the Holy Spirit was included as a part of the

²²⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 117.

²²⁷ Turcescu, L. (2010), *Devotion Versus Theology?: Some Mariological Issues of Interest to Patristicians and Ecumenists. Patristique Et Oecuménisme*, p. 152.

Trinity. Prayers it seems are made to each member of the trinity and including to Mary, though the Holy Spirit has received less attention. This Holy Spirit conundrum is answered well by Craig himself who too expresses amazement at the ‘absence’ of the Holy Spirit in Christian discourses:

The Holy Spirit has rightly been called the forgotten person of the Trinity. When you look at the early post-apostolic fathers it seems that they were virtually binitarians rather than trinitarians. They believed in God the Father and his Word or Logos who proceeded from the Father. But there was almost nothing said about the person of the Holy Spirit. The trinitarian and Christological controversies that dominated the early church for centuries precluded any in-depth discussion of the person of the Holy Spirit. So, for example, in the Apostles’ Creed, all you find with regard to the Holy Spirit is the statement, “I believe in the Holy Spirit” which begs the question – what do you believe about the Holy Spirit? In the Nicene Creed it is even briefer. After saying I believe in the Father and the Son and those persons are explained it says, ‘and in the Holy Spirit.’ He is sort of thrown in there at the end for good measure.

Even today I find that the Holy Spirit seems to be neglected by many Christians. For example, in my own seminary education one of the courses that we took as part of our core curriculum in the Master of Divinity program was a systematic theology course entitled, “God, Man, and Christ.” When you think about it, that is very odd. Is that a new sort of unholy Trinity of God, man, and Christ? What happened to the Holy Spirit? He was sort of left out I’m afraid.²²⁸

Others, such as nineteenth century English theologian John Henry Newman, was also clear about the relegated position of the Holy Spirit, commenting: “Thus, for instance, a person who denies the Apostolical Succession of the Ministry, because it is not clearly taught in scripture ought, I conceive, if consistent, to deny the divinity of the Holy Ghost, which is nowhere literally stated in scripture.”²²⁹ And in the context of the current discussion concerning the soteriological framework of Christianity,

²²⁸ Craig, W.L. Doctrine of the Holy Spirit (part 1): Third Person of the Trinity. Retrieved January 12, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-the-holy-spirit/doctrine-of-the-holy-spirit-part-1>

²²⁹ Newman, J.H. (1899). *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects*. Longmans, Green, and Co, p. 114.

Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson notably points out: “In particular, the Spirit has received short shrift in our understanding of salvation.”²³⁰

The argument of Christian apologists was founded on an idea that the Qur’ān has an incorrect conception of what the Trinity is and consequently, the implication is that the God of Islam cannot be maximally omniscient, and thus cannot be God at all. It has been shown that their false assumption is informed by a partial reading of certain Qur’ānic verses that draw on the topic. Even in so far as the verses they partially quote, the Qur’ān elsewhere, wherein Trinity is mentioned, does not draw on a God-Jesus-Mary paradigm, and nor do they make mention of Mary, except in reference to being Jesus’ mother. It was on the premise that the verse in which the deification of Mary was shown must be a misunderstood reference to the Trinity that Craig and others hinge their argument. The premise was shown to be unsubstantiated and incorrect on the grounds that the verse²³¹ does not mention a Trinity as another verse clearly does yet in a different chapter.²³² The verse the apologists do cite however, is revealing of a major theological deviation which existed in early Christian history and even today. Epiphanius, Bishop of Constantia, in Cyprus, writing in the fourth century against the Collyridians, says:

After this a heresy appeared, which we have already mentioned slightly by means of the letter written in Arabia about Mary. And this heresy was again made public in Arabia from Thrace and the upper parts of Scythia, and was brought to our ears, which to men of understanding will be found ridiculous and laughable. We will begin to trace it out, and to relate concerning it. It will be judged (to partake of) silliness rather than of sense, as is the case with other like it. For, as formerly, out of insolence towards Mary, those whose opinions were such sowed hurtful ideas in the reflexions of men, so otherwise these, leaning to the other side, fall into the utmost harm..... For the harm is equal in both these heresies, the one belittling the holy Virgin, the other again glorifying her over-much. For who should it be that teach thus but women? for the race of women is slippery, fallible, and humble-minded..... For some women deck out a kourkon that is to say, a square stool, spreading upon it a linen cloth, on some solemn day of the year, for some days they lay out bread, and offer it in the name of Mary. All the women partake of the bread, as we related

²³⁰ Johnson, E. (1994). *Jesus and Salvation*, CTSA Proceedings 49, p. 10.

²³¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 116.

²³² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 171.

in the letter to Arabia, writing partly about that..... Yea, verily, the body of Mary was holy, but was surely not God. Verily, the Virgin was a virgin, and was honoured, but was not given to us to worship; but she worships Him who was born from her according to the flesh, having come from heaven out of the Father's bosom..... This offering and eating of cakes was probably derived from the worship of Artemis.²³³

Such disputations concerning Mary exist till today between Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches, facing blame from each other for saying too much or too less about her, and about whether she has a redeeming role alongside her son or not.

The point is furthered through a consideration of the Islamic concept of worship – which includes prayer to entities other than God. In fact, perhaps for many people God is mostly entreated for the removal of difficulties in life. That someone else other than God, in this case Mary, is devotedly called upon by a sizeable population of Christians in the world underscores the correctness of the Qur'ānic narrative. Thirdly, the verse cited underscores a more subtle point about the far less important role of the Holy Spirit as a deified entity. By noting a deified Jesus and a deified Mary, the God of the Qur'ān is shown to be maximally omniscient, that the verses of the Qur'ān are encompassing and most accurate in demarcating the theological errors of Christians. According to Richard Swinburne “even if you regard the New Testament as an infallible source of doctrine, you cannot derive from it a doctrine of the Trinity” since when it comes to passages about the Holy Spirit, “...there are non-Trinitarian ways of interpreting...[these] which are just as plausible as interpreting them as expressing the doctrine that the Holy Spirit is a divine person...So unless Christians today recognize some good a priori argument for a doctrine of the Trinity (and most of them do not recognize such an argument), or unless they consider that the fact that the subsequent Church taught a doctrine of the Trinity is a significant reason for interpreting the relevant passages in a Trinitarian way, it seems to me that most Christians today (that is, those not acquainted with any a priori argument for its truth) would not be justified in believing the doctrine.”²³⁴

Quite ironically, Craig suggests that the doctrine of the Trinity is not crucial to the Christian soteriological paradigm: “I don't think it's necessarily essential to salvation however, for example I think that Abraham and Moses will be in heaven, they were saved, but they didn't believe in the doctrine of the Trinity, they never heard of it...So

²³³ Wright C.H.H. & Neil C. (Eds.) (1904). *A Protestant Dictionary*. Hodder & Stoughton, p. 390.

²³⁴ Swinburne, R. (2018). The Social Theory of the Trinity. *Religious Studies* 54 (Special Issue 3), pp. 419–420.

I don't think that belief in the Trinity is essential to salvation."²³⁵ The Qur'ān explains the error of associating anyone with God in worship, and in the context of the false belief in a Trinity and of declaring Jesus to be divine the Qur'ān here declares:

Say, 'O People of the Scripture, do not exceed limits in your religion beyond the truth and do not follow the inclinations of a people who had gone astray before and misled many and have strayed from the soundness of the way'.²³⁶

Consider still the following verses from the Qur'ān that warn of the associating of any partner with God, both physical and metaphysical; Jesus and a spirit:

They have also established a 'marital' relationship between Him and the jinn. Yet the jinn 'themselves' know well that such people will certainly be brought 'for punishment'.²³⁷

He would never command you to take angels and prophets as lords. How could he command you to be disbelievers after you had devoted yourselves to God?²³⁸

In conclusion, the premise of the Christian contention is that the Qur'ān presents a mistaken concept of the Christian Trinity of God by asserting that it identifies Mary together with Jesus along with God. The section has shown that apologists who make the claim do not fully cite the verses they want us to consider. The verse they quote is the beginning of a dialogue between God and Jesus. This leads to a misunderstanding of the divine charge against Christians with respect to their theological moving away from monotheism and which is furthered by failing to consider other verses in which Trinity is explicitly mentioned. The section also showed the myriad of divergent beliefs amongst early Christians and in particular the over-adulation and worship of Mary amongst large groups of Christians – figured in light of the Islamic concept of what worship is. These verses draw emphasis on the differing deviations that the Christian world fell into and reflect the comprehensive Qur'ānic outlook. The relegated position of the Holy Spirit was also a case in point and one drawn upon by Craig.

²³⁵ Craig, W.L. [drccraigvideos]. (2020, Feb 7). Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Essential? [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wWvgdHXgqm8>

²³⁶ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 5, verse 77.

²³⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 37, verse 158.

²³⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 80.

What about the consort?

The false argument that Islam views Mary as the wife of God, and Jesus as his offspring, has a long history in Muslim-Christian debates, from Early Islam till more recent times. This comes across in Long's thesis²³⁹ and there are other examples as well. In the article 'Concept of God in Islam and Christianity', Craig writes,

But Mohammed evidently thought that Christians believed in a Trinity composed of God the Father, Mary, and their offspring Jesus. It's no wonder that he regarded such a ridiculous doctrine as blasphemous! Mohammed's misunderstanding of the Trinity is evident in passages such as the following found in the Qur'ān:

"God will say: 'Jesus Son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?' 'Glory be to you,' he will answer, 'I could never have claimed what I have no right to.'" (5.117). "The Creator of the heavens and the earth—how should he have a son, seeing that He has no consort, and He created all things...?" (6.102).

The doctrine that Mohammed rejected, namely, that God the Father should consort with a human female to sire a son and these three should then be worshipped as gods, would be rejected by any Christian.²⁴⁰

Aside from Craig's crude literalism with the verses, the earlier misreading of selectively cited verses in Craig's and other apologists' discussion of the Trinity and the Qur'ān from 5:116-118 resulted in fundamental problems as shown in that section. In this current example too Craig for example does not follow the verse through to allow for the narrative of the verses to explain themselves. He cites:

The Creator of the heavens and the earth—how should he have a son, seeing that He has no consort, and He created all things. .? (6.102).

Firstly, most translators have translated the attribute of God here *badi'* as Originator.²⁴¹ The name comes from the trilateral root *Ba-da-'a* which means to "to

²³⁹ Long, W.L. (1988). Christian responses to Islamic Christology: a critique of surahs three, four, and nineteen of the Qur'ān. Durham theses, Durham University, p. 111.

²⁴⁰ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

²⁴¹ The Quran: Translated to English by Talal Itani (Dallas, Beirut: ClearQuran), p. 49; The Quran: English translation and notes by Saheeh International (Jeddah: Abūl-Qasim Publishing House, 2004), p. 126; Quran-e-Karim: English translation by Justice Mufti Taqi Usmani (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: 2016), p. 218; Translation of the meanings of The Noble Qur'ān by Muḥammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and

bring about something new that did not exist before". This is juxtaposed with *Khāliq* which can allow for creating from pre-existing material. Yusuf Ali's translation reads: "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: How can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things."²⁴²

Secondly, Craig does not consider the very immediate context of the verse he cites, from the uncited preceding verse. The verses are cited in full here:

Yet they associate the jinn with Allāh 'in worship', even though He created them, and they falsely attribute to Him sons and daughters out of ignorance. Glorified and Exalted is He above what they claim!²⁴³

The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How could it be that He should have a child without there ever having been a mate for Him - since it is He who has created everything, and He alone knows everything?²⁴⁴

Such is God, your Sustainer: there is no deity save Him, the Creator of everything: worship, then, Him alone -for it is He who has everything in His care.²⁴⁵

Since God is the Originator of all, the idea that that God would have a "son" or "daughter" in any sense of the word would presuppose that there is an inherent likeness between them as Ibn Kathir points out in relation to this verse, that God is the Originator without a previous example and nothing of his creation resembles Him; Because He is the Creator of everything, so He has neither a wife nor a son: "for the child is the offspring of two compatible spouses. Allāh does not have an equal, none of His creatures are similar to Him, for He alone created the entire creation."²⁴⁶ Christians argue that Jesus, "begotten not made," means that He is not a creature but rather shares in the self-same nature as the Father. Of the same substance as the Father is the general understanding of what "Son" means; the vocabulary of "Son of God", "begotten not made", "firstborn" leave an obvious suggestion of parenthood, of a child. Some trinitarians interpret the three persons of the Trinity not as selves, not as intelligent agents but as modes, personalities or manifestations of the one divine self.

Muḥammad Muhsin Khan (King Fahd complex: 1983), pp. 186-187; Asad, M. (1984). *The Message of the Qur'ān: Translated and explained by Muḥammad Asad*. Dar al-Andalus, p. 187.

²⁴² Abdullah Yusuf Ali (trans.) (1946). *The Holy Qur'ān: text, translation and commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali* Islamic Propagation Centre International, p. 319.

²⁴³ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 6, verse 100

²⁴⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 6, verse 101.

²⁴⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 6, verse 102.

²⁴⁶ Ibn Kathīr. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. Dar al-Ma'rifa, p. 578.

So the One God lives his life in three ways at once as father, as son and spirit. Other trinitarians think of these three persons as selves, as three intelligent agents who enjoy interpersonal relationships through love and cooperation. The One true God however is unique, “there is nothing like unto Him”²⁴⁷, “nothing that could be compared with Him”²⁴⁸ and “all stand in need of God, whereas He alone is self-sufficient, the One to whom all praise is due.”²⁴⁹ God is not the progenitor who has another part of Him, a ‘progeny’ on earth, son whatever Christians or Arab pagans mean in their ascription of “sons” and “daughters” to God the verse itself, 6:100 stresses upon the absolutely unique and incomparable nature of God - that such an ascription goes against the very concept of what and who God is: “Limitless is He is His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition.”²⁵⁰

Al-Qurṭubī explains this point, “that *badīʿ* means the Originator; so How can he have a son?” he asks. “Everything that is born is similar to its progenitor yet there is nothing similar to God.”²⁵¹ According to al-Saʿdī, “how could Allāh have a son when He is the Almighty God, who has no wife and has no need of anything that He has created, whilst they are all in need of Him in all situations? A son must inevitably be of the same nature as his father, but Allāh is the Creator of all things and nothing that He has created is like Allāh in any way whatsoever.”²⁵² This point is further stressed upon by al-Razi who highlights that the opening attribute of Allāh, *badīʿ*, as a direct repudiation to those who claim that God has a son, stating that originating the heavens and earth only and not all the happening of and what is contained in the heavens and earth is sufficient since everything in the heavens and earth had a pre-cause except the Originator of them all.²⁵³ As al-Ṭabarī explains, “And God is the One who created everything. Nothing of what He created is hidden from Him, and not an atom’s weight in the earth or in the heavens escapes Him. He knows your quantity and your individual deeds, and the deeds of those whom you call as Lord or ascribe as a son for God.”²⁵⁴

The argument in the Qur’ān addresses the premise set out, that Christians and pagans allege that God has sons and daughters. In doing so, they attribute a gender to

²⁴⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 42, verse 11.

²⁴⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 112, verse 4.

²⁴⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 35, verse 15

²⁵⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 100

²⁵¹ Al-Qurṭubī. (2001). *Mukhtasar Tafṣīr al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 2. Dar Al-Kotob Al-ilmiah, p. 151.

²⁵² Al-Saʿdī. (2018). *Tafṣīr as-Saʿdī*, vol. 7-9. International Islamic Publishing House, p. 136.

²⁵³ Al-Razi. (2004). *Tafṣīr al-Kabīr ow mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 13. Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiah, p. 97.

²⁵⁴ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafṣīr al-Ṭabarī (Jamiʿ al-bayan fi taʾwil al-Qur’ān)* vol. 7. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 312.

God, for Christians there is “Son” and “Father” and for pagans there are “daughters”. The absurdity of the proposition is underscored in the same verse²⁵⁵ since Allāh is the Originator of all and He created all beings and is the Knower of all. As Ibn Kathir explains: “Allāh does not have an equal, none of His creatures are similar to Him, for He alone created the entire creation...[Allāh is] Alone without partners, and attest to His Oneness, affirming that there is no deity worthy of worship except Him. Allāh has neither descendents, nor ascendants, wife, equal or rival.”²⁵⁶ Allāh is not attributed with a gender, the name Allāh in fact cannot be rendered into anything else like a ‘goddess’ from God can, or ‘gods’ from God. When God is thought of in human terms then ascribing unto God a son or daughter becomes conceivable and the progeny thereafter becomes a “god” unto others. Furthermore, in the normal rules of created beings a male cannot have a child without a female partner. It is disingenuous for Craig to posit that the Qur’ān should not make such an assertion since Mary herself gave birth without male intervention. This is because God of course cannot be compared to Mary or any of His creation. Mary conceived miraculously, in fact the analogy itself is indicative of the fundamental problem here of comparing created things to the Creator. The same verse again contests any such analogy – “Limitless is He in His glory, and sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition.”²⁵⁷ The falsity of God having a ‘son’, a being of the same-self as the One God, or God having any partner, rival, is emphasised in these verses: “And it is not appropriate for the Most Merciful that He should take a son. There is no one in the heavens and earth but that he comes to the Most Merciful as a servant.”²⁵⁸

There is a further point about Allāh being the Originator of all, and it is one that relates directly to Craig and his theology concerning Jesus, and one that some of his co-religionists use to accuse him of heresy. To begin, some of Craig’s words are cited in full here from an article entitled ‘A Formulation and Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity’ in a sub-section entitled ‘The Begetting of the Son by the Father’. Discussions about the generating of Jesus (Son) from the ‘Father’ and the bearing this has on his similarity to the Father or inferiority to the Father are the points of discussion in his article. He cites the arguments of fourth century theologians Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers, bishop of Poitiers in their answering of Arian oppositions to the Trinity wherein the place of Jesus in relation to the Father is of key concern:

²⁵⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 101

²⁵⁶ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, vol. 3 (London: AlBirr Foundation: 2000), pp. 427-428.

²⁵⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 100.

²⁵⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 93.

Subsequent Church Fathers flatly rejected any suggestion that the Son was in any respect inferior to the Father, insisting that He shares the same substance or essence with the Father. Nevertheless, these same theologians continued to affirm the generation of the Son from the Father. The Son in their view derives his being from the Father. Athanasius quotes approvingly Dionysius's affirmation that "the Son has His being not of Himself but of the Father" (On the Opinion of Dionysius 15). Similarly, Hilary declares that "He is not the source of His own being (...) it is from His [the Father's] abiding nature that the Son draws His existence through birth" (On the Trinity 9.53; 6.14; cf. 4.9). This doctrine of the generation of the Logos from the Father cannot, despite assurances to the contrary, but diminish the status of the Son because He becomes an effect contingent upon the Father. Even if this eternal procession takes place necessarily and apart from the Father's will, the Son is less than the Father because the Father alone exists *a se*, whereas the Son exists through another (*ab alio*).[5]

It is interesting to note that the Church Fathers interpreted the Arian proof-text, "The Father is greater than I" (Jn 14. 28), not in terms of Christ's humanity, but as an expression of his being generated from the Father (Athanasius Four Discourses against the Arians 1.13.58). Hilary admits: "The Father is greater than the Son: for manifestly He is greater Who makes another to be all that He Himself is, Who imparts to the Son by the mystery of the birth the image of His own unbegotten nature, Who begets Him from Himself into His own form" (On the Trinity 9.54). But then is the Son not inferior to the Father? Hilary denies it: "The Father therefore is greater, because He is Father: but the Son, because He is Son, is not less" (9.56). Even Craig admits, "This is to talk logical nonsense. It is like saying that six is greater than four, but four is not less than six."²⁵⁹

We can deduce the following from the excerpt: (1). That theologians affirm the generation of the Son from the Father (2). This means Son and Father share in the very same being (3). For Craig, since the Son is generated from the Father it would mean that he is less than the Father due to him being contingent on the Father. (4). For

²⁵⁹ Craig, W.L. A Formulation and Defense of the Doctrine of the Trinity. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/christian-doctrines/a-formulation-and-defense-of-the-doctrine-of-the-Trinity/>

Craig therefore it is the Father who is *a se* (independent, self-existing, without external cause) and not Jesus (5). It is illogical to maintain that the Father and Son are equal when the Son is generated and thus contingent on the Father. The Qur’ān, in the verse(s) from Chapter 6:100-102 intended by Craig respond directly to him to settle the great confusion amongst Christian theologians about ‘generating’ of one from the other and about what such a theology does to undermine the Supreme authority of the One God who created all and unto whom all are dependent:

(Verse 100): although it is He who has created them all

(Verse 101): the Originator of the heavens and the earth!

(Verse 101): since it is He who has created everything

(Verse 101): and He alone knows everything

(Verse 102): Such is God, your Sustainer

(Verse 102): the Creator of everything

(Verse 102): He who has everything in His care

Though Christians held to the doctrine of eternal generation for nearly 1,700 years, that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, many Protestants now reject the doctrine on philosophical and theological grounds. Others have proposed new ways to interpret and try and reconcile the longstanding illogicality of the Trinity such as professor Mark Makin in his article in which he proposes that the model of eternal generation is a form of essential dependence, “To say that the Son is begotten of the Father is just to say that the Son essentially depends on the Father. The essence of the Son involves the Father, but not vice versa.”²⁶⁰ The Qur’ān contends each of these arguments and their counter-arguments in one full sweep: Allāh is the sole Originator of all and nothing generates from Him. In chapter 2:117 we are told that Allāh is the “Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”²⁶¹

The debates around the Trinity and its true nature are numerous. Some medieval Muslim scholars who produced tracts responding to Christian arguments include Ibn Taymīyya in his *Answering those who altered the religion of Jesus Christ (Al-Jawab al-Ṣaḥīḥ li man baddala deen al-Maseeh)*,²⁶² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hidayat Al-*

²⁶⁰ Makin, M. (2018). God from God: The essential dependence model of eternal generation. *Religious Studies*, 54(3), pp. 377-394.

²⁶¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verse 117

²⁶² Ibn Taymīyya. (n.d). *Answering those who altered the religion of Jesus Christ* (Translation of *Al-Jawab al-Ṣaḥīḥ li man baddala deen al-Maseeh* abridged by Ash-Shahhat Ahmad at-Tahhan). Umm al-Qura.

