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**PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY  
A COMPARATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM APPROACH**

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**PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY**

*A Comparative understanding of Christian-Muslim approach* ii

**DEDICATION**

To Rev. Dr. Felix J. Phiri and Dr. Newton Kahumbi Maina, Sheikh Nuru Muhammad and the  
entire Society of the Missionaries of Africa.

**EPIGRAPH**

*One can look into the future, or one can look at the future. The latter is by far the more instructive.*

(Ajencis)

*Bring he who has spoken prophecy to the judgement of the priests, and if his prophecy is judged true, acclaim him, for he is clean, and if his prophecy is judged false, bind him to the corpse of his wife, and hang him one cubit above the earth, for he is unclean, an anathema unto the Gods.*

(Warrants 7:48, the chronicle of the tusk)

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Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to my parents, friends and colleagues who have come my way to render successful my life. May Allah our heavenly God bless you all.

**STUDENT DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, achieved through my personal reading, scientific research and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters' Degree in Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and duly acknowledged.

Signed:

Name of the student : \_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed:

Name of Supervisor : Felix J. PHIRI 

Date : 10/04/2017

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

Q.	:	Qur'an
Pbuh	:	Peace be upon him
Ex.	:	Exodus
Obad.	:	Obadiah
Mic.	:	Micha
Josh.	:	Joshua
Jgs	:	Judges
Hab.	:	Habakkuk
Is.	:	Isaiah
Ez.	:	Ezekiel
Jer.	:	Jeremiah
Mt.	:	Matthew
Mk.	:	Mark
Lk.	:	Luke
Jn.	:	John
Act.	:	Acts of the Apostles
Heb.	:	Hebrews
Rv.	:	Revelation

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1. Background of the Study

Historically, Islam and Christianity are two monotheistic religions which have taught the oneness of God. However, in addition to that teaching, Christians go beyond and believe that not only is God one but he is also Triune.<sup>1</sup> That is to say that there are three persons in one God; a conviction which Islam does not go along with and which appears to be in contradiction with Islamic monotheism. According to Islam, God is one and he does not share his being with anyone else. He only has prophets and messengers who collaborate with him in making real and effective his will and his salvific mission on earth. God (Allah), in Islam, was professed by Muhammad (PBUH) his Messenger and Prophet and Messenger. Christians on the other side express their faith in one God who is Triune. That is in a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Son is Jesus and he is God's messenger. The Holy Spirit is his Advocate.

Muhammad (PBUH) in Islam is professed as the last prophet and the seal of every prophecy.<sup>2</sup> Through him, the religion of total submission to Allah came into existence. Allah commissioned him to preach his precepts to the whole of humankind so that it may wholeheartedly submit to his will. Muhammad (PBUH) is God's last prophet, born of human flesh. He was the unique and privileged recipient of God's revelation contained in the Qur'an. In him is found the origin of Islam.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. CASPER, *Trying to answer questions*, 13-19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 87.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. J. GLUBB, *The life and times of Muhammad*, 77ff.

However, Islam accepts and honours Jesus<sup>4</sup> as one of the great prophets who existed and who were sent by God to proclaim the message of wellbeing to all humanity. In the Islamic belief, Jesus is purely human. He was born of the Virgin Mary, one among many women who is honoured and praised by both Christians and Muslims. Jesus is not God though he was born miraculously. Allah the most high sent him to his chosen people. Moreover, Muslims do not accept the Christian affirmation that Jesus is the Son of God. Because God does not have a wife or children. To them, Jesus is a prophet and this is what the Holy Qur'an affirms.

As far as Christianity is concerned, however, Christians do not recognize Muhammad as a prophet. Certainly this fact often raises tensions between them and Muslims inasmuch the prophethood of Muhammad is concerned. The question often raised is 'why don't you, Christians, recognise Muhammad as a prophet among others?' The refusal to do so is mainly because the name of Muhammad is never mentioned among the prophets of the Holy Bible and Islam is posterior to the Christian tradition.

Jesus, on the contrary, is not only a prophet for Christians but also the Son of God who took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. For Christians, Jesus is truly God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is more than a prophet.

## **2. Motivation**

These two different stands of both Christianity and Islam constitute the main reason of our research. Basing ourselves on the Christian and Muslim faiths, we wish to explore more about the understanding of prophethood in these two monotheistic religions. We envisage therefore to know about the prophets of God from the biblical and qur'anic perspective. In other words, we have been motivated by the willingness to explore and to know more about the prophets mentioned in either Qur'an or Bible. A similarity and a comparison, as far as

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. F. NTEDIKA MVUMBI, OP, 95-96.

prophethood is concerned, will be drawn out from both the Christian and Muslim understanding of prophethood.

### **3. Objective**

Before all else we intend to present a general overview of prophethood. We envisage to give a comparison of both the life of Muhammad (PBUH). Our research shall then be extended to the biblical and qur'anic understanding of prophecy. This shall be followed by some proofs of the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH) and of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> A discussion on whether Jesus is a prophet or more than a prophet will be also conducted. Comparatively we will discuss the conviction led by Muslims about Muhammad (PBUH) as the last of the prophets and their seal. We shall therefore investigate much about him, just as we shall expand our knowledge about Jesus Christ. Thus, we shall then present a slight comparison between Jesus and the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Also, a comparative study on prophethood and its understanding will be presented between the two monotheistic religions, Islam and Christianity.

### **4. Methodology**

First of all, we will develop a general understanding of prophethood insofar as prophecy in 'Islam and Christianity'<sup>6</sup> is an important factor of belief. This means that we will collect and borrow insights from other scholars who have explored the topic of prophethood in the Christian-Muslim understanding.<sup>7</sup> Also, in very particular and distinctive ways, we shall present the understanding of prophethood in Islam and in Christianity. Then we will elaborate on the life of the two prophets, Muhammad<sup>8</sup> (PBUH) and Jesus. The historical background of their life and their commission will be presented. We shall proceed to the understanding of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 66-67.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. MELONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM, *The Qur'an*, 103-108.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 7.

the relationship that emerged between Christianity and Muhammad (PBUH). A comparison of the life of Muhammad (PBUH) and his achievements shall be presented so as to elaborate on the mission of both.

Moreover, the prophecy of Jesus Christ will be discussed and analysed. His life on earth will be studied in order to come out with a clear knowledge of who Jesus is for both Muslims and Christians.

Christians strongly believe that before Jesus Christ was known to be a prophet or a messenger, he was God.<sup>9</sup> Jesus Christ is one with God and the two share the same divinity. They believe that Jesus existed with God the father for all eternity. He is God's Word and through whom he created everything that exists. He came on earth to save the corrupted humankind which disobeyed God's law. Thus Jesus came down to preach the Good News of salvation to all human beings so that they may repent and live in accordance with his precepts. He lived among human beings and he cared particularly for the weak ones. Out of mercy and compassion he miraculously cured the sick. He gave food and drink to those who were hungry and thirsty. Many who listened to his teachings and who experienced his miracles testified that Jesus was sent by God. But also many people, although they witnessed to the miracles of Jesus and listened to his teaching, refused to believe in him. They did not accept that he was from heaven or even that he was the Son of God.

