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THE EXALTATION OF JESUS IN THE QUR'ÂN

Oleh: Yusny Saby *

Abstrak

Nabi 'Îsâ termasuk manusia yang paling kontroversi. Orang Yahudi menuduhnya sebagai pembohong, dan menghukumnya dengan salib. Orang Kristen mendaulatnya sebagai Tuhan atau Anak Tuhan, orang yang percaya padanya akan memperoleh keselamatan dunia akhirat, sebaliknya akan masuk neraka. Orang Islam mengakuinya sebagai manusia utama, yang diberi jabatan Nabi/Rasul oleh Allâh. Ia salah seorang dari nabi utama (ûlul 'azmi) dari deretan nabi Âdam, Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, yang berakhir pada nabi Muḥammad. Yahudi mengakui penyaliban telah mengakhiri hidup 'Îsâ. Orang Kristen mengakui 'Îsâ telah disalib (yang disaksikan banyak orang) dan wafat di tiang penyaliban di bukit Golgota. Namun karena istimewanya (sebagai anak Tuhan) ia hidup kembali. Setelah selama 40 hari dalam "persembunyian" ia "diangkat ke langit" oleh Tuhan dan ditaruh di pangkuanNya di sebelah kanan. Orang Islam, dengan memahami ayat-ayat al-Qur'ân, berpegang bahwa 'Îsâ memang benar ada keistimewaan dari nabi-nabi lain. Bahkan ada yang mengakuinya belum pernah mati sampai sekarang. Tapi yang tersalib itu siapa, 'Îsâ, atau bukan? Lebih dari itu, pemahaman yang "benar" mengenai 'Îsâ diharapkan akan dapat menjadi jembatan damai antara penganut tiga agama besar dunia – Yahudi, Kristen dan Islam.

Kata Kunci: Jesus in The Qur'ân, 'Îsâ.

Introduction

There are three names for Jesus in the Qur'ân - 'Îsâ, 'Îsâ ibn Maryam, and al-Masîḥ. All these names are sometimes mentioned together, definitely with full respect.¹ Unlike Judaism, which rejects Jesus as the prophet of God, calls him impostor or false Messiah, and crucifies him, Islam definitely affirms that Jesus ('Îsâ) is a prophet and a messenger of God. This claim is very basic to Islam as it is

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¹*The Qur'ân* 3:45.

made or found in the Qur'ân, the Holy Book of Islam. It constitutes the basic article of faith: belief in the commission of the prophets and messengers of God, some of whom, including Jesus are mentioned in the Qur'ân. According to Islam, had it not been for the role of messengers, human being could not have known how "The Word of God" should be understood.

Unlike Christianity, which claims Jesus to be the son of God, part of the Godhead, fully human and fully God - whatever these terms may mean, Islam maintains that Jesus is fully human, a servant of God, a prophet, and a messenger. Muslims revere him as they do other Prophets of God - Abraham (Ibrâhîm), Isaq (Ishâq), Ishmael (Ismâ'îl), Moses (Mûsâ) - and put him as one in the line of prophets starting from Âdam through Muḥammad, the latter of whom is believed to be the "seal" of the Prophethood.

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, which ignore the coming of Muḥammad, the prophet and the founder of Islam, Islam seems - to some extent - to have "put more weight" on the prophet of Israel, Jesus, than on its own prophet, Muḥammad. This statement is based on the understanding of some verses in the Qur'ân that were revealed to Prophet Muḥammad.

This paper primarily deals with the fact that according to the Qur'ân, Jesus, from his very conception, has had a specific qualification that other prophets - have not had. This qualification continues to stand to his "death," which according to the Qur'ân is different from what is commonly understood in Judaism and - especially - in Christianity. In a word we may say that the Qur'ân has exalted Jesus above other prophets, and this "exaltation" will be shown in the proceeding paragraphs. My discussion will be limited to what the Qur'ân - as the authentic source of Islam - says about Jesus as understood by some exegetes.

The Mother of Jesus

There is one sûrah (chapter) in the Qur'ân specifically named after the mother of Jesus, Maryam (Mary), which is chapter 19. Although not all of the chapter is related to Mary, the naming itself has special reverence. No other woman's name was given as title to any of the other 113 chapters, not even the name of Amînah, the mother of Prophet Muḥammad. This obviously means that Mary, the mother of Jesus, has "special" status in the Qur'ân compared to other mothers.