Hayara fi-l-Radd 'ala-l-Yahud wa-l- Nasara (The Guidance of the Perplexed in Answering the Jews and the Christians)²⁶³, Abū 'Isa al-Warraq's "Against the Trinity"²⁶⁴, Ibn Hazm's *Al-Faṣl fi-Milal wa-l-Aḥwa wa-l-Nihal*²⁶⁵ and others. The tenth-century Andalusian Ibn Hazm in fact wrote one of the most in-depth critiques of the Bible. 'Adnan Al-Maqrāni points to the salient features of Ibn Hazm's critique.²⁶⁶ Ibn Hazm critiqued the Bible from two perspectives: external and internal. By external perspective, Ibn Hazm meant highlighting the socio-historic factors that led to the formation of the Biblical corpus.²⁶⁷ By internal perspective, Ibn Hazm meant highlighting the inconsistencies within the Bible, such as the plenitude of contradictions found therein.²⁶⁸ In Western discourse, it is usually stated that Spinoza started the tradition of Modern Biblical Scholarship, with its emphasis on investigating history and intertextuality. But R. D. Freedman has persuasively shown how Spinoza's critique of the Bible in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was based on Ibn Hazm's prior Biblical criticism. For Freedman, it is Ibn Hazm who deserves to be recognised as the "Father" of Modern Biblical Scholarship.²⁶⁹ Indeed, Freedman stresses that two-thirds of Spinoza's Biblical criticism can be found in Ibn Hazm.²⁷⁰

In conclusion, if the Trinity is accepted as logically coherent by Christians, then they have to agree that a Godhead with Four hypostasis is also coherent. If so, a Godhead with Five hypostasis, etc. ad infinitum. Indeed, it makes more sense for a Godhead to have infinite hypostasis, or persons, than only three; since, God is infinite anyway. Based on this, Christianity cannot rule out, at least logically, that Polytheism restructured into a single Godhead with infinite persons is true. Following this, the difference between Christianity and Paganism is of degree not a difference in kind. Disagreements between modalists who hold that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are the very selfsame person; Modalistic Monarchianism expressed in the views of Sabellius, "Dynamic Monarchianism" of Arius – both of which were deemed heresies,

²⁶³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya. (n.d). *Hidāyat Al-Ḥayara fi-l-Radd 'ala-l-Yahūd wa-l- Naṣāra* ("The Guidance of the Perplexed in Answering the Jews and the Christians") (ed. Sayf al-Din al-Katib). Manshurat Dar Maktabat al-Hayat.

²⁶⁴ Thomas, D. ed. and trans. (1992). *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abū 'Isa al-Warraq's "Against the Trinity."* Cambridge University Press, 1992.

²⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥazm. (1903). *Al-Faṣl fi-Milal wa-l-Aḥwa wa-l-Nihal* 2 vols. al-Maṭba'ah al-adabiyah.

²⁶⁶ 'A. Al-Maqrāni (2008). *Naqd Al-Adyān 'Inda Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusi*. Herdon: International Institute of Islamic Thought.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 144-145.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 151-152.

²⁶⁹ Freedman, R. D. (1989). The Father of Modern Biblical Scholarship. *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 19, pp. 31-38.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 33.

what is considered an ontological model of Trinity in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are God in themselves; an economic model of Trinity in which the Son submits to the Father, the Orthodox belief that the Son emerges from the Father and so and so forth.²⁷¹ Debates around the threeness-oneness problem of the Trinity and its logical problems are well-known. Craig himself has been critiqued by co-religionists²⁷² for arguing against what Christians believe to be an eternal begottenness of the Son, and proposing instead that the idea that Jesus was eternally generated comes to suggest that he is less than the Father. As Craig argues: “This doctrine of the generation of the Logos from the Father cannot, despite assurances to the contrary, but diminish the status of the Son because He becomes an effect contingent upon the Father.”²⁷³ Agnostic and atheistic historians have also pointed out that the debates in Christian theology never end and are always growing into more baffling theological positions.

“There is the recognition on the part of exegetes and biblical theologians, including a constantly growing number of Roman Catholics, that one should not speak of Trinitarianism in the New Testament without serious qualification. There is also the closely parallel recognition on the part of historians of dogma and systematic theologians that when one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the 4th century. It was only then that what might be called the definitive Trinitarian dogma ‘One God in three persons’ became thoroughly assimilated into Christian life and thought...it was the product of three centuries of doctrinal development.”²⁷⁴ The doctrine of the trinity presents a real challenge for Christian missionaries and apologists. Billy Sichone remarks: “Very few Christians seem to understand or are competently able to articulate the doctrine, let alone believe it in the orthodox sense. A survey would probably reveal that many Christians hold defective or unclear views on the Trinity ranging from Sabellianism (Modalism) or Docetism, and in some extreme cases, even pantheism!

²⁷¹ Craig, W.L. (2016). Doctrine of God: Trinity (Part 6): Historical Survey (2) | Modalism. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-god-Trinity/doctrine-of-god-Trinity-part-6/>; see also: Jowers, D.W. The reproach of modalism: a difficulty for Karl Barth’s doctrine of the trinity. *Scottish journal of theology* 56, no. 2 (2003), pp. 231-246;

²⁷² Johnson, K.E. (2012). What Would Augustine Say To Evangelicals Who Reject The Eternal Generation Of The Son?’ *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, Volume: SBJT 16:2 (Summer 2012); see also Sanders, F. & Swain, S.R. eds. (2017). *Retrieving Eternal Generation*. Zondervan.

²⁷³ Craig, W.L. Is God the Son Begotten in His Divine Nature? Retrieved on January 8, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/scholarly-writings/christian-doctrines/is-god-the-son-begotten-in-his-divine-nature/>

²⁷⁴ The New Catholic Encyclopedi Volume XIV, p. 295.

Gnostic views seem to flow apace where ignorance reigns. For these and other reasons, it is necessary to address this important matter not only for now but for posterity.”²⁷⁵

That Allāh simply says “do not say three”²⁷⁶ is a striking imperative that pushes back at every conception of God within a Trinity or tri-theistic formula. A full sweep.

²⁷⁵ Sichone, B.C. (2020). Islam and the Trinity. Kērussōmen 6/1, p. 60.

²⁷⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 171.

Chapter 5

CRAIG'S SECOND ARGUMENT: THE MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF SALVATION COMPROMISES GOD'S HOLINESS

Craig positions his theological defence of Christianity in the frame of perfect being theology. Drawing on Anselm of Canterbury, “God is by definition” he explains, “the greatest conceivable being. If you could conceive of anything greater than God, then that would be God!”²⁷⁷ What follows is a recognition that God must be perfect and without imperfection and such perfection must entail love. He explains: “Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being.”²⁷⁸ From this premise, Craig holds that Islam’s conception of God is not as perfectly loving, since He does not love sinners.

The Adamic conundrum

A fundamental place to begin to respond to Craig’s claim – that the Muslim doctrine of salvation compromises God’s holiness and is therefore insufficient and untenable in securing God’s divine favour (“As the greatest conceivable being, the most perfect being, the source of all goodness and love, God’s love must be unconditional and impartial. Therefore, the Islamic conception of God seems to me to be morally deficient”²⁷⁹) is to consider God and His relationship with His ‘fallen’ servant, Adam. Both faiths are unmistakably contingent on such a formative narrative. Knowing what

²⁷⁷ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

²⁷⁸ Craig, W.L. Questions from a Muslim about the Trinity. Retrieved January 13, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/question-answer/P140/questions-from-a-muslim-about-the-Trinity>

²⁷⁹ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

God considers of His creation from such time immemorial is paramount to this discussion, and knowing what the narrative reveals and reflects details about God Himself and His divine attributes, is most crucial. For Christians, the conversation does indeed begin here. Jesus is viewed as the essential manifestation of God's love to right the wrongs of Adam and subsequently his progeny. Jesus, the saviour, God-man, is only so because of his salvific role. The second person of the trinity is the redeeming Son. This sequence was highlighted by Langford who called on Christians to consider that: "Christians, therefore, can only do their best to present the Gospel, including the fall of mankind through Adam and Eve's original sin, [by] draw[ing] attention to the love of Jesus Who was the Creator, and let the Holy Spirit activate the Muslim mind to perceive his need for God as the Redeemer of mankind."²⁸⁰

In contradistinction to this view, God explains in the Qur'ān that the overriding emphasis in the Adamic narrative is on God's closeness to His creation, His loving nature, and His mercy. Craig posits that, "Christ's death on the cross is God's means of reconciling a sinful and estranged humanity to Himself",²⁸¹ and cites I. Howard Marshall who asserts that the central theme or message of the New Testament is reconciliation with God.²⁸² The conundrum that will make up this section of the work stems not so much from the Book of Genesis, as it does from Paul's letter to the Romans 5:12-21. This is cited here in full:

(13) To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. (14) Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. (15) But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! (16) Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. (17) For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who

²⁸⁰ Langford, J.S.D. (1983). Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643>

²⁸¹ Craig, W.L. God's Love and Justice in Contradiction? Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/gods-love-and-justice-in-contradiction/>

²⁸² Marshall, I.H. (2007). *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity*. Paternoster, chap. 4

receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (18) Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. (19) For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous. (20) The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, (21) so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.²⁸³

In a conversation concerning the biblical and theological importance of Adam, Darrell Bock, Mark Bailey, Elliott Johnson, Robert Chisholm, and Nathan Holsteen focus on what the New Testament contributes to the discussion about his place and person in Christian outlooks on sin and salvation. A lengthy portion of their conversation centres on the aforementioned verse from Romans 5:12-21 concerning what Paul describes of Adam being the antitype of Jesus. The verses here are fundamental in formulating the Christian outlook towards salvation, one of the central focal points of this book. The relationship between the 'fallen' Adam and Jesus as saviour is paramount. Jesus' place in Christianity is predominantly in relation to his character as saviour. This, as Craig and others have highlighted, is a more pressing belief for Christians than even that of the Trinity since Jesus' role as saviour and one's accepting of it will have lasting consequences for the human race. Certainly, the matter is also one of great importance in the context of this work and Christian-Muslim dialogue generally. For Christians, Jesus is precisely an anti-type of Adam as Paul postulated, and that our beginning point of discussion should focus on who God is in relation to human sin and salvation from this primary narrative is fitting. Bailey further explains this point, "So the theological foundation of all of our salvation, the issue of judgement, the issue of imputation and identification with Christ, all of that is rooted in the relationship of a historical Adam and therefore a historical Christ."²⁸⁴

Though Christians would postulate that Adam and Jesus are also the same in that Adam was created 'in the image of God', he is also the antitype to Jesus in relation to the dichotomy of their sinful and sinless states. John MacArthur explains that "Adam

²⁸³ Romans 5:12-21

²⁸⁴ Bock, D. Bailey, M. Johnson, E. Chisholm, R. & Holsteen, N. [Dallas Theological Seminary]. (2013, September 24). Historical Adam in the New Testament [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YQlcjDIBK4>

is a real man as Jesus Christ was a real man and it is Jesus Christ who is called the second Adam and the last Adam.”²⁸⁵

Interestingly, the Qur’ān positions Adam and Jesus as similar with respect their creation: “Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allāh is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, “Be,” and he was.”²⁸⁶ Though the verse is centred on the wondrous creation of both, there is another reflection of the similitude between Adam and Jesus that draws relevance in light of comments made by Christian apologists. Both Adam and Jesus display a poignant approach to God in relation to Him as the Forgiver of sins. In both cases, it is He who is singled out. This observation bears relevance since the central point of this discussion is about the hamartiology and soteriology in both faiths and what they reveal of a maximally perfect God. The verse concerning Adam has been thoroughly considered but cited here again for the purpose of this comparison reflected in Adam and Jesus:

Then Adam received from his Lord ‘some’ words, and He accepted his repentance: ‘Indeed, it is He who is the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful’.²⁸⁷

And if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.²⁸⁸

The verses underscore that it is God alone who is the Forgiving and Merciful, here in the contexts of both Adam and Jesus. Muslim scholar Bilal Phillips explains that: “Adam is thus like Jesus in that both are dependent on God and forever in need of His love and mercy alone. The typology that stems from Paul’s letter to the Romans is overhauled in a broader paradigm in the Qur’ānic narrative of God and servant, including Adam and Jesus, or of God’s Mercy and forgiveness and Adam and Jesus’ dependency on Him. God further iterates in the Qur’ān: “Tell My servants that I - I alone - am truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace.”²⁸⁹

It must be probed whether it can ever be in line with maximal holiness and God’s maximal knowledge and love that He would create Adam as someone weak in his being - meaning predisposed to sin, and God, knowing he would err would prescribe that the only way to redeem his error is to insist on a blood sacrifice from someone external

²⁸⁵ MacArthur, J. [Grace to You]. (2016, April 7). Through Adam, Death [Video].

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sngFHtIK_Q

²⁸⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 59.

²⁸⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verses 37.

²⁸⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

²⁸⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 15, verse 49.

to him. And so, forgiveness is dependent in accepting the suffering, caused through an external event, and not originating in the heart of the sinner, suggesting that God did not give (the means for) direct forgiveness; even though He knew that Adam would make the error. This suggests that God created a being with an anticipated perfection, like a demigod, but who then instead upends the cosmic order of things with his sin. This in turn destabilises, and certainly opposes the concept, of a perfect being and maximal perfection. Sorrells and Simons note, “Turning away from this fellowship is Adam’s mysterious sin, the primal disruption of friendship with God and others.”²⁹⁰

It is poignant to mention here that the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ once spent an entire night in prayer, weeping and repeating the same Qur’ānic verse wherein Jesus tells God: “If you punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, verily You, only You are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.”²⁹¹

He was also so concerned that the Muslim community would do unto him what Christians had done with Jesus, instructing the faithful: “Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Slave. So, call me the Slave of Allāh and His Apostle.”²⁹² The Prophetic character of prayer, devotion and reflective worship, and particularly here in relation to Jesus’ communication with God, is reflective of the prophetic path of an intrinsic bond of purpose centred on the worship of the One God.

It should also be noted that the concept of mercy makes truer sense when one is able to exhibit power, but chooses to opt for mercy instead of punishment, even though one is equally able to exact a penalty. If power was not a factor, then mercy becomes less meaningful. Yet if one has power to punish, but instead enjoins mercy and makes mercy a principal attribute in His dealing with creation – from Adam onwards – then mercy and love become more meaningful. The argument can be presented like this: Imagine if I as a father promise my son that if he gets straight As then I will let him play video games for the summer. Now, if he does get straight As and then I pull back on my promise and don’t allow him to play the video games, then that would be unjust. However, if I promise to punish him if he gets even one B by asserting that he will not play video games all summer and then he ends up with all As but one B, but I decide to go ahead and allow him to play then that would not be considered unjust but is instead a reflection of my mercy. Quinn, in reference to

²⁹⁰ Sorrells, B & Simmons, F.V (eds). (2016). *Love and Christian Ethics: Tradition, Theory, and Society*. Georgetown University Press, p. 340.

²⁹¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118; Ibn Khuzaymah, 1/271 and Ahmad, 5/149.

²⁹² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 3445

Anselm's satisfaction model elucidates that: "A cosmic family in which parents could forgive their repentant children's defaults on debts without having received recompense or inflicting punishment would appear to be a morally admirable arrangement without being unjust."²⁹³

Contrary to the Christian story, the Qur'ān explains that though Adam lost his footing and the splendour of a heavenly realm, he was never denied spiritual closeness to a maximally loving and pure God who created Him – fully aware of the weaknesses inherent in his very being. The perfect God did not create a perfect being and nor expected perfection from him, but in that creation's dependence, remembrance and longing for God – would Adam and his wife – find God's unceasing pleasure. The theological anthropology of Islam thus resonates with a profound bearing on the paradigm of hope. Notwithstanding the gravity of their moment of lapse, the Qur'ān describes it as a 'slip' (*zall*):

But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that in which they had been. And We said, "Go down, as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time."²⁹⁴

Man had been exposed to his lower self, of craving, of allowing ephemeral promises of grandeur impede upon divine assurances: "thus he led them on with deluding thoughts."²⁹⁵ God reminds both Adam, and thereafter reminds us through him, in these two verses:

So We said, 'Adam, this is your enemy, yours and your wife's: do not let him drive you out of the garden and make you miserable.'²⁹⁶

O children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise...²⁹⁷

In James Langford's thesis in which he deliberates on the concept of sin in Islam, the "slip" is unfortunately translated as a "skip", perhaps an inadvertent mistake: "Then Satan caused them to skip therefrom and brought them out of that they were

²⁹³ Quinn, P.L. (1986). Christian atonement and Kantian justification. *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 3 No.4 October, p. 445.

²⁹⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 36.

²⁹⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 7, verse 22.

²⁹⁶ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 20, verse 117.

²⁹⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 7, verse 27.

in...”²⁹⁸ The way that a “slip” into sin is reflected in the Islamic paradigm is described well in an account of an individual during the caliphate of the Prophet’s companion ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb (God be pleased with him). The individual who had been a regular attendee at the mosque had failed to attend on numerous occasions. Concerned, ‘Umar asked about his whereabouts, to be informed that he had taken a liking to a particular major sin, which now keeps him away from the community. ‘Umar called for a scribe and asked him to pen a single verse from the Qur’ān and have it sent to the individual. The verse, from chapter 40 (The Forgiver), verse 3 was believed to be sufficient: “Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no god but Him; to Him is the ultimate return.”²⁹⁹ The individual’s ruminating over the verse eventually caused him to leave his sin, repent, and make company with the townsfolk again. ‘Umar was pleased and addressed the people: “This is what you do when you see one of your brothers has slipped. You don’t want to be Satan’s supporter against your brother [by instilling hopelessness in him].”³⁰⁰

A divine being, maximally perfect would know full well about what He created, his internal and external faculties and functions. The Qur’ān declares the following about Adam: “And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot; and We found not in him determination.”³⁰¹ In verses 121 and 122 we read “And Adam disobeyed his Lord and erred.”³⁰² But the great forgiving, loving and merciful nature of God in exactly the next verse: “Then his Lord chose him and turned to him in forgiveness and guided him.”³⁰³

The hamartiology of Adam and his wife’s lapse is considered immediately in the verse and this is the focal point of the Qur’ānic narrative. The Christian missionary contention in relation to Islam is based on the ontological premise that Adam’s sin created a cataclysmic rift between God and humans. It is akin to humans coming to exist as imperfect demi-gods in a cosmic scheme, wherein the supreme God is unable to tolerate a sliding imperfection in those demi-gods. Tim Mackie of the Bible Project expounds this idea: “It is us lined up with the perfection of God.”³⁰⁴ But the

²⁹⁸ Langford, J.S.D. (1983). *Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims*. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643>

²⁹⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 40, verse 3.

³⁰⁰ Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī, 15/256.

³⁰¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 115.

³⁰² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 121.

³⁰³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 122.

³⁰⁴ Mackie, T. [Tim Mackie Archives]. (2017, August 21). *Christ is Victor - I Am Who I Am - (The Bible Project)* [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F08lsx3prE>

omnipotence of such a supreme God is questioned in light of His dependence on the desired functionability of such ‘demi-gods’. That their sin is able to challenge God’s essential plan and cause Him to forfeit one of his unassailable rights, in the Christian case - his son, speaks of a less than perfect being.

The soteriological positioning of Christianity, therefore, is presupposed as a rift, created between God and His creation, generated by a sin committed by Adam and Eve – a violation and infringement of holiness indefinitely tarnished. The loss was cataclysmic, and thus necessitated Adam’s removal from a heavenly landscape and spiritual closeness to God, into an earthly terrain in which the progeny of Adam, blighted by that initial sin, was incapable of ever returning from the consequences generated by that sin. That is until God would send a saviour, Himself, to die a violent death to eventually redeem them of their sin. He is thereafter appeased and His honour is restored, and human honour too is restored. Unlike the Qur’ānic concept of forgiveness reflected in God first turning to His servants - Ever-Near and accessible, Craig explains the Christian outlook: “On the basis of Christ’s satisfying the demands of divine justice, God can then turn to us and offer us a full pardon for our sins, which we are free to accept or reject.”³⁰⁵ Christians, undoubtedly, are called on to sincerely love God, but God’s benevolence emerges principally through His self-love towards Jesus, the second person of the god-head who comes to redeem mankind, not primarily towards His fallen servant Adam – the one in need of love though Adam does benefit as a consequence of that self-love. The attribute of forgiveness and mercy is overridden by that of justice. God needs His payment in full and even though forgiveness is believed to emanate from Christ’s death it is still God receiving His payment in full. Christians hold that because of their sinful nature, they cannot repair their broken relationship with God on their own, and that only Jesus was qualified to do that for them. But Jesus here is still God for them.

In fact, for Adam there is estrangement and curse. The tri-theistic self-love is explained here: “The Father, in the fruitfulness of his nature, produces the Son, and from their mutual loving contemplation the Holy Spirit proceeds as their bond of Love: the Love, who is the Holy Spirit, does not proceed from the Father, inasmuch as He loves Himself, nor from the Son, inasmuch as He loves Himself, but inasmuch as the One loves the Other, because it is a nexus: therefore the Holy Spirit is the Love, by which One loving tends unto the Other: therefore there is a Love both from Another

³⁰⁵ Craig, W.L. #650 Vicarious Liability and the Imputation of Sins. Retrieved January 13, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/vicarious-liability-and-the-imputation-of-sins/>

and unto Another.”³⁰⁶ The difference in Islam in relation to Piper’s words is that we could only love Allāh first because He turned in love to us, and turned in love to us from the very beginning, and inspired us with the faith-driven love towards Him. This is clear from the Qur’ānic-Adamic paradigm and subsequent examples.

The Islamic understanding of God’s mercy, love and justice

Did God create a being and not know that such a being was capable of transgressing? Such a question in fact, has a direct bearing on the question of God’s mercy, love and justice. The Qur’ān teaches us that God was, is and is forever always in perfect perpetual control. Whilst Christian apologists do draw on the mercy of God in their consideration of Islam, emphasized continuously in the Qur’ān and as very evident from the names of Allāh repeated in opening phrases in chapters of the Qur’ān – *Al-Raḥmān*, *Al-Raḥīm* (Most Merciful, Most Compassionate), perhaps the most repeated motif in the Qur’ān nonetheless is His *‘azma* (exaltedness), that Allāh is *al-‘Azīm* (The Most Exalted). He is the Most dignified, Magnificent, Sublime, Revered, One above imperfection, of the greatest importance, of maximal greatness and majesty. The Qur’ān declares: “He has that which is in the heavens and that which is on the earth, and He is the Great, Most High”³⁰⁷ In his commentary on this verse, al-Ṭabarī says:

Allāh is He who manifests all the attributes of greatness, dignity, glory and splendour. For God is every description and meaning that necessitates veneration, and all things are below him, because they are under His power, subjected to His power over them.³⁰⁸

Jesus too in His responding to God’s question concerning those who claimed to follow him yet took him and Mary as deities will call upon Him in recognition of His exaltedness. “If You should punish them - indeed they are Your servants; but if You forgive them - indeed it is You who is the Exalted in Might, the Wise.”³⁰⁹

God cannot experience any loss in His own divine plan for His creation. He is Supreme and in full control of all His creation [“And you will not cause failure to

³⁰⁶ Marmion, D., & Van Nieuwenhove, R. (2010). *Theology of the Trinity from Richard of St Victor to the Reformation. In An Introduction to the Trinity*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 96-141.