Muslims, on the other hand, refute the divinity of Jesus Christ. For them, Jesus is not the Son of God and he is not God. According to them, Jesus is simply a prophet sent by God (Allah) to deliver his salvific message to his people. Jesus is purely human, born of the Virgin Mary. They totally reject the idea or the reality of the divinity of Jesus Christ. They strongly believe

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. R. CASPER, *Trying to answer questions*, 31-36.

that Allah is the only God. Muhammad (PBUH) is his prophet.<sup>10</sup> For them, Muhammad (PBUH) was a human being who received the revelation from Allah. As a messenger, he was sent to spread Islam into the whole world so that all may submit to Allah, the only God. Muhammad (PBUH) is never seen as divine. He was born of human flesh, he lived in his full humanity, he died and he was buried.

Finally, pointing out agreements and disagreements that have existed between the Islamic and Christian beliefs, we will give a brief suggestion of how to understand monotheistic religions. Inter-religious dialogue therefore will be in this paper the topic that will advocate for cooperation and collaboration, mutual understanding and respect, tolerance and acceptance, and all other possible dimensions that may bring peace and harmony between these two religions.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. IMAM ALI IBN ABU TALIB, *Peak of Eloquence Nahjul Balagha*, 69, 250-256.

## **CHAPTER ONE: PROPHETHOOD, A GENERAL OVERVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The letter to the Hebrews states that “in the former times God spoke to our ancestors through prophets at many times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:1).<sup>11</sup> These prophets were not strange beings, different from other people created by God. This means that God did not leave his people go astray after he had created them. He commissioned people of the same nature to address the problems of their fellow brothers and sisters with whom they lived. He chose prophets out of his free will so that his own people may live together in peace and harmony in society. Their role was to announce to people the will of God for the betterment of a successful future life. Prophets, through dreams, visions, divine inspiration and revelation, foretold what the will of God was for his people. However, due to human crises and needs, we should be very much aware that not all prophets were of divine commission. Some prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jeremiah, Amos, Noah, etc. truly prophesized in the name of God. Some also claimed prophecy, but these were people who freely decided to deceive their audience because of personal interest and motivation. We have for instance Elymas Bar-Jesus<sup>12</sup> and the Beast.<sup>13</sup>

In this first chapter we would like to address some points such as: prophets and prophethood, the role of the prophets in society, prophetic revelation or inspiration in Christianity and Islam, prophethood in history, prophethood today, and true and false prophets.

### **1. Prophets and Prophethood**

Both Muslims and Christians hold the belief that God (Allah) certainly chooses for himself messengers whose task is to transmit his word to the people he created. He purifies and

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. D. LETERSON, *The Prophetic Literature, an Introduction*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Act. 13:4-12.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rv. 16:13.

sanctifies such messengers so as to make of them his faithful servants. Since unmemorable times, messengers were prophets who were sent to guide humankind on the right path. According to the Qur'an, prophets are raised from among their nations.<sup>14</sup> God shows mercy and love by sending his prophets in the midst of nations.

Muslims, however, distinguish a prophet from a messenger of Allah. The messenger or *rasul* is sent to guide God's people. He reforms the humankind guided by a divine scripture. His message always finds supported with a Book. A prophet or *nabi* is sent to proclaim Allah's message. For him no message comes in form of the Book but through Allah's inspiration. Both prophets and messengers, however, are God's chosen people who are sent to deliver his message, given to them through revelation (*wahy*). Nevertheless, not all prophets are messengers but all messengers are prophets. Though all prophets were human beings, Muslims are invited not to discriminate against any of them but to have faith in them because of their excellent example of moral life and of the trust they inspired. To deny the prophethood of any of them would be a sign of disbelief. This is why all the divine prophets who preceded Muhammad must be accepted and respected by Muslims.

## **2. The Role of the Prophets in Society**

Muslims believe that Adam was the first man on earth and, at the same time, the first prophet. God revealed to him the religion of Islam which stands for the total submission to the only one true God. They also believe that all the prophets essentially proclaim the same fundamental message of Islam, that is, the unity of God, or *tawhid*, reward for leading a good, pious and peaceful life, the Day of Judgment or *yawm al-din* and the punishment for believers' life.<sup>15</sup> In the whole succession of prophets, Muhammad is confirmed to mark the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Q. 16:36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 89.

culmination of prophethood in Islam. For Muslims, Muhammad is the seal of all prophethood or *khatam al-anbiya*.

Meanwhile, in the Christian perspective, Jesus who is the Word Incarnate is understood to be more than a prophet. Jesus came to fulfill the expectations of Israel and also the hope proclaimed by the prophets who came before him. Muslims and Christians stress much the importance of the mission of all prophets in the religious history of the human race. These are people who were chosen to guide their fellow community members onto the path that leads to God. A prophet in either Christianity or Islam is a witness (*shahid*). He is the one who, after carrying out the mission entrusted to him in spite of trials and many dangers, humbly stands aside, like John the Baptist, in favour of he who commissioned.<sup>16</sup> Muslims, from generation to generation, are invited to keep the continuity and unity of the message of the previous prophets. The essence of this is found explained in the Qur'an. It is the pure monotheism of the beginning. It is also the full necessity for believers to totally surrender to God and his precepts. It is the worship of the only God and to follow his messengers and prophets. Because of this, religion is understood as one and the same although it is revealed in languages particular to different peoples in different environment. Those who were chosen to bear witness to the people are the divinely chosen prophets. Sent to various rebellious peoples, they experienced mockery, suspicion, rejection and persecution from their own families and communities. Only few people welcomed and accepted their message while a multitude of others rejected it. These last ones were those who doubted the claimed revelation and inspiration of the prophet.

