

“Is Muhammad Also among the Prophets?”: A Response to Harley Talman

by Ayman Ibrahim

Editor’s Note: Talman’s “Is Muhammad Also among the Prophets?” appeared in IJFM 31:4.

In his ambitious article, Harley Talman argues that the vast majority of Christians have perceived Muhammad in a wrong way for the past thirteen centuries by depicting him as a false prophet. He calls on Christians to “allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense.” He believes that there is “theological, missiological, and historical” support for Muhammad’s prophethood. At a minimum, we should congratulate Talman for trying new and creative avenues of thought. Unfortunately, in my judgment, this particular path ultimately proves to be a dead end. I fundamentally disagree with his major argument. To allow for the possibility of “true prophethood” for Muhammad, from a Christian point of view, one must intentionally ignore or avoid specific biblical references and must also stretch some historical evidence a bit too far. In what follows, I will provide five critical observations to demonstrate briefly that Talman fails to interact with crystal clear, relevant, biblical passages, mishandles and overemphasizes marginally relevant historical cases, and relies heavily and *selectively* on secondary studies without acknowledging the counter arguments offered against them. I will show how the core of his argument cannot be accepted even by Muslims, which, in a sense, violates the primary aim of the author in “seeking constructive dialogue with Muslims” based on his affirmation of Muhammad’s prophethood.

First, in his attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category, Talman fails to examine 1 John 4:1–3,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

This passage is echoed in 1 John 2:22–23 with respect to the sonship of Jesus to God the Father, and in 2 John 1:7, linking the Antichrist with the deception of denying that Jesus is the Christ who came in the flesh. These New Testament passages are crucial to identifying a true prophet. The test here is not concerned with the moral behavior of the one who claims to be a prophet, but rather

with his theological claims about the coming of Christ in flesh. Relying on its immediate context, one may ask: Did Muhammad really confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, i.e. that he was God-incarnate? The answer is no. For Muhammad, Jesus was merely a prophet, nothing more.

Before we even consider the claims of any other Muslim source, what about the Qur’ān? It is nearly universally acknowledged by all scholars that the Qur’ān is the earliest Muslim source, and is considered to be Islam’s scripture, the purportedly “revealed” message received and proclaimed by Muhammad. From a Qur’ānic vantage point, Jesus never existed before his birth. He was not God, nor the Son of God, nor God-incarnate. He was only a prophet sent by Allah like many other prophets. Thus, based on the three NT passages cited above, Muhammad fails to pass the test of prophethood—from *this* biblical standpoint, he is to be identified with false prophets, and can hardly be identified as a true prophet of God, that is, the only God, at last and definitively revealed to us in Christ, the Son, the Word of God.

Second, Talman, in his determination to deny that Muhammad was perceived as a false prophet in the earliest Muslim period, is willing to make claims that seem to be actually contradicted by what evidence we do possess. He states: “It is significant that during the first century [of Islam] Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet.” This is not only inaccurate, but clearly wrong. One of the earliest references to Muhammad by Christians identifying him as “false prophet” is dated 634 AD—only two years after his death. (*Doctrina Jacobi* V. 16, 209, cited in Hoyland 1997, 57). However, this is not to suggest that this claim was the only perception concerning Muhammad, neither to argue for its truthfulness, nor to deny its biased attitude. It is simply to demonstrate that Talman’s broad assertion is fundamentally inaccurate and cannot support his argument. In the first century of Islam, Muhammad was depicted in Christian sources in various ways: a conquest initiator, trader, king, monotheist revivalist, lawgiver, and false prophet (Hoyland, “The Earliest Christian Writings,” 276–295). Non-Muslims did attempt to make sense of the growing power of the invading Arabs coming from the desert who were conquering the superpowers of that era. Muhammad, in one of the depictions, contrary to Talman’s argument, was clearly viewed as a false prophet leading “the vengeful and God-hating” Arabs. (As per Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (d. ca. 639) in Hoyland 1997, 72–73).