³⁰⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 42, verse 4.

³⁰⁸ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami‘ al-bayan fi ta’wil al-Qur’ān)* vol. 25. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 9.

³⁰⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

Allāh upon the earth. And you have not besides Allāh any protector or helper.”³¹⁰] In the Christian case, the inability of one of His creation to obey Him at one point in time leads to an utter collapse of the human project and in the eventual loss of his own son. Paul describes that it is Jesus who gets the problem started in Genesis with Adam back on track.³¹¹ Mosley (2019) describes the Christian hamartiology:

In our fallen nature our bent is toward sin and away from God. We were, in fact, enemies of God. Not just turned away from God passively, but enemies of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom 5:10, NASB).³¹²

Ziegler here describes the cataclysmic event of Adam’s sin and its consequences:

Sin is hereditary, internal and external, inherited, and radical (that is, it goes back to the root of Adam). Yet, one thing that runs constant throughout these different conceptions of sin is that the human will is bound and unable to do good.³¹³

In his own answer to a question about the Christian concept of Original Sin, Craig posits that Christians have not agreed on the matter, that some denominations like the Eastern orthodoxy and Armenian church do not believe in it at all. Craig’s reasoning is that he sees Adam as a proxy for all his progeny, that if we had been in Adam’s place we would have done the same and therefore his guilt is imputed on us. Augustine of Hippo, very influential in theorising the concept of original sin, commented, “The first human beings ... having become the first sinners, were then punished by death in such a way that whatsoever sprang from their stock should also be subject to the same penalty. For nothing could be born of them which was not what they themselves had been ...so that what arose as a punishment in the first human beings who sinned also follows as a natural consequence in the rest who are born of them.”³¹⁴ The lack of agreement amongst Christians on the Original Sin should not be taken lightly. It strikes at being at the heart of what the doctrine of salvation requires – that if sin had not entered into the world through Adam’s sin, then there would not have been a need for a saviour to take that burden of sin. However, as Couenhoven commented,

³¹⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 42, verse 31.

³¹¹ See: Drummond, A. (2003). Romans 5:12–21. *Interpretation*. 57(1), pp. 67-69.

³¹² Mosley, F. (2019). *Hamartiology: The Doctrine of Sin*. Submitted to Dr. Dennis McDonald in partial fulfilment of the requirements for completion of Theo 525-D05 LUO December 13, 2019, p. 5

³¹³ Ziegler, P.G. (2018). Bound Over to Satan’s Tyranny: Sin and Satan in Contemporary Reformed Hamartiology. *Theology Today* 75, no. 1 (April 2018), pp. 89–100.

³¹⁴ Augustine City of God, XIII.iii

Augustine “never really explains how all did exist and act in Adam, leaving the matter rather mysterious”³¹⁵

In contrast to this, the Qur’ānic narrative draws not so much on the claim that all of Adam’s progeny would have acted the same way, and thus Adam serves as our proxy – even though Adam’s progeny is inspired by both moral depravities and saintliness “Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be. And inspired it to know its own rebellion and piety!”³¹⁶ – but that God dealt with Adam in the same way that He deals with us, by facilitating openings towards His mercy and acceptance. It is God’s love that shines through. Original forgiveness then, in this narrative, takes centre stage. In David Catchpoole’s comprehensive comparison of Qur’ānic and Biblical accounts made up of a range of Qur’ānic verses relevant to the narrative of Adam,³¹⁷ as well as Craig’s, it falls short in delineating some highly important points: 1) The Qur’ān’s positioning of Adam’s sin as a slip/stumble. In essence, as al-Ṭabarī explains, “Satan caused them to slip from obedience to God.”³¹⁸ 2) God’s immediate ‘reaching out’ to Adam to assist him to find repentance 3) Adam and his wife beseeching their Lord for mercy and forgiveness 4) God’s pardoning of His two servants.

The other crucial point here, is imperative in understanding the soteriology of Islam. The verse describing such a ‘reaching out’ is a fascinating presentation of mercy of a maximally loving God. Adam had erred, both Biblical and Qur’ānic accounts confirm this, but the Qur’ān describes how Adam was prevented from feeling stranded and hopeless following his being admonished for succumbing to Satan’s insinuations. In the timeless beauty of the Arabic text the words *fa talaqqā Adam min rabbihi kalimāt* [then Adam received from his Lord some words] press upon God’s closeness to his remorseful servant. God aided Adam in teaching him and his progeny how to forever return to their Lord’s pleasure: “Then Adam received from his Lord some words, and He accepted his repentance: “Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.”³¹⁹

³¹⁵ Couenhoven, J. (2013). *Stricken by Sin, Cured by Christ: Agency, Necessity, and Culpability in Augustinian Theology*. Oxford University Press.

³¹⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 91, verses 7-8.

³¹⁷ Catchpoole, D. The Koran vs Genesis. Retrieved January 12, 2022, from <https://creation.com/the-koran-quran-vs-genesis>

³¹⁸ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān)* vol. 1. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 305.

³¹⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verses 37.

The hamartiological point is therefore clarified, in one verse. Perhaps the simplicity in the divine explanation might symbolise the ease with which God, the maximally Perfect, is able to pardon – and is not encumbered in His own essence by His creation’s failing. God is indeed Supreme, Exalted, and free of all need. The ‘words’ that Adam received from His Lord were words of repentance which Adam and his wife pleaded to God with: “They (both) replied, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged our souls: if You do not forgive us and have mercy, we shall be lost.’”³²⁰ God, the one who shows the path to guidance, thus facilitated Adam’s repentance by directing him and his wife to forgiveness, revealing that God Himself is not upended by his creation’s wrongdoing; but that creation is upended in their distance from God and can find favour by turning back to God, by renouncing their sins and feeling remorse. God does not expect perfection from an imperfect creation but expects sincere devotion. Let it be emphasised, as the verse shows, that any ‘return’ to God is only ever one facilitated by God Himself, maximally loving. This again reflects the maximal love of Allāh. Any ‘turning’ to God in forgiveness is understood primarily as God having ‘turned’ to that individual in his love and mercy which generates a love for faith and devotion to God: “But Allāh has endeared the Faith to you, and has made it beautiful in your hearts.”³²¹

The exegetes of the Qur’ān draw on the same point about God’s ever-nearness to His servants and attribute of mercy reflected in the case of Adam. Fifteenth-century scholar of the Qur’ān Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli and completed after his death by his student Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, explain in their exegesis: “Thereafter Adam received certain words from his Lord”, with which He inspired him, meaning the words came to him, and these were those of the verse “Lord, we have wronged ourselves [Chapter 7, verse 23], with which he supplicated, and God relented to him, that is, He accepted his repentance; truly He is the Relenting, to His servants, the Merciful, to them.”³²² Ibn Kathir makes the same connection from the verse, about Adam being inspired by God with those words of forgiveness from Chapter 7, verse 23, adding that the verse in question (Chapter 2, verse 37) “testifies to the fact that Allāh forgives the sins of whoever repents, demonstrating His kindness and mercy towards His creation and servants. There is no deity worthy of worship except Allāh, the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.”³²³

In Islam there is nothing that mankind can do to upset God’s holiness. Though Christians might respond by highlighting that it was not God whose holiness was

³²⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verses 23.

³²¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 49, verses 7.

³²² Al-Mahalli & al-Suyuti. (1992). *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Dar al-Ikhaa, p. 6.

³²³ Ibn Kathīr. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*. Dar al-Ma’rifa, p. 68.

besmirched but rather the human being's ability to access that holiness, the theories of atonement which predicate salvation on restoring a wrong done to God, on satisfying, on appeasing, seem to indicate this; the concept of God as maximally loving enough to provide support, comfort, a way out, forgiveness, mercy for His fallen servant falls short. We are reminded in an elaborate Prophetic tradition that God said:

O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My dominion in anything. O My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My dominion in anything.³²⁴

The piety of the most pious has no effect on God's majesty and nor does the wickedness of the most wicked have any bearing on the majesty of God. God's kingdom is complete in all matters, the piety and righteousness of all the inhabitants of the earth does not increase Him in anything since His riches are complete and nothing lacks in His complete perfection. Similarly, if all the people on earth were to gather on immorality, disbelief and transgression that would not detract from anything in His possession, and it would not harm God in the least. Islamic scholar Jamaal al-Din M. Zaraboso explains that, "Allāh loves for His slaves to be pious and to repent. But He does not benefit from this in any way. All of this is for their own good. Similarly, He hates for His slaves to disbelieve and commit sins. However, He is not harmed by their disbelief or sins by any means. They are simply hurting themselves. It is only out of Allāh's mercy, kindness and goodness to His creation that He loves what is beneficial for them and dislikes what is harmful for them. It is by His grace and mercy that He guides people to the Straight Path, while He does not benefit at all from that... He is the real "king" and "owner" of all of creation. He has power over all things. Nothing escapes His rule. He is not in need of anything to assist Him in His rule. He is perfect and complete in and of Himself. In fact, He has no need to drive people to His worship, as that does not benefit Him at all. Similarly, He has no need to force people not to disobey Him, as such disobedience does not harm Him."³²⁵ Ibn Taymīyya contrasts the exaltedness and complete independence of Allāh set against the ever neediness of man: "Weak human "kings" of this world are greatly in need of servants and citizenry to provide support and obedience. The more citizens the king

³²⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2577

³²⁵ Zarabozo, J.M. (1999). *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*, Volume 2. Al-Basheer publications and translations, p. 783.

has, the greater is his kingdom. If the citizenry decides not to obey him, his kingdom may be lost. Allāh's kingdom however is the true and absolute dominion.”³²⁶

The premise of Craig's argument explained in this section was that since God is maximally holy, it would mean that He could never have tolerated human sin and that the consequences of sin was an estrangement from the sinners Adam and his wife. Notice that the Bible and Qur'ān both agree that Adam was instructed not to eat from a particular tree, that he and his wife were tempted by Satan to do so, and that they both earned God's disfavour. The point of divergence between the two faiths rests on the approach of God towards his 'fallen' servant, however. What makes the Qur'ānic presentation a far stronger case of maximal goodness and holiness is firstly, that His holiness is never compromised by anything His creation does or does not do. God declares: “And you will not cause failure to Him upon the earth or in the heaven. And you have none other than Allāh any protector or any helper.”³²⁷ One translation has it, “Not on earth nor in heaven will you be able to frustrate His Plan.”³²⁸ And secondly, that His enabling of Adam to seek forgiveness resonates with maximal love and forgiveness. God does not emerge vengeful, incessant on a blood sacrifice as the only mode of forgiveness and instead recognises man's dual tendencies of sin as well as goodness. That forgiveness becomes contingent on the acceptance of a human blood sacrifice in the Christian model is set against the Islamic paradigm of personal repentance of remorse, beseeching of God and of self-rectification. Instead of an eternal estrangement from God, Adam's “slip” was met with God's divine grace from a maximally loving God. Craig's argument therefore does not hold ground. Because sin is primarily a function of our created state rather than a result of human action, this view doesn't portray human freedom or forgiveness as playing a key role overcoming the state of sin. Rather, the gap is straddled by covenant and, ultimately, incarnation.

That “Adam was met with words from his Lord”³²⁹ is further a reflection of God's maximal love towards Adam since there was no one else around to assist him. There was not a Prophet he could entreat in the hope that he would be shown how to ask for forgiveness. It was only him, and so God fully aware of his vulnerability reaches out to Him so that Adam once more becomes an object of His compassionate attention. This is truly a reflection of the maximal love of God.

³²⁶ Ibn Taymīyya. (1996). *Majmū' al-Fatāwa*, vol. 6. Majma' al-Malik Fahd, p. 194.

³²⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 29, verses 22.

³²⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 29, verses 22.

³²⁹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verses 37.

For Christians however, Adam is only important in the soteriological model in so far as Jesus comes to emerge as his antitype. The problem however is easily understood since God and man cannot be the same; Adam cannot be God and nor can He be perfect like God and nor can God create another perfect being as Himself. To use the word ‘sinless’ might presuppose that God might in some way be capable of being bound by such temporality that exists outside of Him. The demarcations of ‘sin’ are those outlined by God Himself and to position God as ‘sinless’ suggests that He has overcome or avoided the very construct that exists entirely outside of Him and in relation to how He will judge creation. When Paul described that the sinful was corrected by the sinless, the conundrum forever remains since Jesus, the sinless, was God Himself. A narrative is constructed to showcase the grand power of Christ, who is held to be God, to overcome temptation and lead a sinless life as the antitype of the sinful Adam. But what else would Christians expect of God except perfection? Jesus is Adam’s antitype, meaning God became incarnated to lead a sinless life, and Himself be put to death to appease God who happens to be He Himself so that the faithful be forgiven. Christians highlight that it was Jesus alone who overcame death through his resurrection. Aside from the major problem with God being described as immortal,³³⁰ what does it mean to say that God overcame death? And then came to life again? And what does coming to life again suggest about the sacrifice? Did anyone give their life if the coming back to life was quite immediate? And did God therefore give his only son if the son was quite immediately restored to his right hand – to be part of the godhead again?

MacArthur deliberates on the fundamental tenets of Christianity with respect to salvation, outlining the role of Jesus in acting as the substitution for the sins of mankind. He remarks that Jesus paid the price for all who had believed. Similar to Craig’s belief, the atonement is believed to be limited to believers “through all of human history” though what ‘believers’ might mean here is a little confusing. Further, the point about how the wrath of God falls on an innocent individual, the second person of the godhead, suggesting a self-incurred wrath, is troubling. Atonement appears to be predicated on the disgruntled god feeling satisfied that his son, who is also god, is put through a terrible ordeal so that God, who is also Jesus, is no longer in need of venting his anger against his creation. In simple terms, the image it might evoke in some people’s minds is of a disgruntled dragon who was suddenly awoken. He breathes out a terrible flame and then is soothed by the destruction of a person he loved because someone had to pay the price for transgressing against him. God, it is believed,

³³⁰ 1 Timothy 6:16

could not pardon his creation except by punishing himself for their sins because the justice that was due to Him had to be fulfilled. Reverend John MacArthur explained that “his death was the wrath of God on him not for any sins he had done for he had done none but the Father imputed all the sins of all the people who had ever believed through all of human history to him and punished him for all their sins. He thus died in the place of believers. Since God raised Him from the dead it was proof God was satisfied with his death. His wrath was propitiated. Those are unambiguous truths. Those are the objective truths of the gospel. All men are sinners and had to do eternal punishment. God loves and will forgive sinners who put their faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is able to save. He has offered the sacrifice that satisfied God and therefore God declared that a satisfactory sacrifice by raising him from the dead. You’re a Christian because you believe that. Again, all those unambiguous truths are the objective, historical realities about the gospel. All true Christians understand them and embrace them and believe them, that’s why they’re Christians.”³³¹

Christians often say, “Jesus loves you” but was God, the Lord of Jesus loving enough to forgive the first of us? Of course, Christians might instinctively reply “but Jesus is God”, well then wasn’t Jesus the God loving enough to forgive the first of us? Love has to mean something and though Christians and Muslims would assert that God indeed is All-loving and All-forgiving, in the Christian narrative this is mired by a theology that does not reflect God in a way befitting His majesty as One maximally loving and thus maximally forgiving. Christians might point to positive retributivism, that the end result of a more comprehensive forgiveness can explain earlier ‘problems’. And I think this is one of the cruxes of the issue, and one that stems inherently from Paul and his typification of Adam and Jesus in Romans. According to Craig, the doctrine of original sin is based almost entirely upon this single Pauline passage in Romans 5.³³² Seemingly, the descriptions contrasting Adam and Jesus might appear to open up new theological spaces to understand God’s purpose through Jesus, but the description closes as many spaces. The discussion moves away from God in His infinite majesty and becomes lessened in the juxtaposing typification of those two servants of the One God, Maximally Holy and Loving. In reality those two servants, Adam and Jesus were both submissive and entirely dependent on the One true God: “Indeed, the

³³¹ MacArthur, J. [Grace to You] (2021, April 25) The Christian’s Assurance of Salvation [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNg51teW30s>

³³² Craig, W.L. Doctrine of Man (Part 22): Original Sin. Retrieved January 13, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-man/doctrine-of-man-part-22/>

example of Jesus in the sight of Allāh is like that of Adam. He created him from dust, then said to him, “Be!” And he was!”³³³

In conclusion, the Qur’ānic message is far more positive and hopeful. God calls on the Bani Adam (Sons of Adam) to believe and work righteousness and thus to eventually return to where their father Adam was taken out and to not lose hope in the mercy of God throughout whatever life presents. “Then We said: O Adam! Verily, this is an enemy to you and to your wife. So let him not get you both out of Paradise, so that you be distressed in misery.”³³⁴ Adam is God’s vicegerent endowed, therefore, with a purposeful task: “Behold, I am about to establish upon earth one who shall inherit it.”³³⁵

In Islam, Adam is still in the picture, and through him we see ourselves, as weak, temporal, as encompassing both positive and negative traits. Allāh tells us how he chose and preferred Adam: “Indeed, Allāh chose Adam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of ‘Imran over the worlds.”³³⁶ Qur’ānic commentator Ibn Kathir explains, “Allāh states that He has chosen these households over the people of the earth. For instance, Allāh chose Adam, created him with His Hand and blew life into him. Allāh commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam, taught him the names of everything and allowed him to dwell in Paradise, but then sent him down from it out of His wisdom...”³³⁷

God informs us that Adam has a great earthly role, that God, the Most Wise and All-Knowing sought for Adam and his successive progeny to settle and inhabit the earth, to do well towards each other and heed the calls of God’s prophets and messengers, and thus stay in line with God’s ordinances and to adopt a pattern of behaviour modelled on prophetic paths. Notwithstanding the presence of evil and corruption at both the personal and societal level, the human being is not functionless but endowed with qualities that can be dazzlingly gracious and can be demonstrative in enhancing the human condition.

³³³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 59.

³³⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verses 117.

³³⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verses 30.

³³⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 33.

³³⁷ Ibn Kathīr. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*. Dar al-Ma’rifa, p. 275.

Chapter 6

CRAIG'S THIRD ARGUMENT: ALLĀH IS MORALLY INADEQUATE AND NOT MAXIMALLY LOVING

Craig explains:

As the greatest conceivable being, God must be perfect. Now a perfect being must be a loving being. For love is a moral perfection; it is better for a person to be loving rather than unloving. God therefore must be a perfectly loving being.³³⁸

Craig outlines that the trinitarian conception of God positions Him as eternally loving since He gives Himself away in love, that is, it is in His very essence to love and thus “must be giving Himself in love to another.”³³⁹ This, he contends, reveals that God is perfectly loving by His very nature. From this standpoint, Craig contends that the Islamic theological conception of God cannot be a conception of the most perfect being, since He “does not give Himself away essentially in love for another; He is focused essentially only on Himself”³⁴⁰ and thus lacks a self-giving love relationship. In respect to the moral perfection of God, he asserts that God is held by followers of both faiths to be “all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present...morally perfect” and that moral perfection would necessitate that God be all-loving. He holds that the God of Islam does not love sinners and cites several Qur’ānic verses to illustrate his point (Chapter 3, verse 33; chapter 2, verse 277; chapter 3, verse 58; chapter 4, verse 37; chapter 5, verse 88, chapter 6, verse 142, chapter 6, verse 142; chapter 8, verse 59). Craig comments that the God of the Bible “sent His Son to die for them!”, meaning such sinners; and that contrary to the Qur’ān, this reflects His all-loving nature.

³³⁸ Moreland J.P. & Craig, W.L. (2003). *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*. IVP, pp. 594-595.

³³⁹ Craig, W.L. Doctrine of God: Trinity (Part 11): A Plausibility Argument for the Trinity. Retrieved, January 13 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-god-Trinity/doctrine-of-god-Trinity-part-11/>

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Craig has been interested in proposing his thoughts on this question in debates with Muslims and on his website.³⁴¹ Craig introduces the contention by stating that “The God of the Bible is an all-loving God, whose love is universal, impartial, and unconditional, while the God of Islam is not all-loving, but loves only Muslims and whose love is therefore selective, partial, and conditional.” Craig’s response to the question does in fact reflect a foundational issue concerning the concept of God in both traditions. It is important to clarify what Craig means by “universal, impartial and unconditional” love and to consider whether the authority to which he refers, the Bible, also portrays God the way Craig does.

Craig’s premise is that since God is the greatest conceivable being He has to demonstrate a universal and unconditional love to all. The God of Islam, he argues, is not all loving, and therefore the God of Islam is not God. It is argued here that Craig has a distorted view on the love of God. While some are quick to point out Biblical verses which suggest that God isn’t all-loving, in the sense that He doesn’t love everyone the same way and sometimes doesn’t love people for their transgressions, Craig remarks that such Biblical examples are only “poetic passages”. But the vocabulary and context of verses from Psalms, Malachi, Romans to Hosea run counter to Craig’s claim. The vocabulary and context are in fact counter to Craig’s assertions. Consider here the juxtaposing of “love” and “hate” in Hosea 9:15:

Because of all their wickedness in Gilgal, I hated them there. Because of their sinful deeds, I’ll drive them out of my house. I’ll no longer love them; all their leaders are rebellious.³⁴²

Some Christians might be inclined to argue that God loves the sinner, but he hates the sin. In addition to the aforementioned verse from Hosea, the following expressive verses from the Old Testament run counter to such a suggestion:

The boastful will not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do injustice.³⁴³

Do I not hate those who hate you, Lord, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Craig, W.L. #459 Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God? Retrieved, January 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god/>

³⁴² Hosea 9:15

³⁴³ Psalm, 5:5

³⁴⁴ Psalm 139:21-22.