### **3. Prophetic Revelation or Inspiration in Christianity and Islam**

Revelation and inspiration are two characteristics linked to prophethood. We hereby want to clarify the difference between them. Christians support and emphasize the divine inspiration

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mk 1:3.

as the means through which God revealed himself to human beings. Muslims, being not in support of the Christian belief about incarnation, are of the view that God sent a divine revelation to his messengers so that he may reveal himself to all created people. According to them, Allah gave the message to angel Jibril (Gabriel) who in his turn communicated it directly. And it was expressed then exactly as it was heard from the angel. However, the Qur'an uses different terminologies for revelation: *anzal*,<sup>17</sup> *uhiya*,<sup>18</sup> *awha*,<sup>19</sup> *nazzala*,<sup>20</sup> *ata*,<sup>21</sup> *tanzil*.<sup>22</sup> All these terminologies are used to mean that God does not, he himself, come down on earth to reach his people; rather they suggest that he reveals the message to some people whom he has chosen for himself as his agents. His absolute sovereignty is expressed through his revelation to the prophet. It's said that the inspired knowledge of saints and of mystics is found far inferior to that of the prophet. One cannot compare it to the revelation of God's will through his prophets and messengers. From God comes only revelation.<sup>23</sup> In Christianity, Christians hold much more to the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. It simply means that the Holy Scriptures have been breathed out by the Almighty and ever living God through the prophet. Thus, for Muslims, revelation is not equal to the experience of the mystically inspired spirituality. The word *nuzul* suggests the coming down of the divine presence and this is a more accurate interpretation in the Christian understanding of revelation than *tanzil* which is revelation.<sup>24</sup> The focus of the biblical description of revelation is God because he is known for what he does. His redemptive acts persist through his divine revelation. And thus the human response to God is an important aspect of revelation because a human being comes to recognize who God is through it. The need for redemption is as well found and

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Q. 6:92.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Q. 6:94.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Q. 26: 63.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Q. 25:1.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Q. 2:87.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Q. 36:5.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. N. BALAGHA, *Peak of Eloquence*, 223.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. N. BALAGHA, *Peak of Eloquence*, 222.

expressed in the same response to God's revelation. The divine human encounter can only be really understood through the divine revelation. And that is certainly the duty of God's prophets. God revealed his divine revelation to the prophets in order to show what his actions meant and how human were to respond to God's Word spoken to the prophet. The prophet 'heard' the word of the Lord (Is 1:1; Obad 1:1; Mic 1:1; Hab. 1:1)<sup>25</sup> which means an indication of a divine revelation. After God had revealed his actions to the apostles and prophets, they also proclaimed that interpretation through teaching, preaching and even through writing. We recognize God's redemptive presence through the prophetic interpretation of God's saving actions in history.

#### **4. Prophethood in History**

The prophetic office originates from the people's request. Out of fear of death, they preferred not to hear the voice of the Lord. The Lord heard their cry and he addressed them through the intermediary of a prophet. He said to them: "*just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die. And the LORD said to me, they are right in what they have spoken*" (Dt. 18: 16-17). At the time of receiving the Law from Mount Sinai, people of Israel were afraid because they were not at ease to listen to the voice of God directly. They said to Moses: "*Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.*"<sup>26</sup> They asked Moses to speak to them. Indeed Moses spoke to them on the behalf of God. Moses' duty was to proclaim all that God had commanded him to tell his people. God said: "*I will put my words in his mouth and he will tell them (Israel) all that I will command.*"<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Holy Bible (Is. 1:1; Obad. 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Hab. 1:1).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Ex. 20:19.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ex. 18:18b.

However, if it is God who gives what to say and even chooses his prophets, where does the problem of falsehood in prophecy come from? Why do we have true and false prophets? To answer to this question, E. J. Young, in his classical book on prophets, offered pertinent answers in differentiating true from false prophets. According to him, the particularity of a prophet derives from God alone. He says:

*A prophet of God does not declare and shout aloud that he is a prophet. He does not choose himself. Once he has been called and sent by God, he exercises the role of mediator between God and the people through the Word of God. People will know that this is a prophet of God through his preaching and action.*<sup>28</sup>

A false prophet is the one who is not sent by God. He does not act as a mediator between people and God. He says what people would like to hear. His message is never from God. Some false prophets prophesied in the name of the unclean spirits. And very often they cheated their listeners. The book of prophet Ezekiel states: “*Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: ‘Hear the word of the LORD!’*”<sup>29</sup> And according to E. J. Young, “the real reason for the existence of false prophecy exists in the corruption of human heart.”<sup>30</sup>

## **5. Prophethood Today**

Is prophethood still relevant and even exercised today? According to Islam, the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ended the prophecy. He is the seal of prophethood. There is no other prophet after him. Qur’an (33:40) says: “*Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of God and the Seal of the Prophets: and God has full knowledge of all things.*”<sup>31</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments, saying: “When a document is sealed, it is

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. E.J. YOUNG, “My Servants Prophets”3.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ez. 13.2-3, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. E.J. YOUNG, “My Servants Prophets”3.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ABU SALAM, “Muhammad claimed to be a warner only for Arabia”, 1.

complete, and there can be no further addition. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) closed the long line of Messengers. Allah's teaching will always be continued. But no prophet will raise up again the Prophet after Muhammad (PBUH). The later ages will want thinkers and reformers, not Prophets. This is not an arbitrary matter. It is a decree full of knowledge and wisdom, 'for Allah has full knowledge of everything.'"<sup>32</sup> In this verse we clearly see that Allah affirms the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as the last Prophet. And Muhammad himself in one of his hadiths once said that "*In My Ummah (Islamic Nation), there shall be born Thirty Grand Liars (dajjals), each of whom will claim to be a prophet, But I am the Last Prophet; there is No Prophet after Me.*"<sup>33</sup>

According to the Christian belief, the gift of prophethood seems to have been for a while a gift offered for the building up of the Church. In the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians (2:20) we read that 'prophets were foundational to the Church.' To the early believers the prophets preached the message from God. Acts 11:28 and 21:10 say that it happened that a message of a prophet was predictive and sometimes the prophet's message was revelatory; that is to say, the message gave a new revelation and truth from God.

Since the early Christians did not have access to a complete Bible, the prophets played the role of filling the gap by proclaiming God's message to the people who did not have access to the Bible. God sent prophets to preach his Word to the chosen nation Israel.

However, we may ask ourselves some questions here: Do we still find true prophets today? Do we still need prophets at all if we already have the full divine revelation in the Bible? Are we still building the Church's foundation today if the early prophets were the foundation itself? Can someone be God's messenger to another person? It won't be so easy to identify

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<sup>32</sup>Cf. N. BALAGHA, *Peak of Eloquence*, 222.

<sup>33</sup>Cf. Abu Dawood Vol 2 p. 228; Tirmidhi Vol 2 p.45. Cf. O., ABDALLAH, "Where in the Quran does it say that Muhammad was the last Prophet and Messenger of GOD?" 1-2.

with proof one who utters prophecies in God's name. In any case, when someone claims to speak for God, there is a need to compare what he says with what the Bible says. There wouldn't be any contradictions between man and the Bible if God were to speak through them today because God does not contradict himself. The first letter of John 4:1 urges us to question and test the spirits in order to be sure they are divine. We should not simply believe any spirit. And also in his first letter to the Thessalonians (5:20-21) Paul warns them not to treat prophecies with contempt. He rather calls them to test them. He urges them to compare what is said by people to what the Word of God says. And if what is said is found contradicting the Bible then it should be discarded. But if it goes in line with the Bible then they should pray for God's wisdom and discernment in view of implementing and applying the message (2 Tm 3:16-17;).

