



# JESUS IN THE QUR'AN

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The image of Jesus in the Qur'an could be summarized with the words of Nietzsche, words "human all-too human." This, in contrast to the teaching and view of the Church. It is clear that this in principle does not embody a Qur'anic innovation but goes back to early disputes in nascent Christianity.

Thus the *Qur'an* partially preserves traces of embryonic Christology(-ies), which were later modified or expanded upon by councils.

Taken as a whole, such Qur'anic ideas about Jesus are diffuse, and the statements taken over from the Gospels (above all from Matthew) are not noted as such in the *Qur'an*. In the *Qur'an*, Jesus is sent to the people of Israel as a prophet and a messenger of Allah, but they rejected him (6,49; 61,6); he encounters a denial decreed by Allah Himself (5,100); with the exception of a (rather) small group of Israelites (61,14).

Theologically essential is that although Jesus' virgin birth is deemed to be true, he is never viewed in the *Qur'an* as a son or descendant of David (*vis-à-vis* other traditions, such as those from Qumran, e.g. 4Q174, a Midrashic text in which God calls the Davidic Messiah his son). No royal dignity is attributed to him, neither the cross nor the resurrection (as in early Christianity) have any salvational relevance: in the Qur'anic view, Christ's death on the cross had no existential reality, nor did it constitute any part of his calling. Jesus either seems to die a natural death (19,33) or is taken up to heaven (3,55; 4,158; 5,117; cf. Enoch and Elijah) and is raised together with all the dead at the Last Judgment (19,33).

Through this desoteriologization of the life of Jesus, but especially of his Passion, his removal from the economy of salvation, a brazen psilanthropism (Jesus is a mere man: 4,171 "how could he (Allah) have a child?" *yakūna lahū waladun*) is discernible. Basically, the Qur'anic image of Jesus in the early Suras corresponds roughly to that of the Proto-Lucan gospel.

The image of Jesus in respect to the Christology found in the Qur'an is by no means uniform and is the result of theological debates in and during Syro-Mesopotamian Late Antiquity, and which Christology also underwent development, as can be clearly seen by comparing 19,1-33 (compatible with Christianity) with the later interpolation 19,33-40.

Jesus himself is mentioned by name in 14 suras. The name 'Īsā is usually understood as a realisation of Jesus (Ἰησοῦς < יהושע יְהוֹשֻׁעַ "Joshua," i.e., the "Saviour"); but this is not unproblematic. Elsewhere, we find other terms, such as, "servant of God » ('*abdu llāhi* 19,30; cf. the Gospels and Acts 3,13; 4,27, in which the

deutero-Isaian servant of God [ **עבד יהוה** ] is applied to Jesus); "the word of God" (*kalimatu mina llāhi*, 3,39,45; see the **λόγος**, Joh. 1,1ff.); *al-masīhu 'īsā bnu maryama rasūlu llāhi wa-kalimatuhū 'alqāhā 'ilā maryama wa-rūḥun minhu ... wa-rūḥun minhu*, "The Messiah, 'Īsā, Mary's son is only Allah's messenger and His word, ... and Spirit from him" (4,171); "The Word of truth" (19,34; cf. Jn 1,14).

Often the Qur'anic Jesus appears in connexion with Adam and in lists of previous prophets (e.g., 2,136=3,84; 4,163; 6,85; 33,7-8; 42,13; 57,26f.), but he is said to be more significant than those (2,253, "supported by the Holy Spirit" *wa-'ayyadnāhu bi-rūḥi l-qudusi*, cf. 2,87; 5,100; 4,171f. etc.).

Our findings so far: according to the Qur'an Jesus is a human being - in contrast to the Nicaean Creed (*natum, non factum, unius substantiae cum Patre* - Apostle's Creed: *qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine*): created and not begotten! A figure comparable to Adam - the Virgin Mary is indeed his mother, but he does not descend from the line of David, nor does he claim royal dignity; whereas he appears as the (provisional) apotheosis of the prophets - Muhammad is interpolated into the Qur'an (3,144; 33,40; 47,2; 48,29) only in later redactional stages, whereby in some of these passages it is questionable whether it is not actually Jesus who is meant as the Muhammad (i.e. the Blessed One). Allah-God is unique and indivisible (*tawḥīd*, e.g., 112,1 a syntax which is Aramaic and not Arabic: *huwa llāhu 'aḥadun-i*; this is of course a partial imitation of the *Shema Israel*, "Hear, O Israel," Deuteronomy 6, 4-9), and rules alone, i.e., a rejection of the Trinity, considered "association" (*shirk*).

