

Article Responses

"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Second Response to Harley Talman

by Ayman Ibrahim

Editor's Note: Talman's "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" appeared in IJFM 31:4. Talman and Ibrahim's first exchange of responses appeared in IJFM 32:4.

Harley Talman is very kind to respond to my five critical observations on his position concerning the prophethood of Muhammad. I am sincerely honored that he considered my response and took the time to offer his constructive feedback. His detailed response to my critique reflects his genuine heart and faithful desire to present a Christ-like attitude. My understanding of historical accounts and biblical authority does lead me to diverge with him on critical issues. But, I have no desire to reduce this exchange to two competing camps. We are simply having a fruitful discussion for the purpose of mutual edification. Fundamentally, I embrace him as a brother in Christ.

His response did touch every comment I addressed. However, throughout his response he seems to have used the same methodology he adopted in the initial article, namely, elevating the value of *selected* secondary studies above crucial primary sources, as well as avoiding interacting with works that oppose his thesis and arguments. Though I demonstrated in my first response how selectivity and heavy reliance on secondary studies can be misleading, his response to my article still used that exact approach. Having said that, and with full respect and gratitude, here I offer my critical comments on his response to my critique. I will demonstrate how his methodology suffers from an over-reliance on cherry-picked secondary works, how his application brings foreign concepts into the Muslim context, how his hermeneutics is severely reductionist, and how even the Qur'an refutes his claims.

I will begin by discussing the most important point (which comes in his last comment) concerning our witness to Muslims. He admits and agrees that "the possibilities [he] explored differ greatly from typical Islamic views of

Muhammad's prophethood," but he still insists that his "proposal will find greater favor with Muslims than the common Christian contention that Muhammad was a false prophet." I fundamentally disagree. The proposal offered by Talman is *intentionally* misleading to Muslims. He states that he believes that Muhammad is not a "true prophet," yet suggests conveying to Muslims that their prophet had "a prophetic role, function or mission." Muslims do not have a "prophet in some form" category, or a "non-prophetic" prophet. They do not have a non-prophet with "a prophetic function," or a not-a-true-prophet with a "prophetic role of some other order." These are fanciful categories. Lacking even the biblical concept of prophecy as a spiritual gift, Muslims have only prophets, or not. They have categories only for prophets and the general population. If Talman seeks to achieve a "constructive dialogue with Muslims," it can hardly be done through creating such vague categories from outside the Muslim context. His attempts to "over"-contextualize brought him far beyond even the Muslim context itself and what Muslims can comfortably trust.

In my investigation of his proposal, I consulted with three Muslim friends: the Imam in my current city in the States, the Imam of Chiang Mai mosque in Thailand, and my dear Egyptian Muslim friend whom I have known since elementary school. I asked them all one question, repeating Talman's proposal and quoting him: what do you think of a Christian saying "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"? The answer was unsurprisingly simple: Are you playing a word game or trying to deceive me? Is he a prophet or not? What are you really trying to prove? Though I honestly expected this answer, I sincerely attempted to follow Talman's suggestion. In addition, I asked a Moroccan Muslim background Christian the same question, and he said, "This would be compromising the Bible and appears to be a clear lie." Thus, while these four individuals serve as a very small sample of people, it is telling of how Muslims may react to Talman's ambitious proposal. Can we find a Muslim who would accept that Muhammad had a "prophetic function," rather than being a prophet? Is there a chance of convincing a Muslim that the Qur'an actually suggests that Muhammad possessed a "prophetic role of some other order" but he was not a "true prophet" in some of his teachings? I absolutely find this fanciful, and wonder whether it is a mere semantic attempt to support an *argumentum ex silentio* or an argument based on poorly derived inference and analogy. In the final analysis, imagined reasons are hardly persuasive. The fact that this whole approach is useless should cause us to question the value of doing such strenuous "academic" work to craft new categories of thought which are unacceptable to Muslims and thus not even useful in Christian ministry.

In my judgment, the major flaw of Talman's approach is that we place the cart before the horse. Instead of examining the Scriptures and paying attention to what the texts

say on prophets and prophethood, especially after the advent of Jesus our Lord, we reverse the order: we begin by bringing a topic, suggesting an argument that fits our paradigm, and then we go digging into the Bible to see what can be made to support our argument—eisegeting instead of exegeting. This appears clearly in the difference between Talman’s interpretation and mine concerning the “test” of 1 John 4:1–3. He did not engage the passage at all in his initial article, and when I brought it up as a crucial passage for the topic under study, he simply dismissed it as irrelevant. He cautions his reader against the significance and application of my interpretation, relying (again) on *selected* secondary studies that completely support his argument, and dismissing my comment as less than valid.

While I respect his mentioning several studies suggesting the context of the Epistle of John, these studies are simply an attempt to explain what the authors think about the religious and historical context of the inspired text. However, they do not invalidate the idea that a theological concept borne out of one context may be equally applicable in other circumstances. We cannot elevate the *context* above the *text*. The text is clearly concerned with the relationship between the Father and the Son (see also John 5:21–23). Do we need this text to mention Muhammad by name so that the truths inherent in it can be applied in this case? If the text is really a test against Docetists or against the Cerinthian heresy, as the secondary studies cited by Talman suggest, does this then instruct us that, by any means, we cannot apply it and its crystal-clear stance to other cases, particularly concerning the Father-Son relationship? If Talman insists that 1 John 4 cannot be applied to Muhammad because it can only be applied to Docetists/Cerinthians, then I suppose most of the New Testament is completely irrelevant because it addresses doctrinal and behavior problems that have no exact modern parallel. Conversely (and hypothetically speaking), if the text was indeed prophesying against Muhammad as the Anti-Christ, may we not still apply it to Islam along with its clearly spelled-out warnings about the Docetist and Cerinthian heresies?

Second, Talman (of course unintentionally) misrepresents both his article and specific areas in my response. He states that in my response I “allege” that he “attempt[s] to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category.” If I am wrong, then what does his calling to “allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense” mean? In fact, he states, “If Christians

were to accept Muhammad as a prophet in one of the ways posited above, then could we affirm this to Muslims without obliging ourselves (in their thinking) to become Muslims?” He then goes on to answer in the affirmative: “I think that Christ followers could do so and be faithful to biblical authority.” If I am mistaken, then I completely apologize, and now move to his stated intention, as in fact there appears to be a change in his position between his initial article and his response to my piece. In his response to my critical review, he states that “The major thrust of [this] article was to move the discussion about the Prophet of Islam beyond such binary thinking about prophethood.” But, this “thrust” does not easily harmonize with phrases which speak of attributing prophethood to Muhammad “in the biblical sense,” and calling Christ followers to “affirm this to Muslims.” This is confusing, ambiguous, and vague, at the very least. Does this suggest that we need to think about Muhammad and his prophethood in general in a “spectrum” sense? Was he a prophet at some point, and not-a-prophet at another? How on earth would we know, and who should decide the criteria for a so-called prophethood “of some other order”? Should we even contemplate a scale of prophethood? Was he divinely inspired in just a specific period? (This would lead to a whole different discussion on the inspiration of the Qur’an.) All these rhetorical, dialectical questions point to the *ambiguous* language of Talman’s proposal with its confusing meanings and definitions.

I argue that for this discussion to move forward, and for others to understand his position completely, we need to be very clear on definitions. In treating the Prophet of Islam, it is very important to be absolutely clear on our positions, as particularities and differences essential to each religion cannot be set aside. There needs to be careful and extensive discussion of what we mean by “prophethood” in this case. This has not been done. In fact, Talman seems to be *intentional* about such vagueness and ambiguity, as he writes that it “is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role [of Muhammad].” This is shocking—and theologically and missiologically dangerous. What is the point of avoiding clear definitions? Are there any really clear definitions? I doubt there are, as he seems to avoid stating them. Is the point simply language games for the sake of peacemaking? Or is it because the Muslims *might* like our discourse more if we use the word “prophet” about “the Muslim prophet” even though we do not at all mean what Muslims actually mean by it? Surprisingly, this

Was Muhammad a prophet at some point, and not-a-prophet at another? How would we know? Who should decide the criteria for a prophet “of some other order?” . . . His ambitious attempts will fail to convince.

His methodology severely distorts biblical hermeneutics and misinterprets historical accounts. He is patently selective, relies heavily on secondary works . . . and avoids adequate engagement with counter arguments.

treatment reminds me of the questionable doctrine of *taqiyya* (concealment of one's beliefs) among some Muslims.

Third, in response to my rejection of his claim that "during the first century [of Islam], Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet," Talman kindly admits that my use of the primary source *Doctrina Jacobi* challenges his thesis. He actually writes that "at first glance" this source "would appear to refute [his] statement." However, he attempts to deal with it in order for his thesis to survive. Unfortunately, he does so by simply citing a secondary study that agrees and supports his claim and by downplaying the importance of the primary source, claiming that my reference is "essentially a footnote." While this is both incorrect and inaccurate, one may ask: so what? What is the problem with a footnote in a primary source? In scholarly research, as I am sure Talman understands, a footnote in a primary source is undoubtedly more significant and important than one in a secondary work. The reference is not a footnote, and actually refers to the Arab prophet as both false and antichrist (Hoyland 1997, 57).

The *Doctrina Jacobi* is a very important source as it was written in 634, only two years after the traditional Muslim dating of Muhammad's death (632). This is very significant. Although the earliest Muslim biography of Muhammad dates his death in 632, other "earlier and more numerous Jewish, Christian, Samaritan, and even Islamic sources indicate that Muhammad survived to lead the conquest of Palestine, beginning in 634–35" (See Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 1–17, especially 2–3). If we consider the dating of these earlier writings, then *Doctrina Jacobi* is actually written in the same year of Muhammad's death, which makes this primary source of exceptional importance. The text of *Doctrina Jacobi* does not speak only of "the prophet who had appeared among the Saracens," but also clarifies, in the very same sentence, why he is "false" by questioning: "do prophets come with a sword and a war chariot?" (See *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, 5.16.11, 209). While some secondary studies have argued that this text does not identify Muhammad, one would ask: Was there a more famous "prophet" than Muhammad during those days in Arabia?

