

## CHAPTER 5

# THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The exegesis of God’s relationships with Adam, Abraham, and Moses in chapter 4 reveals that Yahweh appears before his subjects as the “immanent-transcendent God” while Allah reveals himself as the “absolute transcendent God” before man. In this consequent discussion of the transcendence of God, special attention is placed upon the implications of God’s relationships through the analysis of systematic theology. The following is in no way meant to be an exhaustive analysis of Christian and Islamic doctrine. It makes no pretence as to the completeness of systematic doctrine. *This chapter is merely seeking to discover a possible cause for the differences of theology in a realm that has always been at the centre of the Christian-Muslim conflict.*

When limited to God’s relationship with the religious patriarchs of Christianity and Islam—Adam, Abraham, and Moses—there are common aspects of revelation as well as significant differences observed from the previous chapter. Due to the undeniable similarities and contradictions between the two Scriptures, there have been heated arguments concerning the authenticity of the Scriptures. Three choices of interpretation may arise from chapter 2. First, with respect to the other Scripture, treating both the biblical and Qur’anic accounts as true and credible seems to be the easiest and most compromising solution for the differences of

the Scriptures. However, it will produce unchallenged questions of the differences in the accounts of God's appearances, creating conflicts in the applications of the texts. The second choice inclines towards the practical level of propagandism rather than a scholastic solution. Both Christians and Muslims will say that the differences between the Scriptures are due to the fact that the other's Scripture has been corrupted or stands as unauthenticated Scripture. This view is irrelevant and will not bring any further arguments or solutions for the contradictions. However, it is the most common opinion of the Scripture held by both Christians and Muslims. The third option is to see the Qur'an as the work of a redactor.

Due to the fact that the Bible originated before the Qur'an, with relatively strong and accurate textual studies to prove its originality along with the fact that the majority of Qur'anic stories depend upon biblical stories as its foundational resource, the Bible qualifies to be a basis to the redactor's material for the Qur'an. Furthermore, as the nature of the Qur'an leans more towards the sermonic and apologetic, it has used the biblical account to support the context of the Qur'an freely. In due time, the redactor may have adopted the biblical story to fit Islamic teaching and its context. In this process, the theology of the redactor may have influenced the adaptation of the biblical accounts of God's relationships with Adam, Abraham, and Moses as we have seen in the previous chapter. In this chapter, however, we are not focusing on the influence of the preconceptions of God, which may change biblical accounts, but on the influence of the results of the redactor's theology of God in shaping Islamic systematic theology and its implications when compared to Christianity.

In practical situations, when Muslims try to propagandize Christians, or Christians do the same to Muslims, conflict usually arises. For example, Christians regard Jesus as the savior and Lord of all Christians; they also believe Jesus is God. For Muslims, Jesus is no more than

a prophet among the 124,000 prophets of Islam (S 4:171). He is simply a man because he was born of a woman. Furthermore, Muslims do not believe they need a saviour since the original sin (Adam's sin) was forgiven by God, for "Allah forgives all sins" (S 39:53). These differences culminate in the Christian belief of Jesus as God in the Trinity. It is the most offensive sin Muslims can commit as written in Surah 5:73: "They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy) verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them."

What is the fundamental cause of the differences? From the previous arguments of the transcendence of God, it seems that the cause is based on the different understandings of God. This chapter will analyse the influence of the transcendence of God in the areas of Christian and Muslim theology such as man, salvation, the Holy Spirit, and Scripture to clarify the differences between them. Chapter 5 concludes preliminarily that the influence of the understanding of the transcendence of God plays a major role in the dissimilarities between the theology and practices of Muslims and Christians. In the following discussion of theology, there is no special connotation for the order of the discussion or the choice of categories except for the aim of a broad discussion in the area of theology.

## **5.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR ANTHROPOLOGY**

Every one of God's creation has its own purpose within the intention of the Creator. A singular purpose in matter reflects its relationship with a superior or connected matter; the purpose of man will reveal God's original intention of his designed relationship with man. In chapter 4, when we discussed God's relationship with Adam, the focus was to ascertain the

kind of relationship reflected between God and Adam. Here and in the remainder of the chapter, discussion will focus on how the relationship, reflected in chapter 4, shapes the overall theologies of Christians and Muslims and their practices of religious faith.

Out of the several purposes of man, both the Qur'an and the Bible agree on the purpose of man's creation as ruler over the earth in Surah 2:30 and Genesis 1:26. Surah 2:30 indicates the purpose of man as well as angels:

**Surah 2:30** Behold thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said "Wilt thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?" He said: "I know what ye know not."

From the meaning of the word "vicegerent" (*khalefah*) in Surah 2:30, God's purpose in creating man is to appoint him deputy-ruler over the earth on behalf of Allah. The purpose of angels is indicated from their own statement of duty as: "we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)." Surah 2:30 describes that the purpose of angels is to serve and worship Allah, while man is to rule over the earth.

The biblical purpose of man is first reflected in Genesis 1:26:

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

The purpose reflected in Genesis 1:26 can be said to correspond to the Qur’anic purpose as a ruler over the earth. The purpose of man as ruler is also shown in Genesis 2:15 as “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The traditional English translation clearly indicates man’s role in the Garden as a servant or caretaker.

However, according to the exegesis of chapter 4 (4.2.3.2), Genesis 2:15 can be interpreted from different perspectives. With the cumulative power of arguments from the cognitive meaning and grammatical issue of the verse, we can translate Genesis 2:15 as “The LORD God took the man and caused him to rest in the Garden of Eden to worship *God* and obey the *commandment*.” This is also supported by Isaiah 43:7 where it clearly expresses the purpose of Israel as “everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” Here the word “everyone” first refers to the people of Israel whom God created and formed (Is 43:1) and then to mankind in general—especially to God’s people “to the ends of the earth” (Is 43:6). This purpose of man, to worship and praise God, corresponds with the purpose of the angel in Surah 2:30. The biblical man is to be the ruler of the earth while at the same time he is to worship God, which the Qur’anic angel is supposed to do.

In the Bible, man is created in the image of God to look after God’s creation on earth (Gn 1:26, 28). Man is to have fellowship with God through praise and worship (Is 43:21). Man takes part in the creation process by naming the animals and the birds (Gn 2:19). Furthermore, man is called a “friend” of God, indicating a personal fellowship (Job 29:4; 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8). Enoch’s “walk with God” (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ הָנוֹךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים) may further support the idea of personal fellowship of man with God. As the LXX (Gn 5:24) translates εὐηρέστησεν δὲ Ἐνωχ τῷ θεῷ (And Enoch was well-pleasing to God), walking with God

implies a personal relationship that pleases God. Hebrews 11:5 also describes Enoch “as one who pleased God.” In the Old Testament, such a personal relationship demonstrates that the transcendence of God accompanies his immanent appearance to man. The immanent relationship becomes epic when God appears to his people and refers to them as “sons” to establish the father-son relationship in the Old Testament (Ex 4:22; 2 Sm 7:14; Jr 3:19; Hs 11:1) as well as in the New Testament. John 1:12 indicates that through Jesus, believers have a right to call God, “Father.”

On the other hand, the Qur’anic man’s account from chapter 4 indicates that man is not to have fellowship with Allah. Even though man (Abraham) is called “friend of God,” the implication of the relationship is not the same as the biblical relationship. It merely indicates a lack of enmity between Allah and man. There is no indication of immanent fellowship of Allah with man in the Qur’an.

Therefore, even though both the Qur’an and the Bible agree on the fundamental nature of man, such as the creation of man and his ruling of the earth, the relationship shown between God and man is different. The difference in the relationships is that of God’s presence among man. In other words, the difference is whether God shows a transcendent relationship or immanent relationship, as displayed in the Bible or in the Qur’an.

The critical issue for God’s relationship with man may come from the argument of the creation of man as being in the “image of God.” Both Christians and Muslims confirm that man is created in the image of God. In the Bible, the creation of man in the image of God is clearly indicated.

**Genesis 1:26-27** <sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” <sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Here, in Genesis 1, both God’s intentions and the result of man’s creation depict man as in the “image of God.” Notice that both man and woman (זָכָר וּנְקִיבָה, male and female) are created in the image of God (v 27). However, the Qur’anic creation indicates that woman is created as the companion of man: “And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are Signs for those who reflect” (Surah 30:21). Ali (1980:1012) interprets the “mates from among yourselves” as woman being a sexual partner to man and the “love and mercy” as the result of sex that produces offspring. Maududi (1988:204) also says the “love” indicates sexual love while “mercy” implies the spiritual relationship between man and woman that maintains the relationship between the two when “in old age sexual love falls into background.” These interpretations indicate that woman in the Qur’an was created for the purpose of man’s sexual fulfilment, not as a being in the image of God created as an equal partner to man as in Genesis 2:18.

The biblical account seems to present woman as a companion to man in Genesis 2:18, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” Woman being a “helper” here is not connoting that she is inferior to man, for God is also called “a helper” (עֲזָרָה) in Exodus 18:4, Deuteronomy 33:29, Psalms 27:9, 118:7, and Hosea 13:9 (cf. Heb 13:6). Furthermore, the word “suitable” (נִיבָרָה) as an adjective means “in

front of ” or “counterpart” (Holladay 1988:226). The meaning of the root (נָגַד) is “to place a matter high, conspicuous before a person” and the fullest expression of the root is from a derivative of the idea of prominence from the word נָגִיד, meaning “ruler,” “leader,” and “captain” (Coppes 1980:549-550). Therefore, the implication of the word “suitable” (כַּנְגִידוֹ, “as his counterpart”) is in no way that woman is a helper to man, but that she is an equal partner to man, not inferior to man. This is an indication of the equality between male and female as it is reflected in Genesis 2:24 where it shows that man and woman are in unity. Both male and female are “man” whom God created in Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” There is no difference in status between them but both are created in the image of God.

In Islam, the image of God is not discussed among the orthodox believers due to the lack of Qur’anic support of man’s creation in the image of God. The Qur’an has no expression of man’s being created in God’s image (Baljon 1988:119). It merely states that God created him in the nicest design as: “We have indeed created man in the best of moulds” (S 95:4). However, Surah 15:29 indicates something similar to the biblical account of man’s creation in Genesis 2:7.

**Surah 15:29** “When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit fall ye down in obeisance unto him.”

**Genesis 2:7** the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.



Beside the direct reference of man's creation in the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27, God's breathing into man in Genesis 2:7 refers to man's creation in the image of God. Similarly, Qur'anic scholars interpret God's breathing in Surah 15:29 as an indication of the image of God.

Haq (1972:282) asserts that man is the synthetic totality of the material world. His argument is that man is created from primary material, dust, into a figure by the moulding of clay, and completed with God's breathing his Spirit into him. God finished the creation of man with the completion of the human soul with the knowledge and wisdom of all things. In Haq's argument, the knowledge and wisdom of all things refer to God's breathing of his spirit into man. At first, Haq's statement seems to indicate the biblical creation of man in the image of God (Gn 2:26). However, his statement is based on the direct reference from the Qur'an which refers to the creation of man as vicegerent on earth (S 2:30). Similarly, Kenneth Nolin (1964:8-9) argues that man is created with God's attributes while the angel is created with nature's attributives. Here, Nolin also refers to God's breathing of his spirit as God's attributes of human knowledge and ability superior to that of nature. Therefore, the Qur'anic account of man's creation in the image of God stands in contrast to the biblical account.

Siddiqi (1993:44) comments on God's spirit: "Human beings are composed of two elements: the material elements and the divine Spirit (*rūh*) that God blows into a human being before his/her birth (15:29; 28:72; 32:9). This divine spark exists only in human beings and it is for this reason that they are called the noblest of the divine creation—as—*hraf al-makhlūqāt* (17:70; 95:4)." Here, Siddiqi refers to the divine spark or God's spirit as the ability to make "the freedom of choice (*ikhtiyār*)," to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil. The important contribution Siddiqi makes is not the issue of "the freedom of choice" but

man's ability to make the choice. Man, as a higher creation of Allah ("the noblest of the divine creation"), has that ability which distinguishes him from the rest of the divine creation.