In a world where there are a number of words with different connotations such as charisms, charismatics, prophets or prophetic actions, there exists a problem of knowing what is really meant by this or that. Our topic here is the meaning of "prophet". However, the question of how to know if one is an authentic prophet troubles our minds. Approaches and systems that are quite different from each other and even contradictory are commonly heard and are claimed to be prophetic!<sup>34</sup> We are not sure whom to believe and whom not to believe. Also, it is quite difficult to differentiate what is right from what is false, what to choose and what not to choose, what to do and what not to do, whom to believe in and whom to reject, what to accept and what to refuse.

We might think of finding enlightenment in the Holy Scriptures, but the same questions are there as well, as a point of discussion. The Holy Scriptures clearly present some prophets who went against their fellow prophets. It shows how prophets lived often in conflict with their

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. W. VOGELS, "Comment discerner le prophète authentique?", 1-2.

own people and with religious and civil authorities. They also developed conflicts among themselves. Many of these conflicts were those during which prophets fought other prophets. Some accused each other of uttering lies and of cheating their listeners. Some accused others of persuading people to listen to them alone. They convinced their listeners and they asked them not to give ear to the prophecy of their adversaries. Here are some biblical passages which explain these conflicts, accusations and convictions. Hos. 4:5 says: “So you will stumble in broad daylight, and your false prophets will fall with you in the night. And I will destroy Israel, your mother”; Is. 28:7ff. says: “But these also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are gone astray; the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are gone astray through strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment”; Mi. 3:5; Jr. 4:9ff; 5:31 affirm: “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?”; Jer. 6:13: “*For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.*”<sup>35</sup>

## **6. True and False Prophets**

As for a false prophet, he does not act as a mediator because he is not really called by God. False prophets say what people would like to hear. Their message is never from God. Some prophesized in the name of unclean spirits. But very often they cheated their listeners (Ez. 13.2-3, 9). Due to this, Young continues and says that “*the real reason for the existence of false prophecy exists in the corruption of the human heart.*”<sup>36</sup>Hence, we hereby elaborate and present the difference between true and false prophets in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>35</sup>Cf. Jer. 5:10; 14:13; 23:9-40; 27-29; Ez.13.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. E.J. YOUNG, “My Servants Prophets”3.

### **6.1. The False Prophet**

As mentioned in previously, a prophet is God's messenger.<sup>37</sup> He is God's Word bearer. He is the one who speaks on behalf of God. He is genuine and God speaks through him. Thus, when we give ear to a genuine prophet, we listen to God himself. And furthermore, a prophet is understood as a seer.<sup>38</sup> He foresees the future basing himself on the present moment. A prophet was to see with his inward eyes. His duty was to predict what was to happen in the future. For the sake of the people of God he was to read in between the lines the signs of the time. Unfortunately, it cannot be said for all prophets that their prophecy was genuine. Among the prophets there are some who are not true to themselves in matters concerning prophecy.

The Old Testament distinguishes two kinds of false prophets:

The first category are prophets who worked for foreign gods such as Baal. Jer. 23:13 says: *"Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray."* These prophets were those who lived during the time of Prophet Elijah (1Kgs 18:17-35). It's said that they probably appeared because of various persecutions carried out in the ninth century (BC). This was a very difficult time and many did not manage to resist being tempted by those foreign gods.

The second category are prophets who pretended to speak in God's name. We find them stated in the book of first kings (1Kgs 22). This kind of prophets constitutes a more dangerous case because they uttered promises based on the pretended revelation of God. Micah 3:5: *"Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead my people astray; When they have something to bite with their teeth, They cry, "Peace," But against him who puts nothing in their mouths they declare holy war."*

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. J. LINDBLÖM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 148-165.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J. LIMBURG, *The prophet and the Powerless*, 2.

The rise of prophets was due to various circumstances of life. True prophets arose because of the lifestyle of the society in which they lived. They wanted to react against that. Meanwhile, many false prophets arose because of survival and personal interest. But what are the circumstances which gave birth to false prophets? Here are four major causes which can help us understand the appearance of false prophets:

- The socio-political stress of the monarchy that attracted around it the people who were ready to defend their interests. People hated each other. We read in the Gospel according to Matthew: *“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. . . . For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.”*<sup>39</sup>
- People’s strong and blind attachment to the tradition and culture gave birth to ambitious prophets who desired to change the life style of their listeners. They uttered false promises and they gave false hope to the desperate.
- There came to be a desire to please people and to make them happy. Popularity was seen and considered as a source of well-being. Jesus in the Gospel according to Luke warns his disciples saying: *“Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”*<sup>40</sup>
- A high desire to be famous and a person to be always consulted developed. Consultation involved receiving donations. It was thus a means to be successful. What made prophethood attractive was the desire to have a better and comfortable life.

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mt. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Lk. 6:26.

We read in Deuteronomy 13:5-6 that false prophets shall be punished by death. Nevertheless, there were unfortunately some other prophets who were killed not because they were false prophets but because they spoke the truth. 1Kgs 19: 9-10: *“There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”*<sup>41</sup>

### **6.2. The True Prophet**

A prophet, as noted above, is a seer.<sup>42</sup> He is someone characterised by holiness and he or she is a diviner.<sup>43</sup> A true prophet lives an exemplary life. His life becomes a model to all who intend to follow God. He or she reflects a better living and a godly life. He or she is a diviner in the sense that he or she reads God’s mind. He or she is God’s messenger. The prophet is sent by God and he or she comes from him.<sup>44</sup> By Messenger of God we simply mean that a prophet is a channel through which God communicates to his own people. And by Messenger from God we mean that a prophet is a person who is sent by God to the people. Brief, a prophet is a man of God.<sup>45</sup>

As messenger from God, a prophet was more an ambassador than just a postman. He enjoyed a certain respect and protection because he represented a message and a power that were greater than himself.<sup>46</sup> However, a question to be addressed and that concerns prophecy will always be: how can one recognize a true prophet and point out a false one? Today this may

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. J.L. MELTON, “The second coming of Jesus Christ”, 1.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 83-95.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. J. LIMBURG, *The prophet and the Powerless*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. J. LIMBURG, *The prophet and the Powerless*, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. R.R. WILSON, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 140ff.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. LIMBURG, *The prophet and the Powerless*, 10.

bring about confusion because of the external appearance in which prophets present themselves. But here are some criteria which serve as guidelines to identify a true prophet:

For an authentic prophecy, the first sign is the fact that the prophecy comes to its fulfilment. The prophet Jeremiah says that *“the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true”* (Jer. 28: 9. 15-17; Dt. 18: 21-22; Isa 38: 1-8). It pleased more when a prophecy would be fulfilled when the prophet remained alive. But prophecies, in most cases, were fulfilled after the prophet himself had died.

The other sign of true prophecy is the continuity of the uttered prophecy with the previous revelation or with the previous tradition. If at all it goes against this, then, whatever may be the sign used by the prophet cannot be trustworthy because God cannot contradict himself.