Fourth, Talman kindly admits that he was unaware of the critical reviews I suggested of the "proposed ecumenical movement [in early Islam] that first included Jews and Christians [as argued by Fred Donner]." He appears to *slightly* change his position. Although he treated the notion of the ecumenical non-confessional monotheist

community led by Muhammad in his initial article as if it were a historical fact, here he states that he "would agree that it is debatable." Nevertheless, he still does not want to give up on this "ecumenical" notion, as it supports his thesis concerning Muhammad's prophethood. He insists that "although it cannot be *proven*, given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner's proposal is *at least consistent* with that evidence." What evidence? We are not told. How consistent? We are not told either. The fact is that even Donner himself is uncertain, as he writes: "But for those [ecumenical] Believers who were inclined to be sticklers on the question of God's oneness, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity must always have been a problem" (213, quoting Q 5:76). This demonstrates Talman's uncertainty of his own argument. What about the references I quoted from the Qur'an in my previous response to refute his proposal? No interaction from Talman. Even my reference to the Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle* (written in the 660s), was downplayed and simply dismissed without enough pieces of evidence from primary sources. I would refer the reader here to the earliest Muslim document, the Qur'an. It clearly commands that *ahl al-kitāb* ("people of the Book," presumably Christians and Jews) are to live in submission, or humiliation, as they pay the *jizya* (tax) to Muslims (Q 9:29). It accuses *ahl al-kitāb* of forgetting what was revealed (Q 5:13–14), or of twisting their description of the revelation (Q 3:78), or of hiding the truth (Q 5:15). Does this sound like an ecumenical movement led by a Prophet "in the biblical sense"?

Furthermore, what about Muhammad's message as set forth in the Qur'an? His message not only does not confirm the Gospel, it contradicts and distorts it. The Qur'an not only claims that Muhammad is predicted by the Torah (Q 7:157) and by Christ (Q 61:6), but accuses *ahl al-kitāb* (Christians and Jews) of falsifying their scriptures (Q 2:42, 59; 3:187; 7:162) even to the extent of fabricating divine scripture as they "distort the scripture with their own hands, then say, 'This is what GOD has revealed'" (Q 2:79). The matter would be even worse if we consulted the earliest Muslim commentaries on the Qur'an to see how they treated Christians and Jews.

Fifth, Talman claims that "the negative judgment of Muhammad put forward by [me] is based on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an [concerning the incarnation]." He then calls us to believe that "the Qur'an can be read as affirming the incarnation of the Word." This is a serious claim that needs adequate treatment. Although I was

initially “thrilled” to read about this “new” Qur’anic discovery, I was quickly disappointed. Talman never engages with Qur’anic verses that are crystal clear such as:

They said, “GOD has begotten a son!” Be He glorified; never! (Q 2:116)

They said, “GOD has begotten a son!” Be He glorified. He is the Most Rich. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. You have no proof to support such a blasphemy. Are you saying about GOD what you do not know? (Q 10:68)

The Most High is our only Lord. He never had a mate, nor a son. (Q 72:3)

Proclaim, “He is the One and only GOD. The Absolute GOD. Never did He beget. Nor was He begotten.” (Q 112:1–3)

All these verses are against any understanding of the incarnation of God’s Son. For the Qur’an, it never happened and it is a severe blasphemy. Again, we are faced with a huge, serious, and unsupported claim. It seems that Talman *wants* the Qur’an to affirm the incarnation. Unfortunately, it simply does not. Of course, Talman may treat these verses as if they are rejecting Christian heresies rather than mainstream Christianity to support his claims. But to do so, he has to rely on post-Qur’anic writings and has to intentionally avoid engaging invaluable, detailed studies by skillful scholars that oppose his views, as I mentioned in my previous response. (See Griffith 2008, 7–9; Reynolds, “On the Presentation,” [2014]: 42–54.)

Instead of interacting with these crucial Qur’anic verses, Talman takes us on a bit of a distracting journey into Arabic. His Arabic reading is misleading and does not support his argument on the incarnation. He believes that it is “remarkable” that the Qur’an refers to the Word as “*ismuhu*” instead of “*ismuhā*.” However, this is simply irrelevant and can never support that the Qur’an “affirms” the incarnation of the Son of God. In fact, Talman himself states a disclaimer, referring *in passing* to the more accurate reading (thus, I wonder why he added this point based on the Arabic language in the first place). The suffix in Q3:45 refers to the son of Mary not the Word. Arabic speakers would not expect that the pronoun suffix used to refer to the son of Mary would be feminine. Thus, this was a bit of an ambitious move on Talman’s part but led to a dead end. Nevertheless, I agree with Talman that the title “Word of God” is very significant in referring to the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus. I do not understand, however, how he can see this as an affirmation of the incarnation especially in light of the four aforementioned verses.

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I believe that the Qur’an in various passages grants a very significant and unique status to Jesus (see, for instances, Q3:42; 19:21; 19:34; 3:45; 3:47; 3:45–49; 4:171; 5:110–113). However, Muhammad (as portrayed in the *hadīth*, *sīra*, *maghāzī*, and other literature) identifies Jesus merely as a prophet. In my first response, this is the point I made which was then rejected by Talman in his first response to me. He critiqued my contention that Muhammad regarded “Jesus as merely a prophet,” by referring to the Qur’anic verses, although I specifically stated “For Muhammad, Jesus was merely a prophet.” This differs from the description offered in *some* parts of the Qur’an about Jesus. In this sense, however, we both seem to agree that later Muslim writings depict Jesus differently, and more negatively. Nonetheless, I cannot support his position that the Qur’an “affirms” the incarnation.

He states: “As for the denial that Jesus is the ‘son of God,’ the Qur’an is rejecting the unbiblical notion of God sexually procreating with a human consort.” That’s fine, though I fundamentally disagree, and ask: How do we know it is a rejection of unbiblical sexual notion? Apparently, we have to consult extra-Qur’anic materials and post-Qur’anic writings? The absence of Qur’anic evidence is not evidence. In truth, the Qur’anic evidence completely refutes Talman’s claims as one can see in the abovementioned four verses which insist that Allah has no son. It should be completely clear that if *Surat al-Ikhlās* (Q112) seems to reflect a creedal Islamic language focusing on the fact that Allah has no son, we should take it seriously as rejecting mainstream Christianity, rather than simply disallowing distorted pagan-Christianity thought that entails God and sex.

How much more do I need to explain to demonstrate the essential errors in Talman’s argument? I am certain that his intentions are exceptional. I have no doubt about his desire to reach Muslims to Christ, and that is clear in his diligent attempts to find new and creative ways to interact with Muslims. However, in my humble estimation, the errors in his analysis and conclusions need sober attention. They elevate the most important figure among Muslims, Muhammad, granting him a biblically and historically unsupported status. A subsequent conclusion of authors following his conclusions would be to argue for the divine revelation of the Qur’an, at least some parts of it, and perhaps call Christians to believe that the Qur’an was actually eternally kept in a celestial tablet.

In conclusion, Talman takes on a very sensitive subject and insists on its validity despite the obvious biblical, theological, historical, and missiological gaps. His pursuit to create a new

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portrayal of Muhammad will fail to convince any religious adherents of either faith, as he himself admits, “the possibilities explored differ greatly from typical Islamic views.” If the author himself admits so, then it is safe to deduce that the entire framework and conclusions of his arguments can hardly hold up. This cannot build bridges with average Muslims, who do not really believe or care much for a historical prophet leading a Jewish-Christian-Muslim movement through a non-binary spectrum of prophethood. This will hurt Christian witness, rather than advancing it, as Muslims may justifiably accuse Christians of being overly subtle—if not even deceptive—in their presentations.

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Further Reading

How the Qur’an attacks mainstream Christianity, rather than Christian heresies: Sidney H. Griffith, “Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur’an’: Who Were ‘Those Who Said “Allah is Third of Three” according to al-Ma’ida 73?” in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an*, ed. Meir M. Bar-Asher, et al. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 83–110; S. Griffith, “*Al-Naṣārā* in the Qur’an: A Hermeneutical Reflection,” in *New Perspectives on the Qur’an*, ed. Reynolds (2011), 301–322; Gabriel Said Reynolds, “On the Presentation of Christianity in the Qur’an and the Many Aspects of Qur’anic Rhetoric,” *Al-Bayān: Journal of Qur’an and Ḥadīth Studies* 12 (2014): 42–54.

Compelling arguments on whether Christians welcomed Muslims in early Islam: A. Papaconstantinou, “Between Umma and Dhimma: the Christians of the Middle East under the Umayyads,” *Annales Islamologiques* 42 (2008): 127–156; J. Moorhead, “The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions,” *Byzantion: Revue Internationale des Etudes Byzantines* 51 (1981): 579–91; S. Griffith, ed., *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian encounters in the early Islamic period*, Collected Studies Series 746 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) particularly chapter 2, and his article “Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Hâlê and a Muslim Emir.” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000); J. van Ginkel, “The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How Did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5. eds. Grypeou et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006): 171–184; S. Griffith, “Answers for the

Shaykh: a ‘Melkite’ Arabic Text from Sinai and the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in ‘Arab Orthodox’ Apologetics,” in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam*, eds. Grypeou et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006): 277–309.

Sound ways for Christians to handle the Qur’an: J. S. Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur’an: A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Qur’an in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015). Biblical hermeneutical principles—particularly refuting Talman’s views on special revelation: G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); K. Vanhoozer, ed., *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); R. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, IL: Kregel Publications, 2010); W. Klein et al, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004); G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2006).

Perspective on Christian-Muslim encounter during the early Muslim conquests: R. Hoyland, *In God’s Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); S. Griffith, “The Syriac-Speaking Churches and the Muslims in the Medinan era of Muḥammad and the Four Caliphs,” in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam*, ed. D. Winkler (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010): 14–46.

The friendliness of Patriarch Timothy I and his views on Muhammad and the Qur’an: Griffith, “Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam,” in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam*, ed. H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), where he concludes: “So we see that even the friendliest of Christian apologists who lived in the world of Islam in the early Islamic period stopped well short of accepting Muhammad as a prophet, in any canonical sense, and of accepting the Qur’an as a book of divine revelation” (124). In addition to *Doctrina Jacobi’s* translation by Hoyland’s and Penn’s see *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, 5.16.11, edited and translated into French by Vincent Déroche, *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991).

Rehabilitating Our Image of Muhammad: A Concluding Response to Ayman Ibrahim

by Harley Talman

My original article, “Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets” appeared more than 20 months ago. Now Ibrahim and I are in a second round of responses to that article in which our focus has been on particular details of my proposal. This examination of the trees may cause readers to lose sight of the forest, the major thrust of my article that called for a reconsideration of (1) Muhammad and the Qur’an in Islam, (2) Christian theology of revelation, and (3) the biblical criteria for prophethood as a basis for (4) reconsideration of Muhammad’s prophethood.

The first major issue my original paper raised was the question of identifying the real Muhammad—who are we talking about? I offered several possible views. The first is *the Muhammad of Islamic tradition* (or “Islamic folklore”).¹ Though the majority of the world’s Muslims accept this portrayal of Muhammad, I, along with many others, believe that this notion of Muhammad is a legend, a myth that hundreds of millions of mistaken Muslims have accepted as truth. Though many Christians regard the Muhammad of Islamic tradition as a “false prophet,” I think it more accurate to call this representation a “false Muhammad” because he has no real historical existence. To be sure, multitudes of Muslims venerate Muhammad in popular Islam to the point of idolatry. But, like other idols, this Muhammad is the product of human creation and is “not anything” (1 Cor. 10:19). Due to the scant biographical information in the Qur’an, we can know very little about *the Muhammad of the Qur’an* apart from his message. Based upon the non-Islamic historical documents and evidences that I cite, I believe that *the real historical Muhammad* is someone quite different from that of Islamic tradition. He is likely closer to some of the revisionist historians’ understandings of him.² While I operate under the assumption that the Qur’an is attributable to Muhammad (aside from its editing),³ I believe that many interpretations of it developed by later Islamic tradition do not accurately represent his message.