Finally, Nūsair (1985:153) says "Man is composed, then, of two contradictory elements, clay (evil) and the spirit of God (good)." Therefore "man is superior to the angels and the whole of creation because of his ability to learn and acquire knowledge" (Nūsair 1985:155). Once again, Nusair's argument concludes that the spirit of God is man's ability in ontological superiority over the rest of God's creation.

The biblical definition of man's creation in the image of God has some similarities to that of the Qur'anic scholars' arguments. Man is not created in the physical image of God, but God has given man abilities greater than the rest of creation. God has distinguished man by giving him some of his (God's) characteristic attributes such as authority, responsibility, the ability to communicate, the ability to distinguish between good and evil, and life after death. Enns (1989:184) confirms: "The image of God is spiritual, not physical....Man is not simply a physical being, but also a moral being with a conscience, intellect, emotion, and will." Chafer (1947:157) adds "There are philosophical and moral features in man's constitution which may be traced back to find their origin in God." This is essentially identical with Qur'anic arguments of man's qualification as vicegerent on earth. However, there are other aspects to man's creation in the image of God.

Wayne Grudem (1994:445-449) discusses the image of God under five categories: the moral, spiritual, mental, relational, and physical aspects. Besides the relational aspects of the image of God, we have already confirmed and discussed the agreement between the Islamic and Christian concepts of the image of God. In discussing the relational aspect, Grudem

compares the aspects between man and animal. The difference is that believers are able to walk in fellowship with God, while animals cannot (Grudem 1994:447). This analogical explanation of fellowship with God is confirmed in the Old Testament as Enoch (Gn 5:22, 24) and Noah (Gn 6:9) walk with God. Furthermore, Abraham is called “friend of God,” one who is able to have fellowship with God (2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8; Ja 2:23). When we come to the New Testament, the fellowship between God and man in the relational aspect of the image of God is seen through Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, Jesus is described as “the image of God.” Colossians 1:15 indicates that “He is the image of the invisible God.” Thus, because Jesus represented God on earth among man, man did have ontological and spatial fellowship with God.

Therefore, the implication of the image of God allows man to possibly be in a relationship with God as shown in the Bible. The Old Testament indicates God’s physical presence among man as “Immanuel” (עִמָּנוּאֵל, “with us is God”). The background of this phrase is Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” This reading in the Old Testament is fulfilled by Jesus in Matthew 1:21-23 where the prophecy of Isaiah is repeated with the birth of Jesus as:

**Matthew 1:21-23** <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”--which means, “God with us.”

The same “Immanuel” concept of God allows the presence of “the Angel of the Lord” (Gn 16:7-11; 22:11-15; Ex 3:2) and “the Captain of the Lord” (Jos 5:14) to be the appearance of God in the Old Testament. Furthermore, in the New Testament, Jesus as God incarnate, as well as the Holy Spirit’s indwelling among the believers, is possible without any conflict with God’s attribute of his transcendence.

However, in Islam, God cannot associate with man because of the absolute transcendence of God. Islam first denies man’s creation in the biblical image of God, for there is nothing like God in the world (S 42:11). On the other hand, the image of God is interpreted with man’s functional attribute. Yahya (1959:20) presents the concept of human values as very closely tied with the purpose of man: “For man is made in the image of God. He is God’s representative on earth [S 2:30].” The image of God, then, is the ability to rule God’s creation on his behalf. The functional attributive interpretation of the “image of God” in Islam limits the purpose of man’s creation as to viceroy or vicegerent (*kahlifa*, S 2:30). The function of viceroy indicates man is a slave (*abd*, servant) to an unknown master. Both Hebrew and Arabic call for the root word *abd* as “slave” or “servant.” In the implication of the root *abd*, a servant should know his master and take responsibility of his duty. The master does not have to make his will known to his slave as in the Islamic concept of man. Then, the slave (believer) lacks a personal relationship with his master (Allah), but requires total submission. However, this slave is the highest creation of God, as the angels must bow down to man in respect of his ability to memorize all the names of the creation that were given by God (S 7:11). On the other hand, as a servant of God in the Bible, man is still lower than angels. For example, the clause in Hebrews 2:7, “You made him a little lower than the angels,” refers to the humanity of Jesus as well as the entire race of man.

Man, created in the image of God, is the greatest evidence of the existence of God in biblical theology. In Islam “God has poured the largest number of his bounties upon man” (Haq 1972:289). The bounties mainly refer to the ability of the soul to gain knowledge through judgment and analysis, an ontological superiority over any other creature including the angel. However, Christianity teaches that man can know God in a limited way by partaking in a covenantal relationship with him. Thus the image of God reflects a more highly attributed quality over all creatures. In Islam, on the other hand, man is a part of the creation with which God has no relationship; man lives in total submission to God.

The fact that in Islamic doctrine man is a viceroy enforces the notion of the transcendence of God. Being a ruler of the earth on behalf of God—man was appointed as viceroy in the beginning and there was no further communication regarding his ruling—means total separation and autonomy from God. This implies that God is being total transcendent from man as well as from his creation. On the other hand the biblical man, as a servant of God and in the image of God, has to depend upon God for his existence on earth. This man’s dependence upon God brings God’s active involvement into the history of humanity. By being involved in the affairs of man, God became an immanent God. On the other hand, by emphasizing the autonomy of man, Islam express non-dependence upon God, and thus God becomes the absolute transcendent God.

In conclusion, in Islam, God cannot be with man and his creation. Apart from the reflection of Allah’s general immanence displayed as a result of his creation, he cannot be with the creation for Allah is the absolute transcendent God. For this reason, Allah created man to be a deputy-ruler over his creation. In order for man to rule God’s creation, Allah bestowed superior ability unto man when he breathed his spirit (ability) into him. As a result, man on

earth rules the creation on behalf of his creator. On the other hand, in the biblical creation of man, there are indications of the immanence of the transcendent God. When God created man, he clearly stated a purpose similar to Islam's purpose for man as a ruler over the earth. However, the implication of the man in God's image means the ability to have fellowship with God. Thus, the Christian doctrine of incarnation or "Immanuel" (God is with us) is not a violation of God's transcendent state from the creation since man is created in God's image. This allows for the interpretation of God's presence with humans throughout the Bible—in the Old Testament, God appears in the form of an angel as well as the Angel of the Lord and Captain of the army of the Lord before man (Gn 16:7-13; 22:11-16; Ex 3:2-5; Jos 5:14-6:2). The New Testament indicates Jesus as incarnated God and the Holy Spirit as the indwelling Spirit of God among people (Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20; 2:9; Phlp 2:5-11; Jn 14:16; 1 Cor 6:19; Rm 8:9).

### **5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOTERIOLOGY**

In reference to the discussion of salvation between the Qur'an and the Bible, one of the most intriguing verses of the Qur'an is from the account of Joseph. Surah 12:53 reads: "Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human soul) is certainly prone to evil unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely certainly my Lord is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful." Kenneth Cragg (2004:15) says the clause "the (human soul) is certainly prone to evil" is the closest Qur'anic concept to that of the Christian view of sin. In the account of Joseph's suspected unfaithfulness (S 12), the Prince's wife confesses that it was she who sought to seduce Joseph and that he remained chaste and faithful. Joseph attributes the vindication to the will of God and says it was through the mercy of God that he was able to keep away from sin. Joseph gives thanks to God for his salvation as he acknowledges that every man is sinful.

When Joseph recognises that every man is sinful, what was Joseph's understanding of man as sinful; did he mean the biblical understanding of original sin?<sup>73</sup>

The discussion of the similarity and dissimilarity in Soteriology between Islam and Christianity may first begin with a definition of sin. Both Christians and Muslims consider the concept of sin in a similar way as we have seen from the confession of Joseph. Briefly, sin in Islam may be defined as a "mistake" while Christianity defines sin as a "transgression of the law of God." However, the differences in the results of sin may come from a further definition of sin as well as the concept of original sin and forgiveness of sin.

Siddiqi (1993:45) presents a proper summary of the Islamic understanding of sin and salvation:

In order to understand the nature of salvation one has to know what is sin according to Islam. Not to follow the laws of God is sin. Sin is violation of divinely established rules given by His prophets. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. Not to do what God has commanded to do is omission and to do what God has forbidden is commission...The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (2:30-39 et al) is mentioned in the Qur'ān as a paradigm of human weakness and vulnerability to be misled by Devil. Islam, however, does not accept any original sin. Every child is born innocent and Islam has no concept of inherited sin. A person is not a sinner

---

<sup>73</sup> Louis Berkhof (1938a:244) defines the original sin as "the sinful state and condition in which men are born." It is referring to the inherent nature of sin that entered the world as the result of Adam and Eve's sin (Gn 3; Rm 5:12).

unless he/she commits a sin...To overcome sin one must have repentance (*tawbah*). The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “One who repents from sin is like one without sin.” Repentance, however, must be sincere and true.

To be more specific, Siddiqi (1993:48) categorises sin in Islam into six different categories: (1) evil actions, *sayy'āt* (S 7:153), (2) offences to the laws of God, *Dhunūb* (S 3:31), (3) mistakes, or actions in which one misses the mark by not doing the right thing, *khati'āt* (S 2:286), (4) an action that brings rebuke and blame, *junah* (S 33:5), (5) misdeeds and serious crimes, *Ithm* (S 4:112; 5:29), and (6) lapse and an error, *zallah* (S 2:209). All six classes of Islamic sin are essentially human mistakes against the law of Allah. Thus, keeping away from these classes of mistake, man can achieve the state of being without sin, for one who cleanses himself from sin is without sin. The Islamic concept of sin denies the Christian notion of original sin for every person is responsible for one's own actions (Braswell 1996:57).

The forgiveness of sin in Islam somewhat contradicts the Christian concept. Surah 39:53 indicates that Allah forgives all sins as “Say: my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful.” Furthermore, Allah is not bound to punish the sins of the believers in Surah 4:147: “What can Allah gain by your punishment if ye are grateful and ye believe? Nay it is Allah that recogniseth (all good) and knoweth all things.” These two facts, namely that every sin is forgivable and that God does not necessarily punish the sinner, bring fundamental differences in implications in comparison with the Christian view. For example, Muslims will deny the need for Christ's substitutionary death, for every sin is forgivable. Thus there is no fear of the consequence of sin, for God will not punish the sins of believers.



There is no need for a Saviour. Corduan (1998:46) confirms the differences in the concept of sin between Islam and Christianity:

But one of the most fundamental incongruities between God as depicted in Islam and in biblical theism lies in Allah's capacity to overlook sin. In contrast to the biblical teaching, epitomised by 1 John 1:5, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all," Allah is free to pardon sin at his discretion without any provision, such as an atonement. His holiness is not violated by human sin.

Muslims are convinced that salvation is largely about material blessings of prosperity and welfare (*fahah*). The material blessing and security of salvation is expressed with the formation of *Umma*, an Islamic community. "The Umma is the community of Allah" (Shenk and Kateregga 1980:48). It is not centred on tribe, nationality, race, or linguistic grouping. It is "a religio-political (or theocratic) community, founded and governed according to the Shari'a (Islamic law). Religious affiliation in the Muslim's mind is therefore essentially equivalent to nationality, and to political and cultural affiliation" (Schorff 1980:360). For Muslims, the identification of themselves with the *Umma* is their life and salvation. Within the *Umma* Muslims find security and protection from the non-Muslim community. To be a Muslim means to be a member of the *Umma* and therefore a brother to fellow Muslims, the definition of salvation on this earth. For as long as one is part of the *Umma*, the protection and welfare of the believer is guaranteed. Stern (1980:90) infers that Al-Ghazzali, one of the most influential personalities of classical Islam, considers the source of salvation not from God, but purely based on individual effort as, "Each man stands for judgment as an individual. Also, each person's struggle for salvation must be based on his own strengths and

weakness as an individual.” The zeal of individual salvation consummates in the implications of *Umma* for self protection as well as the propagandism of Islam that forms the *Umma*. Further discussion of the *Umma* is elevated in this chapter (5.6).

Eternal salvation can be elucidated from the activities in the heavens. The most detailed description of activities in heaven is found in Surah 56:1-40. In the Garden of Bliss, believers will recline on couches made of expensive gemstones. They will be served by youths (young men) of perpetual freshness, drinking from a river of wine without becoming intoxicated. They will eat fruits and meats as they wish, and enjoy companionship—“the highest pleasure of bodily form, sex,” (Ali 1989:1410)—of perpetual virgins with beautiful, big, lustrous pearl-like eyes. This sensual activity in heaven is a result of the Islamic concept of the absolute transcendence of God; even in heaven, man is separated from the presence of God, which allows for the continuation of the physical, sensual activities of earthly life. Due to the Muslim’s concept of heaven as an eternal extension of the physical existence of this life, the concept of eternal salvation becomes the same as that of being a member of *Umma*.