Third, in various parts of his article, Talman equates and conflates “speaking of Muhammad with due respect” and “identifying him as a prophet.” These are two entirely different matters. We can, and actually should, speak of Muhammad with due respect, but that does not suggest that we have to affirm a prophethood that violates biblical passages. Consider Talman’s use of the example of Patriarch Timothy I to support the argument for the legitimacy

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of Muhammad's prophethood. The author simply uses this example as an affirmative one without providing any historical context or background for the Patriarch's assertion. In 782, almost 155 years after Muhammad's death, at a period of the highest power of the Abbasid Caliphate, Patriarch Timothy conducted his debate with the Muslim Caliph al-Mahdi. The Patriarch did speak of Muhammad with respect, but never stated that Muhammad was a true prophet, or even "a prophet in the biblical sense" as Talman's article argues. In fact, Talman himself is uncertain of his own reliance on Timothy's assertion and states: "It can be argued that Timothy cautiously affirmed Muhammad as a prophet. . . ." This disclaimer demonstrates how fragile his argument actually is, and how very weak are his historical lines of evidence. Talman stretched the story a bit too far by taking Timothy's words about Muhammad (as having "walked in the way of the prophets") to mean that Timothy thought of Muhammad as a true prophet.

But, what about the historical context? Nothing is offered by the author. He provides this story to support his argument for Muhammad's prophethood, although the context and stated lines of the debate suggest only a respectful manner on the part of the Patriarch in speaking of Muhammad. Moreover, what may we expect from a Patriarch speaking about Muhammad in the presence of a Muslim caliph? If this story actually took place, then Timothy did the correct thing by speaking of Muhammad respectfully. Undoubtedly, Timothy was also mindful of his people living in the Caliphate of al-Mahdi. Furthermore, assuming hypothetically that Timothy had actually affirmed Muhammad's prophethood, what would that indicate for Christians today? The fact that an eighth-century ecclesiastical leader may, or may not, have entertained the possibility that Muhammad was a prophet, in and of itself hardly constitutes obvious and clear direction for our theological estimation of the Muslim prophet. To question the grounds on which Talman singles out Timothy's views, as well as how he interprets Timothy's statements, is not to belittle Timothy's stature. Nonetheless, it would be equally possible to take other ancient Eastern Christian elites as examples, arguing that the far less favorable views (of Muhammad) of Patriarch Sophronius (d. 638), John of Damascus (d. 749), and al-Kindi (fl. 9th century) are actually more instructive for the church.

Fourth, Talman's article is laced with speculative terms such as "possibility" and "some kind," repeating them over and over. This engenders little confidence in his overall argument, especially when one considers his *selective* use of

secondary studies while ignoring the counter arguments. One of the scholarly arguments favored by Talman is that "Muhammad began his mission as [the leader of] an ecumenical movement of monotheist 'Believers' that included numbers of Jews and Christians." However, this argument has been strongly criticized by various scholars as radically fanciful. (See the reviews of Fred Donner's *Muhammad and the Believers* by Gerald Hawting, Robert Hoyland, Patricia Crone, and Jack Tannous). Talman simply does not inform us about the counter claims, most likely because they pose difficulties for his claims. He adopts a theory, accepts it, affirms it, and uses it to support his position. But this hopeful "ecumenical movement" is notable for its absence in some of the earliest sources. We have a Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle*, dating from the 660s, almost three decades after Muhammad's death, which "refers to Mu'awiya's issuing of gold and silver coins that broke from the widely used [Christian] Byzantine coin type, no longer including the traditional depiction of the cross" (Penn 2015, 55). This suggests that Muslims, as early as 660, refused to use Christian elements on their coinage, which refutes a notion of "an ecumenical movement," and rebuts the core argument of Talman regarding a true prophet leading a monotheistic ecumenical movement. Even the "earliest" Islamic text, the Qur'an, is not clearly supportive of this "ecumenical theory," as it contains polemic verses against Christians and their various doctrines such as the trinity, incarnation, and crucifixion. While Talman seems to favor the debatable notion that Muhammad and the Qur'an reacted to some fringe heretical Christian groups and not to mainstream Christianity (187), this argument is convincingly dismissed by many scholars, such as Sidney Griffith and Gabriel Reynolds. (See Griffith 2008, 7–9; Reynolds, "On the Presentation of Christianity," 2014, 42–54).

Fifth, the model of Muhammad's prophethood offered by Talman can hardly be accepted even by faithful Muslims. Consider these claims by Talman: "[Muhammad's] message brought nothing significantly new; rather it was a confirmation of the message of the biblical Scriptures in an Arabic language," and "[Muhammad's] utterances do not supersede biblical authority," let alone his statement: "As Christians, we do not regard the Qur'an to be utterly infallible and authoritative." These claims are problematic and can never be accepted by any Muslim.