Among key points in my reconsideration of a theology of revelation and prophecy, I explained that the Bible does not reject the notion of divine revelation and prophecy after the close of the canon of Scripture. Any such revelation must play a supporting role to the Bible, is not necessarily infallible (and thus must be evaluated by Scripture), nor is it normative and authoritative for all believers everywhere. I emphasized that the biblical view of prophecy cannot be confined to

binary categories, such as: (a) the only true prophets are those who gave us the books of the Bible as accepted by the church; (b) all other prophets are false prophets.

Ibrahim and I agree that Muhammad is not a prophet in the same way that Christians view the prophets of the canonical Scriptures (type “a” above). However, like other theologians and scholars who have not pursued more nuanced approaches, Ibrahim has difficulty in allowing other than black and white, binary categories of prophethood. But my article demonstrates the existence of various types of prophets in the Old and New Testaments, in church and mission history, and in religious discourse. My view is not unique, as I cited a number of eminent Christian scholars who hold that Muhammad can be regarded as a prophet in various biblical, theological, or missiological senses of the word.⁴ While Ibrahim does not agree, he has not, in my view, provided any specific or convincing arguments to undermine my overall argument. Finally, my article dealt with a wide range of issues that supported my thesis, and Ibrahim’s interaction has focused criticism on some of these particular elements. I will now reply to the points he raises in his second response above.

Is this a constructive contribution to dialogue?

Ibrahim insists that it is not. But as Martin Accad observed, the first and foremost purpose of my discussion of Muhammad and prophethood is as a contribution to Christian missiology and to a theology of religions. I do not seem to have made this clear enough, though I stated in the conclusion of “Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?” (*IJFM* 31:4):

This paper has provided theological, missiological, and historical sanction for expanding constricted categories of prophethood to allow Christians to entertain the possibility of Muhammad being other than a false prophet. (185, emphasis added)

And as I stated in my previous response, this reassessment should in turn promote more constructive Muslim-Christian dialogue, because it shapes our attitude toward Muhammad, and thus how we view Islam—just as Accad maintains:

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.⁵

Thus, the understandings of Muhammad and prophethood that I have set forth should have a positive impact on Christian-Muslim dialogue by affecting our own attitudes as ambassadors. I believe this is an important contribution of my article toward dialogue.

Though Martin Accad’s assertion seems self-evident to me, Ibrahim does not agree that the above change of attitude can positively impact Muslim-Christian dialogue—I leave it to the reader to judge. In denying any positive value of my proposal for dialogue, Ibrahim focuses on its lack of acceptability

I do not expect that Muslims would accept my proposal as an acceptable formulation of Islamic theology; it's just more acceptable (or less unacceptable) to Muslims than the view that he is a false prophet.

to Muslims (which he seeks to demonstrate through his query of three Muslim friends). I admitted that I did not expect that Muslims would embrace my proposal as an acceptable formulation of Islamic theology; I only asserted that it will be more acceptable (or less unacceptable) to Muslims than the view that he is a false prophet—and this could be a step forward. When Muslims raise the issue of our rejection of Muhammad as a prophet, we can acknowledge that for centuries (for many and varied reasons), Christians have regarded him as a false prophet. However, many of us no longer think this is a fair or accurate view—even though we do not hold the same view of him that Muslims have (as I explain below). Communicating a more sympathetic and positive view of Muhammad should be a constructive step forward in the world of interfaith dialogue. In America where Muslims are searching for common ground with Christians, there is even more reason to expect that my proposal could be viewed as a helpful contribution toward bridge-building and cooperation.

As for Ibrahim's query of several Muslims, it is not "telling" us anything about my assertion. Ibrahim should have given his Muslim friends the choice of the two options as I presented them and asked:

If a Christian were to express to you his position on Muhammad and his prophethood, which of the following do you find more acceptable or less offensive?

- a. I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role, function, or mission even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do.
- b. I respect Muhammad even though he is a false prophet.

But Ibrahim only asked for their response to the first; it is difficult to imagine that any Muslim would choose "b." over "a."

Moreover, Ibrahim claims that position "a" above is "intentionally misleading to Muslims." This baffles me. By saying "I respect Muhammad as a prophet (or having a prophetic role, prophetic mission, etc.)⁶ even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do" am I really misleading people—much less deliberately so?⁷ On the contrary, I believe that such a proposal invites discussion and elucidation. (That Ibrahim's three Muslim friends did not understand or appreciate my proposal is not at all surprising given that Ibrahim himself does not embrace my proposal, and therefore could not explain it or provide biblical rationale for it. Furthermore, his assertion that Muslims only have two categories—"prophets and the general population"—is not accurate [see end note⁸]). I can envision that

an interaction like this might ensue naturally or could be facilitated:

Muslim: What do you mean that you "do not consider him a prophet in the same way" that I do?

Christian: I respect Muhammad, but you believe prophets are sinless. I do not. The prophets may be the best of mankind but they are still sons of Adam and therefore sinners;⁹ only Isa the Messiah, the pure Word of Allah that was cast into Mary's womb, is without sin.¹⁰

Furthermore, Muslims tell me that Muhammad will intercede for them on the Day of Judgment,¹¹ but nowhere does the Qur'an indicate that Allah has given Muhammad permission to do this. But the Injil says, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5 ESV). It is to Isa al-Masih, Jesus the Messiah, that "all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

Also, Muhammad is a prophet for Muslims, but that does not mean he is a prophet in the same way for other people of the Scriptures. Does not God in the Qur'an say "And how can they [the Jews] make you [Muhammad] their judge, when they have the Tawrah, which contains Allah's judgment?"¹² The Qur'an likewise states, "So let the people of the Injil judge by what Allah has revealed in it. Whoever doesn't judge by what Allah has revealed are unbelievers" (5:47). Other verses support this: "Truly believers, the Jews, the Christians, and Sabaeans who believe in Allah and in the last day and do righteous deeds have their reward from their Lord, and won't fear or grieve" (Q 2:62; cf. 5:69).

Many, like myself, believe that God can use prophets from outside the people with whom he has a covenant in order to direct or correct them.¹³ We see in the Qur'an that Muhammad rebuked and corrected the Jews for rejecting Isa the Messiah.¹⁴ I esteem him greatly for that. He also warned people of the book not to "exaggerate" in religion by going beyond what is written in the Scripture.¹⁵

The Bible instructs me not to reject anything said by any kind of prophet, but to evaluate what they proclaim by the Bible, accepting whatever is true and good, but rejecting anything that is contrary to its teaching (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–21).

Unfortunately, most Muslim clerics interpret and teach the Qur'an in ways that contradict some fundamental teachings of the Bible. As a result, most Christians completely reject the Qur'an. But I believe that if more Muslims would interpret the Qur'an in ways that affirm biblical teachings (which is what the Qur'an says its purpose is), then many Christians may begin to view Muhammad's prophetic mission much more positively (cf. Basetti-Sani and Wessels).

In what "biblical sense" could Muhammad be a prophet?

Surprisingly, Ibrahim says that I misrepresented my own article when I took him to task for his alleging that I "attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category." Unfortunately, there was a failure to observe what I wrote in my article:

Ultimate greatness in a prophet is a function of his pointing people to Christ. Therefore, we could allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet *in the biblical sense explained in the preceding section*, and in the Qur'anic mode of being a warner to his people, without his performance of miracles.¹⁶ (italics added)

Ibrahim repeatedly quotes from this, lifting out the words "in the biblical sense" without including the modifying phrase "explained in the preceding section." This is a serious misconstrual of my position. It has led some who did not read my article to think that I regard Muhammad like the prophets in the biblical canon (which I clearly do not) and has brought unwarranted backlash. Ibrahim gives no indication that he consulted the preceding section for clarification. The "preceding section" discussed the inadequacy of criteria like moral blamelessness, absence of hostility with Christians, or the performance of miracles, and instead clarified that "the most important issue is their attitude toward Christ and the Scriptures."¹⁷ In other words, I merely said, "Therefore, we could allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense" *of pointing people [back] to the Scriptures and toward Christ*¹⁸ "and in the Qur'anic mode of being a warner to his people, without his performance of miracles." Neither confirming Christ nor being a warner to one's people requires the performance of miracles; hence, there was no change in my position, as Ibrahim asserts. I do accept his apology for doubting my expressed intent.

Should prophethood be viewed as a continuum?

Ibrahim continues his critique by skeptically asking, "Does this suggest that we need to think about Muhammad and his prophethood in general in a 'spectrum' sense?" That, of

course, is the fundamental point of my article which makes a case for closing down the cultural and theological paradigm that treats prophecy exclusively in binary categories. Instead, I have argued that we should replace it with one that recognizes the variety of kinds and categories that my article "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets" finds in the Scriptures, history, theology, and missiology.

In place of strict binary categories, we need a more biblically nuanced perspective. I have noted previously that there were biblical prophets who did not write or give us Scripture.¹⁹ What do we call this distinct office? Moses' office is distinct from other prophets of Israel. Elijah had a "school" of prophets that was distinct from the writing prophets. And as the introduction of my article noted, even Saul was "prophet for a day." Balaam served a different office of prophecy than all the prior-mentioned prophets. Paul recognized truth on the lips of pagan poet-prophets (Acts 17:28); Agabus erred on some details of his prophecy about Paul's future in Jerusalem or at least misinterpreted its application to the apostle; and the utterances of NT prophets require sifting.²⁰

Despite these distinctions, Ibrahim does not agree with the implications of my discussion of the character (i.e., the mixed character) of non-canonical NT prophecy as Spirit-inspired, but potentially fallible and in need of "sifting" (as in 1 Cor. 14:29, 1 Thess. 5:19–21),²¹ and of divine revelation to those outside the Jewish and Christian stream.²²

The issues and perspectives examined in my article should force us all to re-examine our presuppositions as we discuss prophethood of diverse kinds and various senses of the word. Those needing further clarity on my position are invited to consult Bill Musk who sees Christians as falling somewhere on a broad spectrum between two extremes.²³ With respect to Muhammad, Musk (like myself) finds himself "in that uncomfortable, in-between area," approving of the position of the 1984 Conference of European Churches:

Christians respect the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. It calls people to repentance in the service of the one God. It is unjust to dismiss Muhammad out of hand as a false prophet. Christians may recognize Muhammad as part of the same prophetic tradition, and in the past some have done so. We must nevertheless ensure that our Muslim friends understand the subtle differences between the two perspectives, for Christians confess that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.²⁴

Ibrahim repeats his sharp criticisms of what he considers to be my "ambiguous language."²⁵ I freely admit to qualifying some assertions with terms like "possibility," for I am

T*his is a serious misconstrual of my position. It has led some to think that I regard Muhammad like the prophets in the biblical canon (which I clearly do not) and has brought unwarranted backlash.*

I did apply the criteria of 1 John 4:1–3 to Muhammad—Jesus being “Messiah” and “coming in the flesh”—and found that both criteria align with the teaching of the Qur’an.

exploring new territory in which additional knowledge is prerequisite to higher levels of certainty (not to mention my sensitivity to the present anti-Islamic atmosphere in which I write). For example, the conclusion of my initial article pointed out:

A major obstacle is our uncertainty about the actual details of Muhammad’s life due to the great lack of personal information about him in the Qur’an and the complexities of the historical sources. Future historical studies may strengthen or weaken the case for Muhammad being regarded as a prophet. The outcome of critical scholarship about the Qur’an’s relationship to the Bible (positive or negative) will also affect thinking.