When considering who has the right to enter heaven, the answer differs in Christianity and Islam. In Islam, man does not need salvation from sin’s guilt or power, since he is not a sinner by nature (Schorff 1980:347). For a Muslim, sin is only erring from the religious law. Therefore, in Islam a man has no need of salvation (of Christian salvation). Man already has the capability to obey God, and needs only to be guided and strengthened in order to fulfil his responsibility towards his Creator (Nehls 1991:186). Apart from martyrs for the faith, the promise of Paradise is made only to those who repent of their sin, believe in Islam, and are righteous in act (Hamilton 1949:54). On the other hand, no Muslim is sure about his/her

status. During the Judgment, God will measure the good and bad deeds of Muslims and will make a decision as to who qualifies to enter heaven. Muslims believe angels sit on both sides of a man's shoulder to record the good (right side angel) and bad (left side angel) deeds in the book of deeds, which will open at the time of judgment (S 39:69; 54:52). According to the record, if the good deeds are heavier than the bad deeds, such Muslims will cross over a sword-like bridge to heaven. Otherwise, Muslims fall from the bridge to hell. However, Muslims generally believe that those who are condemned to hell eventually end up in heaven after their bad deeds are washed away during their suffering in hell (Nehls 1991:45; Kripalani 2004:113). Then, in the end, all Muslims will eventually go to heaven, but the length of time they must first spend in hell depends on their deeds on earth; the length is dependent upon Allah's decision (S 6:128; 11:107). Furthermore, the Hadith (Muslim 1371; Al-Bukhari 4:567) says "from every one thousand, take out nine-hundred-and ninety-nine"; these will go to hell. This popular belief contradicts the Islamic doctrine of predestination, which says that some are destined to go to paradise and some to hell (S 7:43; 9:51; 16:93; 43:76), and all black people are destined for hell (Al-Tirmidhi Hadith 38).

Siddiqi (1993:41) demonstrates the root cause of the above problems of the Islamic view of salvation when he says that modern Muslim writers have completely denied that Islam has any concept of salvation. His reason for this assertion is that in order to have a concept of "salvation" there must be a "Fall." In Islam there is no concept of the "Fall." For this reason, Al-Faruqi (1979:9) says "salvation" is an improper term and humans can save themselves by deeds and works. Consequently, in Islam, God has no involvement in the process of salvation, which means the transcendence of God is maintained rather than the immanent action of God being involved, as in the Christian concept of salvation.

Concerning original sin, different interpretations of original sin in Islam and Christianity would result in fundamental differences in the concept of salvation. As Jesus took the place of atonement for the original sin, which opened the way to restore man's relationship with God, Christianity supports the concept of salvation through the substitutionary death of Christ. Berkhof (1938b:106) comments that the Old Testament sacrifices prefigured the atoning work of Christ (Lv 1:4; 4:20, 30, 35; 5:10, 16; 6:7; 17:11). However, in Islam, as Adam was forgiven his sin through the sacrifice of an animal (S 2:37), Islam denies the original sin of Adam as well as the vicarious death. Furthermore, "Islam is firmly of the opinion that the human soul is essentially good and that the transgressor is one who wrongs his own soul" (Cragg 2004:7-8). Eternal salvation, therefore, is entering heaven through the final judgment when God will measure both the good and bad deeds to decide a person's salvation. Islamic salvation is expressed by entering a paradise that is the physical extension of earthly pleasures. On the other hand, a Christian faces salvation before entering the eternal fellowship of heaven by restoring the original-personal relationship with God through the acceptance of the fact that Jesus took the sins of the person; Jesus is the means of reconciliation. The final outcome of Christian salvation is restoration of the immanent relationship with God while Islamic salvation does not refer to God's involvement but individual welfare is expressed in the implication of the *Umma* on this earth.

Unlike the Islamic concept of sin based on people's weakness, forgetfulness, or ignorance, which can be made up for by good deeds before the Judgment, the Christian view of sin is based on the relationship between man and God. When man breaks the law of God, man is separated from God. This is first seen in the Garden when Adam and Eve disobey God; as a result, they were separated from the presence of God in the Garden. The people of the Old Testament are saved by the re-establishment of a relationship with God through a legal

covenant in Genesis 12, where Abraham and his seed (progeny) enter the relationship of the covenant. In the New Testament, the covenantal relationship is continued with the Church. Muslims seem to replace this covenantal relationship with the imagery of the *Umma*, which shows the relationships between humans.

The Arabic phrase, “*Istaghfir Allah*” (Seek forgiveness of God), is one of the common words of Muslim prayer. In its implications for the transcendence of God, the interpretation of Surah 3:177 (“Those who purchase unbelief at the price of faith not the least harm will they do to Allah but they will have a grievous punishment”) may contribute to the understanding of salvation. The phrase “not the least harm will they do to Allah” shows that God is neither directly nor indirectly involved with man. It brings forth no indication of God’s involvement in the Fall of man. However, in the Bible, God shows his emotion when men sin. In Genesis 6:5-6, when the condition of men became so wicked “The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.” God’s reaction to man’s sinful state indicates God’s involvement in the salvation of man and reflects the immanence of God in the relationship.

So far the discussion of the differences in salvation between Islam and Christianity focused on the implication of God’s immanence in the areas of the definition of sin, original sin, and substitutional death. The different implications of salvation in Islam and Christianity are based on the understanding of God’s relationship with man. To Muslims, God is unreachable and unknowable, and cannot have any kind of relationship with humankind. Thus, salvation has nothing to do with the restoration of a peaceful relationship with God. Instead, Islam institutes a peaceful relationship among people, one that ensures material and sensual comfort on earth and in heaven. This is formulated as the community of Islam, the *Umma*.

On the other hand, the people of Israel experience the transcendence of God as a result of sin, and the immanence of God from their salvation. The restoration of the relationship began immediately after Adam's sin of disobeying God, the initiating point of the original sin. It is God who approaches man for their salvation, first to Israel then to the Church in the New Testament. Salvation as restoration of the relationship is possible because of the concept that God is not absolutely transcendent. The God of Christians is a transcendent and an immanent God who can be with man (Immanuel). Thus, for the salvation of man, Jesus, as God on earth, is able to fulfil the requirement for salvation (Rm 6:10; Heb 7:27; 10:2, 10; 1 Pe 3:18).

#### **5.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PNEUMATOLOGY**

Concerning the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the Qur'an and other Islamic scholarly works provide no evidence that Muslims have any knowledge of the (biblical) Holy Spirit. However, in the Qur'an, there are several direct references to the Holy Spirit (*ruh al-qudus*). First in Surah 16:102, it is mentioned as the inspiring agent of the revelation of the Qur'an; the Holy Spirit is treated as a title for the Angel Gabriel (Ali 1989:664). The Holy Spirit is also mentioned twice in Surah 2:87 and 2:253 as the divine power which aided Jesus. Surah 5:110 shows that Jesus is strengthened by the Holy Spirit or Holy Inspiration (*ruh al-qudus*) in the English translations (Asad, Malik, Pickthall, Yusuf Ali etc.) In addition, Surah 70:4, 38; 97:4; 15:29; 17:85-86, and 58:22 describe the believers with the Spirit of God. These verses use the word "spirit," not the "Holy Spirit," and thus Muslims do not view them as relevant evidence for discussions of the Holy Spirit. However, in reality, Islamic commentators simply refuse to comment on these verses, partly due to a lack of knowledge and personal experience of the Spirit. They simply state that the Holy Spirit is the Angel Gabriel (Ali 1989:664; Ataur-Rahin 1980:209, 217). The Jalalain, al-Baidawi, and Muslim commentators

in general maintain that this Holy Spirit is the Angel Gabriel, who sanctified Jesus and constantly aided him (Adelowo 1980:125). Consequently, this interpretation leads to the conclusion that the father of Jesus was Gabriel, which conflicts with the Christian belief of the Holy Spirit as One of the Trinity (Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14).

Unlike the negative attitudes of orthodox Islam on the subject of the Holy Spirit, the Sufis attempt to see the work of the Spirit of God upon man. The Sufis treat all spirits, including the spirit of man as created. But the Spirit of God, which is the Holy Spirit, is not created. “The Holy Spirit is holy, pure and free from any defects (*naqa 'is*)” (Al-Din 1980:102). They see the presence of God in Surah 2:115 as the prevailing Spirit of God. Surah 2:115 says: “To Allah belong the East and the West; whithersoever ye turn there is the presence of Allah. For Allah is All-Pervading All-Knowing.” Here, “the presence” is literally “face” (*wajh*) which is also translated as “countenance.” The Sufis treat the countenance of God as his Spirit.

Al-Din (1980:102) comments on the Holy Spirit in man: “Everything in the sensible world (*alam al-mahsusat*) has a created spirit (*ruh makhlug*) and that spirit has a divine spirit (*ruh ilahi*) which is the Holy Spirit. For this reason people will find that the Holy Spirit in man is created because of the incompatibility of having two eternal beings, since God alone is eternal.” According to Al-Din’s argument, the Holy Spirit is not able to stay with man because of the conflict between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God in man at the same time. Therefore, even though they argue the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Sufis deny the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in man.

As we have observed, the Qur’an presents the Holy Spirit in many occasions, yet its interpretation is opposite to that of the Bible. The Qur’an speaks of the Holy Spirit as “the

Spirit” (*ruh*, S 15:29), “Holy Spirit” (*ruh al-qudus*, S 2:87), and “Faithful Spirit” (*al-ruh al-amiin*, S 26:193). Accounts of the Spirit are very similar to biblical accounts, such as God’s breathing of life into Adam in the creation (S 15:29), Jesus’ prophecy of the coming of the Holy Spirit (S 61:6), and a Spirit proceeding from Jesus (S 4:171). Islamic scholars interpret this Spirit as the Angel Gabriel (Ali 1989:664). Others say it is the spirit of holiness. Mawdudi (2006:205-206) comments on Surah 4:171 where Jesus was bestowed with the Holy Spirit: “The import of both verses is that God endowed Jesus with a pure, impeccable soul. He was, therefore, an embodiment of truth, veracity, righteousness, and excellence.” Mawdudi treats the Holy Spirit as the spirit of man but with a higher degree in excellency. This is the result of the Islamic theology of the absolute transcendence of God; that there will be no other deity besides God and Allah cannot be associated with anything else.

In the Bible the Spirit of God is evidence of the immanence of God or his presence in the life of believers. The first instance of God’s immanence is in Genesis 1:2, where “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” The verb “hovering” (מְרַחֵף) refers to God’s “Glory-Presence.” It occurs again in Deuteronomy 32:11, which uses the metaphor of God as an eagle that hovers over its young, the people of Israel, as they travel out of Egypt (Kline 1980:14).

Furthermore, the Spirit of God within believers of the Old Testament gives them the power or strength to defeat the enemy of Israel. Examples include Gideon (Jdg 6:34), Japheth (Jdg 11:29), Samson (Jdg 13:25; 14:6), Othniel (Jdg 3:10), and Saul (1 Sm 11:6). Furthermore, the Spirit provides Bezalel, son of Uri, with the skill to finish building the tabernacle (Ex 31:3). These accounts indicate that God’s transcendence in the Old Testament is accompanied by the immanence of his power through the presence of God’s Spirit among the people. The



relationship between God and man is expressed here as horizontal; God is inter alia among man in the form of the Spirit.

In the New Testament, the coming of the Holy Spirit is pronounced by Jesus (Lk 24:49). This is fulfilled in Acts 2:4 when the disciples are gathered together to wait upon the promise at the day of Pentecost. The Spirit of God is here shown to dwell among the believers permanently (Jn 14:16). The indwelling act of the Holy Spirit is evidence of God's immanence among believers. As Yahweh is expressed as "immanence of the transcendent God," he is able to present himself to man through the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, in Islam, Allah being the "absolute transcendent God" does not associate with man by any means. He must maintain distance from man on earth as well as in heaven. Thus, any indication of God's immanence through the Holy Spirit is interpreted as the immanent appearance of the Angel Gabriel. Therefore, the theology of the Holy Spirit in Islam and Christianity is shaped by the concept of God's closeness to man.

