The Qurʾān and the Bible: continuity or discontinuity?

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Self-Disclosure

I have been invited to contribute this paper to the Bridging the Divide. I regret I am unable to attend the conference in person. It would have been a great pleasure – and a privilege – to meet face to face.

I need to state at the outset that this paper is written for the purpose of facilitating a conversation between those who see Islam as largely discontinuous with Christianity, and those who appreciate and emphasize the continuities.

I am writing from the perspective of someone in the first category: I see Islam and Christianity as radically different, despite the acknowledged existence of a great many points of similarity.

It is all too tempting, when one is deeply invested in a particular worldview, to minimize those who disagree. We all have blind spots, and sometimes these, far from being innate like the blind spot in every human eye, are carefully constructed and maintained in such a way as to protect the way we frame our world. By filtering out conflicting evidence and managing cognitive dissonance, these contrived blind spots serve to reinforce and rationalize our prejudices.

Ludwig Wittgenstein once wrote: "One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it."[1] Wittgenstein was reflecting on the nature of propositional language, pointing out that far from merely describing the nature of things, propositions say as much about the language they are couched in as about the reality of the thing they purport to refer to. The problem with a good deal of academic writing about Islam is that what is being traced is the frame through which people are peering, not the thing itself.

One of the most profoundly fraught subjects today is the relationship of Islam to those who dissent from it, and in particular to adherents of Biblical faiths. Discussions of this topic are marked with blood, because so much blood has been and continues to be shed over claims and counter-claims about Islam. The question of the relationship of the Bible and the Qurʾān is not merely an academic topic, which people can investigate objectively without personal investment. A history of conflict and the overwhelming traumas of today shape and mold the capacity of contemporary Christians to engage with the question of how Islam relates to their own faith.

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[1] L. Wittgenstein. *Philosophische Untersuchungen,* section 114. "Man glaubt, wieder und wieder der Natur nachzufahren, und fährt nur der Form entlang, durch die wir sie betrachten." Translation from: *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E. M. Anscombe, 3rd ed. Blackwell, 1967.

By 'traumas of today' I mean, not only to large-scale events such as the wars in Iraq and Syria, but also the experiences of countless specific individuals, such the Christian woman, Mariam Ibrahim, recently sentenced to death in Sudan for apostasy from Islam.

So much depends upon how we approach the questions raised by Islam, in so many domains, from geopolitics through to Christian missional practice.

I am fully aware that this topic I am addressing is a vast one. There is a world of scholarly resources which could be thrown at the challenge of analyzing Islamo-Christian relations, not least of all the connection of the Qurʾān to the Bible. I am not writing with the purpose of mounting a virtuoso display of these resources. Instead, this presentation seeks to make general observations about the nature of the challenge, to present some reasons why I believe much of contemporary work misses the mark, and to sketch the outlines of an approach to understanding it.

But first some self-disclosure is in order. I undertake this, not to draw attention to myself, but in acknowledgement of the highly subjective nature of this topic. I wish to declare some possible sources of my own subjectivity, for this is a subject on which absolute, objective neutrality is impossible. I also understand that this Divide has emerged as much in missional practice as in the corridors of academia. So I also wish to declare my own missional practice upfront, as an issue of integrity.

I am a pastor in Melbourne, Australia. A rapidly growing congregation under my care consists of around 100 former Muslims, most of whom have come out of Islam in the past two years. In my practice in evangelizing and discipling people I invite them to renounce Islam, the Quran and the example of Muhammad as part of their journey to baptism. The framework for this ministry is laid out in my book *Liberty to the Captives*.[2] We are finding this to be an effective and spiritually empowering, liberating discipleship tool. We welcome and experience many miraculous interventions by the Holy Spirit, including deliverance from demonic oppression and past occult practices.

One young man testified that after confessing Christ he began to be troubled by dreams many times a night in which the Christ figure from the Jesus Film would appear and ask him to choose between him and Muhammad. This figure would ask him "Who do you think is the true messenger from God, I who have been pure and clean before I was born and living my whole life without committing any sins, or someone who lived 40 years without any connection to God, and even after he claimed to have talked to God and become a holy person, committed sins? You be the judge." Then in the dream he would see Jesus captured by soldiers, tortured, mocked and beaten. In the dream my friend would try to reach Jesus, but black shadow people were grabbing him with their arms, preventing him from going to Jesus. He would try to cry out, but he could not even hear his own voice. Then he would wake up weeping. He plucked up courage to tell me this dream. It puzzled him that

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[2] Mark Durie. (2013). *Liberty to the Captives: Freedom from Islam and Dhimmitude through the Cross.* 2nd ed. Deror Books.

although he grew up a nominal Muslim in Iran, he felt he had never personally accepted Islam. Why then would this be such an issue for him? I led him through the prayers renouncing the example of Muhammad, after which the dreams stopped completely and never returned. He found peace. Four months later he was baptized.

In addition to this evangelistic and pastoral work, I have had a long-standing human rights interest in the status of non-Muslims living under the sharia, and the theology and jurisprudence of the dhimma pact, which determines the rights and duties of Christians under Islam. I have been particularly concerned with the spiritual content and psychological impact on both Christians and Muslims of the principles of the dhimma, understood as a psycho-spiritual covenant.

My background, before becoming a pastor, was in academic linguistics, a career I pursued until around the age of 40. My linguistic training included extensive in situ fieldwork with an Islamic community in Indonesia, the Acehnese. This background has made me interested in particularities and the framing power of language, and it gave me some skills to engage with and interpret texts which are very different from one's own native modes of discourse.   A great deal of training in field linguistics is about become attending to the frame through which one looks at language, and at the world.

A digression: the same God?

Having made these disclosures, I would like to begin by naming a concern about this presentation. I am concerned about the issue of stereotyping those who disagree with us. Let me give two examples, both involving the important question of whether the God of the Bible and the Qurʾān are the 'same God'.

In Corrie Block's paper, presented at last year's Bridging the Divide meeting, he spoke of a 'dominant' and 'continuing' 'very serious vilification narrative' 'built on malicious scholarship', namely that "their god was not our God".

I am not completely sure what Block means by calling this proposition a 'narrative'. I suppose that it means a one-sided (not dialogic), teleological reductive framing of a complex set of circumstances, through which someone imposes their agenda on facts to achieve their own ends, and does this by constructing a story, which becomes embedded in the intellectual heritage of a community, and is passed on across the generations. Moreover this story is not evidence-based, but on the contrary, it is resistant to contrary evidence, and imposes its own interpretation on the facts, instead of allowing people to draw their own conclusions from them.

Block suggests that some Christians have pursued dishonorable goals and used dishonorable means to defame Islam with 'malicious' intent using this 'narrative'.

This is a very broad brush indeed with which to dismiss opposing views.