The hatred of one's enemies is expressed very clearly here in Psalm 139:21-22. Dutch theologian Eric Peels explains that,

The rhetorical question in verse 21 (הלוא) suggests that it is self-evident that those who rebel against God (twice a proleptic object)⁸ should be totally rejected by the poet (twice a yiqṭôl-form with the modal nuance 'should', 'ought to'⁹). The answer in verse 22 contains a qāṭal-form to be read as a performative perfect: 'I hereby declare to hate...'¹⁰ The nomen regens in the internal object of verse 22a is formed from the root כלה 'to complete'¹¹: the most absolute form of hatred is meant here.³⁴⁵

This "most absolute form of hatred" has, as Peels explains in his work, been interpreted in varying ways by Christians: some arguing that the verses cannot be used at all in light of New Testament teachings; others arguing for their continued usefulness; and others suggesting that they can only be used with modifications. While the change in contexts that some Christian theologians point to is considered, the argument of Craig does not hold good ground. Moreover, the author of the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments is believed to be God, which of course includes Jesus. In Psalm 11:5 we again find the following: "The Lord tests the righteous but what His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence the Lord so hates that person." Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary explains, "However persecutors and oppressors may prosper awhile, they will for ever perish. God is a holy God, and therefore hates them. He is a righteous Judge, and will therefore punish them. In what a horrible tempest are the wicked hurried away at death!"³⁴⁶ In the Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament the message is even the clearer: "He tries the righteous, i.e., He knows that in the depth of his soul there is an upright nature that will abide all testing (Psalm 17:3; Job 23:10), so that He lovingly protects him, just as the righteous lovingly depends upon Him. And His soul hates (i.e., He hates him with all the energy of His perfectly and essentially holy nature) the evil-doer and him that delights in the violence of the strong towards the weak. And the more intense this hatred, the more fearful will be the judgments in which it bursts forth."³⁴⁷ Furthermore, in the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary, "The trial of the righteous results in their approval, as it is contrasted with God's hatred to the

³⁴⁵ Peels, E. 'I HATE THEM WITH PERFECT HATRED' (PSALM 139:21-22). Retrieved January 13, 202 from <https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/Bulletin/59=2008/3%20Peels.pdf>

³⁴⁶ Psalm 11:5 - <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/11-5.htm>

³⁴⁷ Psalm 11:5 - <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/11-5.htm>

wicked.”³⁴⁸ The Psalm continues, “Let him reign coals on the wicked, fire and sulphur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup, for the Lord is righteous, He loves righteous deeds, the upright shall behold His face.”³⁴⁹

In the New Testament, in Romans 9 the unequivocalty of God loving one and hating another is here expressed: “Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I’ll have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I’ll have compassion on whom I have compassion.”³⁵⁰ According to American New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner, the verse is absolutely clear in showing God’s hatred for one over the other: “The shocking nature of the verb ἐμίσησα is sometimes explained in terms of the Semitic contrast between “love” and “hate,” so that the latter means “to love less” (cf. Gen. 29:30–31; Matt. 10:37; Luke 14:26). Even if this option is correct, which is doubtful here, it hardly lessens the problem, for the point of the text is that God set his affectionate love upon Jacob and withheld it from Esau. It is a doubtful expedient in any case, since Malachi describes God’s “hatred” of Esau (Edom) in active terms: he lays waste their land (Mal. 1:3), tears down their buildings (v. 4), and his “anger” is upon them “forever” (v. 4). What Rom. 9:13 adds to the promise of verse 12 is that the submission of the older to the younger is based on God’s choice of Jacob and his rejection of Esau. This was already evident from the explanation in verses 11–12a, but the OT citation confirms it further.”³⁵¹

Throughout Christian history theologians have attempted to tackle the duality of God’s love and hate expressed in the Biblical texts. There are clear examples of God’s hate for sin and sinners as shown in the aforementioned examples as well as God’s love. Professor of historical theology Tony Lane here describes the reasoning of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas:

[Augustine] reaches the paradox that God both hated and loved us. He hated us for our sin and loved us for that which sin had not ruined and which is capable of being healed. Thomas Aquinas also tackles Psalm 5:5. He maintains that “God loves sinners as being real things of nature,”

³⁴⁸ Psalm 11:5 - <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/psalms/11-5.htm>

³⁴⁹ Psalm 11:6

³⁵⁰ Romans 9:13.

³⁵¹ Schreiner, T.R. (1998). *Romans*. Kindle Edition. *Baker Academic*, 1998. Kindle Locations 9907-9914

as created. But "in so far as they are sinners they are unreal and deficient" and as such God "holds them in hatred." [lxix] Again, wrestling with Malachi 1:2-3, Thomas notes that "God loves all men and all creatures as well, inasmuch as he wills some good to all." But at the same time, "in that he does not will to some the blessing of eternal life he is said to hold them in hate or to reprobate them."³⁵²

Craig's suggestion that the Christian God's love is "impartial" and "unconditional" and "universal" does not concur with the Biblical tradition, and neither does it hold good ground in a rational sense since God does not love everyone in exactly the same way, therefore His love is not impartial. God of course chooses whom He bestows His mercy on and Christians would agree that God does not love the people He sends to heaven exactly the same way that He loves the people He sends to hell. Would the people who enjoy God's blessings eternally and those who receive His punishment and condemnation eternally be loved by God the same? If yes, then what does God's love even mean? Tony Lane explains, "But a love that does not contain hatred of evil is not the love of which the Bible speaks."³⁵³

Further to Craig's views about the love of the Christian God, he explains that in Christianity the faithful are called to love one's enemy, citing Matthew 5: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"³⁵⁴ This work has shown how the attribute of "love" of God can be better understood in reference to His nature of forgiveness and mercy. These are the two most paramount descriptors of love, they entail closeness, kindness and acceptance. God's interaction with Adam has served as a very strong basis for our understanding of the love of God to His creation. This section will look at this closely.

The Islamic ethic of treating others with whom we have a dislike is to treat them with justice and kindness. This is also determined in the Biblical verse that explains

³⁵² Lane, T. The Wrath of God as an aspect of the Love of God. Retrieved January <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/god/the-wrath-of-god-as-an-aspect-of-the-love-of-god>

³⁵³ Lane, T. The Wrath of God as an aspect of the Love of God. Retrieved January <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/god/the-wrath-of-god-as-an-aspect-of-the-love-of-god>

³⁵⁴ Matthew 5:43-48.

what loving one's enemy means: "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."³⁵⁵ At this point there is not much contention. Both faiths stress on having a general care for others, that kindness and mercy are far better standards of behaviour towards people, believers and unbelievers, than malevolence and hatred. The act of not paying others with evil conduct is a paramount teaching in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught, "Do not be people without minds of your own, saying that if others treat you well you will treat them well, and that if they do wrong you will do wrong. Instead, accustom yourselves to do good if people do good and not to do wrong if they do wrong."³⁵⁶ The Qur'an draws attention to the kind treatment of the Prophet's companions towards war prisoners: "and who give food—despite their desire for it—to the poor, the orphan, and the captive, 'saying to themselves,' 'We feed you only for the sake of Allah, seeking neither reward nor thanks from you.'"³⁵⁷ These underline the importance of being just and forgiving, to reciprocate with goodness and not to allow egotistic attitudes to prevail in relationships. A great demonstration of the Prophet's dealing with his enemies in a way that reflects a spirit of magnanimity and patience is seen in his conduct at the battle of Uḥud. It is reported that during the Battle of Uḥud 625CE, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said:

O Allāh, forgive my people for they do not know," he voiced his supplication when his enemies slashed his face."³⁵⁸ The Qur'an instructs: "Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend."³⁵⁹ In explaining the verse, the Prophet's companion Ibn Abbās described, "God commands the believers to be patient when they feel angry, to be forbearing when confronted with ignorance, and to forgive when they are mistreated. If they do this, God will save them from Satan and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends."³⁶⁰ The Qur'an also explains, "It may well be that Allāh will implant love between you and those with whom you have had enmity. Allāh is Most Powerful; and Allāh is Most Forgiving, Most Compassionate. Allāh does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not

³⁵⁵ Romans 12:20

³⁵⁶ Al-Tirmidhī 1325

³⁵⁷ Al-Qur'an. Chapter 76, verses 8-9.

³⁵⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Hibbān 985

³⁵⁹ Al-Qur'an. Chapter 41, verses 34.

³⁶⁰ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'ān)* vol. 1. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 118.

against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allāh loves those who deal with equity.³⁶¹

A co-religionist colleague of Craig, Yale Divinity School professor Miroslav Volf, had an article published in *The Washington Post* in 2015 in which he deliberated on whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God.³⁶² The article comes as a response to Larycia Alaine Hawkins, a fellow Christian academic who was suspended by Wheaton College for her assertion that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, provoking much debate.³⁶³ Such comments were borrowed by Craig in an article published the following year on his website entitled, ‘#459 Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?’.³⁶⁴ This is the citation taken by Craig from Professor Volf’s article:

In addition to contesting the Trinity and the incarnation, Muslims also contest the Christian claim that God is love — unconditional and indiscriminate love. There is no claim in Islam that God ‘justifies the ungodly’ and no command to love one’s enemies. But these are the signature claims of the Christian faith. Take the redemption of the ungodly and the love of enemy out of the Christian faith, and you un-Christian it.

I wish that those who insist that Christians worship an altogether different God than Muslims latched on to this difference — that instead of wanting to ‘end’ Muslims they deem to be their enemies in the name of God, they would seek to embrace them in the name of Christ. If they did so, they would need to show how struggle against enemies is a way of loving them — an argument that many great theologians in the past were willing to make.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ Al-Qur’an. Chapter 60, verse 7.

³⁶² An, K. (2015). Do Muslims and Christians worship the same god? College suspends professor who said yes. Retrieved, January 13 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/12/16/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god-college-suspends-professor-who-said-yes/>

³⁶³ Alexander, S.C. (2015). Thanks But No Thanks: How A Noted Theologian’s Defense Of Larycia Hawkins Goes Bizarrely Astray. Retrieved, January 13 from <https://religiondispatches.org/thanks-but-no-thanks-how-a-noted-theologians-defense-of-larycia-hawkins-goes-bizarrely-astray/>

³⁶⁴ Craig, W.L. (2016). #459 Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God? Retrieved, January 13 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god/>

³⁶⁵ An, K. (2015). Do Muslims and Christians worship the same god? College suspends professor who said yes. Retrieved, January 13 from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/12/16/do-muslims-and-christians-worship-the-same-god-college-suspends-professor-who-said-yes/>

The question of whether or not Muslims and Christians worship the same God has been a topic of some interest and is a popular discussion point between adherents of both faiths. For Muslims, the trinity can never be conceived as absolute monotheism and the Qur’ān both warns Christians against *shirk* (polytheism) and invites Christians back to the radical monotheism of all Prophets. Craig does contend Volf’s suggestion that Muslims are ‘enemies’ to Christians, instead positing that Satan has a primary role in all misguidance, yet together with Volf, fails to present any accurate presentation of the Qur’ān’s position on love. Scott Alexander, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Director of Catholic-Muslim Studies at Catholic Theological Union, wrote this in reply to Volf’s article: “If we begin with the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (s.) himself, it is clear that the virtues of mercy (*raḥma*) and forbearance towards one’s enemies (*hilm*), a willingness to reconcile and rebuild trust especially in the aftermath of conflict (*sulh*), and an unflagging commitment to justice (*‘adl*) are just some of the key virtues of the Sunna which amount to an obvious analogue for standard practical and historically attested Christian interpretations of the command to love one’s enemies.”³⁶⁶

God describes the Prophet as an embodiment of merciful character: “And We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds.”³⁶⁷ Mercy, compassion and empathy are interlinked features of the best of what all people seek. We prefer mercy over harshness, forbearance over rage, kindness over cruelty. The Prophet instructed that kindness be applied in every situation, that “Kindness is not found in something except that it makes it beautiful, and it is not removed from something except that it makes it tarnished.”³⁶⁸ One of his companions ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Amr reported: I met the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and he said to me, “O ‘Uqbah, reconcile with whoever cuts you off, give to whoever deprives you, and forgive whoever wrongs you.”³⁶⁹ The Prophet further said, “The merciful ones are those whom the All-Merciful will show mercy on. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you.”³⁷⁰ 14th century theologian Ibn al-Qayyim explained this by noting, “And Allāh is merciful, and He loves the merciful ones, and He veils the sins of people and He loves those who veil the sins of others. Whoever pardons others, Allāh will pardon him; whoever forgives others, Allāh will forgive him; whoever excuses others, Allāh will

³⁶⁶ Alexander, S.C. (2015). Thanks But No Thanks: How A Noted Theologian’s Defense Of Larycia Hawkins Goes Bizarrely Astray. Retrieved, January 13 from <https://religiondispatches.org/thanks-but-no-thanks-how-a-noted-theologians-defense-of-larycia-hawkins-goes-bizarrely-astray/>

³⁶⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 21, verses 107.

³⁶⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2594

³⁶⁹ Musnad Aḥmad 17452

³⁷⁰ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1924.

excuse him; whoever shows excellence unto others, Allāh will deal excellently towards him. As you do so shall be done unto you, so be how you choose for indeed Allāh will be unto you as you are unto His servants.”³⁷¹ Most of all Allāh loves mercy: “Allāh willed upon Himself grace and mercy”³⁷² One of the most frequently repeated phrases on the lips of the Muslim are: “In the name of Allāh the Merciful the Compassionate”, a phrase they utter in the performance of all things. Amira Abdin explains, “The Qur’ān tells us that humankind was created for one purpose only, to love God and worship Him, but it tells us also that this worship evokes an immediate response: ‘Call upon Me and I will answer’ (40:60). There is therefore a dialogue in prayer, but only humanity is capable of dialogue with God; the rest of creation ‘prays’ and ‘praises’ but does so, as it were, unconsciously, simply by being: ‘The seven heavens and the earth and all therein glorify Him, and there is not a single thing that does not celebrate His praise; but you do not understand their praise’ (17:44)”³⁷³

Allāh therefore emphasises how much He loves what is good and pure; loves the workers of kindness, of patience, of piety, and these serve as great incentives for the faithful to live to a standard of virtuous conduct with all: “and persevere in doing good: behold, God loves the doers of good.”³⁷⁴ Another beautiful set of directives underscore the same point. Again, these are directives aimed at encouraging the faithful to vie for God’s pleasure, with the goal of imbuing within them qualities of social affinity, paradigms of reconciliatory practice and the overcoming of egocentric tendencies:

And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer’s forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious.³⁷⁵

who spend in His way in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men because God loves the doers of good.³⁷⁶

Say, ‘To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth?’ Say, ‘To Allāh.’ He has decreed upon Himself mercy. He will surely assemble you

³⁷¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīyya. (2000). *The Invocation of God: Al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib min al-Kalim al-Ṭayyib*, trans. Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald and Moulay Youssef Slitine. The Islamic Texts Society, pp. 53-56.

³⁷² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 6, verse 12.

³⁷³ Abdin, A.S (2004). Love in Islam. *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*, Spring 2004, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 100.

³⁷⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 2, verse 195.

³⁷⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 133.

³⁷⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 3, verse 134.

for the Day of Resurrection, about which there is no doubt. Those who will lose themselves that Day do not believe.³⁷⁷

A juxtaposing of what God loves and does not love is shown in the following verse; the acts of virtuous merit induce the faithful to love and do what benefits them in the eyes of God and to refrain from what harms them in the eyes of God:

And worship God alone, and do not ascribe any divinity in any way to anything but Him. And do good unto your parents, and near of kin, and unto orphans, and the needy, and the neighbour from among your own people, and the neighbour who is from another community and who is a stranger, and the friend by your side, and the wayfarer, and those whom you rightfully possess. Verily, God does not love any of those who are full of conceit and who act in a boastful manner; nor those who are stingy, and bid others to be stingy, and conceal whatever God has bestowed on them out of His bounty; We have readied shameful suffering for all those who deny the truth. And God does not love those who spend their wealth on others only to be seen and praised by men.³⁷⁸

Christians and Muslims would not falter in agreeing that God is indeed maximally omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent though the Christian concept of these attributes falls short in the Islamic outlook. It is the third of these divine attributes however that deserves much of our attention here in relation to the soteriological and hamartiological positioning of both faiths; and in relation to Craig's claims about Islam.

Craig's conception of God is that He is an eternally loving Being - through the trinitarian theism he upholds, i.e. that God "must be giving Himself in love to another."³⁷⁹ This idea is fraught with difficulties, the most obvious is that in trinitarian theology, it is a love of God – focused essentially on Himself, and not on "another". Firstly, God's divine attributes cannot be equated with human instincts, as the Qur'an declares: "there is nothing that could be compared with Him"³⁸⁰. Manifestation of love between humans is due to a human bonding instinct, but God is not bound by an

³⁷⁷ Al-Qur'an. Chapter 6, verse 12.

³⁷⁸ Al-Qur'an. Chapter 4, verse 36-38.

³⁷⁹ Craig, W.L. Doctrine of God: Trinity (Part 11): A Plausibility Argument for the Trinity. Retrieved, January 14, 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-god-Trinity/doctrine-of-god-Trinity-part-11/>

³⁸⁰ Al-Qur'an. Chapter 112, verses 4.

instinct which bonds Him with others. God is necessarily maximally loving. Craig's hypothesising about God's love reveals something else about the nature of God, that:

It is the very nature of love to give oneself away. Love reaches out to another person rather than centering wholly in oneself, so if God is perfectly loving by His very nature, He must be giving Himself in love to another.³⁸¹

This however, would speak of a self-love, since the three persons of the Trinity are each believed to be independently God, so simply put it is God loving other aspects of Himself, not a love reaching out to anyone except the other part of Himself. R.C. Sproul also draws attention to the interpersonal love between Jesus and the Father, between two persons of the Christian godhead, "Love is to seek the wellbeing of someone other than yourself...Love is sensitive to the needs and desires of others...That's what Jesus does – Take this cup from me, nevertheless not my will but your will be done."³⁸² Is it love or really self-love if God sends Himself (the Jesus part of the godhead) to restore humanity to righteousness? This idea was popularised by the 12th century Scottish theologian Richard of St. Victor who begins his six-book *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity) by stating that the perfection of God is exemplified in the three persons of the Trinity who share a love, what he describes as a perfect love, "so great that nothing greater can exist."³⁸³ Richard thus proposes that God must be three persons. Other Christians have contended Richard's formulation and question whether it is an aberration from orthodox understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg thinks not. He argues that on Richard's model, "at least one person must be presupposed as the subject of love if we are to understand it, whereas in the case of the other persons we run up against the ancient problems of subordination to the first person and the threat of tritheism."³⁸⁴

In more recent times, philosopher Richard Swinburne has drawn on the same idea to outline what has come to be known as a **three-self Trinity theory**. That the Father in perfect goodness "necessarily produces the Son (in order to have one equal whom to love and be loved by) and the Spirit (in order that the Son have one equal other than

³⁸¹ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

³⁸² Sproul, R.C. [Ligonier Ministries] (2021, July 16). What is the Love of God' (Abiding Love) [Video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu7xp2_1Bns

³⁸³ Richard of St. Victor. (1979). *The Twelve Patriarchs; The Mystical Ark; Book Three of The Trinity*, trans. and ed. Grover A Zinn. Paulist Press, 375.

³⁸⁴ Pannenberg, W. (1988). *Systematic Theology*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; 1st edition, p. 297.

the Father to love and be loved by). There cannot be more than three divine persons because three persons are sufficient for the existence of unselfish love, and so any fourth divine person would be produced by an act which none of the three needed to produce, and so would not exist necessarily and so could not be divine.”³⁸⁵ And similar to Pannenburg’s objection to Richard of St. Victor, many see it as “a fairly straightforward form of tritheism.”³⁸⁶ Swinburne’s thesis is very problematic. It can easily be compared to emanationist conceptions of God in the Neo-Platonic Muslim philosophical tradition, where God’s goodness necessitates an overflow of existence (hence creation). Since Swinburne’s thesis is parallel (in important ways) to emanationism, then his articulation of the Son as being part of God is very problematic, given that in emanationism the existence (or more accurately the First Intellect that came from God) is creation subordinated to God and dependent on God, not equal to Him in any way.

Craig makes a series of generalisations about the Qur’ān and the Islamic concept of sin and salvation in Islam. He remarks that the God of the Qur’ān does not love sinners and cites passages from the Qur’ān wherein God declares that He does not love the arrogant, those who sow corruption, and does not love the treacherous. Craig positions his hypothesis on the discussion of moral adequacy and argues that the God of the Qur’ān does not love sinners, but only the faithful and upright and is thus morally inadequate, whereas the God of the Bible loves all humanity: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”³⁸⁷

The Islamic position is very clear. Sin is reprehensible to God, and sinners who are unrepentant and obstinate in their sin are not loved by God. God’s mercy however, extends to all people and God reminds such sinners that His ‘door of mercy and forgiveness’ is always open, thus inviting the sinful back to His grace. Ibn Taymīyya explains: “People have two strengths: strength of love and strength of hate. Mankind was only created this way so that they may love the truth which Allāh loves and hate the falsehood which Allāh hates, and those are the ones who love Allāh and are loved by Allāh.”³⁸⁸

First, while the Qur’ān does state that God does not love the wicked and arrogant, the point that requires stressing is that each declarative is contextualised precisely by

³⁸⁵ Swinburne, R. (2018). The social theory of the Trinity. *Religious Studies*, 54(3), pp. 419-437.

³⁸⁶ Davidson, M. (2016). The Logical Space of Social Trinitarianism. *Faith and Philosophy*, 33(3), pp. 333–57.

³⁸⁷ John 3:16.

³⁸⁸ Ibn Taymīyya. (2018). *The Principle of Love and Desire*. Authentic Statement Publishing, p. 185.

such categories of peoples - embodied in arrogant nations, killers of prophets, stubborn rejecters of God's messages and so on. Christians would together affirm that there is indeed a punishment associated with denial and rejection and evil and that the Biblical God, as stated in the book of Psalms also does not love the arrogant: "The arrogant cannot stand in Your presence; You hate all who do wrong."³⁸⁹ Notice that it is not some abstract "sin" or "wickedness" that God hates in this verse; it is people whom He hates. What good is the teaching that 'God loves everyone' impartially, universally and unconditionally if God still requires from them? Hidden in the Christian narrative is a silent, yet salient, admission that transformative change is always required – in a variety of forms – through penance, redemption, grace, acceptance of Jesus and thereafter living a religious life etc. 'God loves everyone', therefore, becomes a ruse. Verses in the Bible that make clear that salvation is conditional, are the very ones Christians are keen to quote, such as "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."³⁹⁰ Christians might be sure to respond by articulating that it is the human being in his persistence in sin who chooses to be alienated from the Divine and that God nonetheless loves the faithful and sinners. Limited atonement however presents a problem here.