Furthermore, the Torah and the Gospels are seen as the same revelation vis-a-vis the *Qur'an*, which though Jews (4:45) and Christians (e.g. 2:59; 7:162; 30:30) 'corrupted' (*tabdīl*).

This view of things is by no means new in the history of theology, and thus logically, this can not be seen as something unique, revealed to Mohammad, an illiterate merchant in distant Mecca. As explained at the beginning, the early pericopes of the *Qur'an* reflect long-lasting inner-Christian debates, often quite polemical in nature. We find similar theological views, for example, in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. This work, in a Greek (the so-called *Homilies*) and a Latin version (the so-called *Recognitiones* by *Rufinus of Aquileia*), represents the core of the "Teachings of Peter" (**Κηρύγματα τοῦ Πέτρου**), and both go back to a common source, called the *Grundschrift*, probably the **Περίοδοι Πέτρου** of the Church Fathers (*Origen*, *Epiphanes*), the work of a scholarly anti-Marcionist theologian of Syrian Christianity in the fourth century, which is also known in later Syrian,

Arabic and Ethiopian traditions.

In this once very influential treatise we have a corpus that can be regarded in many ways as a starting point for Qur'anic ideas. Here the monarchic rule of God is rigorously adhered to (**μοναρχία Θεοῦ**), a bi- or triarchy is unimaginable (**ἐτέροις συνάρχειν**). Jesus did not fulfill the law as the Son of God (**ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ** < בן-אלהים), but as the Son of Man (**ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου** < בן-אדם ; i.e., **ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων**). He was not preexistent, but merely accepted by God as his Son and anointed (Christ) at baptism (Recog. I.48 "*qui in aquis baptismi filius a deo appellatus est*"), understood as a fulfillment of Ps 2:7 (no longer present in the Koran); before this event, he was merely a Messiah designate.

In the Homilies, Jesus is **ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρί**, born **ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας**, all quite Arian formulations ("deus ingenuitus - filius genitus"). Jesus is seen as a prophet, similar to Moses, who even prophesied about him (Dt 18,15-22). In Hom. VIII.10, we find that the concept of the 'true prophet' (**ἀληθῆς προφήτης**) is elaborated, as the proclaimer of the 'eternal law' (**νόμος αἰώνιος**). This corresponds to the idea of the "well kept tablet," *lauḥ mahfūẓ* in Sura 85,22; cf. 5,48-59) in the past, present and future - "The true prophet, from the beginning of the world age hastening through" ("*verus propheta ab initio mundi per saeculum currens*," Recog. II.22 ), which is identical to the "Holy Spirit" (**ἅγιον πνεῦμα** Hom. III.17, which **ἔμφυτον καὶ ἀέννατος**).

This human prophet is sinless (**ἀναμάρτητος**= קדיק , Hom. II.6; III.11), and is the only one who can "enlighten the souls of men" (Hom. I.19). Christ is not only the New Moses, but also the New Adam, since we find here the idea that the first man (Adam Qadmon) had breathed into him the breath (**πνεῦμα**) of God (cf. Qur'an 15,29; 38,72), and was also anointed with the oil of the Tree of Life (Recog. I.45). Thus an "anointed one," i.e., Messiah or *Christos* (Hom. III.20), and could therefore prophesy. Thus Adam was sinless, and accordingly there could be no fall; otherwise, the Holy Spirit residing in him would have sinned as well.

Here we have an idea very similar to those found in the *Qur'an* (2:30-37; 20:115-122; 7:11-27). So, for example, no notion of original sin (e.g. *Qur'an* 7:23: "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves"); in the *Qur'an* (e.g., 2,31), Adam does not give names to animals as in Genesis (2,19: "And the Lord God formed of earth all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to man to see what he would call them, and that every living creature should bear the name that man would give it"), but Allah taught Adam (and not the angels) their names, a prophetic activity (derived from the **θεῖον πνεῦμα**).