Miroslav Volf's book *Allah* also takes a critical view of those who disbelieve in continuity between Islam and Christianity by making a distinction between

gods. He has criticized some in the 'different god' camp, implying that they 'rejoice in wrongdoing':

> "Those who take the 'differences' approach are a bit like those who rejoice in wrongdoing. Those who take the 'commonalities' approach are a bit like those who rejoice in the truth."[3]

In his media statements, Volf has gone further in criticizing those who disagree with him on the 'same God' issue, calling them 'fearful people bent on domination':

> "The fact of the matter is this: fearful people bent on domination have created the contest for supremacy between Yahweh, the God of the Bible, and Allah, the God of the Quran. The two are one God, albeit differently understood."[4]

Since it has become a cliché to point out that many critics of Islam stereotype Muslims, it is concerning that two learned contributors to the difficult and complex question of continuity and discontinuity between Islam and Christianity seem ready to stereotype those who hold views contrary to their own. They seem to sweep up a myriad of different voices, stretching over centuries, into a single basket, attributing a collective evil teleology to those who take an opposing view. Perhaps I am being unfair, but as someone who has focused on the discontinuities between Islam and Christianity, I do wish to confess to a degree of wariness about writing for an audience if perhaps some in that audience will assume that even to dare to hold the kinds of views I do hold is *ipso facto* a sign of ill-will, malice, 'rejoicing in wrong-doing', or even fear. That prejudice would make constructive dialogue very difficult indeed.

My own engagement in this question of the 'same God' had a long gestation. I had not been exposed to the notion – or the narrative – that Christians and Muslims worship different gods when I undertook linguistic fieldwork in an Islamic society for my PhD. On the contrary, I took it as a working assumption that we **do** worship the same God, albeit differently understood, mainly because it just seemed polite and made everyday conversations with my Muslim friends so much easier and more fruitful. It was only over several years, as I studied the Qurʾān in the light of my knowledge of the Bible, that I came to the view that core attributes of Allah of the Qurʾān seem to be irreconcilable with the core attributes of Yahweh in the Bible.

Subsequently I have encountered others, including many who have left Islam, who share this view. One young doctor, a nominal Muslim who migrated to Australia, emailed me asking to lean more about Jesus. He led into his request by saying "I do believe in God, but I have found out so many contraindications between my God and Islam and I don't have any reasonable explanation." For him it was not that the gods of the Bible and the Qurʾān

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[3] Miroslav Volf. (2011). *Allah*. HarperOne, pp. 91-92.
[4] Miroslav Volf, 'Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God'. *The Huffington Post*, 3 March 2011.

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were different, but that the god of his conscience was different from the god he found in the Qurʾān. This man was certainly not the product of a malicious Christian 'narrative', nor was he fearfully 'bent on domination'. He just did not recognize the God of the Qurʾān as the one he had come to believe in. He also hoped to connect with the One he called 'my God' through coming to know Jesus Christ.

Here I need make a declaration of a personal investment in this issue. Volf's comments about Christians who 'rejoice in wrong-doing' were part of the conclusion of his critique of my book *Revelation*, which he held up as model of how not to approach this question. Volf and I have subsequently had some exchanges by phone and email, which I hope have improved our mutual understanding. As part of these discussions I pointed out to Volf that he had seriously misrepresented my work.

Blind spots and misrepresentation
I have been intrigued to reflect on the psychological dynamics which facilitate misrepresentations of others. The blind spots intrigue me, on all sides, wherever they are found. I know I have blind spots too, despite my best efforts to eradicate them.

It is entirely valid to speculate on the psychological motives which generate blind spots, resulting in flawed scholarship and unfair generalizations about other people's intentions: it is valid to ask the 'why' question about such things. For example, it is quite proper for Block to ask why there was misinterpretation of the Qurʾān by medieval Christians, who put forward the claim that Allah was a solid spherical idol.

I must certainly agree with Volf that fear can also be a significant determinant of negative opinions about Islam held by Christians, and a cause of blind spots. The reality of fear, and how people respond to it, is something I would like to return to later.

My main focus here is not, however, on whether we worship the same God: I have touched on this issue partly to introduce myself into a conversation, and partly to voice a degree of advance concern about how well the dialogue will go. My main focus here is to offer observations about the Qurʾān and the Bible, and the relationship between them.

There has been a preference among some contemporary scholars to emphasize the continuity between these two texts. An example is Gabriel Said Reynolds' work:

> "… from a literary standpoint the relationship between the Qurʾān and Biblical literature is significantly closer than that between the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible.
> … it emerges that the Qurʾān and the Bible, far from being incompatible or in opposition, are very much in harmony. … The Qurʾān can no longer be seen as a foreign or irrelevant book. It now

appears very much within the tradition of Biblical literature, and should be considered as such at universities and seminaries alike."[5]

Block goes further in *The Qurʾan in Christian-Muslim dialogue*, where he suggests that both scriptures are divinely inspired revelation, and therefore, it should be expected, subject to a profound continuity, which comes from the objective unity of sharing a divine author, the "One True God":

> "Now, far from becoming a syncretistic project, the true ecumenism of Islam and Christianity is being explored by representatives willing to question their subjective commentaries in light of the possibility of God's objective revelation to the religious other. …
> … perhaps a humble orthodoxy will growingly govern those who call themselves "Muslim" and "Christian", to accept the ambiguity in their respective scriptures as a divinely intended quality of revelation, out of the deepest respect for their mutually agreed-upon transcendent and omnipotent One True God."[6]

Block's position represents a particularly strong form of the continuity hypothesis, which has however moved from the domain of scholarly opinion into faith: he is advocating for a religious belief in both the Qurʾān and the Bible as God's revelation. Dodds has described this stance the view that "one ought to focus on the reality of the one and only God who authors both biblical and Qur'anic revelation", sprung from the one eternal source.[7]

The Bible and the Qurʾān: models of relatedness
The relationship of the Qurʾān to the Bible is the touchstone of all questions about the connection between Islam and Christianity. Everything around the issue of continuity and discontinuity ultimately goes back to the question of the relationship between the Qurʾān and the Bible.

In considering Islam and Christianity, or the Qurʾān and the Bible, an important question to ask is how to characterize this relationship? What model can we draw upon to compare these two religions and there two holy books?

I would lead into the discussion of this issue by considering two metaphors for the relationship between Islam and Christianity, and the Qurʾān and the Bible.

One is the metaphor of a building.