Moreover, Ibrahim seems not to appreciate the need for nuance (as in the above paragraph on the prophetic office). He also lambasts my statement that it “is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role” (once again cutting off its clarifying context that qualifies it: “*if we apply Gamaliel’s wisdom to this question*” [italics added]). He even goes so far as to associate my treatment with dissimulation (*taqiyya*).

I am not at all opposed to clear definitions. However, the Christian scholars that I cited view the notions of prophet or the prophetic role somewhat differently. Can we not allow each of them to affirm a prophetic role for Muhammad according to the varied senses which they intend without insisting that only one of them is legitimate?

This allowance has implications for our previous discussion of how a continuum or “spectrum” view of prophethood can aid Muslim-Christian dialogue. When, like the Conference of European Churches stated above, we “recognize that Muhammad is part of the same prophetic tradition,” it allows us to interact with the text of the Qur’an through the lens of our tradition and make contributions to the interpretative community. This is an important and legitimate role for us, since Christians were among the original audiences and recipients of the Qur’an’s message—in fact, the Qur’an says it is an essential one for the sake of Muslims (10:94).²⁶ In addition, allowing for varied senses of prophethood makes possible a spectrum of contribution. Precisely where a Christian is situated on this spectrum will determine the nature of his contribution and his potential for influencing the Islamic interpretive community.

Was 1 John 4:1–3 applied to Muhammad?

Ibrahim says that I “simply dismissed . . . as irrelevant” the test of 1 John 4:1–3: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” This is hardly

the case and his ground for such a statement is baffling to me. On the basis of *sola scriptura*, I used the text of v. 3 itself (lit. “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh”) against Ibrahim’s personal inference about it. I was not “relying on . . . selected secondary studies,” but simply backing up my position by listing the main interpretations of leading biblical scholars regarding the doctrinal content of the “test.”

Ibrahim argues that the studies I reference “do not dismiss the idea that we can learn a theological concept.” I agree completely—we can learn about the deity of Christ and the incarnation of the divine Word in John’s epistles, but these things are learned more inferentially than explicitly. I am not discounting what has been learned or inferred, but we must uphold what God gave us to learn and infer from—the inspired text, being careful to adhere to the Scriptures, not inferences.

Ibrahim criticizes my hermeneutics, saying: “We cannot elevate the *context* above the *text*,” but is this not what he himself is doing by insisting on more than the criteria of the text? Granted, the “text is clearly concerned with the relationship between the Father and the Son,” but v. 3 specifies what that relationship is: “Jesus” is the “Messiah” whom God sent “in the flesh” (cf. John 17:3). John is singularly focused upon making this the specific distinction when it comes to evaluating prophets, and Muhammad (of the Qur’an) actually satisfies this test.

Ibrahim also refers us to John 5:21–23 which speaks of the Father’s purpose that all honor the Son as they do the Father). The Qur’an does not contradict this; it may well support it. In Q.3:45 Jesus is “honored” (*wajihan*) in this world and the next. The only other instance of this word used this way is in regard to Moses (33:69). But the only person it is applied to in both this world and the hereafter is Jesus. Most significantly, it repeatedly occurs as an attribute of God,²⁷ referring to God’s glory/honor and countenance/face. As Moses’ face shone with the glory of God (in this life, but not in the hereafter), the term infers that Jesus reflects God’s glory and face—not only in this life, but also in the hereafter.

Then Ibrahim errs egregiously by asserting that I fail to apply the test of 1 John 4:1–3 to Muhammad, because he alleges that I limit its application to Docetists or Cerinthians. I am quite puzzled by such logic when in fact I have done exactly the opposite of what he claims. I examined various possible understandings of the doctrinal content of the “test” in 1 John 4:1–3 and then applied each to Muhammad. However, the point is that while scholars differ over the

identity of the people in the historical context of 1 John, in each case (Docetists, Cerinthians, or other), these people all failed to affirm 1 John's criteria of Jesus being "Messiah" and "coming in the flesh." I applied these criteria to Muhammad and found that both criteria align with the teaching of the Qur'an. Ibrahim then resorts to building a straw man argument, presented as *reductio ad absurdum*, suggesting that I would make the entire NT irrelevant because modern situations are not exact parallels. Again, I maintain that all that we should insist on is what the text of I John 4:2-3 demands—that Jesus is the Christ and he came in the flesh.

And even if John's test is stretched to demand affirmation of a fully developed orthodox Christian theology of the incarnation, the Qur'an need not be viewed as denying it. In contrast to Ibrahim's dismissal of this possibility, Basetti-Sani contends:

For centuries now, there has been a very grave misunderstanding about the two principle Christian mysteries. Hasty interpretation, without proper and judicious weighing of the evidence, persuaded Muslim exegetes that the Qur'an condemns the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity. Christian apologists fell into this same snare.... But those texts condemned a "tritheism" that has nothing to do with the formulation of the dogma of the Trinity. The same is true of the Qur'an's supposed condemnation of the Incarnation.²⁸

The Qur'an does not undertake to express a formulation of these theological doctrines, but that does not mean it opposes them; the Qur'an respects the Bible and seems concerned only with censuring excesses (heretical notions). Moreover, contrary to Ibrahim's assertion, Jesus of the Qur'an is not "merely" a prophet (despite the efforts of Muslim clerics to reduce his status, rather than confirm the prior Scriptures). For example, 4:171 should be read "the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is *certainly* [not *merely*] the messenger of God, his Word, whom he placed in Mary, a spirit from him." The conjunction *innama* should be seen as emphatic, not diminishing, for at least two reasons: (1) in its context this verse is proclaiming the exalted status of Jesus to Jews who reject his messiahship;²⁹ (2) it is nonsensical to say "*merely* God's Word." Jesus is here given exalted distinction as "his [God's] Word" (*kalimat*), a title the Qur'an gives to no one else in history!

It is important to note that Muhammad affirms Jesus as the Word of God (3:45) and this is almost certainly rooted in John 1:1. Though Ibrahim rejects my inference of the significance of *ismuhu* (the Word's name), others view it differently. Musk argues that the Arabic is "intimating that

'a word' does not refer to a simple word of language, but a person."³⁰ One of the premier Islamic authorities of today, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, acknowledges that Jesus' identification with the Word of God is "an idea that has clear resonance with the Gospel tradition, where Jesus is identified as the "Word" of God (see John 1)," but argues that this identification does not preclude the Muslim emphasis on Jesus' role as the "bringer of the Gospel, which like the Torah and the Qur'an, represents God's Word and message to humanity."³¹ He explains that this does not necessarily reject the theological import ascribed to the title in Christianity:

Some commentators interpret *His Word* here as the tidings Mary received of his miraculous conception in her womb or as an allusion to the Divine Creative Command *Be!* by which Christ was formed in Mary's womb... However, while all created beings are brought into existence through God's Word, Christ alone is specifically identified as "a Word from God." **Some might argue, therefore that Jesus, by virtue of being identified as God's Word somehow participates (uniquely) in the Divine Creative Command**, although this is not the traditional Islamic understanding of Jesus' identification as a *Word from Him* (3:45) [emphasis in bold mine].³²

Furthermore, Q 9:31 points to the deity of Christ ("They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords *apart from God and the Messiah Mary's son*, and they were commanded to serve but One God; there is no god but He; glory be to Him, above that they associate." [italics mine])³³ Moreover, the Qur'an asserts that no one but God has the breath of life and is able to create (6:2, 38:71-72; 22:5, 73), a prerogative that it otherwise attributes only to Jesus (3:49; 5:110).

How did Christians initially view Muhammad?

It is unfortunate that what I expressed as a general statement (i.e., "during the first century Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet"), Ibrahim understands to be an absolute that can be refuted simply by citing an example to the contrary (i.e., *Doctrina Jacobi's* denunciation of an Arab prophet).³⁴ Regrettably, Ibrahim takes too literally my comment about the *Doctrina Jacobi* reference being merely a footnote. To say it is a "footnote" is a figurative way of saying it was of extremely minimal importance within the text itself ("a mere cursory rejection of expedience" as I explained). Moreover, while Ibrahim argues that *Doctrina Jacobi* is an extremely important early witness, he seems to regard it as expressing the conclusion of some thoughtful scholar, rather than as the polemical anti-Jewish tract that it is. Rejecting the Arab prophet because prophets do not "come with a sword and a war

The Qur'an does not undertake to express a formulation of these theological doctrines, but that does not mean it opposes them; the Qur'an respects the Bible and seems concerned only with censuring excesses (heretical notions).

If the Qur'an represents Muhammad's message, it is certainly a prophetic message. That these Christians joined his movement indicates that they must have accepted his prophetic message and mission to a significant degree.

chariot" is hardly a studied theological conclusion from Scripture. It makes me wonder whether the Christian writer of the *Doctrina Jacobi* ever read the Old Testament or heard the stories of prophets like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Elijah.

Thus, the primary point I was trying to make was this: During the first century, Christians did not *characteristically* view Muhammad as a false prophet. C. Jonn Block's study concludes that John of Nikiu's position and

the casual dismissal of Muhammad's prophetic status in the *Doctrina Jacobi* . . . seem the *only real rejections of the prophethood of Muhammad by Christians*, and these two authors seem among our sources the least exposed to the teachings of Islam, rendering their judgments solely based on the behaviors of Muslims.³⁵ (italics added)

Similarly, Martin Accad affirms, "there is strong evidence that Islam was initially viewed by Eastern Christians as some sort of variant of Christianity."³⁶

Was Muhammad's original movement "ecumenical"?