Questioned why some people are still damned despite the atonement of Jesus, Craig explains that this is not an objection to penal substitution but an argument about the extent of the atonement, that some reformed theologians believed that Christ died only for the elect "and therefore the non-elect their sins are not atoned for, therefore they are damned."³⁹¹ Craig states that he does not favour the idea of limited atonement. His argument is nonetheless noticeably tautological –

although Christ's atoning death is sufficient for the salvation of all persons its actualisation requires a response of faith and repentance on the part of the individual believer in order to become a beneficiary of that payment...divine forgiveness of sin is much more akin to a legal pardon than it is to the kind of forgiveness that typically takes place in interpersonal human relationships. Because as a result of divine

³⁸⁹ Psalm 5:5

³⁹⁰ John 3:36

³⁹¹ Craig, W.L. If Christ Died for All, Why Isn't There Universal Salvation? Retrieved, January 14 2022 from <http://evangelicalarminians.org/william-lane-craig-if-christ-died-for-all-why-isnt-there-universal-salvation/>

forgiveness of sins our guilt is abolished and our liability to punishment is annulled.³⁹²

He explains therefore that God offers us a pardon for our sins but:

pardons require acceptance by the pardonee...in any case pardons can be conditional...so suppose God has issued the pardon for sins on the condition of repentance and faith. In that case that pardon, though achieved by Christ's death will only be efficacious when the conditions of repentance and faith are met by the individual person. So Christ's death is universal in covering the penalty for all sin but that it becomes an efficacious pardon of our sins only and so far as we accept it by repentance and faith.³⁹³

The same point is made in Craig's text *The Atonement*: "The promise of God's righteousness is to those who are "in Christ."³⁹⁴ Furthermore, he states:

there is the union of believers with Christ whereby they become the beneficiaries of his atoning death... The way in which we appropriate the benefits of Christ's atoning death is by faith culminating in baptism...We are in Christ through faith and baptism, by which we identify with his death and resurrection. We, in effect, accept his representation of us. Those who reject him reject his representation of them and so are not united with him³⁹⁵

Contrary to Craig's charge against Islam, therefore, there is in the Christian outlook an expectation of righteousness through actions which means that Christians would need to do things like repenting, turning away from their sins, choosing to live righteous lives and baptism. In other words, the soteriology of Christianity as explained by Craig is predicated on acceptance in the first place of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, belief in the creedal theology that follows and partaking in the rituals associated with it. The point is also underscored by American evangelist Billy Graham, "God can forgive every sin you've ever committed. God can wipe the slate clean. Because of Christ. Not because you deserve it...but I must receive him."³⁹⁶ For Craig

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 25-26.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

³⁹⁶ Graham, B. [ABOVE INSPIRATION]. (2019, June 27). One of the MOST POWERFUL Videos You'll Ever Watch - Inspirational Video [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHPaFDRZMUo>

this has textual backing in Romans 5.17³⁹⁷ The tautology in Craig's argument is purposed to counter the questioner's enquiry about limited atonement, to which Craig initially said he did not favour on the grounds it was unbiblical. In Islam, mankind's relationship with God is built on an understanding that God is Merciful, that nothing that man does impedes on God's holiness for God is necessarily, maximally holy. The things we do, distance us from divine grace, yet God is Ever Close and pleased that His servants return to Him. Allāh further states:

That He may give them in full their rewards and increase for them of His bounty. Indeed, He is Forgiving and Appreciative.³⁹⁸

This verse concludes with two of the beautiful names of Allāh, *Ghāfir* (Forgiving) and *Shakūr*, (Appreciative). These two names are paired together three times in the Qur'ān, each one a remarkable testament to God's maximally loving nature. Allāh is both forgiving and appreciative of the works of His creation. He provides in abundance to the little that we do, appreciates the smallest of deeds performed with sincere hearts. The verse explains that He both rewards and multiplies such rewards which demonstrates His loving nature. Everything we do comes from Him alone, our faculties, senses, limbs are all created and sustained by Allāh yet He still, out of His love, rewards the faithful for their intentions and efforts. Ibn Kathir explains: "He who is grateful is met with Allāh's appreciation, and he whose heart believes in Him will know Him, and He will reward him for that with the greatest reward."³⁹⁹

[And it will be said], 'Indeed, this is for you a reward, and your effort has been appreciated'.⁴⁰⁰

In the Qur'ānic account, we see the great bounty and benevolence of God. Adam and his wife were both afflicted with sin by eating from the tree forbidden to them, and thereafter, with sincere repentance pleaded with God for forgiveness; and from the honour and generosity of God, both were forgiven. The majesty of God is shown through His closeness to His creation, His being maximally aware, maximally loving and forgiving. The paradigm of seeking forgiveness for human failings was founded at the first instance, and so too was man's realisation that He has a loving and merciful God. Adam's sin was indeed a violation against God, the most Holy and Exalted. His sin was to eat from a tree God had prohibited him from, and it was not so much his sin but the greatness of He who Adam and his wife transgressed against. In Islam

³⁹⁷ Romans 5:15; Craig, W.L. (2018). *The Atonement*. Cambridge University Press, p. 26.

³⁹⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 35, verse 30.

³⁹⁹ Ibn Kathir. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*. Dar al-Ma'rifa, p. 436.

⁴⁰⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 76, verse 22.

however, we are reminded that God is All-Forgiving. The most heinous sin with God is not to eat from a tree; but to deny Him altogether, to associate others in His worship; and even at this end God is pleased with the repentant servant. Even somebody who mocks, denies and opposes God, the path of repentance is open for him too. God explains:

Do they not know that it is God Himself who accepts repentance from His servants and receives what is given freely for His sake? He is always ready to accept repentance, most merciful.⁴⁰¹

Yet anyone who does evil or wrongs his own soul and then asks God for forgiveness will find Him most forgiving and merciful.⁴⁰²

And whoever repents and does good has truly turned to Allāh properly.⁴⁰³

Why do they not turn to God and ask His forgiveness, when God is most forgiving, most merciful?⁴⁰⁴

And all of you beg Allāh to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful.⁴⁰⁵

A verse that warns mankind about grave sins such as murder and adultery of a two-fold severe punishment in the afterlife concludes the proscription with the following encouragement - “except those who repent, believe, and do good deeds: God will change the evil deeds of such people into good ones. He is most forgiving, most merciful.”⁴⁰⁶ What God wants from us is for us to believe in Him alone as the only deity worthy of worship, to know Him, to have hope in Him and trust Him, to love Him. A tradition in which the Prophet informed us of Allāh’s approach towards His creation reads:

Allāh Almighty said: O son of Adam, if you call upon Me and place your hope in Me, I will forgive you despite what is within you and I will not hesitate. O son of Adam, if you have sins piling up to the clouds and then ask for My forgiveness, I will forgive you without hesitation. O son of Adam, if you come to Me with enough sins to fill the earth and then you

⁴⁰¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 9, verses 104.

⁴⁰² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verses 110.

⁴⁰³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 25, verses 71.

⁴⁰⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verses 74.

⁴⁰⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 24, verses 31.

⁴⁰⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 25, verses 70.

meet Me without associating anything with Me, I will come to you with enough forgiveness to fill the earth.⁴⁰⁷

The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: “All the sons of Adam are sinners, but the best of sinners are those who are given to repentance.”⁴⁰⁸ This means everyone sins and God is interacting with us as a people predisposed to sin, as sinners. After all, what use would repentance have if we were unable to sin? This is beautifully expressed in the following tradition: “O My slaves, you commit sins night and day and I forgive all sins, so seek My forgiveness and I shall forgive you.”⁴⁰⁹ Allāh has ennobled His creation and afforded them the provisions of the world, gifted them with senses and enabled them to witness the majesty of His creation. He has blessed them with faculties of reason and of emotions, and sent Prophets and Messengers with proofs and revelation to clarify the truth of man’s purpose and potential. This is coming from a loving God. He also gave within man an innate predisposition, a pure inherent goodness with the proto-knowledge that God is reality, to be alert to human fragilities and vulnerabilities and find the fullest satisfaction in His remembrance. Allāh does not hate the state with which man is created, He formed and fashioned man: “your generous Lord, who created you, shaped you, proportioned you.”⁴¹⁰

The state of man is able to both blossom as well as deteriorate, and it is the test of life that man seeks to know and love God through the refining of his inner self: “Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be. And inspired it to know its own rebellion and piety!”⁴¹¹ He hates man’s indifference to sin, arrogance in the face of sin, wanton disregard for the rights of other fellow men. God hates man’s ingratitude and hates all that is a barrier to His love. God hates that human beings would hate others without due cause. Maximal love, maximal goodness or maximal excellence is not to love everyone and everything unconditionally or impartially, but maximal love is to open the doors of mercy for everyone unconditionally. It is shown in the Ever-nearness of Allāh to His creation, right from the very beginning in how He treated Adam. God’s love is a special thing, one that humans work to attain through sincere reverence and devotion. It is not, as suggested by Craig showered on all, the appalling and evil as well as the saintly. What is showered on all is His Mercy, that at any moment if the sinners seek God He readily accept them.

⁴⁰⁷ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3540

⁴⁰⁸ Mishkāt al-Masābīḥ 2341

⁴⁰⁹ Muslim; Riyāḍ as-Ṣāliḥīn 111

⁴¹⁰ Al-Qur’ān, chapter 82, verse 7

⁴¹¹ Al-Qur’ān, chapter 91, verse 7-8.

The notion of the maximal perfection of God refers to a description of the maximal perfection of God's essence/nature and attributes. The maximally perfect attributes which God possesses under this supposition of maximal perfection, are tied to God's nature in a way that they collectively make up the nature of God, and cannot be abstracted, detached or truly appreciated in complete isolation. Although we can speak of the love of God, power of God, and knowledge of God, and we speak as if we are isolating these specific attributes. In reality, they are interrelated. Thus, the maximal perfection manifest in God's Love, cannot be detached from the maximal perfection of His Wisdom, Justice etc. Craig is mistaken methodologically in performing a kind of extraction of God's attribute of Love from His broader nature. When situated in the nature of God with all His attributes, it makes no sense to speak of an 'unconditional' love.

Christianity's misconceptions of God's forgiveness

In the Biblical narrative, forgiveness is necessitated by the suffering of Jesus as a vicarious atonement. Many Christian theologians including Augustine of Hippo held that even infants carry the original guilt, because this would be the only way to ensure the true universality of the human need for Christ's death (2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 5:6)⁴¹² It is held that God, unwilling to initially forgive Adam instead sent Himself in the form of Jesus to pay the price of Adam's sin and that inherited by us from him. It is ironic that God's penalty seeking needed to take precedence over his love whilst the act of redemption through Jesus is one of much greater injustice – that being the killing of an innocent person for the sins of others. Forgiveness therefore, is outside of one's personal relationship with the divine wherein sincerity, humility and repentance alone are instead replaced by a predication on an event that is intrinsically outside of one's personal repentance – and is only made relevant through acceptance of the (Biblical) narrative surrounding the event. The argument can be presented like this: Imagine if you violated my rights and then, feeling remorseful, you approached me asking for forgiveness. However, I explain that the only way I will be able to forgive you is if you allow your cousin to kill my son. Would one describe this as a reasonable expression of maximal human forgiveness? Not only is it obviously unjust, it also fails to accept the heartfelt remorse of the individual who wronged you, and ignores his sincere volition to seek forgiveness. It instead makes his forgiveness contingent on an external reality

⁴¹² Bonner, G. (1972). *Augustine and Modern Research on Pelagianism, The Saint Augustine Lecture 1970*. Villanova University Press, p. 18.

to your direct relationship with him. So, by greater reason, God must be absolved from such an approach to forgiveness as this would run counter to His maximal forgiveness.

According to ex-Qadiani Nabeel Qureshi, “The Christian God is an absolutely perfect loving father...the Christian God is willing to forgive us for all of our sins by paying the penalty Himself...the Muslim God is unknowable, it’s not meek for Him to enter into this world. The Christian God says believe in Him, follow Him and he will take our sins upon himself. The Muslim God gives us rules to follow and laws to complete for us to have a chance at earning His grace and mercy.”⁴¹³ Qureshi’s words here do not reflect well the idea of a perfect being who is necessarily and maximally omnibenevolent, “a loving father” as he had described and nor do they do well in describing the attributes of the Islamic conception of God. In Qureshi’s outline in order for the penalty of sins to be paid to God, God pays the penalty to Himself and He is thereafter appeased because a price has been paid unto Himself and He is the one who pays the price to Himself. Langford writes, “Sin had brought alienation from God, the lack of personal fellowship with Him. God, consequently, took it upon Himself to rescue humanity by paying the price for its fallenness.”⁴¹⁴ The question of laws and grace has been well covered and so too the contradictory nature of such an argument since it has been established that Christians are not required to do absolutely nothing to attain salvation. There is still a requirement to undergo a baptism, repentance, adhere to a Church community as well as to abide by other Old Testament laws. Qureshi’s comment about what the Christian God says, “believe in him, follow him and He will take our sins upon himself” sounds puzzling since if God is the very one who is wronged by sins then what would taking it upon himself mean? Surely, Qureshi meant that God would forgive those sins though the suggestion is one of God self-burdening himself with the sins in order to forgive those sins. The Islamic paradigm is conversely clear, the same point about wanting “to turn unto you in His mercy” expressed twice sequentially:

It is Allāh’s Will to make things clear to you, guide you to the ‘noble’ ways of those before you, and turn to you in mercy. For Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Wise.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Qureshi, N. [Zondervan]. (2016, July 20). Are Allāh and the God of Christianity the Same? Nabeel Qureshi Answers [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0jDTFyHluw>

⁴¹⁴ Langford, J.S.D. (1983). *Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims*. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643>

⁴¹⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 26.

And it is Allāh’s Will to turn to you in grace, but those who follow their desires wish to see you deviate entirely from Allāh’s Way⁴¹⁶

Secondly, one is led to question whether it is a demonstration of maximal love to create human beings with inherent sin – to which they are inextricably bound – and then eternally separate from them and only reconcile with them through the taking of a blood payment. As Timpe explains, “Because sin is primarily a function of our created state rather than a result of human actions, this view doesn’t portray human freedom or forgiveness as playing a key role overcoming the state of sin. Rather, the gap is straddled by covenant and, ultimately, incarnation.⁴¹⁷ It is of course God who is the doer as well as the recipient of what is done in this paradigm. Meaning, God (1). Does not forgive Adam (2). God appears in human form and dies (3). He dies so that He can be appeased for Adam’s sin through the shedding of His own blood (4). All who accept that God does (1), (2) and (3) will be forgiven by God.

Thirdly, Craig posits that God in Islam is morally inadequate in love because He is not all-loving – with a focus on not being loving towards sinners. Though mercy is to be seen as a synonym for love and God declares in the Qur’ān, “My mercy encompasses all things”⁴¹⁸ the question arises, is it maximal love to love everyone the same? Does one love good; the same way one loves its opposition? Would it be loving to love even evil? Would one not expect an aversion to the opposition to love? Furthermore, is it considered perfect maximal love, to love that which is a barrier to love? God indeed loves His creation, but does not always love how that human being has identified himself by virtue of his state of being, and how he relates to himself, how he relates to others and how he relates to his creator.

Fourthly, by positing that God loves both the saint and the sinner, the devout worshipper and the psychopathic mass murderer, what motivation would it provide for the worshipper to continue on his path, or for the sinner to relinquish his blade? Surely the pressing weight of moral duties becomes meaningless if God loves everyone the same. The Qur’ān explains,

Should We treat those who submit to Us as We treat those who do evil?
What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge?⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 27.

⁴¹⁷ Timpe, K. Sin in Christian Thought. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Retrieved, January 14 2022 from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/sin-christian/>.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 156.

⁴¹⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 68, verses 35-36.

Islam teaches that the maximally perfect Being does not love everyone the same, but His mercy encompasses all. Even the wretched have a chance at any moment to reconnect with their Creator and make amends, and in doing so, will find God accepting of repentance. God, the All-Knowing is Most Aware of a human being's trudges in life, He fully knows every person's circumstance, his or her inner self. He fully knows what a sincere repentance is and what is not. The words of the Qur'ān are sufficient as an explanation:

How could He who created not know His own creation, when He is the Most Subtle, the All Aware?⁴²⁰

Say, 'Whether you conceal what is in your breasts or reveal it, Allāh knows it. And He knows that which is in the heavens and that which is on the earth. And Allāh is over all things competent'.⁴²¹

He knows all that they keep secret as well as all that they bring into the open - for, behold, He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts.⁴²²

And your Sustainer knows all that their hearts conceal as well as all that they bring into the open.⁴²³

Indeed, Allāh is the Knower of the unseen of the heavens and the earth. He surely knows best what is 'hidden' in the heart.⁴²⁴

And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein⁴²⁵

The Prophet's companion Abū Ayyūb al-Ansāri said:

A person might do a single good deed, rely on it, and forget sins that he regards insignificant, but then meet Allāh (on the Day of Judgment) with those sins surrounding him. (Another) man might commit a sin, but never stop fearing its consequences, until he meets Allāh safe and sound.⁴²⁶

It is thus God who knows the trueness of a person's intentions, his repentance and any transformation in his state. With the great emphasis placed on the mercy of Allāh

⁴²⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 67, verse 14.

⁴²¹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 29.

⁴²² Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 11, verse 5.

⁴²³ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 28, verse 69.

⁴²⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 35, verse 38.

⁴²⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 50, verse 16.

⁴²⁶ Ibn al-Mubārak. (1971). *Al-Zuhd wa Al-Raqā'iq* vol. 1. Mu'assasat al-Risālah, p. 170.

sometimes Christians assume that Allāh is so merciful as not to punish those deserving of punishment. This of course is an incorrect assumption. Allāh describes Himself as the “Forgiver of sins and Acceptor of repentance, severe in punishment, infinite in bounty. There is no god but Him; to Him is the ultimate return.”⁴²⁷ Allāh’s divine justice resulting in befitting punishment, as well as divine mercy are together considered in this verse, notwithstanding the comforting words of God: “Indeed My mercy prevails over My wrath.”⁴²⁸

Islam’s understanding of God’s forgiveness

Craig writes on his website the following:

But the problem with that interpretation is that there just aren’t any comparable Qur’ānic passages stating that God loves all people or that He loves unbelievers and sinners. Not one! Over and over again the Qur’ān assures us of God’s love for those who submit to Him and say the confession and do His will, but He has no love for sinners and unbelievers.⁴²⁹

The Qur’ān teaches that to Allāh belong the Most illustrious names and attributes,⁴³⁰ from them is His divine name of al-Wadūd which denotes a maximal love. Meaning ‘affection’ or ‘amity’, it connects with His other mercy and affection denoting names, al-Raḥmān and al-Raḥīm. The Qur’ān states: “He is the Forgiving, the Loving.”⁴³¹ And “Ask forgiveness from your Lord and repent to Him. Verily, my Lord is Merciful and Loving.”⁴³² Eleventh-century theologian al-Ghazālī explained, “al-Wadūd is He Who loves good for all of creation, and treats them in the best manner, and commends them. It is close in meaning to al-Raḥmān (the Merciful).”⁴³³ It is Allāh’s closeness to His creation, His readiness to pardon the repentant, His appreciating of man’s efforts that reflect His love for His creation. Allāh has ennobled the sons of Adam, and conferred importance on them. In Christian theo-philosophical studies agape is held to be a natural love, “spontaneous and unmotivated,” a love that

⁴²⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 40, verse 3.

⁴²⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3022, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2751

⁴²⁹ Craig, W.L. God’s Unconditional Love. Retrieved, 14 January 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/question-answer/gods-unconditional-love/>

⁴³⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 7, verse 180; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 110; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 20, verse 8; Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 59, verse 24.

⁴³¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 85, verse 14.

⁴³² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 90.

⁴³³ al-Bayhaqī. (1993). Kitāb al-asmā’ wa-al-ṣifāt vol. 1. Maktabat al-Suwādī, p. 198.

we do not merit. Many theologians and philosophers such as Swedish Lutheran Anders Nygren, Neera Kapur Badhwar and A. Soble have characterised *agape* in different ways. In simple terms it is understood as a bestowing of value on a beloved, that in bestowing value on another is to project an intrinsic value onto him. According to Singer “love...confers importance no matter what the object is worth.”⁴³⁴

Certainly, in Christianity, love plays an important role, loving God, loving one’s neighbour. Nygren in *Agape & Eros* credits Christianity for “making fellowship the starting-point for ethical discussion. The question of the Good is no longer envisaged from the point of view of the isolated individual, but rather from that of man in society, man in his relation to God and to his fellow-men.”⁴³⁵ The fundamental of this book has called for a re-evaluation of notions of love, or mercy and of forgiveness in the context of God and the Adamic world. Fitting centrally into the Islamic paradigm is the honour shown to Adam and his progeny (“Now, indeed, We have conferred dignity on the children of Adam...”⁴³⁶). Adam is not scapegoated but remains in the frame as a measure of God’s love and Ever-Nearness. Allāh’s love is maximally perfect and is the purest form of love. The terms used to describe His love are many, including mercy (*rahma*), His special mercy (*rahīm*) and His special love (*mawadda*). There are many others which denote the same such the Ever-Near (*al-Qarīb*), the Pardoner (*al-‘Afuww*), the Ever-Pardoning (*al-Tawwāb*), the Forgiver (*al-Ghafūr*), the Most Appreciative (*al-Shakūr*).

Muslim academic Tzortzis explains the love of Allāh as three types: “the first is that God’s mercy is an intense mercy; the second is that His mercy is an immediate mercy; and the third is a mercy so powerful that nothing can stop it. God’s mercy encompasses all things and He prefers guidance for people... God’s love transcends all of the different types of love. His love is greater than all worldly forms of love. For example, a mother’s love, although selfless, is based on her internal need to love her child. It completes her, and through her sacrifices she feels whole and fulfilled. God is an independent Being who is self-sufficient and perfect; He does not require anything. God’s love is not based on a need or want; it is therefore the purest form of love, because He gains absolutely nothing from loving us. In this light, how can we not love the One who is more loving than anything we can imagine? The Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, “God is more affectionate to His servants than a mother to her children.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁴ Singer, I. (1991). *The Nature of Love*. In Solomon, R. C. & Higgins, K. M. (eds.). *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*. Kansas University Press, p. 273.

⁴³⁵ Nygren, A. (1982). *Agape & Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson. University of Chicago Press, p. 45.

⁴³⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 17, verse 70.

⁴³⁷ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5999, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2754

If God is the most loving, and His love is greater than the greatest worldly love we have experienced, this should instil in us a deeper love for God.”⁴³⁸ The heartfelt advice Prophet Ibrahim imparted unto his father underscores the love and mercy focus in his efforts to try and persuade his father to leave off idol-worshipping and turn his reverence and devotion to the One God, the Most Merciful, emphasised through repetition in Prophet Ibrahim’s directives:

O dear father! Do not worship Satan. Surely Satan is ever rebellious against the Most Compassionate.⁴³⁹

O dear father! I truly fear that you will be touched by a torment from the Most Compassionate, and become Satan’s companion ‘in Hell’.⁴⁴⁰

Similarly, Maryam, the mother of Jesus, when she was alone in her chamber and visited by the angel who brought her the good news that she would come to give birth to Jesus, was alarmed by what she assumed was an intruder. She says, “She said, ‘I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him.’”⁴⁴¹ The specific seeking refuge in the “Most Merciful” is very relevant here in light of God’s love, resonating with hope even for the supposed ‘intruder’. The Qur’ānic example is further enlightening since it is what was said by Mary(am), the mother of Jesus. This work has said much about Christian conceptions of salvation primarily centred on Jesus (as well as his mother Mary(am) by large proportions of Christians throughout history). Her reference to God as the Most Merciful at a time preceding the birth of Jesus further anchors the narrative of the Qur’ān on Islam’s God-centric soteriology. When Maryam therefore encountered the angel in her private chamber she calls on God as the Most Merciful. Those who took her son as God would come to hold him instead as the necessary mercy of God for human salvation. But even before he was born his mother testifies to the divine mercy of the One God alone.