The building metaphor was introduced by Dudley Woodberry in an evocative article on missional practice, entitled 'Contextualization Among Muslims: Reusing Common Pillars.' Arguing that the pillars of faith in Islam had been

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[5] Gabriel Said Reynolds. (2010). *The Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext*. Routledge, p.258.
[6] C. Jonn Block. (2014). *The Qurʾan in Christian-Muslim dialogue: historical and modern interpretations*. Routledge, 2104, 308-309.
[7] Dodds, A. (2009). The Abrahamic faiths? Continuity and discontinuity in Christian and Islamic doctrine. *Evangelical Quarterly*, *81.3*, 233.

derived from models used in Biblical faiths, Woodberry compares heavily contextualized missionary strategy which 'resuses' these pillars to the re-use of physical pillars from churches in early mosques:

> As I stood recently in the great mosque in Qairawan in present-day Tunisia, I looked at the collection of pillars from various sources that had been organized together into one harmonious whole. The early Muslim builders had freely incorporated pillars from previous Christian churches as was also done elsewhere in the Empire.1 The columns were modified and whitewashed so that they would blend into their new home.
> These pillars illustrate what also took place in early Muslim religious observance. What have come to be known as the "pillars" of Islam are all adaptations of previous Jewish and Christian forms. If this fact were better understood, some of the current Muslim and Christian reaction to contextualization should be alleviated, for it would not seem artificial. [8]

Another image, which Woodberry introduces at the end of his article, is that of the Hagia Sophia, which is a converted church, not merely a mosque which has re-used building materials:

> "What is happening can be visualized in the Hagia Sophia, a fourth-century church that was close to its Jewish and Eastern foundations. Its pillars held up a dome on which was painted the face of Christ. Muslims made the church into a mosque, altering the direction of prayer, adding the names of Muslim heroes, and painting over some of the Christian mosaics. Over the face of Christ in the dome they painted the quranic words 'God is the Light of the heavens and earth' (sura 24:35). The same pillars continued to hold up this witness. Should the artisans painstakingly remove its paint as they have from some of the other Christian pictures, they could once again see 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (2 Cor. 4:6). And the same pillars would continue to hold it up."[9]

Woodberry's core argument was that leading Muslims to faith in Christ using heavily contextualized expressions of worship is like re-using pillars which are 'common' to Islam and Christianity, because they originally came from Biblical faith. He refers, for example, to practices such as fasting, alms-giving and daily prayers.

The image of the Hagia Sophia offered a more extreme version of the building metaphor: scraping paint off a former church which had been turned into a mosque. This is not so much a matter of 'conversion' as what might ironically be called 'reversion' of the building, which is to say, that rituals of Islam would be restored to their original use. This is a most striking image.

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[8] Dudley Woodberry. (1996). Contextualization among Muslims reusing common pillars. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, *13:4*, 171.
[9] Dudley Woodberry. (1996). Contextualization among Muslims reusing common pillars. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, *13:4*, 183.

The irony in this idea of Christian mission as a 'reversion' process is that it is so similar to the Islamic understanding of its relationship to Christianity and Judaism.[10] It is an orthodox Islamic perspective which claims that Islamic is the proto-religion from which Christianity and Judaism developed. Muhammad was sent call people, including the followers of these faiths, back to the straight path of Islam.[11] This was neatly expressed in a letter by Shamin A. Siddiqi:

> "Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were all prophets of Islam. Islam is the common heritage of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim community of America. ... Islam was the *din* (faith, way of life) of both Jews and Christians, who later lost it through human innovations. Now the Muslims want to remind their Jews and Christian brothers and sisters of their original *din*. These are the facts of history."[12]

Woodberry is not alone in favoring the continuity hypothesis. The view or emphasis that Islam is a continuation of Christianity and Judaism is widely held indeed. Christian theological tradition has always regarded faith in Jesus as Messiah as a continuous development from Jewish faith, and it is unsurprising that some Christians extend this concept to Islam. For example the catholic writer Peter Kreeft has stated that "Islam is a simplification of Christianity as Buddhism is a simplification of Hinduism", "where ... Christians add the New Testament, Moslems also add the Koran" and "the Koran authoritatively interprets the New Testament as the New interprets the Old"[13]

But let us explore the building metaphor further. Consider that a building, created for a particular purpose, can be adapted in two quite different ways to serve a new purpose. One way is through renovation, by which a building is extended while still retaining key structural features of the original – such as the Hagia Sophia. Another way is through demolition and reuse of building materials – such as the re-used pillars in Tunisia. Many a building has been

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[10] This is not the only area where Christians in contact with Islam have developed theologies which appear to be drawn in the image in Islam: another is the medieval holy war theologies, developed after centuries of struggle against the Islamic *jihad*.

[11] A mainstream interpretation of *Al-Fatihah* is that Christians who have gone astray, Jews have incurred God's wrath (Q1:7) while Muslims are the rightly-guided on the 'straight path' (Q1:6).

[12] Letter to the Editor of *Commentary*. <http://www.danielpipes.org/117/letters-to-the-editor-the-danger-within-militant-islam-in>

[13] Comparing Islam and Christianity. <http://www.christlife.org/resources/articles/KreeftIslam.html> Apparently the phrase is taken from C. S. Lewis: etter from C. S. Lewis to Sheldon Vanauken, 14 December 1950, quoted in by Kathryn Ann Lindskoog, *Sleuthing C. S. Lewis: more light in the shadowlands*, Mercer UP (2001), p. 393. <http://catholiceducation.org/articles/arts/al0176.html>.

built out of the materials salvaged from demolition of other, at times perhaps grander structures.

In the first process one would say that there has been only one building, but it has changed through renovation into something which is still identifiably a continuous development from the older building. I believe it is legitimate to regard Christianity as such a development from Judaism, but that is the subject for another paper.

In the second process there will be points of similarity at the micro level between the new and the old buildings. For example an inhabitant of the former building might recognize a brick here or a feature there, such as a pillar, put to a new use. But there will normally be no preservation of former structure, of the unifying organization which formerly held the parts of the former building together in a discernable pattern. The relationships between components will often have been destroyed in the recycling process. A pillar may still be a pillar, but the roof it holds up will look completely different.

Of course everyone agrees there are passages in the Qurʾān which have a connection to Biblical materials. That is obvious and beyond dispute, and there are very many examples. However the question is how to construe these points of similarity. For example, do the Qurʾānic references to Jesus as *al-Masīḥ* form evidence that the Qurʾān has in some sense developed out of a Biblical literary tradition? Or are they more like recycled bricks inserted into a completely new building?

Another useful metaphor is that of a language. Buildings are static physical objects. A language has dynamic features not unlike a religion: both religions and languages are social and cognitive constructs. They exist in people's minds, and also across communities. Both are transmitted from one generation to the next. Both are produced and maintained collectively across communities. Both are tools by which people make sense of their world.