Ibrahim introduced critical reviews of Donner that contest my contention that the original movement started by Muhammad was "ecumenical." Let me clarify—there are two main aspects of this term "ecumenical" that are being debated by scholars: (1) Did the movement include Jews and Christians? If so, what kind? (2) Was their primary self-identity that of a non-confessional monotheist community motivated by an ecumenical religious agenda (as Fred Donner argues)?³⁷ Given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner's thesis regarding aspect #2 of an ecumenical Arab movement cannot be "proven" (nor disproven); thus I granted that scholars are divided over this point. Nonetheless, I wrote, "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." Then I asserted that Donner's proposal is at least consistent with that evidence: Ibrahim says that I did not specify what evidence—Hawting's conclusion which was quoted and documented actually is evidence. And I will repeat further evidence that was mentioned: the participation of Christians in the conquests, as John of Sedreh and John of Phenek testified;³⁸ the minting of coins by Muslim rulers which bore Christian symbols; the inscriptions and papyri containing only the first half of the shahadah ("There is no god but God" with no mention of "Muhammad is the messenger of God"); the use of terms such as "believers" and "emigrants," and the absence of the terms "Muslims," "Islam," and "Qur'an"; as well as (Donner's analysis of) the self-identity

of the "Believers" in the Qur'an.³⁹ All of this indicates that Arab Christians did not find Muhammad's message to be antithetical to biblical faith or a barrier to their participation in it. If the Qur'an represents Muhammad's message, it is certainly a prophetic message. That these Christians joined his movement indicates that they must have accepted his prophetic message and mission to a significant degree. From what we find of that message in the Qur'an, we might view Muhammad's mission as calling the Arabs (Jews, Christians and pagans) back to the exclusive worship of the God of their father Abraham, pious living, and preparation for the day of Judgment.

Ibrahim states that Donner and I are both "uncertain" about our argument. Not at all. Neither of us doubts whether the "Believers" movement included Christians; our only difference concerns the kind of Christians. In endnote 29 of my original article on Muhammad and prophethood I indicated that "Donner thinks the Christians who joined this 'Believers Movement' were non-Trinitarian Christians, seemingly based on his anti-Trinitarian understanding of certain Qur'anic verses." I noted that my only difference with him is that I saw no reason to exclude Trinitarian Christians since I am persuaded that the Qur'anic verses in question were not aimed at Trinitarian Christians, but at followers of tri-theism and other heretical Christian views. This was confirmed by John of Phenek whose testimony I cited, "Among them [the Arabs] there are many Christians, some of whom are from the heretics, others from us."⁴⁰ Ibrahim ignores the testimony of this "primary source."

However, what is important to my argument about an ecumenical movement is aspect #1—that the movement included Jews and Christians. This seems unassailable given the testimonies of John of Sedreh and John of Phenek. Even *Doctrina Jacobi* (which Ibrahim heralds as tremendously significant) regards the attackers as one group comprised of Jews and Arabs. Therefore, the movement had to have been inclusive, even if the nature and prominence of religious motivations is debated.

Then Ibrahim asks, "What about the references I quoted from the Qur'an in my previous response to refute his proposal? No interaction from Talman." This assertion by Ibrahim is unjustified, unfortunate, and unbecoming. Although Ibrahim referred (in a very general way) to traditional interpretations of the Qur'an regarding certain Christian doctrines, he did not quote or give a reference for any Qur'anic verses in his previous response—not even once. But my response actually quoted 3:45 with some linguistic

analysis, cited 4:171 and 4:157, and referenced multiple sources that discuss the Qur'an's Christology (endnote 7).

Ibrahim asserts, "Even my reference to the Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle* . . . was downplayed and simply dismissed without enough pieces of evidence from primary sources." I responded to the data Ibrahim provided and cited Penn's evaluation of this source and his recognition that the *Maronite Chronicle* may have been written much later—and this would discredit Ibrahim's point (that removal of Christian symbols from coins one generation after Muhammad do not support Christian involvement in his movement). But even granting the early date (c. 660 C.E.) for Mu'awiya's removing the cross from coinage, this does not at all indicate that he or early movement was hostile to Christian symbols or Christianity as Ibrahim asserts. Ibrahim fails to note that the immediate context of the *Maronite Chronicle* records Mu'awiya's pious regard for sites associated with Christ's passion:

Many Arabs assembled in Jerusalem and made Mu'awiya king. He ascended and sat at Golgotha. He prayed there, went to Gethsemane, descended to the tomb of the blessed Mary, and prayed there.⁴¹

Why would Mu'awiya sit at Golgotha and pray there if he was hostile to Christianity and the crucifixion? He was essentially performing rites common to Christian pilgrims. We should instead interpret the removal of the cross from coins as indication of Mu'awiya's humility in refusing symbols of exalted status; for the chronicler states in the sentence which immediately follows, "Mu'awiya also did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He established his throne in Damascus but did not want to go to Muhammad's throne."⁴² This also better accords with the fact, as I previously noted, that other Muslim coins continued to display Christian symbols for up to a century.⁴³

Is Muhammad's message in the Qur'an anti-Christian and anti-Gospel?

Ibrahim also cites several Qur'anic passages as condemning people of the book and he thinks that this refutes the idea that Muhammad's movement included Jews and Christians. This issue of inclusivity matters because it directly affects our view of the prophetic place of Muhammad. If the movement that he founded was not anti-Christian, but called all Ishmaelites (Jewish, Christian and pagan alike) to exclusive devotion to the God of Abraham and the practice of righteousness, then we can more easily consider the possibility of according him a positive prophetic role (of some

kind). I think the case of Jewish and Christian participation has been sufficiently established above; nevertheless, I will respond to the Qur'anic verses that he cites as well.

Ibrahim cites Q 5:13–14 as accusing them of "forgetting what was revealed." Why is this a problem? The OT prophets said the same thing repeatedly. Moreover, 5:13 refers back to 5:12 which affirms that God made a covenant with the people of Israel but warns that "he among you who disbelieves after that has gone astray from the straight path." This is no general or categorical rejection of Jews here, but a warning for each individual not to stray from that covenant. 5:14 says the same thing of Christians: God made a covenant with them, too, but they forgot [to obey] part of it and the result was enmity and hatred among them (a fair assessment of the hostile relations between various parties in the Christological controversies of that era). The criticism of the people of the book for "hiding the truth" in v. 15 expresses another aspect of their disobedience.⁴⁴ But we should not take this as a categorical condemnation of all the people of the book. (Note the positive description of Christians in this same surah in v. 82). The Qur'an condemns Christian hypocrisy and apostasy, just as it also condemns Muslim hypocrisy and apostasy.

Ibrahim also says that Q 3:78 accuses them of "twisting their description of the revelation." Actually it says, "Some of them (*minhum*) distort the book with their tongues." The Qur'an declares that there are both faithful and unfaithful people of the book, as noted three verses prior:

Some of the people of the book you can entrust with a huge sum, and they will return it to you. If you give others of them a dinar, they won't return it to you unless you remain standing over them. (3:75).

How can this be viewed as a position of general hostility to the people of the book?

Ibrahim says Q 9:29 requires Jews and Christians to pay the *jizya* tax, in submission or humiliation to Muslims. This is the "tax that is taken from the free non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim government; whereby they ratify the compact that ensures them protection."⁴⁵ There is no scholarly consensus about this verse requiring "humiliation."⁴⁶ As my original article indicated, readers of the Qur'an must recognize that verses like this apply to particular situations or people.⁴⁷ This verse does not apply to *all* people who were given the book, but only to those who do not believe in God and the Last Day—for the Qur'an maintains that many Jews and Christians *do* believe in God and in the

These Qur'anic verses apply to particular situations or people. There is nothing in them that would prevent pious "people of the book" (Jews and Christians) from participating in a Believers movement.

Dozens of verses in the Qur'an endorse the contents of the Bible. The few that speak negatively are unclear and require careful examination of their context; they condemn specific misbehavior of some Jews, Christians, or their clerics.

Last Day (3:113-114, 5:82). An example of such a limited application of 9:29 would be the view that “those who don't follow the religion of truth among those who were given the book” speaks only to the Byzantine empire's planned aggression at Tabuq.⁴⁸

Hence, there is nothing in these verses that would prevent pious people of the book from participating in a Believers movement. More importantly, we should recall a parallel situation in the gospel of John. Despite the gospel of John's negative portrayal and denunciation of “the Jews,” the members of Jesus' movement were Jews. Similarly, my original article stated:

In contrast to the imperialistic arrogance and cult of the cross of the Byzantines, the Qur'an viewed Christians in Arabia (primarily Monophysite, Syrian Orthodox, Nestorian, and Assyrian) as those “closest in affection” to Muslims, for their priests and monks were not proud (Surah 5:82). Thus, the Qur'an does not view Christians with hostility as a matter of principle...⁴⁹

In addition, Ibrahim faults Muhammad's message in the Qur'an for claiming that the Bible predicts Muhammad. However, in 61:6, the reference to a “sent one” (*rasul*) makes better sense as referring to Jesus' foretelling of the Holy Spirit (the Advocate, Gk., *parakletos*) being sent from God (John 14:16-17), as some Muslims will grant.⁵⁰ Jesus is therefore describing the Holy Spirit (not Muhammad) as “*Ahmad*” (meaning “whose name I praise” or “whose name is more praised”⁵¹). Nowhere in the Qur'an is Muhammad called by this term. Instead of viewing “Ahmad” as a descriptor, Muslim tradition seems to have later developed it as an apologetic argument by making this term a name for Muhammad.⁵²

Neither should the “unlettered” (*ummi*) prophet in Q 7:157 be understood as a reference to Muhammad. This interpretation appeared much later in the development of “Islam.” The prophet referred to here is better understood as Christ Jesus who did not receive formal training in the Scriptures from learned men but was taught directly by God.⁵³

Ibrahim also claims that the Qur'an contradicts and distorts the Gospel. While this is certainly true of Islam as it developed much later, this statement does not accurately represent the position of Muhammad in the Qur'an which respects the Bible (Tawrah, Zabur, and Injil). The Qur'an repeatedly attests to the truth contained in the previous Scriptures. Ibrahim also states that the Qur'an accuses Christians and Jews of falsifying Scripture, citing several verses as proof texts with little concern for their context.

Q 2:59 (and a parallel in 7:162⁵⁴) says, “The wicked substituted a saying told them for another, so we sent a plague from heaven down on the wicked for their unbelief.” This refers to the grumbling Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness. The Bible agrees with this assessment.

Q 3:187 refers back to v. 183 concerning the prophets of Baal who combated Elijah.⁵⁵ This is a common problem and biblical theme found throughout the minor prophets.