The third criterion is the clear correspondence of the divine word to the moral state of the listeners. If the people misbehave and yet they have the prophet’s blessing, then that is a clear sign that the prophet is a false one. He is not a bearer of God’s message but of his own. Jer. 23: 16-17, *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”*<sup>47</sup>

The moral life of the prophet as a man of God<sup>48</sup> constitutes the fourth criterion. His duty is not just to speak. Rather, he also acts prophetically. He needs to lead his people to action and not just to reflection. In general, prophets may be seen as trouble makers in the society. This is

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. “Let us reason, When a prophet speaks and his words do not come to pass”, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. J. LIMBURG, *The prophet and the Powerless*, 54.

because their words and actions may often trouble the hearts of those listening to them (Jer. 23:14-15).

The fifth criterion is the lack of financial gain or interest. If by all means a prophet seeks material possession, then the authenticity of his prophecy must be put into question (Mic.7:15-20).

The sixth criterion must prove that even though the prophet may have good news, it is always mixed with expressions of warnings (Jer. 28:5-8; Ezek. 13:8-16).

The seventh criterion is about signs, dreams and even the inspiring nature of the prophet. These do not provide a guaranty of a true authenticity. It's true that dreams do not exclude a revelation. Nevertheless, prophets were certainly suspicious of prophecies based on proofs of that kind (Deut. 13: 1-5; Jer. 28:10-13).

These seven criteria are naturally negative. They help one to be able to mark a false prophet. On the other side, they do not guarantee one to point out a true prophet without the possibility of any mistake. Oftentimes people are hesitant about listening or following a prophet, not because he or she is right, but simply because they are afraid they may be wrong and may lead them to a point of no return.

Though a prophet may have an unpleasant attitude or his message may be unpleasant, if only he leads his listeners to the true faith, they are obliged to consider him as a true prophet. In contrast to this, even though a prophet might be very influential and makes people feel at ease with him, and yet he leads people astray from God's will, he is just a ravenous wolf appearing as a sheep.

In accord with Islamic belief, some reasonable criteria to characterize a true prophet would be:

Evidence for his claim; the prophet must give proof of what he claims to be.

The prophet must be consistent in his message; a true prophet will be expected to be consistent in what he or she preaches or teaches. The sayings and teachings of the prophet must be all about God, daily exemplary life, afterlife, and so forth.

Similarity to the teachings of earlier prophets; the arising prophet is not supposed to contradict the truth which the previous prophets have said. What he or she preaches must remain in line with what the previous prophets taught. Or even more, the actual prophet should be able to address issues that concern the actual situation in the life of the people.

Integrity; a prophet must be someone of high moral qualities. Despite all the ups and downs of human weaknesses, the prophet must always do his possible best to maintain a moral standard.

On how to identify a false prophet, Muslims set up criteria such as:

A false prophet pretends to have been sent by God. He utters things in the name of God while his or her message is contrary to what is practiced.

A false prophet is also described as covetous, drunken, immoral and profane, influenced by evil spirits.

False prophets will often practice divination and even witchcraft. He will utter lies in Allah's name. He will prophesy in the name of false gods.

A false prophet leads people into error, teaches profanities and sin to his audience. In brief, the criteria to identify a false prophet is by the fruits he bears, by his works and his deeds.

All prophets, according to the Islamic doctrine, constitute ‘a spiritual fraternity of brothers with a single father, but with different mothers. The father symbolizes the prophethood and the unity of God (Allah). The mothers stand for the various laws they brought.<sup>49</sup> And, insisting on the spiritual union of prophets, Muhammad (PBUH) declared himself as the closest to Jesus the son of Mary. To him, prophets share one and same brotherhood. They are born of different mothers, but they belong to one religion.<sup>50</sup> “I am the closest of all people to the son of Mary (Jesus). The prophets are paternal brothers, their mothers are different, but their religion is one.”<sup>51</sup>

Islam considers denying one single prophet as equal to refuting all of them. This is because ‘all prophets are rays from the same Lamp.’ Throughout ages the central message of all prophets was to dedicate worship to God only. The holy Quran states:

*“Indeed, those who deny God and His messengers, and wish to separate God from His messengers, saying ‘We believe in some but reject others’ and want to pursue a path in-between<sup>52</sup> - it is they, they who are truly denying the truth: and for those who deny the truth we have readied shameful suffering. But as for those who believe in God and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them<sup>53</sup> - unto them, in time, will He grant their rewards [in full]. And God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.”<sup>54</sup>*

## **Conclusion**

In defining who a prophet is we have to acknowledge that a prophet is a chosen one to whom God has entrusted his mission and message to go and deliver it to the people God created.

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<sup>49</sup>Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. R.B. McCONKIE, “Drink from the Fountain”, 1-2.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. Muhsin Khan, “*Sahih Al-Bukhari, Sahih Muslim*” 1.

<sup>52,52</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, “Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur’an”, 1ff.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, “The twelve Proofs that Muhammad is a True Prophet”, 1.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. “Let us reason, when a prophet speaks and his words do not come to pass”, 1.

Before any scripture that has existed till today, God spoke to all his people through prophets and messengers. These are people whom he sanctified by choosing them among many for a purpose. Their role is nothing else than to maintain their fellow brothers and sisters on the right path. They are given a duty by God which is to enlighten and guide the minds of the people with whom they live in society. Among many people they were to live an exemplary life which was a model for all in view of leading a better and prosperous life. Inspiration and revelation were the characteristics which distinguished them from all other people. Their message was to tell their listeners and followers that they are people inspired by a divine revelation

However, after saying a word on who is a false and who is a true prophet, we hereby briefly presented the difference between the two kinds. Also, we wanted to end with asking ourselves whether there are still prophets today.

As we have demonstrated above, it will not always be easy to distinguish a true from a false prophet. But as Jesus said “it’s by its good or bad fruits that we shall come to distinguish a good from a bad tree” (Mt 7:16). In a similar way, we shall come to know who is a true or a false prophet. However, many people are seduced by appearance, by the celebrity of some who present themselves as prophets. They do not take time to question, to critic or to judge the validity of what is being said by the so called prophets. True prophets are those who are concerned with bringing their listeners to God. Meanwhile, false prophets do not care much. They declare themselves prophets while that they are leading their listeners away from the will of God.

Are prophets still existing today? Giving answer to this question, it will be of great importance to know what history teaches us. History tells us that each and every century has known prophets. The XX<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, gave birth to a number of men and women who have

touched the world by their thoughts and their life style. We can here name for instance Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and many others. Today just as yesterday, the world is in need of prophets.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. R. BUGNON, "Distinguer le vrai du faux prophète"1.

## CHAPTER TWO: PROPHETHOOD IN ISLAM

### Introduction

The concept of “Prophethood” in Islam bears close resemblance with that found in the other two known great monotheistic religions which are: Christianity and Judaism. However, prophethood in Islam has a very special significance and a very distinctive status. According to Islamic belief, Allah the almighty God created the human beings with the purpose for them to worship their creator.<sup>56</sup> He created human beings so that they may lead a virtuous life based on his will, guidance and teaching. Nevertheless, we can ask ourselves whether human beings can know how to fulfil the purpose of their existence if they do not receive practical and clear instructions of what Allah wants them to realize?