Ferdinand De Saussure famously emphasized that a language has a structure. He analysed languages as formal systems of distinct elements. Words and the sounds which make them up are not the sum total of a language: there are also relationships between elements within the language, which linguists call 'structure'. De Saussure argued that this structure should have 'pride of place'[14] in the study of language:

> "The linguist must take the study of linguistic structure as his primary concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it."[15]

De Saussure contrasted this with a 'philological' approach which 'seeks primarily to establish, interpret and comment upon texts'.[16]

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[14] Saussure, F. D. (1986). *Course in General Linguistics*. Peru, Illinois: Open Court, p.10.
[15] Ibid, p.9.
[16] Ibid, p.10.

In the study of diachronic linguistics – of how languages change and evolve over time – a key concept is that of family relatedness. Two languages may share a common ancestor – as do French and Spanish, which both derived from Latin. German *Haus* and English *house* are similar and have essentially the same meaning because they share a common origin in proto-Germanic, the common ancestor of each language.

When two languages derive from a common source they do not merely share words with a common history. They also have cognate or related **structures** at every level. For example the German and Greek gender systems share structural features, which they inherited from a common ancestral language known as Proto-Indoeuropean. A family tree is a method of representing historical relationships of inheritance:

In comparative linguistics, which seeks to trace how languages are related, and the ways they have developed, structural similarities are regarded as particularly strong evidence of relatedness, and when languages are compared, the main focus of attention is the comparison of structures. When the history of a language is traced, this is not done so much by compiling vast lists of similarities, but by tracing the way in which the language system as a whole has evolved.

What is crucially important is that not all similarities between languages are due to a common inheritance. Certainly there can be inherited similarities, features which two languages share because they come from the same original language, but similarities are often due to borrowing. For example the English word *menu* was borrowed from French *menu* in the 17th century, so the fact that both languages have this word in common tells us nothing about whether English and French are related. A shared feature is evidence of contact, but not necessarily of a common origin.

How can we distinguish between borrowed features and inherited features? Features which are inherited are embedded in a cognate structural system, but features which are borrowed have been uprooted from their original context, and inserted into a new and perhaps radically different structure. One mark of something borrowed is how much has been lost along the way.

Borrowing is characteristically disruptive – even destructive – of previous linguistic structural relationships. It is a process akin to plucking a brick or tile from one building and inserting in into another. When a word is borrowed, it is uprooted from its original context. It is given a new meaning, its pronunciation is conformed to the target language, and it loses its connections with other elements in the source language.

For example the English word *juggernaut* comes from *Jagannātha* 'lord of the world', a Sanskrit name for a Hindu god. The English meaning arose from the use of large chariots in religious rituals associated with that god. The destructive process of borrowing is apparent here: the English meaning has only an oblique relationship to the original meaning, the sounds of the word has changed, the internal structure of the Sanskrit word, which was a compound formed from *jagata* 'world' and *nātha* 'lord', was obliterated when it was borrowed into English.

It is absolutely normal for a borrowing process to conform a lexical item to the structure of the receiving language. For example *RV* is borrowed into Japanese as *ārubui*, squeezing the – for the Japanese – unpronounceable English syllables into an orthodox Japanese phonological structure.

Meaning is often lost when borrowing occurs. When I was doing research in Indonesia I learned the Indonesian word *antik*, used to describe particular items which Westerners like to buy from the locals. One day a salesman offered me a brand new Sony Walkman saying it was '*antik sekali*' 'very antique'. To him, understanding nothing of why Western people value old things, *antik* just meant 'what Westerners like to buy'. Some meanings are deeply embedded in a particular cultural context, and the broader semantic structures of a language. When such words are borrowed, the meaning will almost always be completely reinterpreted along with the pronunciation of the word. It is only when two languages are very close to each other that borrowing does not have this disruptive characteristic.

This brings us to what I am suggesting is the key question when considering Biblical material found in the Qurʾān, namely is the material borrowed, or is it inherited? Does this material point to a shared evolving tradition, or to a

disruptive and even destructive process of contact between two unrelated and unlike systems.

One of the problems with a great deal of the literature about the connections between the Bible and the Qurʾān is that it is content to trace connectedness, in a way reminiscent of the philological tradition challenged by De Saussure, without asking why kind of connection is involved.

I need to make it perfectly clear that there is absolutely no sense that borrowing is 'bad' and inheriting is 'good'. The issue is not to make any moral judgement about why two systems share similarities, but just to determine why this is the case.

It is also important to note that it need not be necessary to have a specific model of how contact has occurred in order to answer the question: Is this borrowed, or was it inherited? The way an item is embedded in the structural system will often give the answer. For example, the title *Jagannātha* is clearly native to Hindu because it is a compound formed in accordance with the principles of Hindu grammar.

To answer the question of whether points of connection between the Qurʾān and the Bible are due to borrowing or inheritance is a mammoth task, because there are so many points of contact. I will just focus here on a few instances of how this question might be explored, using two studies of word meanings, and one of related narratives.

The Messiah

Let us consider an iconic example: the title of Jesus as *Messiah*. Does the presence of the title *al-Masīḥ* in the Qurʾān in reference to Jesus reflect a process of inheritance of a shared spiritual tradition, or does it manifest features of a disruptive borrowing process?

The answer, in brief, is that *al-Masīḥ* as it is used in the Qurʾān shows all the signs of being borrowed, and not inherited as part of a shared spiritual tradition.

The Hebrew verb *māshach* (מָשַׁח) means to anoint or smear, and was applied to Kings of Israel referring to the manner their 'coronation', which was by anointing with oil. The noun מָשִׁיחַ is a regular formation from a verbal passive of מָשַׁח.

When the word was borrowed into Arabic via Aramaic *meshīḥā*, this meaning and all its theological connotations were stripped away. Although the cognate Arabic root *m-s-ḥ* can mean 'anoint', al-Ṭabarī suggested Arabic etymologies such as 'purified' or 'filled with blessing' for *al-Masīḥ*. Lane reports that Al-Fairuzabadi proposed 50 different meanings for *al-Masīḥ*.[17] The form borrowed into Arabic does not fit into a regular Arabic nominalization pattern,

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[17] E. W. Lane (1863). *Arabic-English Lexicon*. London: Williams and Norgate. Entry for *masīḥ*.

which means it is unanalyzable. This is why so many competing explanations have been suggested by the commentaries. In any case, it is irrelevant for the Qurʾān and for Islamic theology what *al-Masīḥ* means. There is nothing, for example, in the Qurʾān to suggest that *al-Masīḥ* is a title of kingship. There is also no link made in the Qurʾān between David as an anointed one of God – the Lord's Messiah – and Jesus Christ. There is also no awareness of the metaphorical interpretation of 'Son of God' as a title for the Messiah. The Qurʾān has a Christ without Christology.