## **5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLIOLOGY**

One well-known Muslim leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (Bogere 2008:20), made the following statement on the Scriptures at the anniversary of the birth of Mohammad:

The Bible we have now is not the one that was revealed to Issa and the Old Testament is not the one that was revealed to Musa. Mohammed is mentioned in both (original versions), but the Torah and Bible we have now, there is no mention of him (Mohammad). It means that it (Bible) has been forged. Prophet Mohammed (SAW) was sent to mankind. Allah wanted

mankind to have one religion. The Koran that we have is the only book that was sent by Allah. We believe in the Bible as well as the Torah [original versions].

Gaddafi's statement on the Scriptures represents a belief of Muslims regarding the Bible and the Qur'an, which may close the door of inter-dialogue regarding the Scriptures. Negative attitudes toward other Scriptures are not limited to Muslims only but extended to Christians as well. For example, Poston (2000:181) views the revelation of the Qur'an as the work of Satan: "Mohammad may indeed have been a sincere seeker after God and in many respects led an exemplary life, the tragic truth is that he was deceived by a satanic angel." Here, it is sufficient to present the problem concerning the Scriptures from the other's point of view. On the other hand, implications of the transcendence of God to bibliology should first deal with believers' attitudes toward the Scriptures.

Aasi (1986:65) presents the Muslim's view of their Scripture: "To the Muslim, the Qur'an is the Word of God. It is the Speech of Allāh (Kalām Allāh), verbatim, as the Muslim believes it and receives it. The Qur'an as the Revelation from Allāh embodies the Will of Allāh for a Muslim. For a believer, it is the Guidance par excellence. It contains norms, and teaches the basic principles relating to each and every aspect of life." As Aasi says, to the orthodox Muslim, the Qur'an is the unchanged Word of God; they have a concept similar to a Christian view of the "inerrancy" and "verbal inspiration" of the Scripture. In short, both Muslims and some Christians believe their Scriptures are true and contain no errancy. Lester (2004:222) comments on the issue: "the closest analogue in Christian belief to the role of the Kur'an in Muslim belief is not the Bible, but Christ." He further explains that "if Christ is the Word of God made flesh, the Koran is the Word of God made text, and questioning its sanctity or

authority is thus considered an outright attack on Islam.” Here, we are not discussing the authority or attacking the Scripture, as we depart from the discussion of the problem of the Scriptures. On the other hand, Lester’s analogue of the Scripture lends a significant starting point of our discussion. According to the analogue, the Scriptures reflect God’s relationship with his people.

First, in Christian theology, Christ is the Word of God. In the Bible, there are many indications that Jesus is not only human but also divine.<sup>74</sup> The implication of the incarnation of God connotes the immanence of God in this world. Even the actual revelation of the Bible is through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16), who is part of the divine, indicating that Yahweh is an immanent God.

On the other hand, Islamic beliefs about the Qur’an and the transmission of the Scripture confirm the absolute transcendence of Allah. Unlike the Bible, the Qur’an is the Word of God transcribed into text. The process of writing the Qur’an was through the medium of the angel of Allah and Mohammad, which indicates there is no sign of the immanent God. Once the revelation of the Qur’anic text was over, the interpretation of the Qur’an was left to Mohammad and learned man (scribes) of Islam. Thus, there is difficulty in the interpretation of the Scripture.

Muzaffar Iqbal (2004:281) presents the problem as: “Everyone who has attempted to translate the Qur’an has arrived at the same conclusion: the text they try to translate is, in

---

<sup>74</sup> Jesus being God: Mark 2:7, 10; John 20:28; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9; 1 John 5:20; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 9:4-5; Hebrews 1:8; 3:4; Revelation 21:6-7 and Jesus being Man: Matthew 1:16; Luke 2:52; John 4:9; John 12:27; 13:21; 19:30.

essence, untranslatable.” Elder (1978:27) concludes that the Qur’an is really untranslatable, since Arabic words may have as many as seventy different meanings. Furthermore, Barth (2002:400) says, “Exegesis of the Koran is not possible without an accompanying criticism of the transmission....For such work, help from the Arabic commentators is naturally not forthcoming. For them the canonical text of the Koran is sanctified and not to be touched.” Finally, “Reading the Koran on its own terms, trying to interpret it without resorting to commentaries is a difficult and questionable exercise because of the nature of the text—its allusive and referential style and its grammatical and logical discontinuities, as well as our lack of sure information about its origins and the circumstances of its composition. Often such a reading seems arbitrary and necessarily inconclusive” (Ibn Warraq 2002:38). Unlike the Bible, without the help of God, interpretation of the Scripture of Islam is difficult. For this reason, in Qur’anic exegesis, there are different classifications of the text, some of which are impossible to be understood by the human (*mutashābih*).<sup>75</sup> This *mutashābih* is expressed in Surah 3:7 as “...searching for its [the Quran’s] hidden meanings but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah.” On the other hand, the Bible clearly indicates that the Scripture is written through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pe 1:21), and that help will be given in understanding the text (Jn 6:45; 14:26; Is 54:13). The understanding of the Scripture is possible through the author of the text; God is immanent with the interpreter.

---

<sup>75</sup> There are two major interpretations of the Qur’anic sentences, *zāhir* (obvious) and *khafī* (hidden). The *khafī* interpretation is sub-divided into four categories: (1) *Khajī*-Sentences in which other persons or things are hidden beneath the plain meaning of a word or expression, (2) *Mushkil*-Sentences which are ambiguous, (3) *Mujmal*-Sentences which may have variety of interpretations, and (4) *Mutashābih*-Intricate sentences or expressions which the exact meaning of it is impossible to ascertain until the day of resurrection, but which was known to Mohammad (Hughes [1885] 1998:518-519).

In Islam, the process of revelation is called *Tanzil* (sending down). It is accomplished by the Angel Gabriel, who takes the revelation from the Mother of the Book and whispers or suggests it to Mohammad. This is the so-called “Transcendental Revelation”<sup>76</sup> where God, in the process of revelation, maintains his transcendence from man and even from the angels. The Angel Gabriel receives the revelation from the Mother of the Book, not directly from Allah. This indirect revelation reflects the Islamic notion that God is “absolutely transcendent and non-personal; the only kind of revelation possible is the vertical movement ‘from above’ of transcendent information, ‘down’ to the level of man” (Schorff 1980:356).

The “Transcendent Revelation” of Islamic Scripture is distinctly different from the Christian view that the Bible is the written history of God’s personal involvement within the history of man. Therefore, the revelation of the Bible may be called “*Historical-Inspirational Revelation*,” which shows the activities of God within the history of man’s activities. For Christians, Scripture is the inspired record of God’s history among man, a written self-revelation of God, while Muslims believe that their Scripture is the exact copy of God’s revelation recorded in the heavenly book, “the Mother of the Book” (*umm al-kitaab*, S 3:7; 43:4; 85:22).

Both Christian and Muslim Scriptures share a progressive type of revelation. The Bible is progressive by having the Word revealed to the people over centuries, through the prophets and others in the Old Testament to the New Testament, where Jesus as God becomes the incarnated word and direct revelation from God. The Qur’an is progressively revealed Scripture from the former revelation (the Bible) to the final Scripture of Allah. Mohammad

---

<sup>76</sup> The terms “Transcendental Revelation” and “Historical Inspirational Revelation” are used by Schorff (1980:357).

himself repeatedly said in the Qur'an that the Qur'an is the correct or progressive revelation of the Bible (S 10:37; 35:31; 37:37; 39:33; 46:12). The fact that the Bible is a progressive revelation through prophets and other people to the immanent revelation of Jesus shows that Yahweh is an immanent God in Christianity. On the other hand, compared to biblical accounts, the Qur'an corrects or omits any immanent aspects of God in the revelation, thus maintaining the total transcendent state of God in the process of writing the final revelation.

The teaching of the Scriptures may reveal the implication of God's relationship with the people. First, Qur'anic teaching is oriented entirely towards the practical aspects of faith. It provides guidance for man. Rahman (1967:1) explains:

The interest of the Qur'an in pure, speculative theology is, therefore, negative. Doubtless, the Qur'an contains some theology, a certain amount of cosmology and psychology, etc., but these are all action-oriented and are meant to keep the attitude of man on correct lines, turned up to the proper moral pitch and geared to a certain purpose. The Qur'an concept of God is, therefore, primary—indeed, purely—*functional*.

Man is created as viceroy on earth, and so it is understood that the Qur'an instructs man on the guidelines to fulfilling that purpose. Therefore, the nature of Scripture becomes more oriented towards the practical aspects of faith. As the Scripture of Islam reflects attributes of practical faith, the God of the Scripture becomes the functional God, as Rahman said. The action-oriented Scripture exhibits the will and attributes of Allah as a functional God.

Meanwhile, the Bible is oriented toward the relational aspect of faith. First, the Old Testament was written for the purpose of outlining guidelines for Israel to follow to be God's chosen people. In order to maintain their status as the people of God, Israel had to follow the code of conduct written throughout the Old Testament. The Scripture establishes and maintains the relationship between God and Israel as King and his subject (Nm 23:21; Dt 33:5; Ps 89:18), Father and his sons (Hs 11:1), and Husband and bride (Jr 2:2; Hs 3:1). In the New Testament, the salvation of Christ is the main focus of the message. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, believers become children of God (Jn 1:12). Both the Old and New Testaments show that the focus of the message is on establishing and maintaining the familial relationship. Therefore, the Bible is oriented towards relational aspects rather than task-oriented ones, although the latter is not excluded.

In conclusion, we have seen that the different concepts of God have influenced the formation of the Scriptures. The Qur'an, being a guideline to man on earth, contains practical aspects of life. In the revelation of the Scripture there is no indication of God's direct involvement with man. The primary source of the revelation process of the Qur'an was not God himself, but the Mother of the Tablet which itself indicates the transcendence of God from the beginning. As Allah cannot be with man in any stage of the revelation of Scripture, the Qur'an reflects and contains no suggestion of the immanence of God. It maintains the absolute transcendence of the transcendent God.

On the other hand, the Bible records the immanence of the transcendent God with man. From the beginning of human history, God was with man as shown in the Old Testament. Jesus, as *theo-anthros* (God-man), displays the true God directly to man in the New Testament. Furthermore, the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit is presented in the Bible to show the

continuance of the immanence of God. The revelation of the Scripture shows that the author is the Holy Spirit working through the hands of the different human writers of the Bible. The basic and fundamental concept of the biblical God is that he is immanent with man. This allows Christian theology of the Scripture to contrast with the absolute transcendent revelation of the Qur'an. Allah is absolutely transcendent from man and was not involved with man in the process of the revelation of Scripture, for the content of the Qur'an must reflect the absolutely transcendent God.

## 5.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR ECCLESIOLOGY

In religious terminology, a group of Christian believers can be called a “church.”<sup>77</sup> Hasan (1992:255) comments on this general term for the group: “Since church comes into existence as a binding force in a religious community, its principal function is to create unity by its direction in different ages in doctrine and practice.” In this definition, borrowed from the Christian believer’s definition, the church and the *Umma* can be discussed together in reference to God’s relationship with man. The equivalent terminology for the church in Islam is the *Umma* as it refers only to the community of believers within Islam. Frederick Denny (2004:21-22) explains the community of Islam:

*Umma* is derived from the root “*Umm*” (the mother);...More recent scholarship derives *ummah* from the Hebrew *ummā* or the Aramaic *umetha*, or ultimately from Akkadian *ummatu*, whence Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac

---

<sup>77</sup> The Septuagint translates the Old Testament word for “gather” (לָקַח) with the Greek term ἐκκλησιάζω, “to summon an assembly,” the verb that is cognate to the New Testament noun ἐκκλησία, “church” (Grudem 1994:853).



also derived it...The term *ummah* does exist in pre-Islamic Arab usage in the sense of a religious community, as in the following passage from the Christian poet Nābigha: wa hal ya'thaman dhū 'ummatin wahwa tā i'u [Can a man belonging to a religion (or religious community) err if he is pious?]