The answer to this question is “yes”! because the existence of prophethood by which Allah chose prophets for every nation to proclaim his will and message in a comprehensive language. But one may still ask: how were prophets chosen? We must keep in mind that prophethood is God’s favour and a blessing that Allah bestowed on individuals whom he freely chose in order to convey his message to his people.<sup>57</sup> In reference to various prophets we are familiar with, we realize that Allah chose people of good character. In his community, a prophet is exemplary in as much as morality and intellectual capacity are concerned. This was quite necessary and important because the life of the prophet served as a model for his followers. His personality was to inspire people to accept God’s will and therefore transform their lives. The revelation he receives from Allah makes him infallible on divine matters. To

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. K. CREGG, *Muhammad and the Christian, A Question of Response*, 110ff.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. N. BALAGHA, *Peak of Eloquence*, 95.

prove that he is not an impostor the prophet is supported by miracles that occur under Allah's power.<sup>58</sup>

### **1. Prophecy in the Holy Qur'an<sup>59</sup>**

Before we elaborate on prophecy as understood in the Holy Qur'an it's very important to recall that miracles were clear testimonies that the prophet was not an impostor but one standing in for Allah for the sake of his people. These miracles were signs to challenge people who resisted and contradicted God's power. However, it is also important to look at some of the miracles that are found in the Holy Qur'an and in the Holy Bible. It's said in the first stage that Moses' contemporaries from Egypt excelled in magic. Thus, the first thing he could do was to defeat all the possible best magicians of his society. Secondly, Jesus lived during a period of skilled physicians. In order to silence these physicians Jesus raised and cured people suffering from various incurable sicknesses and diseases. And thirdly, Muhammad's contemporaries were people known for their magnificent eloquence and tremendous poetry, so was Muhammad.<sup>60</sup> We are told that the Holy Qur'an is Muhammad's major miracle in his life.

Before the Qur'an, all miracles that took place were specific to a period of time for a specific group of people. Thus the Qur'an appears to be a universal and an everlasting miracle. Previous generations witnessed to it, contemporary generations learn from it and future generations will find wisdom and spiritual inspiration through it. *It's through the power and ability of the Qur'an to rise above every other limit imposed by time and space on all other prophetic miracles that it proves its divine origin.*<sup>61</sup> The Qur'an is believed to have come

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<sup>58</sup>Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 66.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

<sup>60</sup>Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 38-44.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's prophethood", 1.

straight from heaven. Allah, through his kindness to humankind gave his Word to his greatest prophet Muhammad so that he may proclaim it to all people.

Every true prophet must clearly declare that what he proclaims comes from Allah. And what he says is obviously for the well-being of humankind. His task is to convey the message entrusted to him by Allah. Therefore, he only confirms what was probably revealed in the previous time or what might be revealed by a future prophet. Thus, the message he reveals must always be the same in content, purpose and essence. It should deviate neither from prior nor from future revelations. Prophets, in the Islamic perspective, are so necessary for conveying Allah's guidance and instruction to all the believers. Without such knowledge nobody would be able to provide an answer to the fundamental questions of our human existence. No one would be able to say why we were created, what happens after death, or if there is life after death, or if there will be any future sanction or reward for our actions, and will we be accountable for our deeds, to Allah, the angels, heaven and hell? These questions and even many others are answered through different revelations brought by prophets.

Based on such understanding, Muslims reject some of the prophetic claims found in the Old Testament such as:

The prophethood of Lot who engaged in fornication with his own daughters while drunk.

The prophethood of David who sent one of his soldiers to the war zone so that he may die there for him to be able to marry that man's wife.

It is be really inconceivable for Muslims to believe that prophets of Allah could do such shameful things. The prophets of Allah are not meant to destroy or to cause harm. But in their tasks, the prophets of Allah are miraculously supported and instructed by him.

True prophecy consists of some indications such as:

A clear concept of God and all the attributes given to him, what must and must not be ascribed to God, and a clear understanding of creation.

A non-doubtful idea about the unseen world, the angels and the spirits (*Jinn*), heaven and hell.

Questions like ‘why did God create us? What does he want from human beings? Will human beings be rewarded for obeying him or will they be punished for disobeying him?’ should be answered and should be clearly understood.

There was to be a clear explanation of how to establish order in society according to God’s will. This was to fulfil the law that, when honestly and correctly applied, it will certainly bring about an ideal and happy society.

As stated in the above discussion, we can clearly see that there is no substitute for prophets. And this can push us to ask ourselves: how many prophets did Allah send to be messengers to the human race? Although we cannot satisfactorily offer an answer to such a question, some Muslim scholars raised the number of prophets at one hundred and twenty-four thousand. However, we can only be so sure of what Holy Qur’an says: ‘*Allah has sent one or more messengers to each nation, for he would not be just if he were to hold a nation to account for its actions without first informing its people of what is allowed or what is not.*’<sup>62</sup>

## **2. Prophets of the Holy Qur’an and their role<sup>63</sup>**

According to the Islamic history, all Allah’s prophets are hundred and twenty four thousand in number. Some of them are found in the Bible. The Qur’an offers a number of twenty-five named prophets. These are: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Harun (Aaron), Zachariah, John the Baptist, Jesus, Elias, Ishmael, Elisha (Al-Ya’sa),

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<sup>62</sup>Cf. M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM, *The Qur’an*, 203.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, “Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur’an”, 1ff.

Jonah, Lot. Others are Adam and Dhul Kifl (Ezekiel or Joshua?), Idris (Enoch?), Ilyas (Elijah), Hud, Salih and Shu'ayb.<sup>64</sup> However, not all these prophets have the same importance. But among all of them, Abraham, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad are actually considered as the greatest of all other prophets. In the Qur'an Abraham has been given two hundred and forty five verses, Moses five hundred and two, Noah one hundred and thirty one and Jesus ninety three. This is surely an indication that these selected prophets represent the most significant times of the divine intervention in human life. Nonetheless, of all these prophets, Muhammad is declared by the Qur'an as the last and the seal of the prophets.<sup>65</sup>

The Qur'an indicates that there were probably some other prophets who were unknown to Prophet Muhammad. All the same, without any exceptions, Muslims are asked to respect and to believe in all the messengers of Allah. This is because all the prophets came from him and they were all sent for the same purpose of leading all humanity to Allah their God. Believing in them all is essential and required. To accept some and to reject others would be due to some individuals' misunderstanding of the role of the prophet himself or again of other factual bias.<sup>66</sup>

### **2.1. Abraham**<sup>67</sup>

In the course of history Abraham is known to be the friend of God (*Khalil Allah*). He is also known as the great destroyer of idols and one who bravely defended the monotheistic aspect of Allah.<sup>68</sup> His submissive life enabled him to welcome God's messengers who came to announce to him the birth of Isaac. Historically, as the first Muslim, he was willing to offer to Allah his only son. In reward, a sacrificial victim of a lamb was strangely substituted in