On the other hand, in the Bible the concept of the Messiah is embedded in a rich theological and liturgical structure, which includes the history of the Davidic kingdom, Messianic psalms, and eschatological themes in the prophets. All this is stripped way when the bare title is borrowed into the Qurʾān. *Al-Masīḥ* of the Qurʾān is to *Mashiaḥ* of the Old Testament and New Testaments what 'juggernaut' is to *Jagannātha*. *Al-Masīḥ* sits in the Qurʾān like a piece of flotsam, washed up on Islam's beach, isolated and far from its original context, and thus uninterpretable.

The cooption of the Messianic title for Jesus into the Qurʾān and into Islam, was a destructive process, in that the theological content and context of the title was erased along the way, and all we have let in the Qurʾān is a sequences of sounds, uprooted from the whole religious and cultural system in which the title derived its meaning. This is not Christology painted over, as Woodbery described the pillars of Islamic observance, but a mutilated linguistic sign extracted from its context and repositioned to perform a new and quite different role. *Al-Masīḥ* was not incorporated into the Qurʾān via a process of religious evolution in which one religious tradition was transformed into another by people who had been formed in the earlier religion. The discontinuous way in which *al-Masīḥ* was taken up into the Qurʾān is evidence that the Qurʾān and the Bible do not form part of a continuous or cognate spiritual tradition.

It is necessary to understand that borrowing – as defined here, namely the intrusion of a linguistic sign or sequence of signs from one system into another – can happen on a vast scale. The sheer volume of similarities is not evidence for or against borrowing. Some languages, known as creoles, have been constructed almost completely out of borrowed items. A case in point is Haitian Creole, which has a lexicon mainly taken from French. Nevertheless this does not make the creole a Romance language, a language family which includes French.

A widely accepted hypothesis is that creoles emerge when people speaking different languages (the *substratum* languages) are thrown together, as for example on slave plantations, under the influence of a dominant group, which in the case of Haiti was French speaking. Over time the slave community may develop a completely new language which takes most of its vocabulary from the language of the dominant group (the *superstratum* language). However the linguistic structures of the creole are closer to the original languages of the slaves, the substratum languages. Thus the linguistic system of Haitian Creole in many respects reflects that of West African languages in the Fon Family – for example in the extensive use of serial verbs – while its lexicon is largely

derived from French.[18] Some researchers have used the term relexification to refer to a process in which speakers replace a great deal of the lexicon of the substratum languages, borrowing from the superstratum language, without significant changes to the underlying grammatical system.

The analogy of 'relexification' in the history of religions would be maintenance of a theological framework (analogous to the grammar of a language) which is repopulated with fragments of signs taken from another religion. For example Haitian Voodoo has coopted Christian saints as names of the lesser spirits under the supreme God Bondye (from Bon Dieu 'Good Lord' in French). Rituals include the recitation of European saints' names, the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary's. There is also use of altars and votive candles reminiscent of catholic worship. The structure of Voodoo remains recognizably West African, but the spirits' names and to a certain extent the rituals of Voodoo have been 'relexified', repopulated with Christian forms.

I strongly prefer not to use the term 'syncretism' to refer to this phenomenon, because it is far too blunt an instrument. Syncretism implies merger or blending of two different religions or aspects of culture. Relexification in creolization is much more precise: it involves the combination of a structure from one source with (fragments of) signs adapted from another. This is not convergence, but an asymmetrical adapation of the lexicon of one language to the grammatical structures of others.

In light of this discussion, a key question which needs to be asked about the Qurʾān is whether its many Bibical references are genuinely indicative of affinity and a 'family relationship' between Islam and Christianity – of inheritance reflecting a common spiritual tradition – or whether Islam is the product of a religious 'relexification' which has adapted Biblical (and apocryphal) materials into a theological structure and worldview which is radically different from could bear little family resemblance to Biblical faith. Was Islam the product of some kind of religious creolization process?

It is essential in answering this question to consider the contribution of theology, which forms a core part of the analogue of the 'structure' or 'system' of a religion. The Qurʾān is not just a series of texts collected together. It is not just a string of words. It projects and embodies a coherent theological worldview. What this means is that in comparing the Bible with the Qurʾān it is necessary, not only to compare words, or text fragment with text fragment, but theological systems as well. To consider the question of whether these two texts form part of a coherent tradition, one must engage in structural theological analysis, and not just philological investigations of the origins of words and text framents.

It is on this very point that some scholarship falls short, when it emphasizes continuity between the Qurʾān and the Bible on the basis of philological similarities. For example, it is not enough just to consider how Biblical or extra-Biblical Christian and Jewish materials have left their mark on the

[18] Lefebvre, C. (1998). *Creole Genesis and the Acquisition of Grammar: the case of Haitian Creole*. Cambridge: CUP.

Qurʾān. We need to focus on the Qurʾānic theology in which these elements function as the primary point of comparison. The key question is: does this theology show the marks of having been derived, as a whole system, from a Biblical theology? And is the function of these elements function within the Quranic theological system consistent with a process of structural evolution from a Biblical origin, or have the elements been inserted into a different theological system.

Let us make this concrete with some examples.

Consider the rejection of the sonship of Christ in the Qurʾān, which Jonn Block has discussed in some depth. It is not enough to attempt to understand this theme in the Qurʾān distinct from the broader context of the Qurʾān's theological treatment of *shirk* 'association', of which the 'Son of God' terminology is but one example.

As another example, consider Gabriel Said Reynolds' discussion of *rīsh* 'feathers' in Q7:26 (p.65g). He link this to a Talmudic tradition that blood could not have been shed in Eden, so – it is suggested – God used feathers rather than skins of slaughtered animals to clothe Adam and Eve. This may or may not be the reason this word appears in the Qurʾān, but it hardly demonstrates relatedness, any more than the presence of the word *ārubui* in Japanese demonstrates a family relationship between English and Japanese. Etymological connections in themselves are extremely weak evidence for a shared history. This is because such similarities can be established through contact by borrowing – as in the case of *ārubui* – just as readily as through inheritance.

Let me – and it must be stressed, this is in broad outline only – discuss a few features of the Qurʾān's treatment of Biblical materials, namely references to 'the spirit' and the Adam and Eve narrative. The space I have available is limited, so the treatment here is not extensive.

Pneumatology
In the Hebrew scriptures, *ruaḥ* commonly refers to wind and breath, and by extension to the creative breath of life (Genesis, 1:30, 2:7). It also refers to the animating presence of God (Psalm 51:11). Of particularly significance for the theology of God are the references to the Spirit as divine presence (see e.g. Psalm 139:7, Isaiah 63:11, Ezek 29:39, Joel 2:28), which can be associated with places, communities and individuals. When individuals in the Bible experience the presence of God referred to as the Spirit, they prophesy (Numbers 11:25, 24:2, 1 Samuel 10:10, Isaiah 48:16), and exercise God-ordained leadership (Numbers 11:17, Judges 3:10) including kingship (1 Samuel 16:13). Less frequently they manifest heightened creativity (Exodus 35:31). In the New Testament these themes are continued and developed further, including the extension of the temple metaphor to apply to the believer as the 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Corinthians 6:19), and the linking of activity Holy Spirit with the induction of Jesus as Messiah or 'anointed one', as demonstrated in the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, 'like a dove' at his baptism, combined with the 'enthronement' references to Jesus as the Son of God (Matthew 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23), which aligns with

Messianic references in the Psalms, especially Psalm 2: 7 'He said to me "You are my son; today I have become your father"' (see also Psalm 72:1; 89:26-27).