Elkholy (1987:89) describes the implications of the term: "The Arabic Islamic term for community is UMMA, derived directly from UMM, meaning mother, UMMA in Islam means more than the motherland in this geographical-territorial limitation. It means FAITH and CREED. UMMA AL-ISLAM encloses the entire collectivity of the Muslims living anywhere regardless of their geographical boundaries." Ahmed (1975:27) lists three kinds of *Umma* in Islam: *umma wasta* (midmost community), *umma muslima* (submissive community), and *umma wāhīda* (a single faith). Of these, *umma wāhīda* indicates a non-territorial, ideological unity of mankind. This is a general term for Islamic community, and in this final sense of the *Umma*, it and the church can be discussed together.

In a society hostile and non-receptive to Islam, it was necessary for the nascent religious group to establish the *Umma*. Mohammad started receiving revelations around 610 A.D. and in 613 A.D. he began public preaching in Mecca. The message was to challenge the religious beliefs of the local people as well as to institute a major change in their way of life. Thus, opposition and persecution of the newly formed group of believers were inevitable. In this environment the *Umma* was formed out of the need for protection of the believers. It was at Medina where Mohammad laid the foundations of the *Umma* following the incident of the allegiance of Medinese tribes (*bay's*) with Mohammad. Ahmed (1975:31) supports:

The emphasis was on defensive alliance, and for this reason, this was called *bay'at al-harb*. This was in fact a kind of defensive alliance based on the old Arabian customary law of *hulf* (alliance). In such manner, ideological unity and defensive alliance system were integrated together and the way was paved for the creation of *umma* at Madīna.

The defensive alliances of the *Umma* as well as *Umma* in the specific sense of a group of believers were the foundational purposes of Mohammad. At the death of Mohammad, the foundational *Umma* of Medina extended over the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. The *Umma* had gradually developed into an Arab union, expanding towards a universal *Umma*, which was challenged by a later uprising of nationalism. These facts of the *Umma*, the beginning and development, show that God had no involvement, but rather, a need for man's welfare prevailed. Even though the focus of the *Umma*'s belief is on God, it is man who founded and developed the *Umma* for the expressed needs of man. The 1980 *Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights* indicates the current humanistic character of *Umma*: "It [*Umma*] is called upon to organize itself in the form of a movement for social change and reconstruction and to come forward to help the oppressed and the persecuted of the world" (Köylü 2003:112).

Hasan (1972:270) explains that Christianity started as reformed Judaism where the foundation of the church was laid by Jesus Christ. He further argues that Christianity could not escape the influence of the Jewish discipline even after its complete break with Judaism.

Judaism was anchored in racial pride, "the chosen people of God". Therein prevailed the idea of collective sin, for which the whole Jewish nation

suffered tribulation. Christianity substituted Church for “chosen people”: it differed from Judaism in respect to sin. The Jewish nation sinned and it suffered collectively, but the church being grounded in spiritualism could not sin. Those who commit sin in Christianity lose their communion with the church. This gave rise to the idea of individualism in Christianity most probably through the teaching of the Roman Stoics.

Hasan’s argument of individualism in the church is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s working among believers on an individual level in Christianity. The church indicates a strongly collective trait that included all kinds of people (Gl 3:28). As there is one God, there should be one universal Church. Jesus prayed, “they [believers] may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:22). Furthermore, the Church becomes the Body of Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Pe 2:9). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is both on an individual (1 Cor 6:19) and collective level (1 Cor 3:16) as the church reflects individual and collective traits.

Compared to the strong brotherhood and relationships with the state in the *Umma* of Islam, Christianity places more importance on the relationship of man to God. In Islam, the *Umma* is a group of believers under the example of Mohammad and its ultimate purpose for spiritual life is to be as good as Mohammad. Thus the *Umma* creates a transcendent life for Muslims that is secluded from unbelievers. On the other hand, the church was founded by Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Mt 16:18; Ac 2) and governed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Ac 2; 1 Cor 12:13). The presence of God is among the believers and the believers’ aim is to live in the image of God. They follow the example of Jesus, who represents the immanent form of God. Similar to the *Umma*, the church represents the same transcendent

relationship with unbelievers but reproduces the immanent aspect of God among all people by making God known.

All the above implications of the *Umma* and the church stem from the different concepts of God held by Muslims and Christians. If God is someone who is unreachable, as in Islam, the believers focus their example of faith and practice on someone they can perceive ontologically. For Muslims, their example of faith is Mohammad, as he was the founder and the first leader of the *Umma*. The absolute transcendence of God in Islam has influenced the community of believers to focus on Mohammad instead on Allah.

In Christianity, the emphasis on the immanence of the transcendent God has been the key factor of the formation of the church and its development. God maintains his immanent state among the people through the incarnation of Jesus as well as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the era of the church. Christian believers look unto the life and example of Jesus and strive to be like him. They communicate with God through the form of prayer taught by Jesus; with the help of the Holy Spirit, they acquire the knowledge of God. Compared to the Islamic concept of community, the church intends to focus more on God rather than on the state or men. Thus, the church displays more individualistic traits. However, it is people's relationship with God that governs each community of believers, not merely relationships with other humans or groups. In Christianity, the immanence of the transcendent God is reflected in the traits of the church as they focus more on fellowship with God than on man alone. On the other hand, because of the absolutely transcendent God of Islam, the *Umma* tends to focus on the relationship of believers who unite themselves against the non-believers

for the sake of self-protection. It is, furthermore, a method and a vessel for the ultimate fulfilment of humankind as the vicegerent on earth.

## **5.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTOLOGY**

### **5.7.1 Introduction**

In Islam, “Abraham appears as a model believer, whereas Moses is the model prophet, Mohammad’s personal model” (Causse 2004:325). Jesus is also interpreted as the second Moses in the Bible (Kaiser 1995:57-61). Both the Bible and the Qur’an treat Moses as a prefigure of Jesus or Mohammad. Furthermore, both Scriptures present Jesus as one of the most important figures. As the heart of Christianity treats Jesus as Christ while Mohammad is the seal of the prophets in Islam, *the discussion in this section will not fully extend to the overall theology of Christ and Mohammad but is limited to the advent of a prophet like Moses in both the Bible and the Qur’an, as well as Jesus in the Qur’an with regard to the transcendence of God.*

### **5.7.2 Advent of a prophet like Moses**

As a result of his unfaithfulness, Moses faced death on Mount Nebo (Dt 32:48-51). Before his death, Moses encourages the Israelites with God’s promise to raise another prophet like him to lead the people. In Deuteronomy 18:18, God promises Moses, “I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.” Moses then conveys the word to the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own

brothers. You must listen to him” (Dt 18:15). This promise of a successor to Moses comforts the people as they know the time for Moses’ departure is near. The implication of having another prophet like Moses is to continue the immanent relationship with God, as Moses was the speaker of God who directly conversed with God. Furthermore, a prophet like Moses will ensure that the people of Israel remain the chosen people of God.

Both Christian and Muslim scholars interpret the announcement of a post figure of Moses in a parallel manner but with different applications; Muslims see Moses as a prefigure of Mohammad while Christians interpret the promise to be fulfilled in Jesus. Even though the Qur’an did not make any direct claims to the prophecy of the coming of Mohammad, Muslims treat Moses as the prefigure of Mohammad. The Qur’an alludes to the promise of a prophet like Moses from Deuteronomy.

**Surah 46:10** Say: “See ye? If (this teaching) be from Allah and ye reject it and a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity (with earlier scriptures) and has believed while ye are arrogant (how unjust ye are!) truly Allah guides not a people unjust.”

Yusuf Ali (1989:1305) interprets Surah 46:10 as a reflection of the Jewish and Christian hiding of the true prophecy of Mohammad: “There were learned Jews (and Christians) who saw in the holy Prophet the Messenger of Allah foreshadowed in previous Revelations, and accepted Islam.” The more interpretive translation version by Asad (*Alim* 46:10) shows its content:

**Surah 46:10** Say: “Have you given thought [to how you will fare] if this be truly [a revelation] from God and yet you deny its truth? – even though a witness from among the children of Israel has already borne witness to [the advent of] one like himself, and has believed [in him], the while you glory in your arrogance [and reject his message]? Verily, God does not grace [such] evildoing folk with His guidance!”

Here, what Asad translates as, “witness,” is evidently referring to Moses, who is the prefigure of Mohammad. Surah 2:42 supports Asad’s translation: “And cover not Truth with falsehood nor conceal the Truth when ye know (what it is).” Asad (*Alim* 2:42) interprets the meaning of “And cover not Truth with falsehood” (overlying the truth with falsehood--Asad’s translation) to mean that the Bible has been corrupted by the Jews while the “conceal the Truth (suppression of the truth--Asad’s translation)” means to disregard or deliberately falsely interpret the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18. Asad (*Alim* 2:44) further says, “the ‘brethren’ of the children of Israel are obviously the Arabs, and particularly the *musta’ribah* (‘Arabianised’) group among them, which traces its descent to Ishmael and Abraham: and since it is to this group that the Arabian Prophet’s own tribe, the Quraysh, belonged, the above biblical passages must be taken as referring to his advent.”

In respect to leading people into the new nation, Moses may have been a role model of a prophet to Mohammad. Ali ([1946] 1996:41) says “The importance attached to Moses’ life-story is due to the fact of his likeness with the Holy Prophet Mohammad.” However, in biblical context, a prophet like Moses has different connotations. In Deuteronomy 5:23-27, the people request that Moses represent them before God. The reason behind the people’s request is that they fear death as a result of seeing God if God appears before them again.

Moses was the representative of the people to God, as well as a representation of God before the people. Thus, God raises a prophet after Moses who can take over Moses' role as the reflection of the immanent God through direct speech and conversation. The prophet-to-come must speak to God in his presence as in Deuteronomy 34:10 "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face." In this manner of representing God and his people, if Mohammad is a post figure of Moses he must then be able to communicate with God directly for the behalf of his people. Yet, in the Qur'an, there is no indication of Mohammad being close to God. In the sense of Moses being a leader of the nascent nation, Mohammad was the post figure of the biblical Moses. However, in no way can Mohammad be a post-figure of Moses for Allah cannot associate with man.

Furthermore, in order to be confirmed as the prophet to follow Moses, three tests can be used to determine whether a person is the prophet. First, the person must fulfil the line of prophets from the Israelites. Deuteronomy 18:18 indicates this requirement, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers." As Moses is an Israelite, the prophet must be from his own people. Secondly, the prophet must speak the words of Yahweh in his name, which should be in accordance with God and his word. Otherwise, he must be put to death (Dt 18:19-20). Finally, the message of the prophet must come true (Dt 18:22).

These three tests of the prophet further eliminate Mohammad as the prophet since he is not one of the Israelites but of Arab origin. Furthermore, he has not spoken a message in the name of God (יהוה). He spoke in the name of Allah but not of the LORD (יהוה), God's personal name. However, Jesus fulfils the requirements, as Deere (1985:296-297) comments:



The ultimate **prophet like** Moses (18:15, 18) is Jesus Christ—the One who spoke God’s words and who provides deliverance for His people. Not even Joshua could be compared to Moses, for since Moses “no prophet has risen in Israel like” him (34:10) with such power before men and intimacy with God. However distinguished a future prophet’s role might be in Israel, none would be like Moses until the Mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ, came. Moses set the standard for every future prophet. Each prophet was to do his best to live up to the example of Moses until the One came who would introduce the New Covenant. During the first century A.D. the official leaders of Judaism were still looking for the fulfilment of Moses’ prediction (cf. John 1:21). Peter said their search should have stopped with the Lord Jesus (Acts 3:22-23).

There are New Testament arguments of Jesus and Mohammad being the prophet like Moses. In Greek, the word “prophet” is written as προφήτης. In the English translation (NIV, NAU, NKJ)<sup>78</sup> of the word where it refers to the prophet likes Moses, προφήτης is translated with a capital letter “P.” For Muslims, the verses where the people referred to Jesus as the “Prophet” with the capital letter “P” are interpreted as references to Mohammad. Since the practice of referring to Mohammad as a proper noun, the “Prophet,” Muslims will argue that it refers to Mohammad, not to Jesus (Poston 2000:4). However, this argument is not based on any scholarly argument but argued for the sake of propagandism. For, as a naïve argument of Greek, it is written as προφήτης (prophet) not Προφήτης, thus there is no basis for

---

<sup>78</sup> NIV (New International Version, 1984), NAU (New American Standard Bible, 1995), NKJ (New King James Version, 1982).

disagreement. The discussion of the capital letter “P” in the prophet is an arbitrary argument as there is no capital letter (Π) used in the Greek word (Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> edition, 1993).