It so happens that Mary, according to the Qur'ân, is so special that the Holy Book mentions her very conception. "(Remember when the wife of 'Imrân said: My Lord, I have vowed unto thee that which is in my belly as a consecrated (offering). Accept from me. Lo! Thou, only Thou are the hearer, the knower)."²

²The Qur'ân 3:35 (All translations of the Qur'ânic verses in this article are quoted from Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of The Glorious Koran*, (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: New American Library, nd.), unless otherwise mentioned.

What the Qur'ân means by the wife of 'Imrân is Mary's mother, and what is in her belly is Mary, whose mother wanted her baby to be a male baby - who could serve the temple of God in the future. Male persons were believed to have a better opportunity to serve the temple by being a priest or rabbi, although since a baby was female, she thanked God and named the baby Mary and asked protection from Him.

According to the Qur'ân, when Mary reached the age of discretion, she withdrew herself to seclusion in order to serve God - as it was anticipated by her mother - in the Temple where Zachariah, her protector and priest of the Temple, devoted his life. In an extraordinary way, in that seclusion, Mary received special provisions from God, as she reported it to Zachariah: "And her Lord accepted her with full acceptance and vouchsafed to her a goodly growth, and made Zachariah her guardian. Whenever Zachariah went into the sanctuary where she was, he found that she had food. He said: O Mary! Whence cometh unto thee this (food)? She answered: It is from Allâh. Allâh giveth without stint to whom He will."³ From these two verses we can infer that Mary is not just an ordinary woman. It was she upon whom - the mercy of God had been bestowed - from a young age.

That is why it does not seem strange to Muslims that if she were ever to carry a baby in her womb, that baby would also be blessed. "And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allâh has chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above (all) the women of creation." Mary is exalted by the Qur'ân to the rank at which no other woman is equal to her. Because of this exalted function, however, God commended Mary to pray and devote her life (to purity). "O Mary! Be obedient to thy Lord, prostrate thyself and bow with those who bow (in worship)."⁴

In fact, the lineage of Mary also has special reverence in the Qur'ân, "The family of 'Imrân is considered as the ancestor of Mary. 'Imrân is the father of Moses, and occurs as a generic name for all the Hebrew prophets from Moses to John the Baptist and Jesus Christ."⁵ Yet, Âli 'Imrân (The Family of 'Imrân) is also taken as the name of sûrah 3, one of the longest chapters in the Qur'ân. "Lo Allâh preferred Âdam and Noah and the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrân above (all His) creatures."⁶ Hence, we can conclude that Mary, her mother, and ancestors are highly respected in the Qur'ân.

The Birth of Jesus

Since the Qur'ân has given special respect to Mary and to the whole of her ancestors, it is natural that the Qur'ân has also given a special reverence to the baby she bore. For, the mother who bore that baby had been "prepared" through a process

³The Qur'ân 3:37.

⁴The Qur'ân 3:43.

⁵Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of The Glorious Koran*, p. 61.

⁶The Qur'ân 3:33.

of "purification" under the guidance of God. The story goes on like this: "When Mary became a woman, the Holy Spirit, appeared to her bringing her the news of a son. The Qur'ân says, "(And remember) when the angels said; O Mary! Lo! Allâh giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allâh). He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and in his manhood, and he is of the righteous."⁷

The strange thing to Mary was how could she possibly conceive and bear a baby when she was still virgin, and never "touched" by any man before. For her, this was an unsolvable question. That is why when she received that special news, she addressed a petition: "She said; My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said; So (it will be); Allâh creath what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He said unto it only; Be! And it is."⁸

As a faithful human being, knowing this guarantee had come from God, she accepted what was to happen. She acknowledged her own fate and surrendered to the Will of God, especially, when she knew God's assurance of her would-be child: "And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel. And will make him a messenger unto the children of Israel ..."⁹

Mary, therefore, conceived the child miraculously and retired to a distant secluded place where she awaited for her delivery. Here also the Qur'ân mentions of the mercy of God upon the pregnant Mary: "And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place."¹⁰ "And the pangs of the childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm tree. She said; Oh, would that I had died ere this and had become a thing of naught, forgotten!"¹¹ Upon her lamentation a response came as the Qur'ân says: "Then (one) cried unto her from below her, saying; Grieve not! Thy Lord hath placed a rivelet beneath thee."¹² In this very place, Mary as before, was supplied with a miracle provision by God until she gave birth to the baby. "And shake the trunk of the palm-tree toward thee, thou will cause ripe dates to fall upon thee. So eat and drink and be consoled. And if thou meetest any mortal, say; Lo! I have vowed a fast unto the Beneficent, and may not speak this day to any mortal."¹³ All these verses denote the point that the Qur'ân deliberately shows special honor to Mary and the fetus she was carried in the miracles that gave her the assurance and ease in giving birth.