In the Islamic paradigm, what is required by God is sincere returning to Him. In Islam, God is the Knower of the hearts. His mercy and love are always accessible. For the sinner His message resonates with abounding hope:

⁴³⁸ Tzortzis, H.A. (2020). *The Divine Reality: God, Islam & The Mirage of Atheism*. Sapience Institute, pp. 347-348.

⁴³⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 44.

⁴⁴⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 45.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 18.

Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves ‘by sinning’, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed, Allāh forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.’⁴⁴²

One of the most hope inspiring verses in the Qur’ān is the following declarative: “Tell My servants that I - I alone - am truly forgiving, a true dispenser of grace.”⁴⁴³ The verse contains an emphasis by meaning to stress upon God’s sole ability to forgive and dispense mercy to His creation. The truth of this is emphasised further in the Qur’ānic verse: “And they say, “The Most Merciful has taken unto Himself a son.”⁴⁴⁴ The verse is particularly reflective in that it challenges the entire premise on which Christian belief about Jesus is predicated. One notices that the verse does not say that ‘they say that God has taken a son’ but that “The Most Merciful has taken a son” pressing on the fact that 1. Allāh indeed is the Most Merciful 2. The son, believed to be the second person of the Trinity, is held to be God’s manifestation of his mercy who was sent to redeem mankind though Allāh here underscores that ironically the mercy bearing attributed to the son belongs instead to God alone.

The pairing of attributes of God in the Qur’ān tells us much. God describes Himself as *Ghafūr* (truly-forgiving) and *Wadūd* (all-embracing in His love) in the verse, “And He alone is truly-forgiving, all-embracing in His love.”⁴⁴⁵ The link between God’s forgiving nature and His loving nature is essential here to know that forgiveness emanates from His love. Allāh forgives because He loves. His blessings unto His righteous believers, primarily of belief itself, conviction, reverence, worship, humility and inner serenity are substantiations and manifestations of his divine love: “As for those who believe and do good, the Most Compassionate will ‘certainly’ bless them with ‘genuine’ love.”⁴⁴⁶ Explained by Muḥammad Asad, it is to “bestow on them His love and endow them with the capability to love His creation, as well as cause them to be loved by their fellow-men. As is shown in the next verse, this gift of love is inherent in the guidance offered to man through divine revelation.”⁴⁴⁷ Furthermore, in the Qur’ān we are taught that Allāh is *Ghafūr* (all-Forgiving) and *Shakūr* (Most-Appreciative): “so that He will reward them in full and increase them out of His grace. He is truly All-Forgiving, Most Appreciative.”⁴⁴⁸ Qur’ān commentators agree that

⁴⁴² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 39, verse 53.

⁴⁴³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 15, verse 49.

⁴⁴⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 88.

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 85, verse 14.

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⁴⁴⁷ Asad, M. (1984). *The Message of the Qur’ān: Translated and explained by Muḥammad Asad*. Dar al-Andalus, p. 469

⁴⁴⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 35, verse 30.

God's attribute *al-Shakūr* (the Most-Appreciative) means that He appreciates all that His creation does seeking nearness to Him. Fourteenth-century Qur'ān exegete Ibn Kathīr explained that *Shakūr* means "He appreciates even a little of their good deed"⁴⁴⁹ according to the *Jalālayn* commentary, "appreciative of their obedience".⁴⁵⁰ Allāh is both *al-Shākir* (The Recogniser and Rewarder of good) and *al-Shakūr*. Al-Sa'dī explains that *al-Shakūr* is "The one who recognises and rewards the small quantity of actions and the one who forgives the large quantity of sins. He is the one who multiplies the rewards of His sincere servants manifold without measure. He is the one who recognises and rewards those who give thanks to Him and remembers the one who remember Him. whosoever seeks to get closer to Him by doing any righteous action, Allāh draws closer to Him by a greater degree."⁴⁵¹

Contrary to the Christian outlook which positions man as inherently sinful and unable to draw close to God hence necessitating God Himself to become incarnate to sacrifice Himself for our forgiveness, in the Islamic narrative man is predisposed to both good and evil, life is a test of an individual's pursuit of good and shunning of evil. God, maximally omniscient, created human beings with full knowledge and wisdom. God in the Qur'ān is referred to as All-Knowing and All-Aware: "He is the one whose knowledge encompasses all the outward and hidden matters, the open and secret, all those things that must necessarily occur, all those things that are impossible to occur and all those things that can possibly occur. He knows the affairs of the whole of creation, of the past, the present and the future. There is absolutely nothing that is hidden from Him."⁴⁵² The most Exalted, most Magnificent and Greatest entity is Allāh, Lord of all the worlds. None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Originator and Sustainer of the heavens and earths. To Him alone is ascribed absolute perfection and to Him alone do we turn to in reverential fear, hope and love.

It should be stressed that God loves all that is pure, all that is good. He describes Himself *al-Barr*, the Source of all Good. Humans are called on by God to also love what God loves and to abstain from what contradicts what is good and pure. God does not love what is foul and nor those who arrogantly indulge in what is evil. The Prophet for example instructed his wife to love kindness and not its opposite, "O 'Āisha, Allāh is gentle and He loves gentleness. He rewards for gentleness what is not granted for

⁴⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*. Dar al-Ma'rifa, p. 1314; 1317.

⁴⁵⁰ Al-Mahalli & al-Suyuti. (1992). *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*. Dar al-Ikhaa, p. 437.

⁴⁵¹ Al-Sa'dī. (2008). *Explanation to the Beautiful and Perfect Names of Allāh* (trans. Abū Rumaysah). Al-Sunnah Publishers, p. 89.

⁴⁵² Ibid, p. 41.

harshness and He does not reward anything else like it.”⁴⁵³ For the human, to know what is praiseworthy provides him with another measure of God’s love and grace, in that He does not leave mankind without guidance of the path they should pursue in life. The Qur’ānic message reflects the maximal forgiving nature of God, and this as a demonstration of His maximal love. In Islam, forgiveness is shown to be rooted in love and God’s wanting to turn to His creation in mercy:

And God wants to turn unto you in His mercy, whereas those who follow only their own lusts want you to drift far away from the right path.⁴⁵⁴

God wants to lighten your burdens: for man has been created weak.⁴⁵⁵

The Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم taught us to pray to Allāh in the following words:

O Allāh, provide me with Your love and the love of those whose love will benefit me with You. O Allāh, whatever you provided to me of the things that I love, make them a source of strength for me in pursuing what You love. O Allāh, and whatever You kept away from me of the things that I crave, make their absence free up time that I can devote to whatever You love.⁴⁵⁶

Islam places a great emphasis on the need for human beings to strive in pursuit of God’s divine pleasure. It challenges man’s deviation and heedless pursuit of the ephemeral, in place of seeking the bounty and generosity of God, who questions:

Mankind, what has lured you away from God.⁴⁵⁷

Your generous Lord, who created you, shaped you, proportioned you.⁴⁵⁸

God has afforded man the privilege of life, of his senses and countless blessings too many to enumerate. He reassures mankind that He has not left them alone but is forever close, forbearing, kind and merciful. Allāh is *al-Qarīb* (the Ever-Near). He describes in the Qur’ān that anybody who calls upon Him alone and sincerely, He will respond. He describes, “When he comes to me walking, I will come to him running.”⁴⁵⁹ Allāh is ever-near to His creation:

⁴⁵³ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2593

⁴⁵⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 27.

⁴⁵⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 4, verse 28.

⁴⁵⁶ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3413

⁴⁵⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 82, verse 6.

⁴⁵⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 82, verse 7.

⁴⁵⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6970

And when My servants ask you concerning Me - indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me [by obedience] and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided.⁴⁶⁰

One of the seemingly stark contrasts between Allāh and the way the God in the Bible is presented is in relation to His power and authority. Centuries of theological discussion among Christian denominations has centred on the chasm that emerges between God and His creation, due to the latter's succumbing to sin. Theologians have long sought to explain how mankind can be reconciled with God and what this means in a Christ/salvific sense since God been aggrieved by man's sin and needs to be appeased through a payment. Craig posits that any understanding of the atonement theory needs to incorporate a variety of motifs that stem from a range of theories including justification by faith, penal substitution, ransom theory and moral influence. Though each theory sought to explain God's relationship with His creation regarding the way humanity can 'reconcile' with God, to become 'at-one' with' God; each theory is problematic, vis-à-vis the ascertaining of God's maximal forgiveness and maximal love. Each theory acts to restrict God or make the path to God in relation to his love and forgiveness untenable and mired by theological inconsistencies.

Of Allāh's beautiful names is *al-'Afuw* (the One who Pardons). The trilateral root of the word occurs thirty-five times in the Qur'ān in four derived forms, a reminder of the salient attribute of God's forgiveness and closeness to His servants. At four places in the Qur'ān God mentions that He is both Oft-Forgiving and Oft-Pardoning. Divine pardon is a complete cleansing of any wrong action. More than forgiveness, a pardoning is an absolving of any guilt. One of the Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ most repeated and favoured prayers was "O Allāh You are Pardoning; you love to Pardon; so Pardon me."⁴⁶¹ This prayer is also the encouraged prayer for the faithful to recite in the month of Ramadan and in the superior last ten nights of the sacred month. The time of spiritual cleansing and seeking of God's divine grace is thus merged with an overflowing reminder that God not only forgives but pardons His servants.

A tradition concerning Allāh's forgiveness of an individual who had murdered a hundred people is a good reflection of the love that God has for those who choose sincerely to turn to Him:

⁴⁶⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 186.

⁴⁶¹ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3513

There was a man among the children of Israel who had killed ninety-nine people. Then he set out seeking repentance. He came upon a monk and he asked him if his repentance would be accepted. The monk said no, so the man killed him. He continued asking until another man advised him to go to a certain village. He set out for it but death overtook him on the way. As he died, he turned his chest toward the village. The angel of mercy and the angel of punishment argued about him among themselves. Allāh ordered his destination to move closer to him and his old village to move away. Then, Allāh ordered the angels to measure the distance between his body and the two villages. He was found to be one span closer to his destination, so he was forgiven.⁴⁶²

This narration is sometimes brought up by Christian apologists and there are a few points from this narration that require deliberation here: (1) God is fully able to forgive His creation. He is best aware of the one who is sincere and truly seeking His pleasure, at any given time. And (2) the event of the man's being forgiven does not take away from the divine grace that can be allotted to each wronged party. (3) In this light God's justice is one we cannot appreciate fully in this life because divine accountability is reserved for the next life. This is reflected well when the Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "Then the person who had suffered the most affliction in the world of those destined for Paradise will be brought forth and merely dipped into Paradise for a moment. Then he will be asked 'O son of Adam, have you ever seen suffering? Have you ever experienced hardship in your life?' He will reply 'No my Lord, by God. I have never undergone suffering. I have never seen hardship.'"⁴⁶³ (4) The hadith reflects the way that God does not want anyone to feel lost, trapped and shut off from divine grace. (5) The worshipper and the learned man both had different responses to the sinner. The worshipper discounted God's grace for such an individual whilst the learned individual was cognisant of God's attributes of mercy and pardon which can take precedence over His anger. In discounting God's grace, the sinner lost hope and persisted in his killing. (6) The sinner took the necessary steps by moving to a new location that would facilitate his pursuing a path to God. (7) The incident serves as a reminder of the hope that God wants His creation to have in Him. The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم informed us that "All of the children of Adam are sinners, and the best sinners are those who repent."⁴⁶⁴ God thus emphasises His mercy and forgiveness throughout the Qur'ān for those who seek it. God calls on His servants to be sincere, upright, and to

⁴⁶² Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3283, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2766

⁴⁶³ Ibn Mājah, Book 37, Hadith 222

⁴⁶⁴ Sunan al-Tirmidhī 2499

live their lives in obedience, love and trust of God: “but those who repent, who believe, who do righteous deeds, will enter Paradise. They will not be wronged in the least.”⁴⁶⁵ Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves before Your Lord and serve Your Lord and do good that you may prosper.

This discussion was centred on what is fundamentally accepted by Christians and Muslims, that God is maximally loving. Craig’s argument that the God of Islam is not maximally loving due to his conditional and not unconditional love has been shown to be false. The argument has been made and shown that love cannot exist as an abstract but must mean something concrete. In this case, the argument again is one of agreement since both faiths agree that it is God’s forgiveness that is a fundamental demonstration of His love. Rogers explains that “perhaps it is a comment on our own times that so many contemporary philosophers see a tension between transcendent perfection and concern for creation. The medievals take it for granted that love is a real power. Love is a virtue. God is Love. As Aquinas says, ‘God loves all existing things...the love of God infuses and creates goodness in things’.”⁴⁶⁶ Craig begins his argument by isolating John 3:16 as a reflection of God’s unconditional love. But it is to be remembered that the point Craig is making is fundamentally tied to forgiveness since that was the purpose behind God ‘giving His son’ to the world – to become the antitype that redeems them from the sin of Adam. The Biblical God’s forgiveness however is of a limited atonement tied to an acceptance of the sacrificial death of Jesus. According to Swinburne, “Those theologians who think that God forgives everyone whether or not they want to be forgiven seem to me to have an inadequate view of what his perfect goodness consists in.”⁴⁶⁷ The work has shown that God in the Qur’ān not only forgave Adam as a reflection of His love for His creation but taught and facilitated for Him the seeking of forgiveness. God’s maximal forgiveness in Islam is shown with the opportunity of forgiveness and repentance for sinners being available for all, at any time and for any sin, from Adam till the last man. In conclusion, the following points can sum up this section:

1. In each of the examples Christian missionaries often cite, similar verses are found in the Bible, about God not loving the transgressors, wicked, rejecters of faith.

⁴⁶⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 19, verse 60.

⁴⁶⁶ Rogers, K.A. (2000). *Perfect Being Theology*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁶⁷ Swinburne, R. (2012). Christ’s Atoning Sacrifice. In *Philosophical Theology and the Christian Tradition: Russian and Western Perspectives Russian Philosophical Studies, V Christian Philosophical Studies, III*, ed. David Bradshaw. The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, p. 23.

2. Christians hold that the rejectors of Christ's death and atonement will be cast into hell for eternity, and this would not be an expression of an unconditional love.
3. Christians, like Craig, maintain that though Jesus provides the pardon, the pardonee needs to accept the pardon in order to be forgiven. This, then would not be an unconditional love since a strong condition is placed on the receiving of God's love
4. Protestant Christians hold that salvation is by faith and grace alone and not by works. There are some obvious works Christians still need to do to ensure God's approval, such as baptism, repentance and the living of righteous lives. This is a contentious point between Catholics and Protestants.⁴⁶⁸
5. Islam strongly emphasises that salvation is only through the grace and mercy of God, though good actions are an integral component and representation of one's faith.
6. The greatest problem is that the concept of 'love' is not well defined in Christianity as it is clearly defined in Islam. In Islam God was loving from the very beginning and showed His forgiveness to Adam. Christians, too, would maintain that God's love means forgiveness and that forgiveness was shown through the sacrificial death of Jesus.
7. So, while Adam was cut off, Jesus who himself is held to be God underwent a sacrificial death so he himself, meaning God, could be appeased, satisfied, for the just penalty due for sins
8. The Christian God is presented as one demanding retribution, as one refusing to initially forgive, as one exacting payment for the sin instead of forgiving as a measure of His love. In Islam God's mercy is said to overcome and precede His anger.⁴⁶⁹
9. In Christianity works we do are held to be insufficient and unworthy of God, and only Jesus' blood as penalty was sufficient to satisfy God's anger but He Himself is Jesus. His punishment was held to be our punishment. In Islam God is *al-Shakūr*, the maximally appreciating One, who rewards little with much.

⁴⁶⁸ Bryan Mercier. [Catholic Truth]. (2021, August 13). Roman Catholic vs Protestant (A Catholic debunks Todd Friel and WRETCHED) [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoRlPF6SwQY&t=876s>

⁴⁶⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3022, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2751

10. God is shown to be maximally close, merciful and forgiving in Islam and these are the greatest hallmarks of love.

Chapter 7

THE PROPHET OF ISLAM IN CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION

Muslim-Christian dialogue and debate has existed for a long time. Some Christian outlooks towards Islam have been more positive,⁴⁷⁰ and others ill-founded and defamatory. There have been many who have sought to present theological understandings of the religion of Islam and in particular on the life and character of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. This book has gone through each of Craig's arguments on Islamic theism and responded to them in considerable detail. There is however one more area that Craig deliberated on in his list of objections. These, again, are not specific to Craig but are nonetheless quite typical in Christian apologetic and missionary discourse directed at Muslims. The detractions centre on the life and character of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.⁴⁷¹ The things he writes about in relation to the Prophet's engagement with hostile entities are not new. In fact, they have their origin from much earlier times.

Soon after the advent of Islam, beginning with John of Damascus in the late seventh century, Christian apologists either saw Islam as a new heresy, even a Christian heresy, as a false religion, and as a challenge to Christian faith and practice. Michael Curtis explains: "Rivalry, and often enmity, continued between the European Christian world and the Islamic world [...]. For Christian theologians, the "Other" was the infidel, the Muslim. [...] Theological disputes in Baghdad and Damascus, in the eighth to the tenth century, and in Andalusia up to the fourteenth century led Christian Orthodox and Byzantine theologians and rulers to continue seeing Islam as

⁴⁷⁰ Ford, P.F. (2015). "He Walked in the Path of the Prophets": Modern Christian Perspectives on Patriarch Timothy's View of the Prophet of Islam. *Theological Review* 36, 2015, pp. 3 – 22.

⁴⁷¹ Craig, W.L. Concept of God in Islam and Christianity. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/christianity-other-faiths/concept-of-god-in-islam-and-christianity/>

a threat.”⁴⁷² Islam’s social and political rise to power therefore and subsequent growth of conversions to Islam in the Near East among Christians posed a serious theological challenge to Christian clergy. For others, Islam figured as an eschatological phenomenon, for others it was hard to explain such as for the ninth-century Byzantine monk and chronicler Theophanes, “baffled by Islam’s continuing success, Theophanes does not pretend to know what God has in mind.”⁴⁷³

Two of the high-ranking and influential Christian polemicists and apologists whose writings on Islam left a strong impression on other Christian apologists were seventh-century monk and priest John of Damascus (Yuhanna bin Mansur bin Sarjun) and thirteenth-century Italian Dominican monk and philosopher Thomas Aquinas. Both were important in shaping Christian attitudes to historic Islam, popularised by John of Damascus in his compendium *The Fount of Knowledge*. Others included twelfth-century Cluniac monk Peter the Venerable, Roger Bacon, ninth-century Cordoban priest Eulogius of Cordoba who wrote that “the church of the orthodox groans beneath his most grievous yoke and is beaten to destruction”⁴⁷⁴ and other monks of the ninth-century Cordoban Christian Martyr Movement threatened by the growth of Islam as well as that of the Andalusian Christian scholar and theologian Alvaro of Cordoba, concerns outlined in his letter directed to Speraindeus the abbot.⁴⁷⁵ He further complained that Christian youth had come to be particularly impressed by Arabic culture, religion and language instead of the Latin writings of Biblical scholars and church fathers:

The Christians love to read the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the Arab theologians and philosophers, not to refute them but to form a correct and elegant Arabic. Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or Apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books; they gather immense libraries at great expense; they despise the Christian literature as unworthy of attention. They have forgotten their language. For every one who can write a letter in Latin to a friend, there are thousands who can express

⁴⁷² Curtis, M. (2009). *Orientalism and Islam: European Thinkers on Oriental Despotism in the Middle East and India*. Cambridge University Press, p. 31,

⁴⁷³ Tolan, J. (2002). *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*. Columbia University Press, p. 66.

⁴⁷⁴ Eulogius. (n.d). *Memoriale sanctorum* 2:1:1, CSM, pp. 397-98, trans. Colbert, E. (1962). *The Martyrs of Cordoba 850-859: A Study of the Sources*. Catholic University of America, p. 194.

⁴⁷⁵ al-Tamimi, A.J. Mozarabic Writings: Álvaro of Córdoba’s Letter to Speraindeus. Retrieved January 15, 2022 from <https://www.aymennjawad.org/2019/09/mozarabic-writings-alvaro-of-cordoba-letter-to>

themselves in Arabic with elegance, and write a better poem in this language than the Arabs themselves.⁴⁷⁶

Thomas Wienandy's observation about the theological push back of what the Qur'an strongly deemed heretical beliefs and practices is telling of the kind of religious environment John of Damascus and Thomas Aquinas would find themselves in living under Muslim rule. Jews would have a partner of sorts with the Muslims at least in affirming the non-monotheism of trinitarian belief. With regard to the presence of Judaism and Islam, Wienandy writes, "it is worth reminding ourselves that the novel revelation of Islam only reinforced the original Jewish insistence that God is one, which had figured trenchantly in the early elaboration of Christian doctrine. Why else can we surmise that it took four centuries to clarify the central teaching of Christianity about Jesus (Chalcedon, 451) out of which a full-blown trinitarian doctrine emerged?"⁴⁷⁷ In the Iberian Peninsula Jews of course suffered early under seventh-century Visigothic kings Recared I, Sisebut and Chinthila, a shared fate they would come to live out again with the Muslims in the fifteenth century Catholic led Spanish Inquisition. Catholic led anti-trinitarian heresy targeted both Muslims and Jews.

John of Damascus' apologetics stem from what he saw in Islam as a heresy to Christian belief. John was as a Christian theologian serving in the Muslim Umayyad empire. His grandfather, Manṣūr ibn Sarjūn was the financial governor of Damascus when the city was captured by the Muslim general and Prophet's companion Khalīd bin Walīd in 635CE. The grandfather was promoted to the highest position in the caliphate under Mu'āwīya I (661-680CE) as chief financial officer, a position passed down in the Mansur, family though John of Damascus may have had an even more favourable position as personal secretary to the caliph. Janosik draws on the difficulty of drawing conclusions of many of the non-Muslim sources contemporary to John of Damascus' time: comprised of sermons, religious teachings, apocalyptic literature, letters from church officials and polemical responses dealing with Christian sects and Arab heresies. The account of Sophronius in 639 of "godless Saracens" entering Jerusalem and building a mosque is one example of the evident religious bias in his description.⁴⁷⁸ The other problem is to do with the changing of documents at a later date during copying and translating into different languages. According to Nevo such texts ran the danger of later embellishments like the Feast of the Epiphany account by Sophronius: "We have no information on the date of the manuscript or its

⁴⁷⁶ Paulus Alverus. (n.d) *Indiculus luminosus* 35, CSM, pp. 314-15, trans. Southern, R. (1962). *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*. Harvard University Press, p. 21.