The word “Prophet” can refer to the second Moses, who first appears in the context of John the Baptist. In John 1:19-21, John first denies being Christ (Jn 1:20) when the priests and Levites ask him: “They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’ He said, ‘I am not.’ ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No’” (Jn 1:21). Here, “the Prophet” (ὁ προφήτης) is the prophet to follow Moses, who they expected to come. The expectation of the leaders of Israel shows that they are holding onto the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18. However, it is not only the leaders of Israel but the common people who also expect the prophet.

A very large crowd in Jerusalem acknowledged that Jesus is “the Prophet” (Mt 21:3-11). When Jesus entered Jerusalem, those with Jesus shouted with joy and the people in the city asked the identity of Jesus. The crowd answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (v 11). In addition to the large crowd in Jerusalem, “a great crowd” in the mountainside of the shore of the Sea of Galilee was convinced that Jesus is “the prophet” (ὁ προφήτης) as “After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, ‘Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world’” (Jn 6:14). Also in John 7:40, after hearing the words of Jesus some of the people said, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Observing Jesus’ appearance and miraculous signs as well as hearing his words, the people interpreted that Jesus was the prophet in the prophecies which is to come after Moses. Finally, it is in Jesus’ own statement that he identifies himself as the prophet in Luke 13:33: “In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” It may seem that Jesus is not referring to himself as “the Prophet,” but at

least he identifies himself as a prophet. In the context of testimony from others, he refers to himself as the Prophet. Again Jesus says about himself, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (Jn 5:46). Jesus refers to what Moses says about “the Prophet,” which is immediately confirmed by the people (Jn 6:14).

### 5.7.3 Jesus in Qur’an

In addition to Jesus being the prophet like Moses, the Bible clearly states that Jesus is God (Jn 1:18; 20:28; 1 Jn 5:20; Tt 2:13, Rm 9:5; Heb 1:1-3, 8; Phlp 2:5-11). In Christian Christology, Jesus is fully man and God at the same time (Grudem 1994:552), and it is sufficient here to state that. However, based on the doctrine of the “Oneness of God,” Islam rejects the Christian concept of God as a Trinity. The concept of the Islamic Trinity consists of God, Jesus, and Mary implied from Surah 5:75-76, 116, 119 and 4:171. Thus, Islam denies Jesus as God for God cannot enter into matrimony with Mary and have a son, Jesus. Therefore, Muslims’ major approach to the Trinity is an anthropomorphic interpretation of Jesus that he is no more than a prophet, a human being (S 4:171). Ali (1989:142) argues against the divinity of Jesus:

If it is said that he was born without a human father, Adam was also so born. Indeed Adam was born without either a human father or mother. As far as our physical bodies are concerned they are mere dust. In Allah’s sight Jesus was as dust just as Adam was or humanity is. The greatness of Jesus arose from the Divine command “Be”: for after that he was--more than dust--a great spiritual leader and teacher.

Muslims deny the divinity of Jesus based on the humanity of Jesus, yet they respect him as “a great spiritual leader and teacher” as Ali states above. Staley (2004:98) confirms: “The Muslims do respect Jesus as a great prophet, but based on their view of Allah they cannot accept His deity or crucifixion, the former being a matter of impossibility due to the essence of Allah, the latter being unacceptable due to the mercy of Allah towards his prophets.” Essentially, these statements claim that Jesus is a human being who was created by God’s will in the same way Adam was created, yet he is inferior to Adam.<sup>79</sup>

Conversely, by examining the acts of Jesus in the Qur’an one can perceive that his works do not belong in the class of human work but fall into the category of divine work.<sup>80</sup> For example, miracles are attributed to Jesus in the Qur’an, such as his birth and holiness, the creation of life, the healing of those born blind, and the raising of the dead (S 19:19; 3:49; 5:113). However, Muslims do not perceive the miracles as evidence of Jesus’ divinity. Rather, Muslims explain that Jesus was created by the will of God to prepare the way for Mohammad (S 3:59; 19:35).

---

<sup>79</sup> There is a popular argument that the King James Version of John 3:16 translates the word *μονογενη* as “begotten” causing a misunderstanding of Jesus being begotten by the result of maternity activity while the word should be translated “only.” Historically, however, the Qur’an is dated earlier than the King James Version and already rejects the idea of “begotten” by the understanding that the nature of Jesus’ birth as a physical act depends on the needs of men’s animal nature. Thus, this argument is only valid for the Christian setting of witness.

<sup>80</sup> Charles Torrey (1933:79) lists the mission of Quranic Jesus: Jesus was sent to confirm the Israelites in the true doctrine, in the teachings of the Torah, to insist on the worship of only one God, and to warn against straying from the faith of Abraham and Moses and forming new sects.

Beyond the miracles of Jesus performed in the Qur'an, Jesus is called "a Mercy from Us [Allah]" in Surah 19:21.<sup>81</sup> Thomas O'Shaughnessy (2004:70) explains that this is not God's mercy but rather offspring as a result of sexual intercourse between man and woman, which is a blessing to man based on Surah 30:21: "And among His Signs is this that He created for you mates from among yourselves that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are Signs for those who reflect." Here "love" is understood as sexual intercourse and "mercy" is the child resulting from "love." Therefore, unlike the biblical account of the birth of Jesus, there is no indication of incarnation or God's involvement in the birth. It is purely a human birth. Therefore, as a son of a woman, Jesus in the Qur'an is no more than a prophet among the 124,000 prophets of Islam (Braswell 1996:49). Therefore, the immanent act of God through Jesus in Christianity is denied in Islam. This denial of the divinity of Jesus is another sign that the Qur'an maintains the absolute transcendence of God.

#### 5.7.4 Conclusion

It is clear that both Muslim and Christian scholars interpret the post figure of Moses as their Prophet (Mohammad) or the Lord (Jesus). There seems to be no compromising point of the interpretation of the coming of the prophet like Moses. However, in reference to the

---

<sup>81</sup> There are many more references to Jesus in the Qur'an. For a comparison of the references to Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible see *Jesus and Mohammad: Profound differences and surprising similarities* by Mark Gabriel (2004:236-238) and *Islam: Its prophets, peoples, and power* by George Braswell (1996:280-281). Parrinder (1977:30-54) provides discussion of a few examples of Jesus' titles given here: The messiah (*al-masīh*), servant (*'abd*), prophet (*nabī*), messenger (*rasūl*), word (*kalima*), spirit (*rūh*), sign (*āya*), a parable or example (*mathal*), a witness (*shahīd*), a mercy (*rahma*), eminent (*wajīh*), one brought near (*min al-muqarrabīn*), one of the upright (*min al-saalihīn*), blessed (*mubarak*).

discussion of the transcendence of God, there is a distinctive application towards the understanding of God's relationship with man.

If we confirm that Jesus is the post figure of Moses, God's immanence as well as his transcendence exists. For Christians, the presence of Jesus on earth as the second person of the Trinity is a firm indication of an immanent God. This is further confirmed in the New Testament's interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 where it says "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel [עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים, "God with us"]." The New Testament confirms the prophecy of Isaiah in Matthew 1:23, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, 'God with us.'" The text indicates that Jesus is God (אֱלֹהִים) and that he is physically with the people (עִמָּנוּ). When the Hebrew word עִם (with) is used with the pronominal suffix, it carries the meaning of closeness of possession. For example, Brown ([1906] 1999:767) defines the word as "of fellowship and companionship," indicating the immanent fellowship of God and his presence with humankind.

In maintaining God's immanence with people, the presence of Jesus with man implies the transcendence of God. Just as Moses took the direct words of God and conveyed the message to his people, Jesus represents God (the Father) and speaks on his behalf (Jn 8:28). It is in his own statement that God is ontologically transcendent from the people as "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (Jn 1:18 see also Jn 8:19; 14:7, 9). Furthermore, Jesus says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). Nevertheless, as he says, Jesus represents God so that people may know God. Without God's direct visual manifestation, Jesus as a second person of the Trinity

appears to people to make God known and at the same time to maintain God's transcendence among the people.

In Islam, by asserting that Mohammad is the post-figure of Moses, God maintains his absolute transcendence from the people. In terms of revelation, the biblical Moses receives a direct revelation from God, which is *tanzil* in Islam. This direct revelation is supposed to be carried by the angel before God's will is revealed to Mohammad. However, when God communicates to Mohammad it is through inspiration, as in Surah 26:52, where Allah speaks to the Qur'anic Moses through inspiration (*awhaynaa*, also in S 26:63 and 7:160). This is an indication of God's absolute transcendence. Even before Moses, as well as with Mohammad who had a close calling from God, God maintained his transcendence.

Furthermore, the role of Jesus in the Qur'an indicates the absolute transcendence of God. Even though the Qur'an indicates that Jesus is more than a prophet through the God-given miracles as well as the spirit (Holy Spirit) upon him, the Qur'anic interpretation limits Jesus to a mere prophet. Thus, the God-given abilities displayed in Jesus in the Qur'an are understood as the will of Allah carried out. Jesus was a simple vessel of Allah's performing acts upon his people. Therefore, Jesus in the Qur'an is simply a prophet.

## **5.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGY PROPER**

### **5.8.1 Introduction**

While Muslims and Christians use the same terminology such as prayer, heavens, and sin, their understanding of these terms is not necessarily identical. The understanding of God is

no exception. Different concepts of God are the main cause of theological differences as we have seen so far. Both the Qur'an and the Bible declare that God is one God. Jesus of the Qur'an (Issa) says, "O children of Israel. Worship Allah my Lord and your Lord" (S 5:72). As Jesus of the Qur'an declares that the God of the Qur'an and the Bible are the same, Islam views biblical passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4 ("Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one") as true statements corresponding to Qur'anic passages (S 5:72; 29:46; 112:1-4). As Islam claims, are the God of the Qur'an and the Bible one and the same? Zwemer (1905:7), in his Christian understanding of God, comments on the issue of the one God:

Jews, Christians and Mohammedans believe in one God and yet differ widely in their interpretation of this idea. Unless we know the Moslem's idea of God we cannot understand his creed nor judge his philosophy, nor intelligently communicate our idea of God to him. The strength of Islam is not in its ritual nor in its ethics, but in its tremendous and fanatical grasp on the one great truth--Monotheism.

Muslims conclude that the God of the Bible and the Qur'an are the same. Likewise, some Christians believe that the God of Islam and Christianity are the same, while other Christians say they are different. For example, in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam, David Shenk and Badru Kateregga (1980:8, 88) say Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Hans Küng (1987:83) supports this view: "Whoever reads the Bible—at least the Old Testament—and the Qur'ān parallel will be led to ponder whether the religions of revelation of Semitic origin—Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and especially the Old Testament and the Qur'ān—could have the same foundation. Is it not one and the same God who speaks so clearly in both?" In continuing to explore the implications of the transcendence of God in the



theologies of Islam and Christianity, this section focuses on the comparative evaluation of how God is understood in Islam and in Christianity. Furthermore, the question of the same God as seen in the Bible and the Qur'an will be dealt with attentively.

### 5.8.2 One God

Islam holds a Unitarian theology in insisting on the absolute Oneness of God. This is called *Tauhid*,<sup>82</sup> and is evident in their opening prayer repeated every day: "Say: He is Allah, The One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, absolute; He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten; And there is none Like unto Him" (S 112:1-4, cf. 29:46). Adelowo (1980:117) explains:

*Tauhid* is an Arabic word which, in the literal sense, means "The making one". In the context of Islamic theology, it is used to express the Unity or Oneness of the Godhead. It is the concept of *monotheism* in Islam. In this context, it is absolute monotheism and not otherwise. With regard to this aspect of theology, Muslims generally cannot afford to sacrifice dignity for depravity. They maintain the doctrine even to the point of death. They are very rigid concerning this issue since it is regarded as the fundamental basis of Islam.