In the Qurʾān, the expression *al-rūḥ* often refers to a specific angel, sometimes called *al-rūḥu l-qudusi* 'the holy spirit', who brings revelation to support humanity, especially prophets (Q 2:87 & 97; Q5:109-110; Q16:2; Q16:102; Q17: 82, 85; Q26:190ff; Q40:15; Q58: 20-22).[19]

There are also references to 'angels and the spirit', marking out 'the spirit' as a distinct one among the host of angels (16:2; 70:4-6; 78:38; 97:4). *Al-rūḥ* is usually identified as the angel Jibrīl (or Jibrāʾīl), for example this is the common understanding of the report that 'the angels and the spirit' 'come down' on the night of power (97: 1-4):

> 97: 1-4 We have indeed revealed this in the Night of Power: And what will explain to thee what the night of power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels **and the spirit** by Allah's permission, on every errand...

'The (holy) spirit' is also linked to Jibrīl through other passages, for example the following nearby verses from Sura 2 which speak of Jesus being strengthened by the holy spirit, and Jibril bringing revelation from Allah. In the next passage, from Sura 16, the two actions of strengthening and bringing revelation are linked: the holy spirit brings revelation in order to strengthen believers. So it is reasonable to conclude that the 'holy spirit' of 2:87 and 16:102 is referring to the angel Jibrīl.

> 2:87 ...We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with **the holy spirit** (*rūḥi l-qudusi*) ...
> 2:97 Say: Whoever is an enemy to **Jibril – for he brings down the (revelation)** to thy heart by Allah's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe ...
>
> 16:102 Say, **the holy spirit (*rūḥu l-qudusi*) has brought the revelation** from thy Lord in Truth, in order **to strengthen** those who believe, and as a Guide and Glad Tidings to Muslims.

We have seen that 'the (holy) spirit' refers to an angel, and sometimes specifically to the angel Jibrīl. There is also another distinct theological use of *rūḥ* to refer to the creative breath of God imparted to people to give them life. In contrast to 'the spirit', which refers to a distinct being, descriptions of this divine creative act use the phrase 'my/our breath (*rūḥ*)', i.e. God's breath:

> 15:29 When I have fashioned him [Adam] and blown into him of **my breath**, then fall down and prostrate yourselves to him"

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[19] On 'the spirit' in Islam, see also Kritzeck, J. (1975). Holy spirit in Islam. In *Perspectives on Charismatic Renewal* (pp. 101-111). Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press; Shih-Ching, J. T. (2006). *The Holy Spirit in the Qurʾan: an assessment from a Christian perspective.* MTh. University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch;

The English translation 'breath' seems more appropriate here than 'spirit', especially in conjunction with the physical action verb *nafakha* (نَفَخَ) 'blow'. This is consistent with other mentions in the Qurʾān of the creative breath of God (see also 32:79; 38:71-3).

Although 'the spirit' seems to refer consistently to an angel, and 'my/our breath' refers consistently to the creative breath of God, there is one passage where the two uses overlap, in 19:17, where Jibrīl is referred to as 'our spirit':

> 19:17-19 And mention in the Book Maryam, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the east. ... We sent **our spirit** to her, and he took for her the likeness of a well-proportioned man. ... He said "I am only a messenger from your Lord, that I may bestow a pure son on you."

Of particular interest in the context of the birth story of Jesus are references to his conception by means of God blowing his breath into Mary (21:91) or into her vulva (66:12):

> 21:19 And she who guarded her vulva: we blew of our breath into **her** and we made her and her son a sign for the worlds.

> 66:12 And Maryam, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her vulva: we blew of our breath into **it**.

For some translators of the Qur'an, the potential ambiguity of 'our spirit/breath' is resolved by saying that it was through 'our spirit' Jibril that God blew into Maryam's womb:

> 66:12 "We breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment) through our Ruh (i.e. Jibrael)..." (Muhammad Muhsin Khan translation)
> 66: 12 "Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into (her garment) through our angel." (*Sahih International* translation)

Finally, Jesus is referred to as a *rūḥ* from God (4:171), which appears to be a synonym for calling him a 'word' from God:

> 4:171 The Masih, Isa, son of Maryam, was a messenger of Allah, and his word which he conveyed to Maryam, and a breath from him.

The focus appears here to be upon Jesus as a created human being, brought into being by the breath of God.

There is some overlap between the Qurʾān and the Bible in their theological uses of *ruaḥ* and *ruḥ*. Both use the term for 'breath/wind' to refer to God's creative breath of life (cf. Genesis 2:7). However what is lacking in the Qurʾān is a theology of the presence of God by his Spirit.

There are certainly textual associations between the Bible and Qurʾān, in that both refer to Jesus being conceived by the 'Spirit'. In Luke's gospel this is the Holy Spirit, the power-imparting presence of God:

> Luke 1:35 The angel answered "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."

In contrast, in the language of the Qurʾān the 'breath' that gives life to Jesus is a physical intrusion into Maryam's body – via her vulva – apparently as a mechanism of conception.

Gabriel Reynolds over-translates verse Q21:91 in his discussion of Christology in the Qurʾān, painting an impression of similarity between the Qurʾān and the Bible which goes well beyond what the text can sustain. He writes: "The Qurʾān has Christ, like Adam, **created directly from the Spirit of God**." (p.53). It is reading too much into the text here to speak of the 'Spirit of God' because there is no theology of the divine presence or Holy Spirit in the Qurʾān to sustain such a designation.

It is indeed striking that so many of the Qurʾān's references to the 'spirit/breath' have Biblical 'sub-texts', as Reynolds would put it. That is, they show philological evidence having an origin in Biblical textual materials, by a process of transmission about which we can only speculate. The most striking example is the narrative material referring to the conception of Jesus. The Biblical account of the angel Gabriel visiting Mary and telling her that she will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit speaks of the coming of the presence of God 'overshadowing' (ἐπισκιάζω) her. This expression invokes terminology from the Old Testament. Thus in Exodus 40:35 the same word ἐπισκιάζω is used in the Septuagint to translate the idea of God 'dwelling' over the tabernacle:

> Exodus 40:35 Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled (LXX: ἐπισκιάζω 'overshadow'; Hebrew שָׁכַן 'dwell, settle') on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

The Qurʾān references such narrative materials, which speak both of the angel and the Spirit, and fits them into its own theological grid, which allows no space for references to the dwelling or indwelling of God. The 'Spirit' by whom Mary conceives thus becomes either a physical breath blown into her body, or the angel doing the blowing.