⁷The Qur'ân 3:45-46.

⁸The Qur'ân 3:47.

⁹The Qur'ân 3:48-49.

¹⁰The Qur'ân 19:22.

¹¹The Qur'ân 19:25.

¹²The Qur'ân 19:24.

¹³The Qur'ân 19:25-26.

After this extraordinary delivery, for which, unlike the Bible,¹⁴ the Qur'ân does not mention any specific location, Mary took the baby home with her. Evidently, the people accused Mary of giving birth out of wedlock. In their accusations, they pointed out that her parents were not promiscuous; why should Mary have been so. The accusation was so strong that Mary could not answer it. In fact, she was very sincere and far from what they accused her to be. It so happened that Mary pointed to the baby as if she were trying to get the answer from him to the accusers. The Qur'ân relates: "Then she pointed to him. They said; How can we talk to one who is in the cradle, a young boy."¹⁵ Of course in the beginning they did not understand Mary's gesture to baby Jesus. Immediately the first Quranic miracle of Jesus occurred, and it was beyond what anyone expected. "He spake; Lo! I am the slave of Allâh. He hath given me the Scripture and has pointed me a Prophet. And hath made me blessed where-so-ever I may be, and hath enjoined upon me prayer and alms-giving so long as I remain. And (hath made me) dutiful toward her who bore me, and hath not made me arrogant, unblest. Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive."¹⁶ Muslims see this testimony of baby Jesus as a rejection of the malevolent accusations of the people toward his mother. By this testimony, in fact, Mary was released from the punishment which the community would ordinarily have sought for bearing an "illegitimate" child.

As was already mentioned, the Qur'ân also attaches a special significance to Jesus, starting from his very early life - yet from his very conception. This confirmation is difficult to understand, and it is not strange if there are people who do not appreciate it. Admitting the peculiarity of this situation, the Qur'ân seems to justify, and responds to its peculiarity: "Such was Jesus, son of Mary; (this is) a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt."¹⁷

Without elaborating on whether the description is based on historical fact or not, according to the Qur'ân, up to this point, baby Jesus is really special and unique. In a sense, he is different from others who would become prophets, especially in terms of the extraordinary circumstance surrounding his birth; the nature of his mother bearing a child without any human father, the situation of her giving birth, the ability of Jesus to "talk" in defending his mother and telling about his mission while he was in the cradle - all are evidence of the fact that Jesus was treated as having a special "approval" from God, which no other human being had ever attained. The Qur'ân has put baby Jesus above other babies, whether baby Abraham, baby Moses, or even baby Muḥammad, upon whom this very Qur'ân was

¹⁴See for example in *The New Testament*, Matthew 2:1, Luke 2:4-7, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea.

¹⁵*The Qur'ân* 19:29.

¹⁶*The Qur'ân* 19:30-33.

¹⁷*The Qur'ân* 19:34.

then revealed. This assertion is based only on what has been discussed about Jesus in the Qur'ân, what is taken for granted and commonly understood, without reference to any historical document.

The Miracles of Jesus

From what Jesus said, as it is mentioned in the Qur'ân, "He hath given me the Scripture and appointed me a prophet,"¹⁸ we can infer that Jesus had been commissioned by God as a Prophet from his very childhood. As far as the Prophets are concerned, none had ever been called to the office of prophethood by the Qur'ân at a very young age other than Jesus. Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam, received the Call when he was about 40,¹⁹ the age at which, standard maturity is traditionally considered to be achieved. In a way we can say that Jesus was the only "baby Prophet" admitted in the Qur'ân. The approval of "baby Prophet" is really a great miracle.

Apart from that miracle, which the Bible does not mention at all, the Qur'ân and the Bible seem to be in accord in relating that Jesus, son of Mary, did perform other miracles in his mission. Moreover, the Qur'ân mentions those in which Jesus is said to have had the ability to breath life into a clay bird, to raise the dead, to heal the sick, the blind, and the leper, the ability to tell people what they have and what they hide. For the Qur'ân says: "Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allâh's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! Herein verily is a portent for you, if you are to be believers."²⁰ These series of miracles are considered by Muslims to be very "complicated" miracles in the sense that they have a "super miraculous" ability, especially the miracle of raising the dead. In fact, no other prophet had ever before performed such miracle or had ever proved the ability to do it, let alone Muḥammad. From this understanding also, we can say that the Qur'ân has elevated Jesus even in his ability to perform miracles above all other prophets mentioned in the Qur'ân.