---

<sup>82</sup> It is also spelled as *Tawhid*. Ansari (1983:93) explains it in the Sufi context: "*Tawhid*, as it is used in the sufi literature, means four different things. It refers, first, to a man's belief about God's unity, and consists essentially of some propositions about the nature of God and his relation with man and the world...secondly, to disciplining one's life, external and internal in the light of one's beliefs...thirdly, to the mystical experience of unity or union...fourthly, to a view of reality that arises from the mystical experience of unity."

Because of the “Oneness of God” (*Tauhid*) being the fundamental basis of Islam, the association of other gods with Allah is the greatest sin (*shirk*) possible to a Muslim (Madany 1994:3). Based on the doctrine of the “Oneness of God,” Islam, therefore, rejects the Christian concept of God as a Trinity (Pratt 1996:271; Sirry 2005:368).

The Muslims’ major approach to the Trinity is an anthropomorphic interpretation of God. For example, Jesus is no more than a prophet, a human because he is born of a woman (S 4:171). Therefore, the Qur’an commands Christians, “O people of the Book! commit no excesses in your religion...so believe in Allah and His Apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One Allah.”(S 4:171).

Adelowo (1980:121-126) comprehensively lists the Muslim reaction to the Triune God. A few of his major analyses are discussed in the following points: the Islamic absence of the doctrine of co-eternity, the theory of adoptionism, the concept of incarnation, the Muslim concept of sin, over-emphasis of the ontological aspect of God, forgiveness and salvation or redemption, and finally the undefined concept of the Holy Spirit and the Angel Gabriel in the Qur’an. We have covered most of the list in this chapter already. This list of Adelowo’s analysis of the Trinity concept in Islam refers to a fundamental governing principle of the theology of God, namely God’s ontological immanence and transcendence. The concept of the Trinity is readily accepted when Jesus and Holy Spirit, understood as God, are present among the people. However, in Islam, the absolute unity of God, *Tauwid*, does not allow for God’s presence among mankind nor the notion of the Trinity, for God is an absolute one.

The Bible does not use the word “Trinity,” yet it has many indications of the doctrine. Enns (1989:202) states the teaching of the Trinity concisely: “The *Father* is called God (1 Cor

8:6); the *Son* is called God (Heb. 1:8-10); the *Holy Spirit* is called God (Acts 5:3-4); God is *one God* (Deut. 6:4).” All these three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are mentioned together in Matthew 28:19, Luke 3:21-22, and 2 Corinthians 13:14. In the Trinity, Jesus represents the immanence of the transcendent God while the Holy Spirit enables the continuing fellowship between God and man. Adelowo (1980:121) brings together the implication of the Trinity concept: “God in Trinity is fullness of life, living in eternal relationships and in never ceasing fellowship. This again makes intelligible the revelation and self-communication of God.” Unlike the Islamic concept of the Holy Spirit, the Christian concept of an immanent God allows God’s fellowship with man. This also allows for the Holy Spirit’s and Jesus’ divinity when they interact with man. Without the Trinitarian concept of God, Christians would have the absolute transcendence of God due to the lack of God’s immanent presence (in Jesus and the Holy Spirit) among man.

Muslims seem to have no objection to the Father God, or perhaps they treat the Father God as Allah. Muslims even use the Bible to prove that the God in the Bible and the Qur’an are the same (Dt 6:4 compared to S 5:72; 29:46; 112:1-4). The Qur’an commands Muslims, “But say, ‘We believe in the Revelation which has Come down to us and in that Which [the Bible] came down to you [Christians]; Our God and your God is One; and it is to Him We bow (in Islam)’” (S 29:46). Even some Christians, based on the Quran’s indication that Muslims believe in the former Revelations, the Bible (cf. S 2:136; 4:136) and the “Oneness of God” (S 29:46, Dt 6:4), believe that the God of the Qur’an and the Bible are the same (Shenk & Kateregga 1980:8). Rahman (1967:2) hints that the God of Islam and Christianity are the same by bringing an argument of the immanent God to Islam:

It has been generally held that the God of Islam is uncompromisingly transcendent and that this is shown by the tremendous emphasis Islam puts on the unity of God, His majesty, awesomeness, etc. This picture, however, does not emerge from the Qur'an, but from later theological development in Islam. A careful perusal of the Qur'an would reveal that it attributes all natural processes and events to God: from rains to the processes of the rise and fall of nations, from winning and losing in war and peace to the orderly revelation of cosmic bodies, all is referred to God. This clearly shows that God is not just the most transcendent but also the most immanent.

Rahman correctly explains that Allah is immanent through the result of his creation. Yet, it is the theological development of the ontologically transcendent God in Islam which resulted in the theology of *Tauwid* in Islam. The theology of *Tauwid* may have influenced Mohammad and his immediate successors in the time of the compilation of the Qur'an. Thus, as we have seen in chapter 4, there is lack of an ontological immanence of Allah while the Bible shows the immanence of Yahweh in the same accounts of Adam, Abraham, and Moses. It had been the preconception of the thought of God as absolutely transcendent and independent from humankind and creation that influenced the theology of Allah as the absolute one God.

On the other hand, in Christianity, God is revealed as the Trinity in the Bible with his immanent fellowship with man. The same immanence of God, as Rahman argues above, is seen by means of the general revelation present in the Bible. However, the personal ontological appearance of God before man shapes the theology of God as "Immanuel." This immanence of God through individual and group experience throughout the Bible shape the

theology of God as the Trinity. As a result, the immanence of the transcendent God is manifested in Jesus as well as through the indwelling acts of the Holy Spirit.

### 5.8.3 Attributes of God

The purpose of man shows the kind of relationship the creator intended with man. Furthermore, the attributes of God indicate God's relationship with his subjects. Basic attributes or functions of God in Islam and Christianity are very similar. In Islam, "although God is not known in His essence and in His nature, He is known to us through His qualities or attributes, through the Most Beautiful Names (*asma'u Allah al-husna*) in Islam" (Khodr 1981:170). The Most Beautiful Names of Allah, or the Ninety-Nine Names of God, are derived from the Qur'an, which will be discussed in the next section. The majority of the names not only indicate Allah's attributes but also his functions. Some of the functional names are: The King, The Protector (and guardian), The Creator, The Maker (originator of all creation), The Fashioner, The Provider, The Destroyer, The Restrainer (who takes hold and draws together), The Watcher of All, The Pardoner, The Giver, The Director, etc. (Abd-Al-Masih 1970:84-87). As the name indicates the nature and essence as well as the name giver's understanding of the subject (see 4.2.2), one can perceive the nature of God through his name. Rahman (1967:1) concludes that "The Qur'anic concept of God is, therefore, primarily—indeed, purely—functional." Thus, most of the functional attributes of Allah's names in the Ninety-Nine Names of God, if not all, are similar to Christian belief.

On the other hand, Islam lacks the concept of the Covenant-making and Covenant-keeping God (Schlorff 1980:342). The argument of the Covenant-making God is considerably

significant in understanding the God of Christianity, revealing the true attributes of God through the relationship reflected in the covenant. The covenantal relationship is evident in the Mosaic covenants (Ex 19-24). The relationships are expressed as: God of Israel (Lv 26:9-12), King of Israel (Nm 23:21; Dt 33:5; Ps 89:18), Father of Israel (Hs 11:1), Husband of Israel (Jr 1:32; Hs 3:1), and Owner of Treasure (Ex 19:5). These relational attributes of God contradict the Islamic functional attributes of God that are shown in the Ninety-Nine Names of God. In the literal and anthropomorphic approach to the study of God in Islam, the relationships of Husband and wife, Father and son, and man as the Treasure of God are unthinkable due to the absolute transcendence of God.

#### 5.8.4 Names of God

The Ninety-Nine Names of God<sup>83</sup> in Islam is a collection of the names or attributes which originated from Surah 7:180: “The most beautiful names belong to Allah: so call on Him by them; but shun such men as use profanity in His names: for what they do they will soon be requited.” Malik (*Alim* 7:180) translates it as: “Allah has the most excellent names (over ninety-nine attributes); call on Him by them; and shun those people who use profanity in His Names, such people shall be requited for their misdeeds.” Zwemer (1905:34) explains the importance of the names further:

---

<sup>83</sup> Zwemer (1905:48) categorises the names into five groups: Allah’s unity and Absolute being (7 names), Creator or Originator of all nature (5 names), merciful and gracious (24 names), Mohammad’s idea of Allah’s power and pride and absolute sovereignty (36 names), and Allah as hurting and avenging (5 names). See “Appendix: Names of God in Islam” for a full list of names of God in Islam.

The attributes of God are called by Muslims *Isma-ul-Sifat* and also called in the Koran *Isma-ul-Husna*, the excellent names. The number of these names or attributes of Allah is given by Tradition as ninety-nine. Abu Huraira relates that Mohammed said, “Verily, there are ninety-nine names of God and whoever recites them shall enter Paradise.”

Concerning the nature of Allah, Staley (2004:70) says that even though Muslims place great value upon the names of Allah, the names themselves tell us nothing about the nature of Allah. The reason behind his argument is that “they are simply characteristics of Allah’s will and not of his nature” (Staley 2004:70). Staley’s argument holds truth because the absolute transcendent Allah cannot ontologically be involved in human history. Consequently, Muslims do not experience the expressed traits of the names, but it is the explanation of the wish of Allah upon his faithful. For the same reason, Zwemer (1905:30) says, “Mohammed, outside of the Koran, was silent regarding the nature of God’s being....The great Imams are agreed regarding the danger and impiety of studying or discussing the nature of the being of God. They therefore, when speaking of Allah’s being, fall back on negations.” This avoiding of the discussion of God’s nature is due to the Mohammad’s lack of understanding of God. He may have seen and had a correct idea of the functional attributes of God. But he had no conception of God’s moral attributes (Zwemer 1905:49).

In considering the Islamic names of God, Christians should appreciate Islam’s Ninety-Nine Names of God that show the attributes, characters, and functions of God. Most of the Ninety-Nine Names of God can be identified with Christian concepts. Staley (2004:80) puts it as “the Christian can affirm many non-moral attributes of God which are similar to those affirmed by the Muslim regarding Allah.” The non-moral character of God would refer to

functional attributes of the God of Christianity. However, the moral attributes of God differentiate between Yahweh and Allah. For example, the Islamic names of God do not indicate the loving father God, which is at the heart of the moral aspect of God as seen in the Bible (Dt 32:6; Jr 31:3; Hs 11:1; Jn 1:12; 3:16, 10:14-15. 15:12). Zwemer (1905:100) confirms: “The attribute of love is absent from Allah...*in no case is there any reference to an inner personal relation...*when the Koran even hints at earthquake, and in the fire, but not in the still small voice of love.” The concept of the loving God which is based on the parenthood of God is missing in Islam as the Qur’an does not allow for God’s presence among man. The filial relationship of the loving father God only exists in the Bible.

The closest Islamic concepts to that of the loving God of Christianity are *Al-Rahman* and *Al-Waduud*. Haleem (2004:111) explains that the name “*Al-Rahman* is an adjective from the root *r-h-m*, the noun of which is *rahma*. Lexically, when we say *rahimahu* it could mean ‘he was, or is tender-hearted towards him and inclined to favour or benefit him.’” The root of the word *Al-Rahman* is derived from the Arabic and Hebrew root *rhm* denoting two main emotions: love and compassion. They seem to be strongly related to the name *rhm* in both languages, which denotes, according to Hamilton (1996:1096), “womb,” but originally it meant “a female,” or a “mother.” Ben-Shemesh (2002:239) comments: “The ancient man, observing the natural love and compassion in the behaviour of a mother toward the offspring of her womb, called these motions by the name the mother was known to him, that is, *rhm*.” Therefore, from the root meaning of *rhm*, the translation of *Al-Rahman* could indicate that God is love or compassionate.

In the Bible, the root word *rhm* is used to indicate the love of God (Ps 103:13) towards man as well as man’s love toward God (Ps 18:1). Yet, in the Qur’an, it indicates a simple favour



to Allah's servant or to his viceroy to do the given task by Allah. The usages of the root word in the Bible reflect the personal fellowship between God and man similar to that of a mother to her children. This is the closest and most intimate expression of personal relationship shown in the Old Testament. However, due to Allah's absolute otherness, even though the Qur'an most likely has used the word in similar situations as the Bible, the interpretation of the word will not be the same. For this reason, the root word *rhm* as well as its derived forms are interpreted as a material blessing upon man and not as the relational blessing of the closeness to Allah. The word is used metaphorically to express Allah's favour extending to his followers in the Qur'an.