Therefore, is Muhammad a prophet? Yes, indeed, he is a prophet for Muslims, but not for Christians. With these five abovementioned observations, it appears that Talman

makes a radical claim, relies on several *selected* secondary sources that agree with it, offers little in the way of evidence from primary sources to support it, and then calls Christians to go against clear New Testament teaching to support Muhammad's true prophethood. When evidence offered by secondary studies supports his claim it is emphasized; when primary sources contradict him it is downplayed. Talman's approach to Islam is hardly the only thoughtful Christian option. There are a variety of possible, nuanced Christian approaches to Muhammad which, even if they do not satisfy, let alone replicate, a Muslim view of their prophet, are theologically honest, historically attested, and missiologically measured. Out of love for Muslim friends, Christians need to speak of Muhammad with due respect, but they cannot go against clear biblical descriptions of prophethood to grant him titles he does not merit.

Ayman Ibrahim, PhD, is a Post-Doctoral Fellow of Middle Eastern History. Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and the Senior Fellow for the Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

My Response to Ayman Ibrahim

by Harley Talman

I thank the esteemed Ayman Ibrahim for expending the time and effort to respond to this complex and important issue. As he affirmed, it was rather "ambitious" to attempt to undertake it. Not surprisingly, there were some issues or aspects that I did not address in sufficient detail. Dr. Ibrahim's knowledge and expertise in this domain are clearly evident, and enabled him to raise questions and challenges that many others could not. I will endeavor to respond to his comments following the five points in his outline.

Point One

First of all, Ibrahim alleges that I "attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category." Unfortunately, for those who do not clearly recall the argument of my article, this statement may misconstrue my position—given that the major thrust of my article was to call for moving the discussion beyond such binary thinking about prophethood. I am not arguing that Muhammad is a "true prophet" as traditionally conceived (on par with biblical prophets in the canon of scripture), but as one who could have a prophetic function or prophetic role of some other order.

As for applying the "test" of 1 John 4:1–3, I would first caution against assuming that Ibrahim's interpretation of its significance and its applicability to Muhammad are so straightforward. This is because several aspects are debated by biblical scholars.

1. Some (e.g., Keener¹) believe this confession is a test for docetists who denied the full humanity of Christ whom they assert only *appeared* to be human. A good translation would be, "If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that Jesus Christ came in a real body, that person has the Spirit of God" (New Living Translation). Raymond Brown holds that the issue was not a denial of "the incarnation or the physical reality of Jesus' humanity," but a high Christology that could have been "relativizing the importance of Jesus' earthly life" to his messiahship.² I am sure that Ibrahim would agree that Muhammad and the Qur'an do not deny Jesus' full humanity.
2. Others (e.g., Stott, Hiebert³) see it as rejecting the Cerinthian heresy which asserted that the "Christ Spirit" only came upon Jesus at his baptism and departed prior to his death. The Qur'an says Jesus was Christ from his birth (Surah 3:45).
3. A case can be made for 1 John 4:1–3 referring again to the denial that "Jesus is the Christ" that appears in 2:22, the affirmation of this truth in 5:1, and the parallel in John 9:22. The test may be a variation of that same denial. Muhammad could hardly be guilty of denying this, for the Qur'an repeatedly refers to Jesus as the *al-Masih* (the Messiah/Christ).
4. Many, like Ibrahim, view the test as a confession of the incarnation. If this is the correct meaning, the negative judgment of Muhammad put forward by Ibrahim is based on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an. While we can say that Islamic theology eventually developed arguments against the incarnation, this does not necessarily reflect the view of the historical Muhammad; for the Qur'an can be read as affirming the incarnation of the word.

A key passage is Surah 3:45: "The angels declared, 'Mary, God announces to you good news of a word from him (*kalimat* *minhu*) whose name is Christ Jesus, son of Mary . . .'" What I find remarkable in this verse is the attaching of the masculine pronominal suffix to "name" (*ismuhu*) instead of the feminine suffix (*ha*), since the pronoun would be expected to match the grammatical gender of its feminine antecedent, "word" (*kalima*). This grammatical feature could conceivably be a theological parallel to the Christian Arabic translation of John 1 (Van Dyck-Bustani) which uses the masculine case verb with the feminine case *kalima*, seeking to convey the personality of the pre-incarnate Word.

However, if the masculine pronominal suffix in "his word" (*ismuhu*) is taken as pointing forward to the proper noun "Jesus," it is very significant that the word from God has a specific name ("Christ Jesus, son of Mary").