Despite the many textual parallels between the Qurʾān and the Bible, this comparision of 'pneumatology' illustrates that narrative materials which ultimately derive from the Bible have been fitted into a quite distinct theological structure.

It is striking that Ibn Naqib emphatically rejects – and I believe rightly so, on the basis of Quranic theology – any suggestion that the God of the Qurʾān can be present in his creation. Thus where the Qurʾān speaks of God being 'nearer' than one's jugular vein, Ibn Naqib interprets this as his being 'witness to everything', and not an actual presence:

He is not delimited by magnitude, contained by place, encompassed by directions, or bounded by heavens or earth. … **He does not indwell in anything, nor anything indwell in Him.** He is as exalted above containment in space as He is above confinement in time. …

He is above the Throne, the heavens, and all else to the farthest reaches of the stars, with an aboveness that does not increase His nearness to the Throne or heavens, or His distance from the earth and what lies beneath it. He is as exalted in degree above the Throne and the heavens as He is above the earth and its depths, though He is near to everything in existence, **nearer to a servant than his own jugular vein, and is witness to everything**. His nearness no more resembles the nearness of objects to one another than His entity resembles the entities of objects.[20]

The presence of God is absolutely central in Biblical theology. It is a core and foundational part of a Biblical understanding of God. In the Qurʾān this understanding is absent. Consequently when texts from the Bible that speak of God's powerful presence have related passages in the Qurʾān, the references to the presence of God have been radically reinterpreted so as to make them almost unrecognizable. Instead of God's holy presence overshadowing Mary to cause her to conceive, the Qurʾān has the angel Gabriel (Jibril) breathing into her vulva. The discontinuity is not superficial, but profound. As similar as the texts may seem on the surface, the apparent similarity conceals a much deeper divergence and disruption of meaning, because the narrative material which ultimately derives from Biblical texts has been deployed to serve a very different theology.

The Fall
For a further example I would offer is the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace. Again, I can only due this in outline.

In the Bible the narrative of Adam and Eve and their fall is not just an isolated event, but a story which is signifies and embodies a theology. Theological themes which are engaged in the Genesis account include:

- Why humans experience suffering: the curses of the fall (cf Gen 3:14-19, and also 5:29 and 8:21).
- The loss of innocence and 'knowledge' of good and evil (2:17, 3:5).
- Becoming like God and humans being made 'in the image of God' (1:27; 5:1; 3:5 'you will be like God'; also 3:21 'the man has now become like one of us'; and 9:6).
- The nature and inevitability of sin: cf. the story of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:7-8) 'sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you but you must master it', and Gen 6:5 'every inclination of the thoughts of his

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[20] Keller (trans (1994). Rev. ed. *The Reliance of the Traveller* (*'Umdata al-Salik*) by Ahmad ibn Naqib Al-Misri, paragraph v1.3, pp.817–818. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications.

heart was only evil all the time'. This leads into themes of judgement (Noah's flood), rescue, covenant and blessing, and ultimately the doctrine of sin becomes a foundation for the doctrine of salvation.

In the Qurʾān the story of the fall clearly shows vestigial connections to the Genesis account. The curses of the fall are retained in vestigial form; the loss of innocence theme is garbled (in the story of the clothes) and the focus on sin is vestigial. However any reference to becoming like God is completely deleted.

I would like to dwell on this last point: the treatment of sin in the story of the fall.

Passages referring to the fall are scattered throughout the Qurʾān: Q2:27-44; Q**7:3-37**; Q15;26-43; Q17:59-65; Q18:49-52; Q20:113-126; Q38:71-85; (cf also Q36:59-64 on Satan and the 'children of Adam'). We can identify the major theological themes of these passages by attending to the associated warnings, and to homiletic framing as displayed in the questions which each passage purports to answer.
An example of such framing material is Sura 2: 38 when God speaks to Adam and Eve as they are expelled from the garden:

> We said: "Get ye down all from here; and if, as is sure, there comes to you Guidance from me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." (Q2:38)

This mini-sermon from God to Adam highlights what the Qurʾān considers to be one of the main points of the story of the fall, that it is about the need to follow God's guidance. A similar framing message is found in Q7:3, introducing another of the fall narratives, which urges people to follow God's revelation, and warns them about the dangers of following the guidance of demons (Q7:30).

By applying these techniques, we can identify the two main themes of these narrative materials as:

i) the fall of Satan and his destiny as the false guide for humanity, and
ii) false guidance; there is a warning to humanity not to take guidance from others except God (*shirk*), which will cause people to 'stray' from the right 'path'.

There are also various minor themes, such as:

- The rights of the creator (Q2:29; Q7:10)
- Ignoring God's signs (Q2:39, 41; Q7:36; Q17:59)
- Adam is favored after the fall (Q2:37; Q20:122)
- The somewhat garbled treatment of nakedness (in Q7:22 Adam and Even suddenly realize they are naked, and in Q2:27, just a few verses later, it is suggested that Satan stole their clothes)

Satan's fall is a salient theme which tends to structure the stories of the fall. It is referenced in Q2:34-35; Q7:11-18; Q15:31-40; Q17:61-64; Q18:50; Q20:116; and Q38:74-82. In outline the story is:

- God creates man.
- He tells angels to bow to him.
- Satan refuses, saying he is better.
- God rejects Satan and curses him.
- Satan asks for 'respite' and is granted a stay in final judgement.
- In the mean time, Satan is commissioned with authority to lead humanity away from the straight path.

The theme of false guidance, a manifestation of *shirk*, keeps cropping up in the stories of the fall, being referred to in Q2:38, Q7:3, 21, 30, 33; Q15:39-40; Q17:64; Q18:50-52; Q20:123; Q36:62. For example:

- [Satan] swore to them that he was their sincere advisor. So by deceit he brought about their fall. (Q7:21-22)
- Do ye say of God what ye know not? … Some he hath guided: Others have (by their choice) deserved the loss of their way; in that they took the evil ones, in preference to God, for their friends and protectors, and think that they receive guidance. (Q7:28, 30)
- He said "Get ye down … from the Garden … whosoever follows my guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall in misery."(Q20:123. cf. Q2:38)
- They bowed down except Iblis. … Will ye then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me? … (Q18:50-52)

There are multiple points of connection between the stories of the fall in the Qurʾān and the narrative in the Bible. However the two theological contexts are completely different. In the Bible the focus is very much on the fall of Adam and Eve, and the problem of human sin, an issue which is elaborated in the following chapters of Genesis. In the Bible, the fall is not a warning text: it just explains the way things are. However in the Qurʾān, the focus is on the fall of Satan, not humanity. The human problem is ignorance – which fully conforms to the general structure of Quranic theology – and these stories function as warnings against following false guides (the Quranic sin of *shirk* 'association').