Explicitly, we find the equation of Adam and Jesus in the Qur'an (3:59: "Indeed, the likeness of 'Īsā near Allah like that of Adam. He created him from dust. Then he to him 'be' and he was." This is quite similar to what we find in the Gospel of John (1,3: **πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν**), based in turn on Psalm 33,6.9 ( **כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי הוּא-לָצֶה וַיַּעַמְד** ), quite opposite to Paul's conception of the Second Adam.

Thus, the teachings of Peter, based on Jewish tradition, describe how the divine spirit (θεῖον πνεῦμα), i.e. the glory of God (Hebrew **שְׁכִינָה**), was already effective in Adam (which is why he is considered a prophet in this work, as in the Qur'an). This glory thereafter wandered through the ages to manifest itself successively in prophets - a metamorphosis and not a hypostasis - in, cf. e.g. *Hom.* XVII.4 (=Recog. II.47), an allusion to Proverbs 9,1 ("Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars"; cf. in the Talmud, Chagiga 12b: **עמודים ז'**) —the list includes Adam-Christ Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus, the representatives of the "sevenfold mystery" (**ἑβδομάδος μυστήριον**, *Hom.* XVII.9), the **ἑπτὰ στῦλοι υπάρχοντες κόσμῳ**.

These bearers of revelation (**ἡγεμόνες τῆς προφητείας**, *Hom.* II.15 - "who are all born of women," *Recog.* I.60) found their culmination in the "Jewish body of Jesus born among the Jews" (op. cit.), cf. in early rabbinical exegesis of Ecclesiastes 1:9 ("What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again"): "Like the first the last saviour so shall the last saviour be." Jesus, like Adam and Moses, were different from other prophets in that they possessed the ability to foretell (prognosis). Although the figures mentioned in the list of prophetic mediators of the 'eternal law' in the Pseudo-Clementines are subject to variation, Adam, Moses and Jesus are constant factors.

This has its counterpart in the Qur'an, which also often lists such figures, e.g. 2,136; 3,84; 4,163; 6,85; 33,7-8; 42,13, and thus apparently continues this tradition: prophets are the representatives of humanity with whom God makes his covenant, and the truth of each former messenger is included in the proclamation of the following one, so that Mohammed, in the Islamic understanding, brings together once and for all all the truth conveyed by them (e.g. 33:7). *Hom.* VII.8 "Religion is to fear him [scil. God] alone and to believe only the Prophet of Truth" is to all intents and purposes equal to the Islamic Shahāda: "There is no God but God - Mohammed is the messenger of God."

The reason for the successive repetition of revelation is the belief that not all parts of the Torah are equally authentic, some are even considered to be blatant forgeries. In *Hom.* I.18f./*Recog.* I,15 this is

illustrated: the world is like a house filled with the smoke of ignorance, vice and aberrations, the true prophet must come to its door, open it and expel this smoke and let in the (true sun)light (cf. Jn 3:19ff.).

Moses in this tradition, like Muhammad in the Islam tradition, only passed on what had been revealed to him orally, as < interpretations' (**ἐπιλύσεις**, *Hom.* II.38; see, II Petr. 1,20 ... **προφητεία... ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται**). This, however, was quickly corrupted by Satan and thus the true **παράδοσις Μωϋσέως** became adulterated with false pericopes (**ψευδεις περικοπαί**), by bad instruction, misrepresentation, etc. Here we find a certain influence of Isaiah 29:13 (Septuagint) and Mt 15:13 (see also Jer 8:8, Ez 20:25).

Hence, everyone was able to read into the Scriptures (*Hom.* III.9) what he wished. Ergo, the repeated call in the homilies: "Therefore, if some of the scriptures are true and some are false, our Master said for a good reason: 'Be good money-changers,' insofar as there are some true whilst some are false."

Generally speaking, the 'eternal law' (*Hom.* VIII.10, see above) was inscribed by God's hand into the world at creation as the first teaching to mankind (IX.10); it was known to Adam (III.48 ), and was revealed again to Moses, becoming though in the course of time increasingly obscured by errors, until it was finally elevated to eternal validity by Jesus, who had the "knowledge of the mysteries or laws" (**γνώσις τῶν ἀπόρρητῶν**, XVIII.15; *secretior legis intellegentia*, *Recog.* I.74) (cf., *Qur'an* 3, 48; 5, 46, 100; 57, 27).