Apart from the problem of how to understand the meaning of "miracles" mentioned in the Bible and in the Qur'ân (because many scholars are still struggling with how to define what "miracle" means) the affirmation of miracle itself is significant. It is worthy asking, why is something a miracle and why should there be more miracles attached to Jesus than to other Prophets?

The Qur'ân mentions that miracles are just signs of the omnipotence of God and that they show human beings that God has unlimited will and power. "... If he

¹⁸The Qur'ân 19:30.

¹⁹Abdul Hameed Siddiqui, *The Life of Muhammad*, (Calcutta: Hilal Publications, 1982), p. 59.

²⁰The Qur'ân 3:49.

decreeth a thing, He said unto it only; Be! And it is.”²¹ Hence, miracles never come from the power of human beings: it means that no human being can perform any miracle unless with permission of God. The Gospel of John also gives us a little clue on the matter;²² that without miracle it was very difficult for prophet to fulfil his duty. In the Qur’ân, John the Baptist (Yahyâ) was a pious Saint and Prophet, and what he said they considered to be true. Yet, according to the Qur’ân, the prophet of Israel did not believe in his teaching because he did not perform miracles.²³ The miracles of Jesus were performed by the permission of God and constituted an important part of his mission of preaching the Word of God to human beings, although in the end of his career few people were following him. Still, whatever outcome, what is the purpose of the miracles? If God is so omnipotent, why should He just play a “trick” through the prophets to persuade people? Does miracle mean “the absence of knowledge”? Last but not least, are there (anything) miracles or not?

If miracles are understood as extraordinary events, we may say that in so far as these miracles are concerned, Jesus is in fact far ahead of other Prophets, including Muḥammad, who as never been known popularly as heaving miraculous powers.

The Death of Jesus

Contrary to what Christians believe about the death of Jesus, - that Jesus was crucified and died on the Cross in Galgotha²⁴ - the Qur’ân unequivocally mentions that, “... They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and Lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; the slew him not for certain.”²⁵

Not intending to judge which view is right or wrong, the main purpose of the Qur’ânic rejection of Jesus’ death on the cross is seen as the rejection of the Jews’ claim that they had successfully crucified Jesus to unto death. This claim, Muslims say - along with the overwhelming mocking of Jesus²⁶ would have meant victory and satisfaction for the Jews. For they believed that they had killed the “destroyer” of their Temple, the false Messiah, who had come to change their Law. According to the Qur’ân, the Jews had changed substantially from what Moses had taught them. “Then, because of their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelieving in the revelation of Allâh, and their slaying of the Prophets wrongfully, and their saying; our hearts are hardened - Nay, but Allâh hath set a seal upon them for their disbelief,

²¹The Qur’ân 3:47.

²²Jesus said to them, “I did one miracle, and you are all astonished,” John 7:21.

²³See, *The Bible*, John 10:41-42.

²⁴*The Bible*, Mark 15:37; Matthew 27:32-54; Luke 23:44-49; John 19:28-37.

²⁵The Qur’ân 4:157.

²⁶See, *The Bible*, Matthew 27:35-43; Mark 15:24-36.

so that they believe not save few.”²⁷ This reasoning, is, again, emphasized by, “And because of their saying; We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allâh's messenger”²⁸ It is to this arrogant claim that the Qur'ân responds, “. . . - They slew him not nor crucified but it appeared so unto them; . . . ; they slew him not for certain.”²⁹

From this refusal - as it is indicated from the narration of the “death” of Jesus - see that Muslims infer that: if the Jews' claim of the death by the crucifixion were to be true, their claim and deed should be also right, and, hence, Jesus would be a false Prophet and yet, a criminal. If this so happened, the death of Jesus on the cross as the result of their punishment would be a kind of justification or validation from God for their so doing, which resulted in this seeming reality. Qur'ânically, the Jews strongly believed that the false Messiah must be punished. “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commended him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”³⁰

It seems to me that this obvious rejection to the Jews' boast is also the affirmation of the Prophethood of Jesus. As is the rejection of the Christian belief later on, which was seen as based on this particular Jewish belief. This event is even more crucial in Qur'ânic understanding, when the Christians take this very event as the cornerstone of their belief. That Jesus is God, that his death on the cross is to atone for the sin of human beings who have been sinners since Âdam, the first creation, by transgressing God's Law.³¹

