

## Exploring Islam in the Light of Scripture (6)

Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt.16: 15 -16).

### Jesus in Islam

How would Muslims answer Jesus' question? They hold an exalted view of Jesus. Through the Koranic witness, Jesus appears as different from all other human beings. In the Traditions (the hadith) Jesus is portrayed as humble, otherworldly, ascetic, perceptive and witty, willing to suffer and possessing a personal relationship with God. Jesus is introduced in the Koran via His mother, Mary. She is the daughter of "a woman of Imram." Joseph, her husband, is not mentioned. The angel Gabriel announced to Mary the coming of the virgin birth of Jesus. Both the Koran and the New Testament relate the annunciation in a similar way. In the Koran, Jesus is consistently called Isa. The name Isa is often linked with the phrase "son of Mary", emphasizing the fact that he did not have an earthly father. The purpose of the birth story in the Koran is, of course, to get across the message that Jesus is the son of Mary and not the Son of God (Sura 43:57-67). Jesus Christ is not "the Son of God", for he was *created* by God. "Say: He is God the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten; And there is none Like Him."(Sura 112:1-4) And Sura 9:31 states, "Allah's curse be on them [Christians], how they are deluded away from the truth." The Koranic denial of Jesus' divinity is quite specifically expressed, "They do blaspheme who say, "God is Christ the son of Mary."

"Jesus the son of Mary" becomes the most important name for Jesus in the Koran and serves continually to emphasize his humanity. He is described in the Koran with very little allusion to the context in, which He lived and preached. Yet Islam believes the miracles done by Jesus. In Islam, Jesus is a prophet, just a man, like many men who were chosen by God to deliver His message to the world. He is greater in many ways than Moses but still a prophet as a forerunner of Muhammad. Islam also denies the reality of the crucifixion. Sura 4: 157 says, "That they [the Jews] said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God"; - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them..." Islamic theology has consistently interpreted this sura to mean that the crucifixion did not happen historically. The Koran will not allow that a prophet sent by God could be "unsuccessful." Muhammad had the idea that the crucifixion amounted to a "failure" which Jesus successfully avoided. Furthermore, since no atonement for sin is necessary, there is no need for Jesus' death on our behalf. God can just say "I forgive" and someone is forgiven. Whatever the cross may mean for Muslims, Islam will not allow it to stand for vicarious suffering and redemption. Therefore, Jesus Christ is still a stumbling block in any dialogue between Christians and Muslims.

## **The Trinity in Islam**

The Koran is very clear on what Jesus is *not*. He is not the Second Person in the Trinity. This means in our dialogue with Muslims we cannot just sidestep the doctrine of the "Trinity," a concept which they strongly reject. Muslims argue that the Christian belief in the Trinity is not only a heresy but a despicable blasphemy, an affront to God. Islam emphasizes God's absolute oneness. God is one and one means singular. Nothing in creation may be associated with the only God - that would amount to *shirk*, or assigning partners to God, an unpardonable sin. The Koran declares, "God forgiveth not [The sin of joining other gods with Him; but He forgiveth Whom he pleaseth other sins Than this; one who joins Other gods with God, Hath strayed far, far away [From the Right]" (Sura 4:116). This conviction makes Islam a rock-solid obstacle for missions.

## **Jesus: Our Saviour**

The Bible has a realistic view of mankind. Man is a fallen creature. The rupture between him and God cannot be repaired by human effort. The Bible warns us never to put our trust in people for our salvation." Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save" (Ps. 146:3). Salvation is in Christ alone. He alone is completely trustworthy. He alone has the right to ask from every human being on the face of the earth complete surrender. He is more than a prophet. He calls Himself the Son of Man, the Son of God. When we listen to Him, He comes across as one Whose Word is not relative but absolute. He was sent by God. He did not point to the Way. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). On the cross, He died in our place. He underwent the just punishment we deserve, to reconcile us to God, so that we can be justified before God (2 Cor. 5:21). In *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* Dr. H. Kraemer remarks, "The Cross and its real meaning - reconciliation as God's initiative and act - is antagonistic to all human religious aspirations and ends, for the tendency of all human religious striving is to possess or conquer God, to realize our divine nature."

## **The Bible and the Trinity**

If we call Islam one of the monotheist (one God) religions, why don't Christians forget about this mysterious doctrine of the Trinity and stress the unity of God? Why all the fuss? If it were not for Jesus, we wouldn't have a Trinity controversy to deal with. It all began with Him. The words and deeds of Jesus were charged with a Father, a Holy Spirit, and His own claims to deity. Jesus called Himself the Son of God (John 10:36, 11:4). He claimed that He and the Father were one (John 10:30). He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). Jesus said that all authority in heaven and on earth were given to Him (Matt. 28:18-20). Without question, Jesus dominated the thinking of the early believers. For instance, the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians concludes his letter by saying, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (13:14). The Bible shows how the triune God acts in the world. God is the creator of all people. Christ is the Sent One from the Father. The work that God accomplishes in Christ is realized through the Spirit

who has been poured out. When we compare, therefore, the Muslim view of God with the Christian view, we must conclude that *we don't worship the same God*.  
(To be continued)

Johan D. Tangelder  
November, 2006