So, Moses received a Torah that was different from the one we have today. Specifically, the group behind the Pseudo-Clementines rejected the sacrificial cult as pagan, and which had only been temporarily tolerated by Moses. Therefore necessarily Pauline soteriology, which regarded the death of Jesus as a bloody atonement, is rejected outright.

In their view, Christian liberation from the Jewish sacrificial cult was not initiated by the sacrifice of the Son of God, but by the water of baptism, through which Jesus extinguished the fires of the sacrificial altar once and for all.

This understanding of Scripture, i.e., the existence of false verses or passages that corrupt the unchanging eternal law of God, which can only be reinstated through a new revelation, corresponds to the role of Mohammad in the later Islamic understanding of the *Qur'an* (see above on *tabdīl*; in Islamic

theology the terms *tahrīf* and *kitmān* are also used to denote the falsification of the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity).

Another conspicuous feature that cannot be discussed in detail here is the political rejection of the monarchy (and the glorification, as with the Samaritans, of the age of Judges, *Recog.* I.38), which is seen as synonymous with war (*Hom.* III.62); the biblical kings were rather tyrants (*tyranni magni quam reges*), the building of the Temple, the place of sacrifice par excellence, was considered hubris - the whole institution, also the status of David, is said to have had no part in the "eternal law."

Thus, as has already been mentioned, Jesus' Davidic descent is not mentioned in the *Qur'an*, nor is he mentioned in the *Qur'an* as king (e.g., 21,78ff.). In Islam, as with Eastern Christianity (and Mesopotamian predecessors), we find the notion of "vicarious kingship" (e.g., Caliph means 'vicar'; 'Abd el- Malik was Caliph, the representative of God. Allah was King, Arab. *Malīk* - cf., Koran 20,114; 23,116; 59,23; 62,1; 114,2; also one of the ninety-nine most beautiful names of God in Islam - whose slave or servant this ruler viewed himself as). This was probably a reason for dispute of the early Umayyads with Heraclius after his Pyrrhic victory over the Sassanids - after his reorganisation of the empire, he took the title **Βασιλεύς**.

In the preceding, an attempt was made, admittedly with (very) coarse brushstrokes, to show that some decisive theologumena of the *Qur'an* already appear in the *Pseudo-Clementines*. As mentioned above, versions of this literature were handed down in Semitic languages during Late Antiquity and probably exerted, directly or indirectly, influence on various Qur'anic authors who shared these attitudes or convictions, at least partially: Jesus both as *Adam novus* (see above e.g., ad 3,59) and *Moses novus*, as the ultimate fulfillment of revelation.

As far as the equation with the latter is concerned, it is interesting to note that in the *Qur'an*, Mary is presented as the daughter of 'Imran (e.g., Qur'an 3,35; in Christian tradition Joachim); in the Bible though Amram is the father of Moses; in 19,28 Mary (biblically, Miriam, is listed as Hārūn's, i.e. Aaron's (who is aligned with John the Baptist) sister. Some commentators see in this a confusion - but this is unnecessary. If Moses is supposed to be a prefiguration of Jesus, Moses 2.0 (or Adam 3.0), then this similarity is more than understandable (also because Mary and Miriam are actually the same in Semitic, m-r-j-m).

Here we see again a hint of the sophisticated compositional technique of the *Qur'an*. Theologians were at work here, not an illiterate desert merchant! The Islamic understanding of Mohammed as the last prophet, as Jesus *novus* (resp. 2.0 - which partly explains the intertextuality of Jesus' *vita* with that of Muhammad in the *Sira*) is but a continuation (*Fortschreibung*) of this theme.

The notion found in *Hom.* VIII.6f. that the teaching of both Moses and Jesus was the same(!) revelation, that love for Moses and Jesus was the true fulfillment of religion, and those who understand this (single!) revelation are blessed by God - is rooted historically in antimarcionite polemics. Yet the idea that the Torah and the Gospel are identical, as are Adam, Moses and Jesus show that this doctrine, in an expanded form, underlay the composition of the *Qur'an*.

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The [image](#) shows Muhammad leafing Abraham, Moses and Jesus in prayer, in heaven, in a 15th-century Persian miniature.