⁴⁷⁷ Wienandy, T. (1985). *Does God Change?: The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation*. St. Bede's Press.

⁴⁷⁸ Janosik, D.J. (2016). *John of Damascus: First Apologist to the Muslims*. Pickwick Publications, p. 110.

transmission history; but suggest that either the entire section was tacked on to Sophronius' sermon at a later date, or that his initial rhetorical question, "Why do barbarian raids abound?" was considerably embellished by a later transcriber..."⁴⁷⁹ These textual problems warrant a cautious approach when dealing with John of Damascus' work.

John of Damascus did not have a developed understanding of Islam, of the Prophet ﷺ and nor of the Qur'ān. Though he knew some details from a few sūrahs he would have relied on conversations with his co-religionists and with Muslims. At some points wherein Christian belief in the divinity of Christ is opposed such as chapter 5, verse 72: "They do blaspheme who say: 'Allāh is Christ the son of Mary.'" John of Damascus makes no comment on such a verse, strongly indicating that he did not know of it since the purpose of his treatise was to defend Christian belief in the face of the new religion.⁴⁸⁰ It is clear that John of Damascus lacked knowledge of the Qur'ān and any detailed knowledge of the whole Qur'ān. What he knew were some of the stories of the Qur'ān though he refers to the Qur'ān not as one book but as separate books and even bizarrely presents a story called 'The Camel of God', He knew only a limited number of stories of the Prophet ﷺ circulating at the time.⁴⁸¹ Another example wherein John of Damascus resorts to mockery instead of providing a theological response to a Qur'ānic description in which Jesus' divinity is denied is telling of the lack of sophistication in his apologetic response. To no surprise it is the same partially quoted verses that Christian apologists discussed throughout this book use today, particularly in relation to Chapter 5, verse 117-118.

That is not to say that John had no knowledge of Islam at all. He knew only a limited number of stories of the Prophet ﷺ circulating at the time.⁴⁸² Where John is closer to the mark in his citations, it is still evident that he lacks sophistication in his apologetic response. The Qur'ān mentions strident rejection of the notion of Jesus being God-Incarnate. John is aware of these verses. In his *Heresy of the Ishmaelites*, John of Damascus cites Qur'ānic verses as follows:

O Jesus, did you say 'I am the son of god and god?' and Jesus answered, saying, 'Be merciful to me, lord. You know that I did not say (that), nor am I too proud to be your servant. Errant men have written that I have

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 58.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 108.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, p. 110.

⁴⁸² Ibid, p. 110.

made this declaration, but they are lying about me and they are the ones in error.’

John added: “And, according to them, God answered him, saying, “I know that you did not say these words.” John also commented thus: “There are many other absurd stories worthy of laughter recorded in this writing, which he insolently boasts descended upon him from god.”⁴⁸³ To fully appreciate John of Damascus’s point, the Qur’ānic verses cited earlier in ‘Christian Apologetic misrepresentation of the Qur’ān’ must be cited again in full:

When God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, ‘Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God?’ he will say, ‘May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say- if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me, though I do not know what is within You, You alone have full knowledge of things unseen.’⁴⁸⁴

“I told them only what You commanded me to: “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things.”⁴⁸⁵

And if You punish them, they are Your servants; if You forgive them, You are the Almighty, the Wise.”⁴⁸⁶

It is clear from a comparison between the Qur’ān and John of Damascus’ citation that John had distorted the Qur’ānic verses perhaps intentionally. The phrase “I am the son of god and god” cannot be located anywhere in the Qur’ān. This led D. J. Janosik to wonder “is John changing the words (of the Quran) for his own purposes?”⁴⁸⁷

Thomas Aquinas’ Order of Preachers, better known as the Dominicans, was founded by Dominic de Guzman in 1216 to counter the heretical Cathars. They also sought out and prosecuted heresy beginning after the brutal Albigensian Crusade in Languedoc (1209-1229). In 1252, the papacy made it legal to use torture while interrogating suspected heretics for the first time. The goal of the inquisition was to convert heretics but those resilient in their heresies were turned over to secular officials

⁴⁸³ Ibid, pp. 261-262.

⁴⁸⁴ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 116.

⁴⁸⁵ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 117.

⁴⁸⁶ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 5, verse 118.

⁴⁸⁷ Janosik, D.J. (2016). *John of Damascus: First Apologist to the Muslims*. Pickwick Publications, p. 208.

for execution. Both Jews and Christians were targets as well. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required Muslims and Jews to wear distinguishing clothing.⁴⁸⁸ In this context Catalan Dominican friar on the 13th century Raymund of Penyafort encouraged Thomas Aquinas to write a book of Christian doctrine which could be used by missionaries among non-Christians. Thomas Aquinas, may have responded to the request by writing his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, also known as *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium*, ‘Book on the truth of the Catholic faith against the errors of the unbelievers’. In this text Aquinas criticises the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ with a range of unfounded allegations to do with violence and his teachings. Aquinas’ caricaturising of the Prophet ﷺ is described by Davis Kerr as “fabulous story-telling and slander.” He writes:

With deference to Muslim sensitivity I shall draw a veil over the absurdities and crudities of the medieval Christian character assassination of Muḥammad in the polemical attempt to refute Islam. Suffice it to say that the massive literature, exhaustively analysed by Norman Daniel, in his *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, witnesses to an abject failure of Christian theology to deal creatively with a post Jesus claimant to prophetic status as a recipient of divine revelation. Theological enterprise gave way almost entirely to fabulous story-telling and slander.⁴⁸⁹

When it comes to the specifics of Aquinas’ critique of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, contemporary academia seems strangely silent. This has to do perhaps with how contemporary academia has focused a lot on Aquinas’ philosophy regarding God, with very few studies being done to ascertain Aquinas’ engagement with the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

British Christian Arabist Alfred Guillaume stressed how *Contra Summa Gentiles* was written specifically to persuade Muslims in Spain to abandon Islam and convert to Christianity.⁴⁹⁰ Brain Davies, however, tries to downplay any relation between *Contra Summa Gentiles* and Islam.⁴⁹¹ Guillaume points to Aquinas’ criticism of

⁴⁸⁸ Meyerson, M.D. (1991). *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel Between Coexistence and Crusade*. University of California Press, p. 47.

⁴⁸⁹ Kerr, D. (1997). The Prophet Muḥammad in Christian Theological Perspective. In *Islam in a World of Diverse Faiths*, ed. Dan Cohn-Sherbok. MacMillan Press Ltd, p. 123.

⁴⁹⁰ Guillaume, A. (1950). Christian and Muslim Theology as Represented by Al-Shahrastāni and St. Thomas Aquinas. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13(3), p. 551.

⁴⁹¹ Davies, B. (2016). *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Contra Gentiles: A Guide and Commentary*. Oxford University Press, p. 9.

Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and the Qur’ān. Readers can examine Davies’ text on *Contra Summa Gentile* and will be unable to find a single mention of the Prophet in it. Only in footnote 45 of chapter 1, tucked away as it were, does Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ make an appearance.

Guillaume emphasises that Aquinas’ criticism of Islam is a “failure”.⁴⁹² Davies acknowledges that Aquinas was “not very well informed about Islamic thinking”.⁴⁹³ Guillaume, however, hones in on this point by making a comparative analysis between twelfth-century Persian historian of religions Al-Shahrastānī and Aquinas on their presentation of theological views. This comparison shows how Aquinas’s criticism of Islam was “not a success” and that Aquinas was “unwise” to try to polemically confute Islamic scholars.⁴⁹⁴

David Burrell provides additional facts that are important to consider. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas admits he is ignorant of Islam.⁴⁹⁵ Despite this, Aquinas wrote another work entitled *Reasons for the Faith Against Muslim Objections*. The key feature of this work is that Aquinas did not debate the Islamic position but merely reiterated the doctrines of the Church.⁴⁹⁶ The socio-cultural milieu of Thomas Aquinas that saw crusades being waged against Christian heretics, and Christian successes in the Muslim empire of al-Andalus that would soon enough culminate in the Spanish Inquisition and rooting out of heresies heightened his Muslim apologetic and anti-heresy driven focus. For Thomas Aquinas knowing of pre-existing attitudes developed about Islam and Muslims from Muslim-Christian interactions in the Islamic empire of al-Andalus and from the Crusades are important to understand his influences. The political circumstances involving the Seljuq attacks into Constantinople, most notably the Battle of Manzikert in 1074 and subsequent Byzantine appeal for assistance from Pope Urban II in France, set in motion a mechanism of war-driven othering of Muslims. Pope Urban II’s ‘First Crusade’ speech in Clermont in 1095 used highly inflammatory imagery to provoke moral outrage and propaganda continued to play an essential part in the course of the crusades.

⁴⁹² A. Guillaume (1950). Christian and Muslim Theology as Represented by Al-Shahrastānī and St. Thomas Aquinas. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13(3), p. 552.

⁴⁹³ B. Davies (2016). Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Contra Gentiles*: A Guide and Commentary. Oxford University Press, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹⁴ A. Guillaume (1950). Christian and Muslim Theology as Represented by Al-Shahrastānī and St. Thomas Aquinas. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 13(3), pp. 579-580.

⁴⁹⁵ D.B. Burrell (2004). Thomas Aquinas and Islam. *Modern Theology*, 20(1), p. 86.

⁴⁹⁶ D.B. Burrell (2004). Thomas Aquinas and Islam. *Modern Theology*, 20(1), p. 86.

The four surviving accounts of Urban's speech each present a distinctly different version of what his speech entailed, but the build-up of anti-Muslim rhetoric is unmistakable. He presented a city of Jerusalem under threat of a 'wicked' race who partake in 'abominable' practices. Crusade propagandists from Pope Urban II's speech in Clermont in 1095 to further crusades in subsequent decades produced the image of the Muslim as a godless defiler of Christian sanctities, as a barbaric torturer of Christians, as an idol worshipper. The Othering of the Muslims had begun and became more pronounced when Muslims were outside the bounds of normative civilised society, as animals "who cut open the navels of those whom they choose to torment..."⁴⁹⁷ Indeed, Muslims are portrayed as people who deny miracles regularly, such as the Christian miracle of the mass, whereas Aquinas portrays Christians as readily accepting miracles. He emphasises this when he charges Muslims with being "carnal" because they "only think of what is flesh and blood".⁴⁹⁸

Islam today continues to grow, and Christian missionaries, by and large, have been unsuccessful in penetrating the hearts and minds of Muslims. Tolan observes that "increasingly, Christian theologians, like Dominican Thomas Aquinas, affirmed that it was impossible to prove the truth of Christianity through reason alone. Yet when missionary Riccoldo da Montecroce failed to convert Muslims in Baghdad, he attributed his failure to the irrationality of the Muslims. At the end of the thirteenth century, the hopes of converting the Muslims to Christianity dwindled, and (as in some Franciscan texts), the irrational, oriental Muslims were blamed."⁴⁹⁹ About thirteenth-century Dominican friar Riccoldo de Montecroce's polemical works on Islam, Tolan writes: "Throughout these works one senses the disillusionment of the missionary as he comes to realize that his grand project is doomed to failure."⁵⁰⁰ The arguments of Christian missionaries throughout the centuries have been very similar, in fact from a Qur'ānic perspective such arguments precipitated on partial, selective quoting and character assassination of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ are anticipated. The Qur'ān declares: Say, "Say, "O People of the Book! Why do you turn the believers away from the Way of Allāh—striving to make it 'appear' crooked, while you are

⁴⁹⁷ Robert of Rheims. (n.d). In L. and J.S.C. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality, 1095-1274*. (1981). Edward Arnold, pp. 42-45. For the full text of Robert of Rheims's chronicle, see *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade*. (2005). Sweetenham, C. (trans.). Routledge; see also: Latiff, O. (2020). *On Bring Human: How Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy*. Sapience Institute, pp. 73-75.

⁴⁹⁸ Frassetto, M. (2020). *Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages: From Muḥammad to Dante*. Lexington Books, p. 249.

⁴⁹⁹ Tolan, J. (2002). *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*. Columbia University Press, p. 233.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 246.

witnesses 'to its truth'? And Allāh is never unaware of what you do.”⁵⁰¹ Aquinas' crude descriptions of the Prophet ﷺ and hyperbolic focus on warfare emerge from such a post-crusading context fuelled by stereotyped images of the Muslim *Other*.

According to William Long, “Aquinas' critique of the first Muslims as being brutal and ignorant men is grossly unfair. For instance, many of the first followers of Islam were young men from influential Meccan families. Business persons like Muḥammad's first wife Khadījah, and the merchant Abū Bakr, and others of similar status were among the first to embrace Islam. Of course, slaves were attracted to Islam with the most famous one being Bilal, a black Abyssinian. The pagans of Mecca opposed Muḥammad and the early Muslims. Some of the said Muslims died under torture, and others were sent to Abyssinia to escape persecution. Therefore, the first Muslims were sincere in their response to Islam. Can such sincerity be equated with brutal and ignorant men? Further, it is untrue to assert that Muḥammad coerced others by force to accept Islam. After thirteen years of patient preaching and bearing with trials of all kinds in Mecca, Muḥammad and his followers migrated to Yathrib (later Medina).”⁵⁰²

There are many who have borne testimony to the remarkably positive changes introduced by Islam to the lands it was to impact upon. According to William Montgomery Watt,

Of all the world's greatest men none has been so much maligned as Muḥammad. It is easy to see how this has come about. For centuries Islam was the great enemy of Christendom, for Christendom was in direct contact with no other organized states comparable in power to the Muslims. The Byzantine empire, after losing its provinces in Syria and Egypt, was being attacked in Asia Minor, while Western Europe was threatened through Spain and Sicily. Even before the Crusades focused attention on the expulsion of the Saracens from the Holy Land, medieval war-propaganda, free from the restraints of factuality was building up a conception of 'the great enemy'. At one point Muḥammad was transformed into Mahound, the prince of darkness. By the eleventh century the idea about Islam and Muslims current in the crusading armies were such travesties that they had a bad effect on morale. The

⁵⁰¹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 3, verse 99.

⁵⁰² Long, W.T. (1993). *A critical analysis of Christian responses to Islamic claims about the work of the Prophet Muḥammad, 'the Messenger of God'*. Durham theses, Durham University, pp. 117-118. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5660/>

crusaders had been led to expect the worst of their enemies, and, when they found many chivalrous knights among them, they were filled with distrust for the authorities of their own religion.⁵⁰³

Such caricaturing of the Prophet ﷺ was not new even in John of Damascus' time. Antagonistic disbelievers from the Prophet's own community who opted to remain in their paganistic traditions were primarily intended in the Qur'ānic verse: "We are well aware that your heart is weighed down by what they say. Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to Him: worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you."⁵⁰⁴ Such a verse revealed in the Prophet's early Makkan time nonetheless draws on finding solace in the face of such derision. The Qur'ān calls on him to "Be patient 'O Prophet' with what they say. And remember Our servant, David, the man of strength. Indeed, he 'constantly' turned 'to Allāh'."⁵⁰⁵ We truly subjected the mountains to hymn 'Our praises' along with him in the evening and after sunrise.⁵⁰⁶ And 'We subjected' the birds, flocking together. All turned to Him 'echoing His hymns'.⁵⁰⁷ Eighteenth-century Scottish historian and philosopher Thomas Carlyle, who was among the first people to speak against the Christian lies against the Prophet ﷺ says: "Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Imposter, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to anyone. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped around this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only."

Some Christians in more recent times have attempted to push back against the caricaturising of the Prophet. Revered F. Peter Ford for example, writes: "this biting medieval Christian polemic against Muḥammad stands as an embarrassment to thoughtful Christians today. Yet its legacy is still with us in numerous anti-Islamic Christian books and internet sites and this has seriously hampered genuine Christian-Muslim dialogue about Muḥammad."⁵⁰⁸ The case of Samuel Zwemer who has had some mention in this book is an interesting one of some transformation in outlook. His early vilification of the Prophet of Islam, of Islamic history, of the names and attributes of Allāh underwent quite a radical change in his later life. Zwemer, the reluctant admirer of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in the early 1900s became a

⁵⁰³ Watt, W.M. (1956). *Muḥammad At Medina*. The Clarendon Press, p. 324.

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 15, verse 97-99.

⁵⁰⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 17.

⁵⁰⁶ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 18.

⁵⁰⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 38, verse 19.

⁵⁰⁸ Ford, P.F. (2015). "He Walked in the Path of the Prophets": Modern Christian Perspectives on Patriarch Timothy's View of the Prophet of Islam. *Theological Review* 36, 2015, p. 7.

genuine admirer by 1941 stating that he was “one of the greatest creative spirits in the history of human culture. The impress of his mind and life has been colossal.”⁵⁰⁹ Zwemer celebrates Prophet Muḥammad’s ﷺ role in calling the Arabs “back to the worship of one living God.” Zwemer also had a U-turn on the names and attributes of Allāh.

⁵⁰⁹ Zwemer, S. (1941). *The Cross Above the Crescent*. Zondervan, pp. 68, 69. 29.

CONCLUSION

To end as we started, it need be stressed that Craig who figures prominently in this book, in spite of his misinformed contentions about Islam, is to be credited for his work as a theist against atheism in numerous works, including *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*,⁵¹⁰ *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*,⁵¹¹ *God, Time, and Eternity*.⁵¹² Muslims and Christians have much in common and both seek God's love and mercy. Both hold God to be the centre-point of their lives and seek Him sincerely with devotion and hope. The names that figure prominently in this book, of Jesus, Mary, of Adam are names common to both of us and held in high esteem.

This work has shown however that the claims presented by our Christian friends have been lacking in judicious consideration. In respect to matters as predominant as these wherein matters of sin and human salvation are outlined, much more needs to be understood from both faiths. Each of the arguments presented by Craig has been challenged and corrected. Responses to his claims and those of other apologists come to underline how the Qur'ān most accurately reveals the errors that Christians fell into concerning the nature of God Himself, of Jesus, of sin and salvation.

In the Christian model "it is in the cross above all that God makes both his holiness and his love known simultaneously."⁵¹³ The cross however is bound by an act of injustice shown to one for the benefit of another. Christian theories to explain the 'cross' in relation to God's love and justice lead to one problem or another. The book outlined that love necessitates closeness, forgiveness and mercy and each of these falls short in the Christian soteriological outlooks. Though the Bible is clear on some ideas of soteriology, namely that it is from God, is available, and is fundamentally connected to Jesus [Romans 10:9 - If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.], Estes points out that "The greatest dilemma in soteriology is the lack of clear and precise biblical

⁵¹⁰ Craig, W.L (2001). *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz*. Wipf and Stock.

⁵¹¹ Craig, W.L (1996). *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*. Oxford University Press; Revised ed.

⁵¹² Craig, W.L. (2001). *Time And Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time*. Crossway Books USA; Illustrated edition.

⁵¹³ Brunner, E. (1947). *The Mediator*. Westminster Press, pp. 450, 470.

delineations for the manner and means of salvation...In the Bible, salvation is paradoxical: at times particular, at times progressive; at times completed past, at times future event, at times coming through faith, at times related to human acts. The mosaic and anthological nature of the Bible adds to the mystery – even though salvation is arguably the leitmotif of the entire Bible, there is no precise or extended discussion of it.”⁵¹⁴ The lack of clarity may explain the lack of interest in clearly explaining atonement in many of the Church Fathers and why Christian theologians over the centuries of Christian history formulated theories that sought to explain the function of Jesus in light of God’s divine plan for His creation. These, as the work has shown, speak of differing conceptions of atonement. Other theories outside of those discussed in this book also exist.⁵¹⁵ Some tried to make sense of the love of God shown symbolically in the death of Christ, others considered the sin of Adam as one that reflected the love of God since it precipitated salvation through Jesus. Others like Martin Luther described the vengeful nature of God who could not be satisfied except with the blood sacrifice of His son – who happens to be fully God as well: “the greatness and terror of the wrath of God against sin in that it could be appeased and a ransom effected in no other way than through the one sacrifice of the Son of God. Only his death and the shedding of his blood could make satisfaction. And we must consider also that we by our sinfulness had incurred that wrath of God and therefore were responsible for the offering of the Son of God upon the cross and the shedding of his blood.”⁵¹⁶ The difficulty of Adam and of God’s maximal benevolence still remains however. How might we understand God’s maximal love without a considering of His willingness to pardon and forgive? Though the paradigm of love is central to Christian thought, one would be hard pressed to find any information pertaining to the love of God at the first instance or first encounter with His sinful servant Adam. Adam for example is an absent entry in Brady’s *Christian Love*⁵¹⁷ except in relation to the Fall.

John Cummings, in his nineteenth-century work *The Church Before the Flood* tells us that “He so loved Adam in his ruin, that he gave, as the expression of his love, “his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life...He so loved Adam in his ruin, that he touched the earth with the blood of his incarnate Son, that poor lost Adam’s sin might be forgiven...access to God is

⁵¹⁴ Estes, D. Soteriology. In *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, p. 2215

⁵¹⁵ Nettles, T.J. History and Theories of Atonement. Retrieved, January 15, 2022 from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/history-theories-atonement/>

⁵¹⁶ Martin Luther. (2000). *Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*. Baker Books, Reprint edition 4.1, p. 190.

⁵¹⁷ Brady, B.V. (2003). *Christian Love*. Georgetown university press.

permitted where there was no access before.”⁵¹⁸ As discussed in this book it is a love that is Christ-centric not one demonstrated personally to Adam but one confounded by multiple attempts to try and make sense of God and his plan of salvation through Jesus. In Christianity, humans as sinners are unable to reach up and love God, and for this reason it is God incarnate in Christ who comes down to humans. This is held to be the highest expression of what love is and of what God is. It is a love that we do not deserve since we are instead deserving of punishment. There can be nothing that humans can do to earn God’s love since they are undeserving. Christians are required to depend completely and entirely on Christ for salvation. Christians believe that they are saved by what God the Father has done for them in Christ, the second person of the trinity who too is God. It is in turn this love that calls on them to love others.