Q 2:42 refers to God instructing the children of Israel to fulfill the covenant and believe . . . and “don't cover truth with vanity or knowingly hide the truth.” This has nothing to do with accusing them of textual corruption (*tahrif*). However, the kind of accusations against Jews and Christians that Ibrahim was looking for I addressed in an endnote in my article (which it seems that Ibrahim overlooked):

Muhammad's accusation against the Jews (and Christians?) of *tahrif* (“corruption” of the Word of God) did not charge them with changing the written text of Scripture, but with concealing the truth (Surah 3:71; 6:92), distorting its meaning as they read it aloud (3:78), composing their own texts and passing them off as Scripture (2:79), and forgetting the covenant (5:14, 15). On the contrary, he insists that no one can “change the words of God” (10:64, 6:34).⁵⁶

The Qur'an does charge *some* Christians and Jews with “corrupting” their scriptures; but this refers to corrupting the meaning (*tahrif al-ma'na*), not corrupting the text itself. Some leading scholars, both Muslim and Christian, have demonstrated that the notion of textual corruption became popular four to five centuries after Muhammad, largely due to the impact of Ibn Hazm in the 11th century.⁵⁷ Dozens of verses in the Qur'an endorse the contents of the Bible. The few verses that speak negatively are unclear and require careful examination of their context; they are better understood as condemning specific incidents of misbehavior of some Jews, Christians, or their clerics.⁵⁸

Ibrahim asserts that Q 2:79 charges Jews or Christians with “fabricating divine scripture as they ‘distort the scripture with their own hands, then say, ‘this is what God has revealed.’” He apparently is quoting a biased translation of the Qur'an. Upon closer examination, we see that the Arabic text only says, “Woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say ‘This is from God’ to purchase with it a little price.”⁵⁹ It relates to the preceding verse where the *ummiyyun* (variously translated as unlettered ones, unscriptured, gentiles, or illiterate), who do not know the book apart from their own wishful thinking or desires, are just guessing or imagining. What is being written

are not the Scriptures but what is being peddled as the Scriptures for a small price. Hence, this verse is most likely condemning those Jews who wrote down alleged texts to sell as amulets and talismans (as is frequently done with Qur'anic verses even today) and/or to their selling Tefillin (phylacteries), the double prayer straps they wear with two boxes containing verses from the Torah.⁶⁰

Concerning Ibrahim's reference to what the earliest Muslim commentaries on the Qur'an say about Christians and Jews, I believe they are irrelevant to our discussion on whether or not the original movement included Jews and Christians since they were written long after this movement ceased to be inclusive.

Does the Qur'an deny that Jesus is the "son of God" in the biblical sense?

Ibrahim is convinced that the Qur'an's rejection of Jesus as "the son of God" is not a rejection of the blasphemous notion that God cohabited with Mary to produce biological offspring, but rather a denial of mainstream Christian doctrine. He "fundamentally disagree(s)" with me: he asks, "How do we know it is a rejection of unbiblical sexual notion?" But he then cites 2:116, 10:68, and 72:3 which all use the Arabic "*walad*" for son, a word that means "to beget (by seed)" or "to bear (a child)" (i.e., beget a son biologically).⁶¹ Moreover, sexual sonship is patently indicated in the internal content of a number of these verses. For instance, he cited 72:3: "He never had a mate (*ṣāhibatan*), nor a son"—if God has no mate to procreate with, then neither did he have a son. Likewise, in 6:100–101: "How can he have a son when he has no consort?" And, in 4:171, the claim that "He is far beyond having a son (*walad*)" immediately follows an affirmation of the Virgin Birth, inferring that physical/sexual begetting is being rejected.⁶² Other verses (19:93–94, 39:4, 4:171) reject that God adopted (has "taken" or "acquired" a son).⁶³ These last verses do not reject mainstream Christian doctrine, but rather the heresy of Adoptionism (namely, that Jesus was born as an ordinary human, but later became divine when God adopted him). Contrary to Ibrahim's assertion, none of these verses relates to the orthodox Christian doctrine of incarnation.

Ibrahim's charge that I "rely on post-Qur'anic writings" to support my contention that the Qur'an condemns Christian heresies is a bit audacious given that the Qur'anic verses themselves wholly substantiate my position by employing the words *walad*, "mate" and "consort." They are addressing something entirely unrelated to the language of the New

Testament (son of God, begotten of God) that refers to God's promise to David. If Ibrahim is arguing that being "son" and "begotten" of God are physical, then we should be deeply concerned about his Christian theology.

This interpretation that the Qur'an is rejecting divine biological and adoptive sonship is not novel or unique to me; extensive support in both Muslim and Christian quarters can be found. Al-Ghazali, Islam's most celebrated philosopher and theologian, states the son–father relationship of Jesus and God in the NT must be viewed as a metaphor, not as physical/biological which the Qur'an rejects.⁶⁴ The reason for this rejection is that in classical Arabic the word "son" almost always conveys physical sonship when used in connection with a personal relationship.⁶⁵ (Christian orthodoxy agrees that NT usage of Father/Son for God/Jesus is metaphorical, but this in no way disavows their "metaphysical" or "ontological" existence from eternity). Even someone like Sam Shamoun, who has no praise for Muhammad or the Qur'an, after examining the Qur'an and leading Muslim commentaries, concludes: "the Qur'an nowhere condemns the historic Christian understanding of Jesus' Sonship."⁶⁶

And finally, just for clarification, I did not say in my previous response that the Qur'an unmistakably "affirms" the incarnation, but only that it "can be read" that way—meaning it "allows" for such a reading. (I have mentioned various inferences to this in this response).

Does the Qur'an criticize Christian heresies or Christian orthodoxy?

Appealing to Griffith and Reynolds, Ibrahim rejects my contention (as supported by C. Jonn Block's research) that the Qur'an criticizes Christian heresies, not Christian orthodoxy. However, Ibrahim appears unaware of later interactions by the authorities and sources involved. In a work subsequent to that cited by Ibrahim, Griffith interacts with Block's research and rules out a number of possible heresies on the Arabian Peninsula as influencing the Qur'an.⁶⁷ He does not criticize this research, but instead acknowledges that it is "somewhat at variance" with his own theory. Clearly Griffith does not reject Block's findings (since in the same footnote he references both Block's research and his own article).⁶⁸ But regardless, it seems untenable to deny that some verses in the Qur'an are condemning, not Christian orthodoxy, but heresies (e.g., the rejection of the deification of Mary in a "trinity" with God and Jesus in 5:116).

Al-Ghazali, Islam's most celebrated philosopher and theologian, states the son–father relationship of Jesus and God in the New Testament must be viewed as a metaphor, not as physical or biological.

Ibrahim contends that I have elevated Muhammad to a position that has no biblical or historical basis. To the contrary, I have denigrated the legendary status given him by Islamic tradition by relying on earlier evidence.

Ibrahim cites Reynolds' "Presentation" which interprets these Qur'anic verses as attacking orthodox Christianity based on his theory of "rhetoric." However, Reynolds does not engage Block's more recent historical research which invalidates his theory.⁶⁹ Neither does Reynolds' hypothesis account for the dozens of verses that affirm (rather than attack) the previous Scriptures. It makes little sense for the Qur'an to repeatedly and emphatically insist that it confirms and authenticates the biblical Scriptures and at the same time reject their fundamental teachings (i.e., as expressed in orthodox Christianity). Furthermore, it has been argued that Qur'anic verses allegedly critical of Christian doctrines generally appear when addressing people in Jewish contexts, thereby indicating a correction of Jewish distortions and misunderstandings of orthodox Christian belief.⁷⁰

Along with most Muslim theologians and Christian apologists, Ibrahim invokes Q.112 ("Say: 'He is One, the Eternal. He does not beget and was not begotten, and there is none like him'") as a denial of divine sonship. Seyyed Hossein Nasr states to the contrary,

Attempts to link this verse to discussions of Christianity are thus somewhat tenuous, and it is best understood in relation to . . . the Quranic critique of the pagan Arab notions of Divine procreation, as in 37:149-53.⁷¹

Moreover,

Such notions are distinct from the Christian understanding of Divine sonship in that the meaning of "son" in the phrase "Son of God" employed in the Christian creed is very different from the meaning of "son" in the Quran. For Christianity, the term "Son of God" refers to Jesus as the pretemporal, uncreated Word of God that is begotten of the Father before time. For the pagan Arabs, however, the progeny of God had a distinctly temporal and physical connotation.⁷²

Ibrahim supposes Q.112:3 denies a Christian creed, but we must remember that begottenness language has been prevalent since the Cappadocian fathers and throughout the centuries statements similar to Q.112 have been made by great Christian theologians (e.g., John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin), affirming that the essence/being of God is one, eternal, unique, and does not reproduce. In fact, the exact wording of this surah appears in the Fourth Lateran Council's affirmation that the one divine essence shared by the three hypostases/persons of the Trinity "does not beget, nor is it begotten." Hence, Louis Massignon, the great French scholar of Islam, explained this verse as "an affirmation of the unity of the divine essence (*ta'wḥīd*)

rather than a statement of the unique personality of God."⁷³ Thus, it is not a rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (which is not specifically addressed in the immediate or wider context of the Qur'an). Seyyed Hossein Nasr confirms this, affirming that in Q.4:171 and 5:73

the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as three "persons," or hypostases, "within" the One God is not explicitly referenced, and the criticism seems directed at those who assert the existence of three distinct "gods," an idea that Christians themselves reject.⁷⁴

Conclusion

In my initial article and two subsequent interactions with Ayman Ibrahim, I have offered a wide-ranging rationale for reconsidering some crucial issues: Muhammad and the Qur'an in original Islam, a Christian theology of revelation, and a biblical view of prophethood, as the basis for a positive prophetic role for Muhammad.

Ibrahim contends that I have elevated Muhammad to a position that has no biblical or historical basis. To the contrary, I have denigrated the legendary status given him by Islamic tradition by relying on earlier and more reliable historical evidence than is found in dubious later Muslim traditions. I have also given evidence from the earliest and primary Muslim source, the Qur'an, which repeatedly claims to confirm the Bible and not to contradict it (and thus we should seek to interpret it in ways that do that). Yes, the result is an understanding of Muhammad that is elevated well above the "demon-inspired false prophet" view that prevails among Christians today. But I have shown that such a view has a historical and missiological basis and is compatible with Scripture.

I maintain that the Bible does not reject the notion of divine revelation and prophecy after the close of the canon of Scripture. But such revelation and prophecy must play a confirming or supplemental role to Scripture; they are not necessarily infallible (and thus must be evaluated by Scripture); and they are not normative and authoritative for all believers everywhere. I especially emphasized that the biblical view of prophecy cannot be confined to binary categories—contrary to the commonly held that (a) the only true prophets are those who gave us the books of the Bible and (b) all other prophets are false prophets. In support of my argument, I gave examples of other kinds of prophets—both from Scripture as well as from mission history (e.g., William Harris whom Lamin Sanneh classes as one of Africa's "charismatic prophets")—and this was not refuted by Ibrahim.