That is why, in order to clarify these “distortions,” - “the too bad distortion” of the Jews and “the too good distortion” of the Christians, the Qur'ân deliberately needs to give the mission to Muḥammad to invite those peoples, the people of the books” (Ahl al-Kitâb), - The Jews and the Christians - to come together, no matter how far off they have been, and believe in Allâh, God of the universe. “O People of Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you; that we shall worship none but Allâh, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allâh. And if they turn away, then say; Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered.”³² To this point, it is understood that the Qur'ân has always been trying to reject as wisely as possible the false accusation of and the “mis-belief” in Jesus, and it also tries to put Jesus in his proper position, as the servant of God, the beloved Prophet and Messenger. Hence, the Qur'ân does exalt and rescue Jesus from any plot of denigration.

²⁷The Qur'ân 4:155.

²⁸The Qur'ân 4:157.

²⁹The Qur'ân 4:157.

³⁰The Bible, Deuteronomy 18:20.

³¹See, The Bible, Roman 3:25; One Peter 2:24; One John 1:17; and Isaiah 53:4-5.

³²The Qur'ân 3:64.

Due to this conspicuous Qur'ânic rejection of the death of Jesus on the cross, it is unavoidable that some will thrust questions: Did Jesus really die on the cross as it is told in the New Testament? If he did, the Qur'ân must have been telling "a lie," or at least it must have been understood "falsely" - or, perhaps the Qur'ân was describing the event metaphorically. Then, is there any other explanation about this issue besides this mere rejection? And if it is there how should we understand it properly?

As the Qur'ân is not a book of history or biography, we cannot expect to have more about this issue. There are, in fact, two little hints that can be related to this issue. The first is "He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and his manhood, and he is of the righteous."³³ The clue here is the word "manhood," in Arabic, kahlan. The idea that Jesus will speak unto mankind in his manhood (kahlan) is the problem, for what is the precise meaning of kahlan. How old is a person when he is kahlan?

Al-Qurtubî (one of the classic exegetes of the Qur'ân, d. 1273 CE) defines that the word kahlan as meaning "the age of person between maturity and the old age."³⁴ Although Al-Qurtubî in other parts of his discussion specifies that kahlan means the age of Jesus at his second coming, from his definition we can infer that kahlan can mean the age of - roughly speaking - between 20 through 70 years or more. It could be 30, or 40, or 50, or 60, years of age. According to this interpretation, the age of manhood is not so precise, except of maturity and over. In a way, the uncertainty of this age also has given us another possibility, that Jesus (who, according to the Qur'ân, did not die on the cross), had survived the crucifixion and might have lived through the age of 40 or 50 or 60, or even more. Based on this interpretation, we can say that there is at least the possibility - not the certainty - of the life of Jesus after his 30s (his age when he was crucified). However, we still cannot historically determine whether Jesus did live after the crucifixion or not.

Muhammad Âli (d. 1951), an Ahmadi exegete of the Qur'ân, interprets kahlan unequivocally as "old age," "ripe old age;" that means over sixty years of age or so. According to this exegete, Jesus did survive the crucifixion and lived normally while preaching "the Word of God" to the people far from Jerusalem and then died normally in his old age.³⁵

A second small hint is mentioned in the Qur'ân 14:15, "Peace on him the day he was born, and the day he dieth and the day he shall be raised alive." The hint here is two words "peace" and "dieth." According to this verse we are informed that

³³The Qur'ân 3:46.

³⁴Muhammad ibn Ahmad Al-Qurtubî, *Al-Jâmi' al-Ahkâm al-Qur'ân*, vol. 4, (Cairo: Dâr al-Kâtib al-'Arabî li-al-Ṭibâ'ah wa-al-Nasyar, 1967), p. 90.

³⁵Muhammad 'Alî, *The Holy Qur'ân, Arabic Text, English Translation and Commentary*, 5th ed., (Lahore, Pakistan: The Ahmadiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam), 1963. See, also his book *Muhammad and Christ*, (Madras: The S. P. C. K. Press, Veprey, 1921), pp. 108, 109, and 158.

Jesus did die - not necessarily on the cross in the cruel death, which would contradict the other Qur'ânic claim - "they slew him not, for certain" - but he died a natural death.