Another of Allah's names that may indicate "love" is *Al-Waduud*, which seems to correspond to the Christian concept of the loving God. It is translated as "The Loving [One]." However, a better translation is "The Objectively Loving One" or "The One Who Shows Sympathy" (Al-Ghazali 1970:91 and Abd-Al-Masih [s a]:86). These translations are supported by the usage of *Al-Waduud* in the Qur'an (S 11:90; 85:14). The verses indicate that Allah would show sympathy to faithful Muslims only. Thus, the implication of the name *Al-Waduud* contradicts God's sacrificial and unconditional love toward all of his creation, which implies "God is love" in Christianity (1 Jn 4:7-8). Jomier (1964:76) argues accordingly: "But the Qur'an refers rather often to God's love in connection with moral life. God loves those who do good, who are righteous, and so forth. He does not love the wicked, those who break the law, and so forth. This brings out the aspect of the kind, merciful Lord, who loves His faithful servants." Jomier's assessment of the loving God concept confirms the conditional love of God that Allah will love "those who do good." Loving the wicked will qualify one to practice unconditional love.

The argument behind Muslims' interpretation of the name *Al-Waduud* is the approach to the idea of "love." A Muslim would argue that "love is to sense a need of the beloved, and since Allah cannot be said to have a need or an experience of a need, it is therefore impossible that Allah should love" (Nehls [s a]:7).<sup>84</sup> Ansari (1983:89) explains: "Love is much more than self-negating submission and sincere devotion. 'It is,' Junayd says, 'a feeling of profound attachment.'" Thus, in Muslim theology, God cannot be love and God cannot be associated with man in any possible way. Therefore, the name *Al-Waduud* implies that God gives mercy not to all sinners, but only to those who are faithful to Islam.

Baljon (1988:121) confirms the conditional love concept of *Al-Waduud* as: "with God as the subject, nowhere do we find the idea that God loves mankind. God's love is conditional. He loves those who do good, those who turn repentant to Him, and so on. Unqualified Divine love for mankind is an idea completely alien to the Qur'an." This is seen in Surah 19:96 where it says: "On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow Love." [*'inna 'alladhena 'aamano wa- camilo as.- s.aalih.aat sa- yajcal la- - hum ar- rah.maan wudd(an)*] The word "love" here is the same word that we are discussing, namely *Al-Waduud*. Shafi (2005c:71) applies the concept of *Al-Waduud* to relationships among the believers: "It means that for those who are steadfast in their faith in Him, Allah creates an environment of friendship and love for each other, which consequently promotes mutual amity and goodwill among the true Muslims." The implication of *Al-Waduud* is not centred on Allah in spite of its nature as his name, but among the believers. Therefore, there are no indications of God's love to the believers in this meaning of the name.

---

<sup>84</sup> On the side of Christian's perspective on "love," the Apostle Paul explains it very well in the context of the believers in 1 Corinthians 13. However, the love of God is expressed as sacrificial and unconditional love as evidenced in many occasions in the Bible (Jn 3:16; Phlp 2:6-8, etc.).

In conclusion, the filial love with which Christians call God “Father” and its revelation are expressed in many different forms of God’s name in the Bible. However, the same love is not found in the Qur’an or in the Islamic concept of God. Allah is indeed called the “Loving One” (*Al-Wadud*) in the Qur’an but only on two occasions (S 11:90; 85:14). The phrase’s interpretation does not indicate a moral attribute of God. It is functional love toward believers; the love is a conditional, objective love. On the other hand, the Bible shows the loving God as Father and Mother who provide relational love towards believers. The “loving God” concept is possible since the God displayed in the Bible is an immanent God who allows personal relationships with man. This concept can be contrasted to the God absolutely separated from man in the Qur’an that results in no personal relationships.

#### **5.8.5 Similarity between God of Islam and Christianity**

The common ground of belief between Islam and Christianity is substantial. For example, Christians and Muslims agree that God created the world and all that is in it, as well as heaven and hell; God is all-powerful, knows everything and is everywhere at all times; God revealed his will to mankind through certain prophets; he gave to the people laws which should govern their lives and prevent them from doing wrong; God will judge all people; some will be permitted to go to heaven, while all others are doomed to hell (Nehls & Eric 1994:1). If only the similarities are considered between Islam and Christianity, one may conclude that the two religions are essentially the same. Thus, some would not hesitate to say that Islam is a heresy of Christianity. Even one Muslim scholar (Maqsood 1994:1) says something of a similar view:

Islam is one of the three great faiths that sprang from the harsh land and deep silence of the Middle Eastern deserts. The other two are Judaism and Christianity and all three are interlinked because they are, in reality, worshipping the same One God. In historical terms, Islam is the youngest of the three, although Muslims argue that it is the earliest and forms the basis of all three.

Maqsood's explanation of Islam is based on the assumption of One God among the three religions. Then, are we worshipping the same One God? Are Yahweh and Allah the same God? If so, there would be less conflict between Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, Christian evangelists' task should not be so difficult, as there would be no need to share the Gospel with Muslims. In the same way, Muslims would make peace with Christians with little hesitation. There should be no extreme groups of Christians and Muslims against each other.

From the ongoing arguments, one can be assured of the fact that the God of Islam and Christianity are different. Differences result from the separate ways of understanding God: the anthropomorphic and literal understanding of Muslims, and the representational (or analogous) and relational understanding of Christians. For example, Christians understand Jesus as the Son of God, who submitted to the will of God, the Father. In the Muslim mindset, Jesus cannot be the Son of God, for He was born of a human mother and God cannot be his corporeal father; Jesus is a human.

Furthermore, Muslims believe that God cannot be known since he is the “absolutely Other.” He is a totally different being, set apart from all creation including man, and holds himself absolutely aloof from the realm of history. This is the so-called Islamic doctrine of *Tanzih* (transcendence), and it implies that language used to describe God has no positive connotation whatsoever, because Allah is *bila kayf* (without how) and *bila tashbih* (beyond comparison). “Thus Islam has a negative theology; it cannot say what God *is*, but only what He *is not*” (Schlorff 180:339). Consequently, the negative approach to the doctrine of God results in the tendency of human behaviour to explain everything literally within the human perspective.

Christians are convinced that human beings have a limited knowledge of God. Only within the revelation that is given to us can we perceive God (Dt 29:29; Heb 11:1). Furthermore, Jesus says that by knowing him we can know God, for he is the image of the invisible God (Mt 11:27; Jn 14:6-7; Col 1:15). Therefore, those who believe in Christ, who are called Christians in whom the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Jn 4:7), can be sure of who God is, even though human languages have a limited scope of explanation.

In conclusion, Islam and Christianity may seem to be one religion on a surface level because Islam originated from the Bible and Jewish religious practices. However, the God of Islam and the God of Christianity are distinct. In Christianity, God is Love, and the Father who has a personal relationship with believers. In Islam, God is power, and unknowable to humans, for he is neither personal nor spiritual. Christians can say who God is, but Muslims can only describe what he is not.

## 5.9 SYNTHESIS

Based on the previous argument of the transcendence of God in chapter 4, we have so far examined the implications of the transcendence of God in several areas of the systematic theologies of Islam and Christianity. In the anthropological argument, the purposes of man's creation as well as the creation of man in the image of God are the key factors of argument for whether God is immanent or transcendent. In Christianity, the immanent-transcendent God allows for the argument of the image of God and man's purpose to be concluded toward God's immanent fellowship with man. On the other hand, the absolute transcendent notion of God in Islam maintains the transcendent gap between God and man. Consequently, Islam must interpret the Qur'anic texts which indicate man's relationship with God towards a non-relationship oriented context.

Due to the denial of the original sin and immanent fellowship of God and man, Islam does not identify with the concept of Christian salvation. In Christian theology, salvation can be said to be a restoration of the broken relationship between God and man. However, for Muslims, salvation means the well-being of believers, which is expressly manifested in the form of the *Umma* as well as the continuation of the *Umma* in heaven. On the other hand, salvation of Christianity points to the restoration of the fellowship with God on earth through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as well as through immanent fellowship in heaven.

Both the Qur'an and the Bible account for the Holy Spirit. Due to the denial of the Trinity as well as the immanent acts of God, Islam denies the Holy Spirit and interprets it as the Angel Gabriel. The Holy Spirit in the Bible signifies the immanent God on earth. In Christianity, because of the concept of God as a immanent-transcendent God, the interpretation of the

Trinity as well as the Holy Spirit as God is possible when it is compared to the Islamic notion of the Holy Spirit.

The revelation of the Scriptures similarly reflects the transcendence of God. The Qur'an is the result of "Transcendent Revelation," where the Angel Gabriel repeatedly took a portion of the Qur'an to Mohammad from the Mother of Tablet, not from God. On the other hand the Bible is "Historical-Inspirational Revelation," the written historical account of God's involvement with man. Furthermore, Jesus as God-man became the visual representation of the manifestation of the "word." This concept further enforces the notion of the immanent-transcendent God in Christianity.

In the discussion of ecclesiology, the governing principles of the *Umma* and the Church are keys to understanding the transcendence of God. In the *Umma*, the foundation was laid by Mohammad and governed by the principles which Mohammad taught his followers. However, the Church was founded by Jesus. It started with the coming of the Holy Spirit and was guided by the indwelling acts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the notion of God being with man determines the characteristics of the *Umma* and the Church. For example, when God is immanent with man, the foundation of the Church is God himself. On the other hand, since God cannot be with man in Islam, the *Umma* has to look to its foundational element in a man, in this case, Mohammad.

Jesus in the Qur'an is no more than a prophet. He was a man in Islam, while in Christianity he is God-man. The prophecy of the prophet to follow Moses (Dt 18) is fulfilled in both Islam and Christianity but with different applications. In the Bible, Jesus is the fulfilment of the prophecy of the prophet like Moses. The implication of the discussion of the transcendence of God is that Jesus enables the progression of the immanent relationship

between God and his people by being a mediator between God and the people. However, in Islam, Mohammad was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 in the sense that he led his people into a new religion. He formed the *Umma* as Moses did with Israel. However, he is not the same figure as the biblical concept of the prophet like Moses, for his role is not that of a mediator since Allah is absolutely transcendent from man.

The argument of the transcendence of God in theology proper depends on the “Oneness of God,” the “Attributes of God,” and the “Names of God.” The concept of the “Oneness of God” in Islam denies the Trinity, based on their anthropomorphic interpretation of Trinity, while Christians base it on the ontological appearance of God, which is “Immanuel.” The discussion of the “attributes of God” and the “names of God” concentrates on the issue of God’s love. Based on the functional interpretation of God in Islam, the attribute of God that reflects “love” is interpreted as the conditional favour to the believers in Islam. On the other hand, the “love” concept of Yahweh concludes that he is a relationship-oriented God, which allows man to call him “Father.” This section concludes that the God of Islam and Christianity are similar in the functional aspect, while they are different in the attributive aspect.

From the foregoing argument, one can conclude that a proper understanding of the transcendence of God is the key to understanding the differences between Islam and Christianity through defining the different relationships between God and man. The different relationships with God, in turn, result in a fundamental difference between the two faiths’ belief, including the nature of God as well as theology in general.

Furthermore, for Christian relations with Muslims, it is necessary to understand that the markedly different doctrine of the transcendence of God is the root cause of the differences



and conflict between Islam and Christianity. Despite formal similarities between the Bible and the Qur'an (chapter 4), the relationship between God and man revealed in the two Scriptures is essentially different. In Islam, it is a vertical relationship; God is absolutely transcendent. The Bible indicates that both vertical (transcendent) and horizontal (immanent) relationships exist between God and man. Thus, transcendence in the Bible can be expressed as the immanence of the transcendent God which allows believers to know and experience God, yet without full understanding, since man is a finite being while God is an infinite divinity. The immanence of the transcendent God results in the Christian understanding of God as closely immanent with man, which develops a different understanding of theology from Islam. Islam's absolute transcendence of God prohibits the knowledge of God, and views the different areas of theology accordingly, resulting in the understanding of Allah as a functionally-oriented God.