Christians may argue that Adam had to take the fall for the greater consequence of human redemption at a later point but this is precisely the conundrum. Everything in Christianity is saviour-centric framed around a developing Christology. It is not Adam-centric to the point that forgiveness, closeness and love of God became our first impression of Him. In that instance we only have a wrathful God whose forgiveness culminates in the Jesus model - in a vengeful, price-exacting, propitiatory blood payment. In the Bible we read:

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.⁵¹⁹

The matter was made further clear by American evangelist Billy Graham who explained that humans are called to “receive this gift offered in love and sacrifice so that you can live. There is no other way to have salvation.”⁵²⁰ Graham’s words explain how Jesus has to be central to the whole paradigm of love. Johnson points out in her work on salvation that “To concentrate on Jesus alone in a kind of Christomonism has led historically to many dead ends for understanding as well as to imperialist action toward those who do not believe in Christ.”⁵²¹ We might forget that the “Son as an atoning sacrifice” is God Himself according to Christians. Certainly, Christians might be sure to explain his words by simply replacing “Jesus Christ” in his words with “God”, so that it is God who sacrifices himself for us, to pay the penalty for our sins.

⁵¹⁸ Cumming, J. (1854). *The Church Before the Flood*. J.P. Jewett, pp. 341-342.

⁵¹⁹ 1 John 4:7-12

⁵²⁰ Graham, B. (2015). *Where I Am: Heaven, Eternity, and Our Life Beyond*. Thomas Nelson, p. 222.

⁵²¹ Johnson, E. (1994). Jesus and Salvation. *CTSA Proceedings* 49, p. 10.

But the question remains, unto whom is God then paying the price, if not unto himself? Therefore, there never was a forgiveness, only an exacting of a price and paying that price fully unto Oneself. The other thing in Graham's words is that Jesus became "the final and complete sacrifice for our sins." Imagine if someone stole something from you. The thief then, guilt ridden and repentant approaches you and asks for forgiveness. Expecting your mercy, instead you tell him to bring an innocent person with him and have him put to death so that a price be paid for the sin of theft. It also becomes thereafter imperative that the thief acknowledges that the sacrifice of the innocent person had indeed taken place because without acknowledging it the thief would never find forgiveness. Thereafter the thief would need to now do additional things like baptism and repent for his sin to experience the fullness of forgiveness. Meanwhile the innocent man who had to be put to death now comes back to life and will live forever with God. The price paid was only a temporary price, everything is now restored but it was essential that you were appeased by the blood sacrifice because the sin was of too great consequence. You couldn't forgive as a measure of your love the guilt ridden and repentant thief. As Langford explains, "Unless and until a Muslim, or anyone else for that matter, sees himself in God's eyes as a sinner, he will never seek a Savior from sin."⁵²²

In Islam the mercy of Allāh, the One true God, being the underlying focus of salvation, is holistic and encompassing. It does not emanate, nor settle from a developing theology like Christianity which seeks to make sense of a trinitarian unity with love (a trinitarian supposition that sees the Son as a reflection of the love of the Father) and thereafter necessitating a pervading mercy through that Son as redeemer. Such points about a triad of self-giving love are also challenged by Christians such as Professor Keith Ward who argues that love between two persons 'must involve a concern to help the other, to be interested in the actions and distinctive features of the other, to achieve shared actions and experiences.'⁵²³ Ward points out that a problem, however, arises when we apply this view of love to a triad of divine persons:

If one is thinking of two (or three) persons who are omnipotent and omniscient, none of them can need help from the others, nothing can be

⁵²² Langford, J.S.D. (1983). *Some Principles of Christian Mission to Muslims*. Loma Linda University Electronic Theses, Dissertations & Projects. 643. Retrieved January 9, 2022 from <https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/etd/643>

⁵²³ Ali, Z. (2019). *Some Reflections on William Lane Craig's Critique of Islam*. *HeyJ 00*, p. 10; Ward, K. (1996). *Religion and Creation*. Clarendon Press, pp. 322-323.

hidden from the others, and no action or experience can be shared which is not already enacted or known by each person anyway.⁵²⁴

Ward thus suggests that it would be vacuous to describe the relationship between a triad of divine persons as loving.⁵²⁵ In Islam such a love and mercy exist necessarily, on their own, emanating from the One God, as a reflection of his maximal love. The Prophet ﷺ explained,

Verily, on the day Allāh created the heavens and earth, he created one hundred parts of mercy. Each part can fill what is between the heaven and earth. He made one part of mercy for the earth, from it a mother has compassion for her child, animals and birds have compassion for each other. On the Day of Resurrection, he will perfect this mercy.⁵²⁶

In Islam, the mercy of God and forgiveness are intricately linked. The mercy of God extends to His entire creation in that He is All-Near and His forgiveness is accessible to the sincere hearted. Together with this is mankind's opportunity to do works of righteousness seeking His pleasure. In them can he find contentment, purpose and direction. His love, faith, reverence and hope in God is felt in those actions with a heart that is called upon to be in awe.⁵²⁷ It is not by those works that man attains salvation however but only through the mercy of God. Each and every act of devotion is one inspired by God in the first place and the Qur'ānic reminder here is all the more pertinent: "And God wants to turn unto you in His mercy..."⁵²⁸ His promise of mercy as outlined in Islam is unparalleled in any religious discourse. Man, however is not to resign himself to an apathetic commitment to a grace so insurmountable in goodness that little would surface as a reflection of obedience. The Qur'ān reminds its readers: "But whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer - it is those whose effort is ever appreciated."⁵²⁹ The Qur'ān also describes the angels who ask forgiveness for those who have believed, saying "Our Lord, You have encompassed all things in mercy and knowledge, so forgive those who have repented and followed Your way and protect them from the punishment of Hellfire."⁵³⁰ In the Islamic paradigm the entirety of creation is in

⁵²⁴ Ward, K. (1996). *Religion and Creation*. Clarendon Press, pp. 322-323.

⁵²⁵ Ward, K. (1995). *Christ and Cosmos: A Reformation of Trinitarian Doctrine*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 191-23.

⁵²⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2753

⁵²⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 45.

⁵²⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 4, verse 27.

⁵²⁹ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 17, verse 19.

⁵³⁰ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 40, verse 7.

constant praise and glorification of God and humans too are called to join them in such a pursuit. In this light, one of the very early verses revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was one to do with finding strength and consolation in the tradition of previous Prophets who exhibited patience and inner strength with their communities. One such Prophet was Dawūd (David). The Prophet ﷺ is taught that in his remembrance of Allāh the world around him joined in that remembrance, “Be patient ‘O Prophet’ with what they say. And remember Our servant, David, the man of strength. Indeed, he ‘constantly’ turned ‘to Allāh’⁵³¹ We truly subjected the mountains to hymn ‘Our praises’ along with him in the evening and after sunrise.”⁵³²

In the Christian paradigm, what will get a person to heaven is to accept the sacrifice of God being killed at the cross. Whether it was God fully, or the human Jesus (which questions the notion of a ‘divine saviour’ dying at the cross), the belief system does not resonate with justice. Imagine an individual, while drunk and speeding, crashes into another car and kills a child seated in that car. Surely that person would pay the price for that crime, would be sent to prison, be fined and so on and so forth. For a judge to instead punish someone else for that crime instead of the irresponsible driver is not a reflection of justice or of mercy. Or imagine an individual murders someone and instead of punishing the culprit a judge instead decides to have his own son killed to pay the price of the individual’s murder. And can it even be self-sacrifice foreordained by the three persons of the godhead if Jesus would cry out: “My Lord, My Lord why have you forsaken me?”⁵³³ Christians hold that without that sacrifice humans were prevented from arriving to heaven. Questions about who it was that cried those words - the human Jesus, or the divine Jesus, or both, have long puzzled theologians.

Islam explains that the human plight is not only generated by the presence of sin but also by man feeling incapable of returning in forgiveness to God, that in being stranded there is much more likelihood one would stray further – due to social isolation and spiritual impasse. One of the devil’s names is in fact Iblīs, the ‘one who lost hope’ (in the mercy of God). The Qur’ān reassures its readers from the beginning and through the narrative of Adam that God always dealt with His creation with a love and closeness and that His creation should not lose hope in Him. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ explained that Allāh said, “Indeed My mercy prevails over My wrath.”⁵³⁴ The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ described how “Allāh is happier about the

⁵³¹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 38, verse 17.

⁵³² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 38, verse 19.

⁵³³ Matthew 27:47.

⁵³⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 3022, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2751

repentance of one of His slaves than one of you would be about finding your camel which had strayed away from you in the middle of the desert.”⁵³⁵

The Qur’ān reminds its readers of the mercy of God, that God is *Al-Raḥmān*, *Al-Raḥīm* (Most Merciful, Most Compassionate). Further to these beautiful attributes of God, He is also *Al-Ghaḥfār*, the All Forgiving, *Al-Wadūd* – ‘The Most Loving. It is this mercy of God, a part of His maximal love, that delivers man from iniquity and transgression since no human being, however imbued by faith, can remain entirely free from fault and temptation; and all salvation is dependent on the Mercy of God: “none would be able to enter Paradise because of his deeds alone. The Companions asked: Allāh’s Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allāh wraps me in His Mercy”⁵³⁶ The Qur’ān calls man to a “sincere repentance: it may well be that your Sustainer will efface from you your bad deeds, and will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow.”⁵³⁷ Mercy itself is a divine gift and one the faithful are called on to acknowledge and acclaim: “Say, “In the bounty of Allāh and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate.”⁵³⁸ The soteriology within the Islamic framework of “sincere repentance” necessitates a desisting from sin, committing oneself to not revisit the sin and offsetting any indifference to the sin and its consequence with a conscious remorse. Allāh reminds us of one of His most beautiful names - *al-Wadūd* (The Most loving, the Most Affectionate). Allāh, ‘al-Wadūd’, is the source of all affection and all mercy emanates from Him alone. His creation is reminded:

Hence, ask your Sustainer to forgive you your sins, and then turn towards Him in repentance - for, verily, my Sustainer is a dispenser of grace, a fount of love!⁵³⁹

And He alone is truly-forgiving, all-embracing in His love.⁵⁴⁰

According to Robert Luginbill in his work on hamartiology, *Hamartiology: the Biblical Study of Sin* the consequence of Adam and Eve’s initial disobedience decided matters for their entire progeny, that the sin has been passed on in exactly the same way and everyone is in a state of spiritual death at birth.⁵⁴¹ These contrast dramatically with

⁵³⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 6309

⁵³⁶ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2818 a

⁵³⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 66, verse 8.

⁵³⁸ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 10, verse 58.

⁵³⁹ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 11, verse 90.

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 85, verse 14.

⁵⁴¹ Luginbill, R.D. *Hamartiology: The Biblical Study of Sin*. Retrieved January 8, 2022, from <https://ichthys.com/3B-Hamartio.htm>

the paradigm of forgiveness seeking passed down through Prophetic moralising since Adam. This, enabling man to navigate through life carried with the twofold current of fear and hope resonating in his ontological foundation. In this, God coherently shows mercy, compassion and forgiveness for His creation.

For Luginbill, the fact that we are born spiritually dead, enables a sin nature which produced sins in every human being. But how does this account for Adam's original sin? If we are born with a sin nature, what was Adam created with that made him predisposed to sin? The confusion is clarified in the Prophet Muḥammad's ﷺ explaining that all humans sin, and the best are those who repent for their sins. If spiritual death, as proposed by Luginbill, is the absence of spiritual life which is only awakened through faith in Jesus, then we must ask about the many nations that preceded Jesus and quite pertinently we question the place of Adam himself in the whole soteriological framework.

Finding Further Clarity in the Adamic Conundrum

The chasm and rift that emerges between God and His creation, due to Adam's sin – as mentioned earlier in this work, is here drawn upon in considerable detail by Luginbill who explains that due to the proliferation of inevitable sin caused by Adam we are separated from God at birth because of our corrupt nature, and the personal sins which we later commit demonstrate this innate corruption. It matters little when or how or to what degree we commit, or possibly even refrain from committing, personal sins. The fact is that because of our corruption at birth we will die physically, and since we must at the very least acknowledge that we are not completely pure, holy and righteous, we can have no reasonable expectation of anything good beyond physical death (absent salvation by means of divine grace).⁵⁴² The chasm between God and Adam is further revealed here in Luginbill's explanation:

And it is not just that God is under no moral obligation to provide after death for creatures who are intrinsically corrupt, unholy, and impure – without the propitiation of all sin through the sacrifice of His Son, His intrinsic incorruptibility, holiness and purity would forbid Him by nature from anything like eternal fellowship with creatures so disposed

⁵⁴² Ibid.

(let alone the issue of the divine judgment on our personal sins which His divine justice must in that case demand).⁵⁴³

This presents a very bleak picture, an inescapable conundrum for Adam and his progeny for their status as sinning creatures. Our mortality therefore, which incidentally is a necessary by-product of our created and thus temporal state, presupposes our sinful state. Islam upholds that it is God, Perfect in his wisdom, who created Adam with the free will to err as well as to perform beautiful acts of righteousness. Lugbill's words suggest an unapproachable God, cut off from His own creation.

In explaining the atonement theory espoused by the Genevan-Italian Reformed scholastic theologian François Turretini, Craig gives reasons to how sin as a “mutual enmity between us and God...For Turretin it is a mutual enmity, not only that we are opposed to God but that He is opposed to us.”⁵⁴⁴ On God's side His divine wrath upon sin, that must be appeased, and on our side, our sinful rebellion against God. So, for Turretin this enmity is not simply on the human side, it is a mutual enmity that exists between sinners and God.⁵⁴⁵ God is portrayed as a Being whose mercy is contingent on the shedding of blood, whereas in Islam God grants forgiveness to all those who call upon Him and sincerely repent. Secondly, is the enmity shown towards Adam, or instead to Satan, who refused to turn back to God? The difference between the devil in his sinful, arrogant state and the sinful state of Adam, was that Adam repented from his sin, whilst the devil refused to. The sinful states of Satan and Adam are thus not the same, and God does not deal with them both the same.

It is worth making an obvious point here. Adam of course was not a founder of any religion. Jesus is believed by Christians to be the founder of Christianity. Therefore, it makes sense for Christians to revere Jesus more than Adam but this has nothing to do with reverence at all. After all, while Adam is respected in Islam, he is not given the same weight or value as the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ for example. But the paradigm of Adam is of premier importance here. It is one, often, negligently or purposely, circumvented in Muslim-Christian dialogue and regrettably since it provides us with a necessary understanding of who God is. The question of Adam however takes centre stage in the hamartiology of both faiths but only does so expressly

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Craig, W.L. Doctrine of Christ (Part 17): The Work of Christ (10) - Penal Substitution Theory. Retrieved, January 15 2022 from <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-christ/doctrine-of-christ-part-17/>

⁵⁴⁵ Craig, W.L. [ReasonableFaithOrg]. (2017, June 3). Doctrine of Christ Part 17: The Work of Christ (10) - Penal Substitution Theory [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjDHqbh9nyU>

in the soteriology of Islam. In the soteriology of Christianity Adam re-appears through Paul in the Book of Romans but only so as to exist as Jesus's antitype. This, in spite of one being a mere creation, predisposed to sin, and the other being God himself, the Creator of the heavens and earth in the Christian outlook. Hesburgh Professor of Catholic Theology Gary A. Anderson notes that "the elevation of the first Adam could not be allowed to overshadow the second. For this reason Christian writers preferred to speak of the incarnate Son as he who was elevated above the angels. This argument is made at great length in the Epistle to the Hebrews. For this writer, Christ is "the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being...when he had made his purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (Hebrews 1:3-4)"⁵⁴⁶ In the soteriology of Islam Adam is still present as an actor, not forever condemned but censured and then forgiven. The encounter between God and Adam in the Qur'ānic account is magnificent in his exposition of perfect being theology. The point of God's loving and forgiving nature is further elucidated upon by the grammatical structure of the verse in question in chapter 2, verse 37 in which an emphasis (*tawkid*) التَّوَكِيدُ الْمَعْنَوِي (emphasis by meaning) is used to remove the possibility that one is speaking forgetfully or to intend something with a wider meaning than what is being said. In the verse the translation of "Indeed, it is He" is the example of such an emphasis to stress on God's mercy and acceptance of acceptance. It also emphasises that it is only He who can afford that to His creation.

One of my favourite examples, and one which entirely concurs with the love-forgiveness model expressed in the Qur'ān is here in relation to three individuals who were censured for not participating with the others in the Battle of Tabūk (630AD). Each one underwent his own experiential undertaking of seeking repentance. The Adamic paradigm of forgiveness is shown clearly in this example. Just like Adam was not separated from God - who instead stressed on His being Ever-Near (*al-Qarīb*) to His servants, as shown, it is always Allāh who first aids His creation in finding their way back up, finding their way through the haze of disobedience into the reassurance of a loving God. This is contrary to the Christian outlook on distance and separation from God emanating from the sin of Adam and forever decreed until Jesus appears in his salvific mode. The verse here from Sūrah al-Tawba illustrates the loving nature of God:

⁵⁴⁶ Anderson, G. (2001). *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. Westminster John Knox Press, p. 36.

And ‘Allāh has also turned in mercy to’ the three who had remained behind, ‘whose guilt distressed them’ until the earth, despite its vastness, seemed to close in on them, and their souls were torn in anguish. They knew there was no refuge from Allāh except in Him. Then He turned to them in mercy so that they might repent. Surely Allāh ‘alone’ is the Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful.⁵⁴⁷

The verse is striking in the way it juxtaposes man’s despondency and stricken state with the encompassing mercy of God. The imagery of the earth and their souls “closing in around them” reflects what the consequence of sin creates in man when he is conscious of his error and seeks reconciliation with God. Adam too, further to his transgression says a prayer that denoted internal blame and a realisation of the consequence of his sin. In Islam God reveals Himself as *Al-karīm*, the Most Generous: “He is the One Who initiates the favours before they are deserved, donates goodness without seeking a reward, forgives sins, and pardons the wrongdoer.”⁵⁴⁸

Christian commentators however in their consideration of the Islamic outlook on sin and salvation have little, or nothing to say about mercy, love and forgiveness from the Adamic paradigm as reflected in Islam. In Smith’s (1993) study on soteriology in Islam there is no discussion of Adam.⁵⁴⁹ Norman Gulley in his evaluation of Catholic and Islamic soteriology has the same omissions. In addition, his points are often lacking. He begins his commentary for example by asserting, “Salvation in Islam is not a gift. It has to be earned through vigorous works.”⁵⁵⁰ This work has clarified the overriding emphasis in Islam on the love of Allāh and a love reflected in His giving and forgiving nature. Contrary to Gulley’s selective reading, though Islam of course does stress on the need for man to submit to God - seek, revere and love One’s Creator, to do good, to keep faith, to strive and commit oneself to pursuing social goodness - it also stresses that nobody can attain to heaven on account of his or her deeds: “none would be able to enter Paradise because of his deeds alone. The Companions asked: Allāh’s Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allāh wraps me in His Mercy”⁵⁵¹ In Islam the reward one receives for good deeds is not the natural consequence of those acts but instead due to the grace and mercy of Allāh. The types

⁵⁴⁷ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 9, verse 118.

⁵⁴⁸ Al-Sayyid bin Jādillah, A.H. *Ibtigā’ al-ḥusnā bi-‘ilal aḥādīth al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* vol. 2. Dar al-Lu’lu’, p. 305.

⁵⁴⁹ Smith B.C. (1993). Road Less Traveled: Soteriology in Islam. *Honors Projects. 2*. Retrieved January 15, 2022 from https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/religion_honproj/2

⁵⁵⁰ Gulley, N.R. (2003). A Biblical Evaluation of Islamic and Catholic Soteriology. *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 14/2 (Fall 2003), p. 152.

⁵⁵¹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 2818 a

of reward are in the full prerogative of Allāh. At the same time, punishment for sins is not an unalterable consequence of man's acts. Allāh, All-Knowing and All-Wise has the full prerogative to punish as well as to pardon. Everything that Gulley asserts thereafter⁵⁵² is only a reflection of the initial point about the need to do good works as a measure of one's devotion and love of God. Gulley comments, "Muḥammad places human works in place of Christ's gift of salvation" without considering that salvation in Islam is dependent on the mercy of a loving and forgiving God. At least seven times in the Qur'ān it is repeated that everything is completely dependent on the maximally perfect grace and mercy of Allāh:

Had it not been for Allāh's grace and mercy upon you, none of you would have ever been purified. But Allāh purifies whoever He wills. And Allāh is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.⁵⁵³

If it were not for God's bounty and mercy and the fact that He is compassionate and merciful.⁵⁵⁴

Had it not been for Allāh's grace and mercy upon you in this world and the Hereafter, you would have certainly been touched with a tremendous punishment for what you plunged into.⁵⁵⁵

And if it was not for the favour of Allāh upon you, and His mercy, a group of them would have determined to mislead you. But they do not mislead except themselves, and they will not harm you at all. And Allāh has revealed to you the Book and wisdom and has taught you that which you did not know. And ever has the favour of Allāh upon you been great.⁵⁵⁶

And if not for the favour of Allāh upon you and His mercy, you would have been among the losers.⁵⁵⁷

And if not for the favour of Allāh upon you and His mercy... and because Allāh is Accepting of repentance and Wise.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵² Gulley, N.R. (2003). A Biblical Evaluation of Islamic and Catholic Soteriology. *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 14/2 (Fall 2003), p. 152.

⁵⁵³ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 24, verse 21.

⁵⁵⁴ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 24, verse 20.

⁵⁵⁵ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 24, verse 14.

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 4, verse 113.

⁵⁵⁷ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 2, verse 64.

⁵⁵⁸ Al-Qur'ān. Chapter 24, verse 10.

In his explanation of this last verse al-Ṭabarī explains: “Were it not for the grace of Allāh upon you, O people, and his mercy on you, and that He favoured His creation with his kindness and with His wisdom over them, He would hasten to punish you for your sins and expose the sinful among you, but instead He covers your sins and not disgrace you with them.”⁵⁵⁹ And so, it is hoped that all interested parties can keep an open mind and sincerely consider the points made here. God commanded the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ to discuss using the best manners and speech: “Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is rightly guided.”⁵⁶⁰ The Qur’ānic paradigm of repelling with goodness should always be a standard in our engagements. We ask Allāh, the Exalted and Wise, the Loving and Merciful: “O Allāh show us the truth as it really is and guide us to it, and show us falsehood as it really is and protect us from it.”⁵⁶¹

“And, O my people, how is it that I summon you to salvation, the while you summon me to the fire?”⁵⁶²

You invite me to disbelieve in Allāh and associate with Him that of which I have no knowledge, and I invite you to the Exalted in Might, the Perpetual Forgiver.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī. (2004). *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī (Jami‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl al-Qur’ān)* vol. 18. Al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiya, p. 91.

⁵⁶⁰ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 16, verse 125.

⁵⁶¹ Ibn Kathir. (2003). *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*. Dar al-Ma‘rifa, p. 195.

⁵⁶² Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 40, verse 41.

⁵⁶³ Al-Qur’ān. Chapter 40, verse 42.