Elsewhere (4:171) the Qur'an declares that Jesus is "his word (*kalimatuhu*) which he cast down/spoke to Mary." This construct in Arabic grammar clearly indicates that

Timothy was not kowtowing to a powerful sovereign. He and al-Mahdi were friends and were engaging in honest dialogue. But as patriarch he had to be careful in his choice of words.

Jesus is “the word of God”—even if most Muslims try to make it mean a word. Moreover, 4:171 implies that the word existed before God cast it down to Mary, supporting the idea of incarnation.

Such high views of ‘Isa as the word of God are not exclusively Christian readings of the Qur’an. Muhammad Sarwar translates this verse:

“Behold,” the angels told Mary, “God has given you the glad news of the coming birth of a son whom He calls His Word, whose name will be Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be a man of honor in this life and the life to come, and who will be one of the ones nearest to God.”

Al-Tabari’s early commentary on the Qur’an cites Ibn Abbas’s observation, “God calls this son which is in thy womb his word.”⁴ Jesus is not merely created by the word of God, but he is that word. Thus, it is possible to read the Qur’an in ways that harmonize with the incarnation of the word.

In this light, let me also comment on Ibrahim’s assertion that for Muhammad, “Jesus was merely a prophet, nothing more.” While this may hold true for later developments in Islamic tradition and apologetics, many Muslim theologians acknowledge the need for and the legitimacy of recovering original Qur’anic meanings.⁵ For example, a modern Muslim authority suggests that Surah 4:157 is not a denial of the death of Jesus, but that “the Qur’an was speaking about the Word of God who was sent to earth and who returned to God. Thus, the denial of Jesus’ killing is a denial of the power of men to destroy the Divine Word.”⁶ To regard Jesus as the Divine Word indicates he is more than a mere human. I refer again to Parrinder’s summary of Muhammad’s exalted teaching about Jesus Christ. As for the denial that Jesus is the “son of God,” the Qur’an rejects the unbiblical notion of God sexually procreating with a human consort. For a more detailed response to Ibrahim’s view of the Qur’an’s teaching, see the discussions of its Christology in the endnote.⁷

Point Two

Ibrahim rejects my assertion that “during the first century [of Islam] Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet.” At first glance, his citation from *Doctrina Jacobi* would appear to refute my statement. But my assertion conveys the conclusion of C. Jonn Block’s analysis which I encourage readers to consult. However, I will here respond to the two specific reports which Ibrahim contests.

First, the comment about the Arab prophet in *Doctrina Jacobi* is not actually an evaluation of the Arab prophet.

Essentially a footnote at the end of a 100 page tract, it is a mere cursory rejection of expedience. Block concludes:

In terms of Christian-Muslim relations, it can be considered little more than the opportunistic dismissal of the prophet of the Saracens in order to bolster the position of Jesus in a tract intended to convert Jews to Christianity...⁸

The prophet of the Saracens here is interpreted in the context of the Jewish messianic concept. The Jews heard rumors about an Arab prophet and are interpreting the military success of his followers as potential evidence that the unknown prophet is the Jewish Messiah. The Christian author of the tract dispels the rumor, and instead propagates the messiahship of Jesus to its Jewish audience. The tract is highly informative on Jewish-Christian relations, and is a very early mention of the prophet of the Saracens, but carries little, if any useful information on Christian-Muslim relations as the author himself has little if any direct experience with the Arabs.⁹

Ibrahim also cites Sophronius as refuting my assertion. However, in his strong reaction to the conquest of Jerusalem, Sophronius says nothing about Muhammad, the Qur’an, Muslims or Islam, but only that they were Saracens who were “godless” and brutal. As Spencer observes, Sophronius “shows no awareness that the Arabians had a prophet at all or were even Muslims.”¹⁰ Similarly, without doubt, Muslims inside the walls of Jerusalem, when the attacking Crusaders turned it into a blood bath, would have uttered similar expressions about the Christian invaders. But, in so doing, they would not be giving any indications of their views about Jesus Christ. Block concludes that Eastern Christians distinguished between Muhammad’s teaching and wicked acts of his followers.¹¹

Point Three

Ibrahim’s third main point argues that I overstated the significance of Patriarch Timothy—whom he believes merely showed respect for Muhammad, but did not grant him prophetic significance. If we look at the broader context (which he asserts that I failed to do), we find that Timothy is doing more than this. By stating that Muhammad “walked in the way of the prophets” Timothy was not kowtowing to a powerful sovereign. He and al-Mahdi were friends and were engaging in honest dialogue. But as patriarch of the largest church of his time, he had to be careful in his choice of words, lest Christians who had less favorable views of the caliph misunderstand his words and accuse him of conversion to Islam.¹² Later in the dialogue, Timothy goes on to cite the Qur’an:

I also heard that it is written in the Qur’an that Christ is the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and not a servant. If Christ

What scholars find less persuasive is that this Islamic “Believers movement” would have included those who self-identified as Jews and Christians and the validity of the term “ecumenical” to describe them.

is the Word of God and Spirit of God as the Qur’an testifies, He is not a servant, but a Lord, because the Word and Spirit of God are Lords. It is by this method, O our God-loving King, based on the law of nature and on *divinely inspired words* and not on pure human argumentation, word and thought, that I both in the present and in the first conversation have demonstrated the Lordship and Sonship of Christ and the divine trinity (emphasis mine).¹³

Block observes,

It is not at all disguised here that in Timothy’s appeal to Q4:171 as the foundation of a Qur’anic trinitarian theology, he has likewise rendered the words to which he appeals as “divinely inspired.” Timothy is not simply employing the Qur’an as a debating tool [but] believes the Qur’an and Muhammad to be “voices of his trinitarian God.”¹⁴

Therefore, is not Timothy attributing, at least in some measure, a prophetic function to Muhammad?

As far as John of Damascus (d. 749) and al-Kindi being “more instructive for the church,” I think that they have been. John of Damascus marked the turning point for the church in following the polemical approach as the dominant model for Muslim-Christian relations. But this is unfortunate as more conciliatory approaches like Timothy’s also existed. However, as I stated, Timothy I is not unique among Christian leaders and theologians who grant a prophetic role to Muhammad (e.g., Herman Bavinck, Johan Bavinck, Martin Accad, Bill Musk, Charles Ledit, Timothy Tennent, Anton Wessels, H. Montgomery Watt, Giulio Basetti-Sani, Hans Kung, and Kenneth Cragg).

Point Four

In regard to Ibrahim’s rejection of a proposed ecumenical movement that first included Jews and Christians, I am grateful for his informing me about the critical reviews of Donner’s book, for I was not aware of them. Nonetheless, what is important to the main thesis of my article is not what is the major focus of these criticisms, but what is consistent with Hawting’s conclusion:

Many scholars today would accept elements of Donner’s thesis. That what became Islam only gradually took on a distinct identity, and that the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik provides the first clear evidence of the assertion of that identity, are propositions that would receive significant support. That neither the new Arab rulers nor their non-Arab subjects at first called the religion of the Arabs “Islam” can also be supported by the evidence.¹⁵

I, like Hawting, doubt the “religious and moral valuation . . . that Muslim sources give to events.” What Hawting and

others find “less persuasive” is that this “Believers movement” would have included those who self-identified as Jews or Christians and the validity of the term “ecumenical” to describe them.¹⁶ But what is meant by “ecumenical”? Was their primary self-identity that of a non-confessional monotheist community? In light of the critical reviews Ibrahim refers to, I would agree that this is debated. Although it cannot be *proven*, given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner’s proposal is at least *consistent with* that evidence. Elsewhere Donner builds his case for such an inclusive community’s self-identity based on a study of the Qur’an.¹⁷ However, what is important to my argument and what seems unassailable is that Jews and Christians participated in the conquests (cf. the testimonies of John of Sedreh and John of Phenek). Therefore, the movement had to have been inclusive, even if the nature and prominence of religious motivations is debated.

Secondly, Ibrahim quotes Michael Penn on the *Maronite Chronicle* regarding removal of Christian elements on the coinage as rebutting the possibility of a monotheistic ecumenical movement. However, if we read Penn more carefully, he states,

Alternatively, it may be an anachronism based on the author’s knowledge of ‘Abd al-Malik’s famous coin reform in the 690s. As a result, it remains uncertain whether the *Maronite Chronicle* was written in the mid-seventh century or simply comes from a later author well informed about the 660s.¹⁸

And even if we accept the early date as correct, would we not expect the eventual elimination of symbols unique to one particular faith tradition, if a movement was truly “ecumenical”? Moreover, as I noted, coins continued to display Christian symbols for up to a century.¹⁹

Finally on this point, I do agree with Ibrahim that the issue of whether certain Qur’anic verses are critical of mainstream Christianity, or heretical groups, is debated. However, I would encourage engagement with studies such as Block’s that give support to my position. Moreover, the Qur’an’s commitment to the sole deity of God—a commitment shared by biblical Christianity—should be a determinative consideration in interpreting those texts that address various Christian entities (e.g. Surah 4:171²⁰). This is especially so, given the multitude of verses stating that Qur’an’s purpose is to confirm, not contradict, the teaching of the biblical scriptures.