Taken for granted that the premise "Jesus did not die on the cross," as has been discussed earlier, is true, which is death in cruelty, and that he also talked to the people in his kahlan, we can infer that although Jesus was crucified, he did not necessarily die on the cross in cruelty, but survived and lived long enough to preach the Word of God to the people as he did "when he was in cradle." He then lived through his old age and died peacefully - as peaceful as the day when he was born. Muḥammad Âli specifies clearly on this event. "That the death of Christ did not take place on the cross, ..., but that having escaped with wounds, he died a natural death afterwards, having lived to the ripe old age of 120 years,"³⁶ To make the point clearer, I am going to put his exegesis of that particular issue. "... And they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they kill him not for certain."³⁷ In his exegesis, which is mainly based on some traditional commentators of the Qur'ân, he clearly mentions that, "The words *mâ-ṣalabû-hu* do not negate Jesus' being nailed to the cross; they negate his having expired on the cross as a result of being nailed to it. *Ṣalb* is a well-known way of killing (T, LA). *Ṣalabû-hu* means they put him to death in a certain well-known manner (LL)."³⁸

The point of the whole discussion here is not to prove whether the Qur'ânic claim or the Biblical claim is correct or false, but to bring into discussion the issue in order to show that the Qur'ânic claim is ultimately aimed to establish the correct understanding of Jesus by way of respecting him in every sense. That he is an human being held in special reverence, that he is a Prophet and Messenger of God, and that his claim is ultimately true.

In order to obtain more information about the historicity of Jesus and its details, scholars have been looking at the Bible, especially the New Testament, to see whether there are more clues that can give us better understanding with which to solve this "mysterious" Qur'ânic claim: - that "Jesus did not die on the cross."

Conclusion

After discussing some issues relating to the exaltation of Jesus in the Qur'ân, we can now make some points of conclusion:

As far as the text of the Qur'ân is concerned, and how it is generally understood, Jesus does have special reverence among other prophets. This appreciation may differ

³⁶Muḥammad 'Alî, *Muḥammad and Christ*, p. 158.

³⁷Muḥammad 'Alî, *The Holy Qur'ân*, p. 230-231.

³⁸Muḥammad 'Alî, *The Holy Qur'ân*, p. 231 (fn).

from what the Jews and the Christians generally believe about Jesus, in such a way that the Qur'ânic claims stand in the middle between the two extreme poles.

The Qur'ânic claim about Jesus does not necessarily mean that Jesus is above all other prophets - that other prophets are under his superiority. This exaltation is meant as a part of the general statement of variety of attitudes toward the prophets. "Of those Messengers, some of whom we have caused to exel others, and of whom there are some unto whom Allâh spake, while some of them He exalted (above) others in degree . . ." ³⁹ This exaltation can only mean that the duty and the challenge they had to face is more difficult than other prophets had faced. The Qur'ân admits that many Messengers have been sent to every nation which means that there are many Prophets, that they have different struggles, and that some of them are exalted above the others.

The literal meaning of Qur'ânic claim *wa mâ qatalûhu wa mâ salabûhu* [they did not crucify nor did they kill him (Jesus)] has not been interpreted to necessarily mean that Jesus was not crucified, but that Jesus did not die on the cross as the result of the crucifixion. This assertion brings Christianity and Islam one more step toward a meeting point; yet, the job has to be done.

Due to the fact that the Qur'ân is not a book of history, or of biography, the rejection of "Jesus' death on the cross" does not necessarily mean the rejection to the historical record. However, it should be understood as the affirmation of the mission of Jesus, that he is a Prophet and Messenger of God.

As the Qur'ân is believed to be the Word of God, this kind of expression is not without purpose. The purpose is love, respect, and mutual understanding which constitute the very root of peace. If we realize this at least, it can be as a bridge building between two major world religions, Christianity and Islam, whose followers are now playing a determining role in the world arena.

Realizing this, it is very crucial to consider that the role of Jesus in his life - as a Prophet and a Messenger - and the respect The Qur'ân gives to him, manifest evidence to the fact that Jesus and The Qur'ân are both rooted in God. This means that Jesus and the Qur'ân are conveying the same message from the only One Supreme God.

The failure of recognizing this reality signifies failure on the part of human beings, not that of God. This failure can lead to sudden "punishment" and suffering. That is, we ought not to be living in a world of suspicion, hatred, enmity, and killing each other "for the sake of God." In pursuing mutual understanding between the two religions, we, on the one hand, have to pay more attention to the sharing of similarities and avoid inflaming the delicate issues on which we differ. On the other

³⁹The Qur'ân 2:253.

hand, imbued with the Spirit of God, we also have to perpetuate our study of both traditions of which, so far, no one has ever claimed to be the Master.