Partly due to misunderstandings, Ibrahim asserts that I elevated some secondary studies above crucial primary sources, but my responses have shown otherwise. He introduced a number of secondary sources that I have interacted with and still sustained my thesis.⁷⁵ Ibrahim insists that the average Muslim on the street will automatically reject non-binary categories of prophethood, and therefore my proposals are not constructive (and even damaging to dialogue). A major factor in our differing perceptions is that the first audience in my mind for discussion of these issues would be Muslim scholars and intellectuals, primarily in contexts of inter-faith dialogue which easily provide opportunity to explain the concepts that I have proposed. In contrast, Ibrahim is focused solely on the ordinary Muslim who he insists will reject my proposal out of hand and view it as subterfuge. Strategically, engaging first with open-minded Muslim religious leaders is ideal; for they can sanction new ideas that influence the average Muslim on the street. Nevertheless, even Muslims on the street can be engaged in ways that invite honest and frank explanation and elucidation of new concepts. (See the sample conversation in the beginning of my response above.) The fact is that paradigm shifts take time, effort and persistence in the face of entrenched ideas and opposition (e.g., belief in a flat earth); nevertheless, progress is possible.

I find it difficult to understand the fear expressed in Ibrahim's conclusion that those who accept my view might subsequently "call Christians to believe that the Qur'an was actually eternally kept in a celestial tablet." Perhaps this is indicative of a proclivity to binary thinking: either accept the false prophet view of Muhammad or you will be pulled to affirm the supposedly inane Muslim view of revelation.⁷⁶ Moreover, Ibrahim's "prophecy" that my proposal will "fail to convince any religious adherents of either faith" is a false one—for some have already given testimony to the contrary (e.g., the doctor who told me, "Your article blew my brains out of the back of my head."). Likewise, the alleged "biblical, theological, historical, and missiological gaps" in my treatment are not "obvious" to all—Martin Accad considers my work as "belonging to the field of missiology *par excellence*."⁷⁷

Despite the differences in our views, Ibrahim and I have mutual respect and appreciation as scholars, as well as love for one another as brothers in Christ. Readers, however, may wonder how evangelical scholars, equally committed to the authority of Scripture and the lordship of Jesus Christ, can be so far apart in their understandings. What factors lead to such disparate attitudes, interpretations, and assessments?

The discussion of these issues would be with Muslim scholars and intellectuals, primarily in contexts of inter-faith dialogue which easily provide opportunity to explain the concepts.

I would suggest that one contributor to our differences is the paradigmatic lenses through which we view the issues. Therefore, I asked Bradford Greer to write about these lenses through which we approach scripture, history and the religious phenomena of Islam. (His article, "Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task," is found in this issue of the *IJFM* on page 93). But, regardless, it is clear that we are not all going to agree on the nature of Muhammad's prophethood and the original movement that he founded. Looking at an analogous situation in Scripture, skeptics and critics might consider applying Gamaliel's wisdom to this question surrounding Muhammad. Gamaliel had some unanswered questions in his day; but though unconvinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he suspended judgment, allowing that the purpose and activity of the movement that Jesus started might be of God (Acts 5:34–39).⁷⁸

From the outset I acknowledged this to be a complex and controversial topic and pleaded for greater tolerance of those holding differing positions. I had hoped that by the time Ibrahim and I reached the conclusion of our dialogue, the added clarity would have significantly narrowed the gap between our positions. Perhaps this will be the case for those who read our exchanges. If not, then let us ensure that our interactions avoid misrepresentation, exaggeration, and alarmism, so that we may endeavor to follow the ancient wisdom: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*

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Endnotes

¹ This description, the Muhammad of "Islamic Folklore," is borrowed from Nabeel Jabbour.

² Moderate revisionists referenced in my original article include Fred Donner and Gabriel Said Reynolds; Robert Spencer speaks for radical revisionists.

³ As Fred Donner observes, "Those of us who study Islam's origins have to admit collectively that we simply do not know some very basic things about the Qur'an—things so basic that the knowledge of them is usually taken for granted by scholars dealing with other texts" ("The Qur'an in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds [New York: Routledge, 2008]), 29.

⁴ Harley Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets," *IJFM* 31:4: section IV, 182-185.

⁵ 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), 31.

⁶ While speaking of Muhammad's "prophetic role, function or mission" can be helpful in academia, elsewhere it may be clearer to just to use "prophet" with qualification (e.g. "I respect Muhammad as a prophet even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do.")

⁷ Of course, any fruitful dialogue will be based upon the establishment of relationships of sincerity and trust in which Muslims can recognize our good will, sense our conciliatory attitude and respect, and appreciate our efforts at finding common ground. It will not always be easy to overcome the suspicions and mistrust engendered by a millennium of adversarial culture in Christian-Muslim controversy where there is a permanent investment in the other side's falseness. (Like race car drivers who anticipate their competitors' "moves" in order to jockey for position, religious controversialists construct narratives in their minds of the other's beliefs that are limited to perceived weaknesses and "straw men" who can be excoriated and rejected as representative of the entirety of the competing religion).

⁸ Muslims may distinguish *rasul* "messenger" from *nabi* "prophet," though some have a dual function as messenger-prophet. In Q 3:81 a prophet brings scripture and wisdom, whereas a messenger comes to confirm the existing scriptures. "Warner" (*nadhir*) is another Qur'anic function that has overlap with them. It is not difficult to explain to a Muslim that in Christian theology we can use the term "prophet" to also refer to messengers, to warners, to those who are moved by God's Spirit to make predictions or to give direction or guidance (not necessarily infallibly), and even to those who proclaim the Scriptures.

⁹ "Every son of Adam sins, the best of the sinners are those who repent." *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, Hadith no. 2499.

¹⁰ Cf. "Word of God" Q 3:45, "sinless" in 19:19 and in the well known hadith: "There is none born among the offspring of Adam but Satan touches it . . . except Mary and her child" (*Sahih Bukhari* 4.55.641).

¹¹ Cf. Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine*, vol. 4: Intercession (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1998).

¹² Qur'anic quotations unless otherwise noted are from *The Arabic-English Reference Qur'an: The First Translation of the Qur'an into Modern English with References to the Tawrah, Zabur, and Injil* [The Reference Qur'an Council, July, 2014], subsequently referred to as *Reference Qur'an*.

¹³ The position of Tennent, Ledit and Aquinas in the article under discussion in Harley Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" *IJFM* 31:4: 183, hereafter referred to as "Talman."

¹⁴ Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ*, edited by Ron George (Winpress, 2000, reprint of *The Koran in the Light of Christ*, trans. W. Russell Carroll, Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 44, 106, 111, 117, 120, 129, 148, 159, 161, 166 and elsewhere.

¹⁵ e.g., Q 4:171.

¹⁶ Talman, 181.

¹⁷ Talman, 178.

¹⁸ I showed how, at least from a "centered-set" perspective, Muhammad fulfilled this function which did not require performance of miracles. Moreover, I noted that Muhammad emphasized biblical themes "such as the resurrection, the return of Christ, and

reward and judgment that were so neglected by the Christians who were embroiled in Christological controversies," Talman, 180.

¹⁹ Talman, 175.

²⁰ Re: Agabus, see D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 97-99.

²¹ Cf. Talman, section on "Post-Canonical and Present day Prophecy," 175.

²² Cf. Talman, section on "Special Revelation Beyond the Jewish-Christian Border," 175.

²³ Bill Musk, *Kissing Cousins?: Christians and Muslims Face to Face* (Oxford, U.K. and Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch, 2005): 78-83.

²⁴ "Witness to God in a Secular Europe," Conference of European Churches: Geneva (1985), 56, cited in Musk, 80.

²⁵ Ibrahim's first response denounces my "speculative terms such as 'possibility' and 'some kind,' repeating them over and over" *IJFM* 32:4, 202.

²⁶ "So when you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who are reading the book that was before you" (*Reference Qur'an*, 241).

²⁷ Q 6:52, 13:22, 18:28, 28:88, 30:38-39, 55:27, 75:22, 76:9, 88:2 & 8, and 92:20.

²⁸ Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ*, Ron George, ed. (Winpress, 2000), 129. Reprint of Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977). Basetti-Sani views the Qur'an as rejecting Nestorian and Monophysite Christologies; others might agree that orthodoxy is not being condemned, but differ as to which particular Christological view(s) the Qur'an is criticizing. In contexts where the critiques are addressed to Jews, not Christians, it is presumably condemning distorted Jewish views of Christian theology.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁰ Musk, 342.

³¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins), 2015, 267.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Diacritical marks in the Qur'an are a later development. In light of the tortuously awkward word order with "apart from God" coming between "rabbis and monks" and "Messiah, it seems most probable that an accusative case marker was later inserted after "Messiah" to avoid his equality of lordship with God so as to conform to later Islamic theological position."

³⁴ Ibrahim is overly generous to himself saying, "Talman kindly admits that my use of the primary source *Doctrina Jacobi* challenges his thesis." What I actually said was, "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" ("Response to Ibrahim," 205). Cf. 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" (PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, U.K., 2011), subsequently published as *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

³⁵ Block, 126. See his discussion for evidence that Christians generally did not seem to object to Muhammad as prophet in the first century.

³⁶ Martin Accad, "Towards a Theology of Islam: A Response to Harley Talman's 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?'" (*IJFM* 31:4): 192.

³⁷ Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

³⁸ Abdul-Masih Saadi, "Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (NY: Routledge, 2008), 218–220.

³⁹ Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.

⁴⁰ A. Mingana, *Sources Syriacques* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1908), 147, as cited in Saadi, 218.

⁴¹ Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 58.

⁴² *Ibid.* I am indebted to C.D. Johnson for this insight and a number of valuable editorial suggestions to this article.

⁴³ I quoted Penn: "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," Talman 172.

⁴⁴ The word is not "truth" but "the book"; this is the only verse Ibrahim cites where *abl al-kitāb* is actually used.

⁴⁵ Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate 1863), Book I, 422.

⁴⁶ Cf. attempts by seven different scholars to decipher its meaning in part 5 of Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 319–371.

⁴⁷ Talman, 184.

⁴⁸ Cf. for example, Kaleef K. Karim, "Examining Quran 9:29 – Does Islam Sanction The Killing Of Christians & Jews?" <https://discover-the-truth.com/2014/06/03/examining-quran-929-does-islam-sanction-the-killing-of-christians-and-jews/>.

⁴⁹ Talman, 184.

⁵⁰ Nasr, 1366.

⁵² W. Montgomery Watt observes: "It is impossible to prove that any Muslim child was called Ahmad after the Prophet before about the year 125 A.H. On the other hand, there are many instances prior to this date of boys called Muhammad after the Prophet. The fact that Ibn Sa'd thinks it worth including three traditions to the effect that the Prophet's name was Ahmad is an indication that this had not always been obvious; there are no similar traditions about his name being Muhammad" ("His Name is 'Ahmad,'" *The Muslim World* 43 no. 2 (April 1953): 110, 113).

⁵³ The Torah discussion in Luke 4 between young Jesus and the scholars illustrates this as does his teaching that amazed those in the synagogue ("Where then did this man get all these things?" Matthew 13:54, 56). Although I do not favor the spirit and tone of sites such as this, Sam Shamoun and Jochen Katz make a strong case for this view from the Qur'an, Bible and revisionist history in "The Quran and the Unlettered Prophet: Jesus or Muhammad?" http://www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/unlettered_prophet.htm.