Point Five

Lastly, Ibrahim faults my proposals for not being helpful in “seeking constructive dialogue with Muslims.” I will agree that the possibilities explored differ greatly from

typical Islamic views of Muhammad's prophethood. But surely my proposal would find greater favor with Muslims than the common Christian contention that he was a false prophet—even when said “with respect.” Would not a Christian who says, “I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role, function or mission, even though I do not consider him a prophet the way that you do,” find more favor with Muslims than one who says, “I respect Muhammad, even though he is a false prophet”?

I would add here that it is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role, if we apply Gamaliel's wisdom to this question. Even though he was not convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, Gamaliel was prepared to allow that God had created the Jesus movement.²¹

However, as Martin Accad has observed in his response to my article, my examination of this issue in the interests of dialogue is aimed primarily at Christians—as it directly affects our attitude, and our view of Muhammad directly affects our view of Islam. And as Accad declares:

Your *view* of Islam will affect your *attitude* to Muslims. Your *attitude* will, in turn, influence your *approach* to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that *approach* will affect the ultimate *outcome* of your presence as a witness among Muslims.²²

In closing, I appreciate Ibrahim's interacting with my article and raising questions and objections that surely reflect the concerns of others. He has helped me refine my thinking and has shown the need for further discussion of some issues. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 743.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 505.

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 154; D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1991), 182.

⁴ *Tafsir al-Tabari* 3:45, cited in Rodney Cardoza, “New Paths in Muslim-Christian Dialog: Understanding Islam from the Light of Earliest Jewish Christianity,” *The Muslim World* 103, no. 4 (October 2013), 448–463.

⁵ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 143.

⁶ The view of Mahmoud Ayyub as expressed by Abdullah Saeed, 140.

⁷ Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977); C. Jonn Block, *Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends* (New York: Routledge, 2014) and “Historical Solutions to Some Problem Texts in Qur'anic Exegesis,” a paper presented to Bridging the Divide, June 2013 <http://btdnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Historical-Solutions-to-Problem-Texts-C-Jonn-Block.pdf>; Rodney Cardoza, “New Paths”;

Joseph Cumming, “Muslim Theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari's Doctrine of God and Possible Christian Parallels,” “Did Jesus Die on the Cross?,” “The Word of God in Islam and Christianity,” and “The Meaning of the Expression ‘Son of God.’” <http://faith.yale.edu/reconciliation-project/resources>; Mark Harlan, “A Model for Theologizing in Arab Muslim Contexts” Evangelical Missiological Society Dissertation Series, (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2012), chapter 9.

⁸ Block, 123.

⁹ Block, 124.

¹⁰ Robert Spencer, *Did Muhammad Exist? An Inquiry into Islam's Obscure Origins* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2012), 28.

¹¹ Block, 126.

¹² See the numerous references to Timothy with Caliph Mahdi in C. Jonn Block, *Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 72–73, 93, 126–132.

¹³ N. A. Newman, ed., *The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632–900 A.D.): Translations with Commentary* (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 239, cited in Block, 93.

¹⁴ Block, 93.

¹⁵ Gerald Hawting, *Journal of Religion* 91, no. 2 (April 2011): 284–85.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Fred M. Donner, “From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community,” *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.

¹⁸ Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam*, (Oakland: University of California Press), 56–57.

¹⁹ Harley Talman, “Is Muhammad Also among the Prophets?” *IJFM* 31:4 (Oct–Dec 2014), 172, fn. 31.

²⁰ Here the Qur'an warns against exceeding the bounds in religion/theology. We are reminded not to say “three” gods, for He is one God. And we are exhorted to not confuse the Creator with creation by regarding Jesus' sonship as physical/biological.

²¹ Theologian Kurt Anders Richardson recommended applying the Gamaliel test to this issue (personal communication, August, 2015).

²² Martin Accad, “Christian Attitudes Toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach,” in Evelyne A. Reisacher, ed., *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 29–47.

Harley Talman has worked with Muslims for 30 years, including two decades in the Arab world and Africa, during which he was involved in church planting, theological education, and humanitarian aid. Talman holds a ThM from Dallas Seminary and a PhD from Fuller. He presently teaches Islamic studies.