It is striking that the differing theological preoccupations of the Qurʾān and the Bible are reflected in religious liturgies on the two traditions. For example the Lord's Prayer focuses on forgiveness for sin and a prayer for deliverance "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Let us not be led into temptation, but deliver us from evil." In contrast *Al-Fatihah*, which is a building block of Muslims' daily prayers, is a cry for assistance to stay on the path of the rightly guided: 'Keep us on the straight path, not the path of those who earn your anger, or the path of those who have gone astray.' (Sura 1).

Despite the many interesting points of comparison of the stories of the fall in the Qurʾān with the Genesis account – all of which suggests the Qurʾān has, by unknown and undoubtedly circuitous pathways, been influenced by the Bible,

these narrative elements are fitted into a very different theological superstructure, one in which the fundamental human problem is not sin but lack of guidance. There is clearly evidence of contact between the two religious traditions. Said Reynolds interprets this extensive evidence as proof of some kind of unity or 'harmony', even to the extent that, because the Qur'an incorporates so many fragments of Biblical narrative elements, that he identifies the Bible as the Qurʾān's 'subtext'. Consequently, he says, we need the Bible to explain the Qur'an. This misreads evidence of historical contact as evidence of continuity.

Note also that there is a misappropriation of the term 'subtext' in Said Reynolds' core thesis. This term normally refers in literature to a synchronic feature of a literary text, as part of its current meaning. Said Reynolds by way of contrast redefines the term to refer to the existence of a discernable historical relationship. In fact identifying this 'sub-text' does not so much give the meaning of the Qurʾān as it sheds light how it came to be what it is. To call this a 'sub-text' confuses meaning with textual paleontology. It confuses physiology with forensics. Knowing that *juggernaut* was borrowing from the name of a Hindu God is an interesting fact about the origin of the word, but in reality it tells us next to nothing about what the word actually means in present day English, nor does it prove any connectedness between Sanskrit and English beyond mere evidence of contact.

Conclusion

I am working on a ThD dissertaion which fleshes out in greater detail the arguments presented here in outline form. There is much more evidence that I could have adduced to support the thesis that the Qurʾān and the Bible are not texts from a shared religious tradition, but rather they show the characteristic signs of influence through contact. The sheer volume of associated material may be great, but everywhere there are signs of the disruptive effects of borrowing.

My conclusion is that Islam represents the result of a process analogous to creolization, where the religious lexicon of Biblical faiths (and materials from other faiths as well, but that is another story) are co-opted to flesh out the emergent theology of Islam, the faith of the Qurʾān. This theology did not emerge in the first instance in the hearts of people who were formed in Christian or Jewish faith. Muhammad was not formed in either Biblical tradition.

This contrasts, for example, with the reported relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism, as most of the Buddha's disciples were practicing Brahmins, and Buddhism was consequently built upon the foundation of a Hindu worldview.[21]

The situation with Islam is very different. It is certainly true that during the first centuries vast numbers of converts from Christianity and Judaism entered Islam, and many became influential scholars. But the foundation of

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[21] Schober, J. (2007). Disciples of the Buddha. In D. K. a. C. S. Prebish (Ed.), *Encyclopedfia of Buddhism* (pp. 299-302). Oxford: Routledge.

the faith, as embodied in the Qurʾān, displays all the signs of being a new construct, drawing its lexicon from Judaism and Christianity to be sure, but not emerging in a continuous fashion from either of its predecessors. From this perspective, the early Christian critics of Islam who referred to it as a Christian heresy – such as John of Damascus[22] – were mistaken. They were judging by surface similarities, but were not aware of the deeper theological divergence.[23] Islam was something quite different again from either Judaism or Christianity.

A postscript about fear and its three manifestations

Finally I wish to make a few remarks about fear. We are all familiar with the two responses to fear of 'fright' and 'flight'. Yet anyone who has a dog will know that there is a third response, which has been described as 'tend and befriend'.[24]

I am minded of a hadith cited by Ibn Kathir in his commentary on Sura 9:33, which spoke of Islam's inevitable spread 'as far as the night and day reach', and the resulting elevation of Muslims over non-Muslims. Ibn Kathir quoted a former Christian who had embraced Islam, who said about this hadith:

> Tamīm Ad-Dārī [who was a Christian before Islām] used to say, "I have come to know the meaning of this *Ḥadīth* in my own people. Those who became Muslims among them acquired goodness, honor and might. Disgrace, humiliation and Jizyah befell those who remained disbelievers."[25]

Tamīm Ad-Dārī was one who chose the 'tend and befriend' option in responding to the challenge of Islam. He was rewarded with a grant of land, while his family stayed Christians and paid the *jizya* head tax.[26]

The   Christian imperative is to combine both love and truth, fearlessly. We should be on guard against the 'fight' response, which manifests in irrational aggression and even hatred, but we should equally be aware of and on guard against the 'tend and befriend' response to the challenge of Islam. Both the fight response and the tend and befriend response are reactions to fear. It is incumbent upon us is to distinguish respect for the truth from the arrogant and destructive self-validation of aggressive hatred. It is equally incumbent upon us to distinguish true self-giving love of the neighbor from 'tend and befriend' counterfeits.

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[22] Sahas, D. J. (1972). *John of Damascus on Islam: the "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

[23] This opinion would be like that of someone who takes Haitian Creole to be a dialect of French.

[24] Taylor, Shelley E. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight. *Psychological Review* 107 (3): 411–29.

[25] Ibn Kathir, (2003).*Tafsir Ibn Kathir (abridged)*. Riyadh: Darussalam.

[26] Lecker, M. (2014). Tamīm al-Dārī. In B. P. L. Laura Cousino Klein, Tara L. Gruenewald, Regan A. R. Gurung, John A. Updegraff (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Brill Online. < http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/tamim-al-dari-SIM_7381?s.num=232&s.start=220>

Here then could be a tool for identifying blind spots. Could it not be that the aggressive critic of Islam and Muslims is oblivious of their own blind spots because they insist that they are fearlessly proclaiming the truth? Could this not be the 'fight' response to fear? And could it not be that the one who adopts a stance of respect and admiration for Islam is oblivious to their own blind spots when they think that they are fearlessly loving their Muslim neighbor. Could this not be the 'tend and befriend' response to fear?

And then there are those who find the whole Islam challenge too hard: the flight response. May the Lord protect us from this as well. The best response seems to be to stand firm.