⁵⁴ "The wicked among them substituted a different saying for what they had been told, and we sent a plague upon them from heaven for their wickedness" (7: 162).

⁵⁵ "Allah made a covenant with those who were given the book, so that you would show it clearly to people and not hide it, but they cast it behind their backs and sold it for a small price. How dreadful is what they sell it for" (3: 187).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 189, endnote 105.

⁵⁷ Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World*, vol. 93:3–4 (Fall 2002): 419–436; and Martin Accad, "Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible: The Story of the Islamic Usage of *Tahrif*," *Near East School of Theology Theological Review* 24 (2003): 67–97. We see some contemporary Muslim clerics returning to the early Islamic position, e.g., Sheikh Hasan Farhan al Malaki, "Are the Tawrat and Injeel really corrupted?" <https://www.facebook.com/hasanalmaliki/posts/10153365960233001?fref=nf>.

⁵⁸ Cf. Al-Azhar sheikh Mustafa Rashid, "The Quran did not say the Injil or the Torah has been corrupted," <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=297504>; George, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ*, 116–119.

⁵⁹ Fawaylunun lil-ladhina yaktubuna al-kitaba bi-aydihim thumma yaquluna hadha min 9indi Allahi li-yashtarū bihi thaman-an qalilan.

⁶⁰ Heribert Busse thinks the reference is to Jews who made and sold Tefillin, Jewish prayer straps with phylacteries containing Torah passages (*Die theologischen Beziehungen des Islam zu Judentum und Christentum: Grundlagen des Dialogs im Koran und die gegenwärtige Situation* [Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1988], 49). Some others think it may refer to the oral tradition of the Jewish Talmud (Basetti-Sani, 118). Among many Muslims there is opposition to profiting from the word of God and this attitude may be a concern of this verse as well.

⁶¹ My article (p. 174 and endnote 52) noted that the difficulty posed by the one passage (2:116–117) in the Qur'an that rejects Jesus being the *ibn* of God was resolved by C. Jonn Block (*Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge*, 126).

⁶² Ibrahim may consider arguments coming from a Christian apologist that the Qur'anic rejection of "son of God" is in regard to Jesus being the physical son of God (Memsuah Mansoor, "The Son of God in the Bible and the Qur'an," http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Memsuah/son_of_god_bq.htm).

⁶³ Hence also in 4:171 is the Qur'an's rejection of three (*thalatha*) gods: God as father, Mary as mother, and Jesus as son. If the orthodox formulation of the Trinity was being condemned, then the Arabic term for Trinity (*thaluth*) would have been utilized instead of the number "three" (*thalatha*). Block demonstrates that the Arabic technical term for Trinity had religious currency in Arabia at the time and would have been used in this verse if the Trinity was being rejected.

⁶⁴ Al Ghazali, *al Radd al-Jamil li Ilabiyat 'Isa bi Sharib al-Injil*.

⁶⁵ Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni, *Al-Biruni's India*, translated from Arabic by Edward C. Sachau, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), vol. 1, 38, cited in Ungaran, "Son of God in Indonesian Christology: An Analysis of the Doctrine of Christ in the Indonesian Reformed Churches," International Islamic University dissertation, Malaysia, 2012. Rodney Cardoza likewise observes, "In classical Arabic both *ibn* (*son*) and *walad* (*boy* or *son*) were not used figuratively or metaphorically for interpersonal relationships. Instead they referred almost exclusively to biological offspring" ("New Paths in Muslim-Christian Dialog," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 102 [October 2013]:453–454).

⁶⁶ Sam Shamoun, "The Quranic Understanding of Historic Christian Theology," http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/rebuttals/dirks/islam_christiandocctrine.html.

⁶⁷ Sidney Griffith, "'Syriacisms' in the Arabic Qur'an: Who were 'Those who said that Allah is third of three', according to al-Ma'idah 73?," in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an*, edited by M. M.

Bar-Asher, B. Chiesa and S. Hopkins, 83–110 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007); C. Jonn Block, “Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of ‘Thalātha’ in Qur’ān 4. 171 and 5. 73.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2011): 1–26.

⁶⁸ Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the Language of Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 28.

⁶⁹ Reynolds did not interact with Block’s research in any of the sources cited by Ibrahim, probably because the former’s article was in process of review during the interim. Thus, this scholarly source is out of date on this point and not useful for the purpose of rejecting Block’s support for my position.

⁷⁰ Basetti-Sani, *The Qur’an in the Light of Christ*, 162–164.

⁷¹ So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons? Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses? Behold! It is of their own perversion that they say, “God has begotten,” while truly they are liars. Has He chosen daughters over sons? (see also 39:2–3; 52:39).

⁷² Nasr, 1580, references Q 4:171C as condemning this pagan notion.

⁷³ Basetti-Sani’s quotation of Massignon, *The Qur’an in the Light of Christ* (Ron George, ed.), 83.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁷⁵ For example, Ibrahim cites Griffith as saying, “even the friendliest of Christian apologists who lived in the early Islamic period stopped well short of accepting Muhammad as prophet, in any canonical sense and of accepting the Qur’an as a book of divine revelation.” But where did I ever advocate that Muhammad was a prophet in the “canonical” sense or that the Qur’an is a book of “divine revelation” like the Bible?

⁷⁶ If this is his inference, then Ibrahim seems unaware of the fact that ancient Jews actually held this view in regard to the eternity of the Torah.

⁷⁷ Martin Accad, “Towards a Theology of Islam: A Response to Harley Talman’s ‘Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?’” (*IJFM* 31:4): 193.

⁷⁸ As noted previously, theologian Kurt Anders Richardson recommended applying the Gamaliel test to this issue.

An Afterword

by Ayman Ibrahim

One of the exceptionally positive results of my exchange with Harley Talman is that I got to know him better, as we talked over the phone several times and discussed various details of his thesis on Muhammad’s prophethood. He is a serious scholar, diligent researcher, and thoughtful Christian. Another significant positive outcome is that in our printed exchanges he was skillfully able to explain and clarify several points of his proposal. Readers should grasp the details of his thesis more accurately to be able to discern whether it is actually valid in missiological circles, precisely in bringing the Gospel to Muslims. *IJFM* is to be thanked for graciously offering its platform for such a sophisticated exchange.

Jesus’ deity is extremely fundamental for Christians, which makes it very important for Muslims to understand it, to discuss it and to ultimately insist on rejecting it if they are to remain orthodox Muslims. Similarly, Muhammad’s prophethood is a pivotal belief in Islam—if he is not a prophet, Islam collapses. This is precisely, in my view, the main reason why Talman’s proposal is very important to evaluate with scrutiny. He treats Muhammad’s prophethood as a “non-essential” topic for faith that deserves *liberty*, while I view it as a significantly “essential” topic. He equates his proposal with the “unanswered questions” of Gamaliel’s day, although the Church for the last fourteen centuries has not generally felt that this question is unanswered. He indicates that his thesis is like “a movement” that deserves time before judging it with scrutiny, while I view it as very crucial to our day-to-day missiological concerns in connecting with Muslims, especially as it raises unneeded ambiguity.

It is obvious to those who have been following this exchange that Talman and I disagree on fundamental issues. However, is it possible that he and I can agree on some level? Yes, I believe we can.

Talman and I agree that Muhammad is not a true prophet like the prophets of our canonical scriptures. However, while I am willing and completely comfortable to call Muhammad a false-prophet based on biblical and theological measures, Talman is unconvinced and reluctant to use such a term. He believes that there is a possible biblical space to assign Muhammad some kind of prophethood, especially if we distinguish between the different Muhammads, such as the one of Muslim tradition and the one of history. The crucial issue in my view is that we cannot actually establish a substantial “Muhammad” of history apart from the “Muhammad” of Muslim tradition. Talman disagrees and would be satisfied with a minimalist “historical Muhammad” confined to his message in the Qur’an.

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Talman and I agree that binary categories are clearly found throughout the Bible. However, he insists that binary categories do not actually apply when it comes to the issue of prophethood, even after Christ. This is one reason that he views Muhammad as neither a prophet nor a false-prophet, proposing that Muhammad fits in another category (e.g., “charismatic prophet”). By way of disagreement, I view Muhammad as a clear example of a post-Christ false-prophet, and, in a sense, one of the warned-against anti-Christ in the Johannine inspired writings.

Talman and I agree that we should bring the Gospel to Muslims because Jesus is the only Savior. We agree that Muslims need to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and that Christians need to find every possible and creative way to communicate the Gospel to Muslims. However, we disagree on how Muhammad’s prophethood would fit and should be used in such a Gospel proclamation. He respects Muhammad “as having a prophetic role, function, or mission,” although he does “not consider him to be a prophet the same way [Muslims] do.” On the contrary, I do not need to assign Muhammad any prophetic role in any sense to respect him. In fact, I mainly respect him because Muslims do, and I love them. In respecting Muhammad, Christians are never obliged to assign him any unmerited prophetic roles. It is unnegotiable that Christians should respect Muslims and treat them with esteem and honor. This is a part of our identity as followers of Christ. Nonetheless, the matter is different when it comes to Muhammad, especially as we consider what the Muslim traditions themselves report about his morality and ethics, and what the Qur’an as Muhammad’s allegedly received revelation affirms about Jesus’ deity and message. Consider this: I can love and respect Druzes, Buddhists, and Hindus, and find some points of contact that are true in their culture and sacred writings, but in no way am I supposed to support their religious claims.

Talman and I disagree that his proposal is relevant for reaching out to Muslims. While I acknowledge Talman’s obvious diligence and absolutely value his painstaking research, I see his proposal as unhelpful in communicating truthfully with Muslims. Of course, his thesis could be quite interesting in some secular circles where researchers are only concerned with manuscripts, texts, and sophisticated debates concerning picky rarefied, obscure, or abstruse matters. However, in dialoguing with average Muslims, it is hardly convincing to speak about the various Muhammads, the continuum of prophethood, let alone affirming the incarnation or the deity of Christ based on the Qur’an.

My disagreement with Talman centers on methods and approaches that eventually have missiological consequences. It is my conviction that the Gospel is offensive. We do not need to deny or shy away from such a biblical truth. Paul interacted with both Jewish and pagan cultures. He was not only remarkably relevant to them, but also significantly offensive in his discourse and Gospel preaching. Christians should be concerned with creative and effective ways to communicate the uniqueness of the Christian faith and the supremacy of Christ to adherents of Islam who do not generally care about sophisticated terms or complicated definitions. In this exceptionally important mission, we do not need to make our faith appealing to Muslims by according any level of prophetic honor or biblical truth to Muhammad. This cannot create a common ground with Muslims. Nor can it make the Gospel convincing. **IJFM**