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Q. 6:83-86.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Q. 33:40.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Q. 19:42-43; 6:80; 21:56; 37:99.

replacement of his son. This unique and exemplary obedience is yearly commemorated by one of the rites of the pilgrimage to Mecca. This pilgrimage is called the 'Great Festival' (*Iddul al-kabir*). It's also known as the 'festival of great sacrifice' (*Idd ul-Adha*). It's believed that Abraham, together with his son Ishmael, are the ones who restored and purified the temple (ka'aba) of Mecca. He appears as the founder of the true and worthy worship of one God. For that reason, Islam is understood as the perfect restoration of Abrahamic monotheism. In this line, Christians and Jews trace their religiosity to the book of Genesis whereby Abraham is mentioned as their father in faith. This is why they can rejoice because the 'Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself' with the person of Abraham obeying the order to 'submit wholeheartedly' to the 'inscrutable decrees' of God (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). However, in relation to Genesis 22:18, the Qur'an does not say anything about what was promised to Abraham, namely that he would have a great prosperity through which all nations of the earth shall be blessed. And furthermore, there appear to be a preference given to Ishmael, the promised son, as opposed to Isaac.

### **2.2. Moses (Musa)**

Muslims believe that God directly spoke to Moses<sup>69</sup> (*kalim Allah*). According to them, Moses is similar to the figure that Christians and Jews find in the book of Exodus. Moses' mission seems to be that of trying to convert Pharaoh together with his people to monotheism before he could obtain permission to lead the children of Israel into the desert. The test and the sin of idolatry encountered in the desert lead Moses to become a messenger and a promoter of monotheism to the people of Israel. In this process Moses was given the Torah (*Taurat*) on Mount Sinai. The Torah was given because the Israelites made for themselves a golden calf misled by the Samaritans.<sup>70</sup> After all that Moses' people did not seem to be grateful to him in spite of the various signs he gave to them such as providing quails and manna, providing

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, 51.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Q. 20:85.

water from the rock. That became the reason why the children of Israel were condemned to face hardship in the desert for forty years. Abandoned by his own people, Moses died after going through a challenging mysterious experience. However, the Qur'an presents a great privilege that Allah granted to Moses.<sup>71</sup> Moses here the role of a messenger and at the same time that of a prophet in the land of Israel.<sup>72</sup> His characteristics in the Qur'an, moreover, are found similar to those in the Bible. Both Muslims and Christians believe that Moses spoke to God (Allah) face to face. Moses challenged Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian power. He saved the Israelites from the dominion of Egyptian slavery. In the desert Moses received the Decalogue in order to help his people Israel to follow God's precepts.<sup>73</sup> The substance of the Decalogue is also found in the Qur'an.<sup>74</sup>

### **3. The prophet Muhammad in the History of Islam<sup>75</sup>**

The Qur'an declares that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came into the world for a purpose. Allah chose him to be his messenger. He was born and he lived in a mortal body. He died.<sup>76</sup> The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) enjoyed various benefits from God. The Qur'an defines the kind of mission Muhammad (PBUH) was entrusted to carry on.<sup>77</sup> In order to carry out his mission, the prophet Muhammad received extraordinary privileges and even specific prescriptions for his people in matters regarding laws, worship, personal behaviour and conduct, family guidelines, etc. In the night journey Muhammad was given eminent favour.<sup>78</sup> Thus, authority was given to him by virtue of such benefits. Q. 5:92 says: *Obey Allah and*

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<sup>71</sup>Cf. Q. 19:53.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. Q. 7:143.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM, *The Qur'an*, 77.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Q.18:111.

<sup>77</sup>Cf. Q. 5:67.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Q. 17:1.

*obey the messenger, and beware of the evil...*<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the Qur'an says: *"We have indeed in the Messenger of Allah, a beautiful pattern (of conduct). The sayings (hadith), practices and conduct (Sunna) of Muhammad constitute the Traditions of the Prophet. These traditions are the supreme model of the Islamic ideal."*<sup>80</sup>

### **3.1.His Origin**

Unlike Jesus of the Bible, Muhammad was not of divine origin. He was born of human flesh in a relation of a man and a woman. Muhammad was born in Mecca in 570 in a merchant family and was of a very influential clan. He never saw his father who died before he was born. His mother too died when he was six years old. He was then taken care of by a considerably old widow Khadija who had sufficient faith in him and thus entrusted him with her business. At the age of twenty five the young man and the old widow married. For about fifteen years Muhammad lived a life of a merchant even though he developed with time an extraordinary and strange life for a merchant. Strange for a merchant as from time to time he went to the mountain to pray and to meditate. In 610 he received a vision which completely changed his life and it affected the entire history of the world.

According to tradition, it's said that it's on Mount Hira that Gabriel the archangel appeared to Muhammad. Later he described what had happened explaining how a luminous being commended him to repeat the words of Allah. He occasionally had similar experiences in his life.

The year 613 marks the time when Muhammad preached in Mecca the message he received from Allah. Essentially, his message was about the existence of one powerful and merciful God. He freely admitted that other prophets such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus preached the same truth in times past. He preached the monotheism aspect of Allah even though many who

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<sup>79</sup>Cf. Q. 5:92; 48:28.

<sup>80</sup>Cf. M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM, *The Qur'an*, 78.

heard his preaching remained dependent on idols. However, with time Muhammad started to win some converts to his new profession of faith making enemies among the traders of Mecca.

### **3.2. What the Qur'an Presents as Proof of the Prophethood of Muhammad<sup>81</sup>**

Muslims believe that Allah is the first to testify about the prophethood of Muhammad by revealing to him matters of the past. After this revelation Muhammad told others about that past and he then spoke about it as if he himself met and saw it. Yet he was an illiterate man who knew not how to read and he grew up in an environment which did not know much about different realities of the world. Allah told him about Maryam and her story, as he said: You were not with them, when they cast lots with their pens as to which of them should be charged with the care of Maryam; nor were you with them when they disputed.<sup>82</sup> This means that: 'you were not present when all this took place, but to you this is Allah's revelation.'

In a similar way, Allah spoke to him about Nuh (Noah) and his people; how He saved Nuh and punished the stubbornness of his people saying: this is of the news of the Unseen which We reveal unto you; neither you nor your people knew it before this. So, be patient. Surely, the (good) end is for those who have Taqwa.<sup>83</sup>

After Allah had spoken about Noah, he then spoke also about Moses (Musa) saying: and you were not on the western side of the Mount when we made clear to Musa the commandment.<sup>84</sup> Meaning that you, Prophet Muhammad, were not present at the mountain side where Allah talked to Musa from the tree which was in the valley.

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<sup>81</sup>Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 66.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Q. 3:44.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Q. 11:49.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Q. 28:44.

Allah goes further and say: and you were not among the witnesses; meaning, to that event you were not a witness but Allah has revealed all this to you so that it may serve as evidence and proof of events which took place centuries ago because people have forgotten what Allah established and what was revealed to the earlier prophets.

Allah says again: And you were not a dweller among the people of Madyan, reciting Our Ayat to them.<sup>85</sup> This simply means: `you were not living among the people of Madyan reciting Our *ayat* to them, when you started to tell about Our Prophet Shu`ayb and what he said to his people and how they responded.<sup>86</sup>

Allah says: but it is We who kept sending; meaning, but it is we who gave you the revelation and sent you as a messenger to people. And remember when your Lord called Musa, when his Lord called him in the sacred valley of Tuwa;<sup>87</sup> We called him from the right side of At-Tur, and made him draw near to Us for a talk with him.<sup>88</sup>

But (you are sent) as a mercy from your Lord;<sup>89</sup> to mean that `you were not a witness to any of those things, but Allah has revealed them to you and told you about them as a mercy from Him to you and to His servants, by sending you to them.'

Allah said to Muhammad: we have sent you to give warning to a people to whom no warner had come before you, in order that they may remember or receive admonition.<sup>90</sup> Meaning, `so that they may be guided by that which you bring from God.'

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<sup>85</sup>Cf. Q. 28:45.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Quran Tafsir Ibn Kathir, "Proof of the prophethood of Muhammad".

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Q. 79:16.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Q. 19:52.

<sup>89</sup>Cf. Q. 28:46.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. Q. 28:46.

And if (We had) not (sent you to the people of Makkah) -- in case a calamity should seize them for (the deeds) that their hands have sent forth, they would have said: "*Our Lord! Why did You not send us a Messenger?*" (Q. 28:47).<sup>91</sup> Meaning: `and We have sent you to them to establish proof against them, and to give them no excuse when the punishment of Allah comes to them because of their disbelief, lest they offer the excuse that no Messenger or warner came to them.' This is like what Allah says about the situation after He revealed His blessed Book the Qur'an: they shouldn't say: "*The Book was sent down only to two sects before us, and for our part, we were in fact unaware of what they studied.*" Or lest you should say: "*If only the Book had been sent down to us, we would surely have been better guided than they.*" So, now has come unto you a clear proof from your Lord, and a guidance and a mercy.<sup>92</sup>

O People of the Scripture! Now has come to you Our Messenger making (things) clear unto you, after a break in (the series of) Messengers, lest you say:<sup>93</sup>"*There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner.*" But now has come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner.<sup>94</sup>

Instructive proof from Allah about Muhammad. We read in the Qur'an:<sup>95</sup> But when the truth has come to them from Us, they say: "Why is he not given the like of what was given to Musa? Did they not disbelieve in that which was given to Musa of old." They say: "Two kinds of magic, each helping the other!" And they say: "Verily, in both we are disbelievers." Say: "Then bring a Book from Allah, which is a better guide than these two, that I may follow it, if you are truthful." But if they answer you not, then know that they only follow

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. M. SALIH, "What is the wisdom of creation of this Universe?" 1-8.

<sup>92</sup>Cf. M. JARRAR, "Civilization Sequence", 1-4.

<sup>93</sup>Cf. Q. 5:19.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. M. JARRAR, "Civilization Sequence", 1-4.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Q. 48-51.

their own lusts. And who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts, without guidance from Allah? Verily, Allah guides not the people who are wrongdoers. And indeed now We have conveyed the Word to them, in order that they may remember.<sup>96</sup>

These are some proofs in the Qur'an which affirm the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH). God alone freely chose Muhammad with the purpose of transmitting his message and will to all believers. These few proofs are clearly Qur'anic and are as well Allah's own communication with his prophet and messenger Muhammad. God also chose him so that he may present his image to his people. He was born and came into the world so that all may come to believe in the only one God (Allah) and worship him through the only one religion (Islam).

### ***3.3. Muhammad's miracles as Proof of his Prophethood***<sup>97</sup>

Muslims believe that Muhammad is the true messenger of Allah. His veracity can be proved by numerous evidences. Nevertheless, among so many of those we may encounter, let us here present twelve proofs of Muhammad's miracles which are regarded as proof of his prophethood.<sup>98</sup> We learn that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was illiterate. He never knew how to write. He did not know also how to read. However, despite this incapability, he was trustworthy. He did not know about religion even before he received Allah's revelation. Allah revealed himself to him at the age of forty. Though he did not know how to read and to write, Muhammad (PBUH) received the Qur'an from Allah. This Book exists until today. In it are found historical accounts that occurred before the existence of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). But these are narrated in such a way one gets the impression that he already existed

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<sup>96</sup>Cf. Quran Tafsir Ibn Kathir, "Proof of the prophethood of Muhammad".

<sup>97</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 66.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Shaykh `Abdul Rahman `Abdul Khaliq, "Twelve Proofs that Muhammad is a True Prophet" 1.

and he witnessed to them. These accounts are similar to those which contain book of law which was handed to Moses.<sup>99</sup> They also refer to the message of Jesus Christ found in the Gospels. However, despite his revealed and inspiring message, neither Jews nor Christians believed in his prophecy.

In his prophecy, Muhammad (PBUH) foretold all that was to take place. He also predicted everything that his community was to experience after he will be no more alive. For instance, the victory pertaining, the victory over the nations and the teaching of Islam as the religion of the world. According to history these events took occurred as they were foretold.<sup>100</sup>

The Qur'an Muhammad (PBUH) presented was written in Arabic. It was the peak of clarity and eloquence. Its content was a high challenge to all those who were known as masters in Arabic language. No scholar of the time was capable of producing a single paragraph which can be compared to those the Qur'an. Among all the influential Arabs who lived during Muhammad's time, none could contest the content Qur'an. It is still believed that until today no man possesses the ability to compose a text capable of challenging the order, beauty and the splendour found in the Qur'an.<sup>101</sup>

1. Tafsir ibn Kathir says: *the life history of this Noble Prophet was a perfect example of being upright, merciful, compassionate, truthful, brave, generous, distant from all evil character, and ascetic in all worldly matters, while striving solely for the reward of the Hereafter.*<sup>102</sup> *Moreover, in all his actions and dealings, he was ever mindful and fearful of Allah.*<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's Prophethood", 1.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's Prophethood", 1

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Quran Tafsir Ibn Kathir, "Proof of the prophethood of Muhammad" 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

2. Muhammad (PBUH) was highly blessed with God's love. Allah does the same to every believer. His true believers love and honour him. They are ready to offer and sacrifice all that they have in order to be with him even though that could mean once.
3. Islam holds onto the belief that Muhammad's biography is one of the rare bibliographies found in the history of the world. It is the more valuable than that of every other person who ever existed in the world. This approach is so held because no one in the world praised every morning, noontime, evening time and many other hours of the day. Daily Muslims honour Muhammad (PBUH). They wholeheartedly ask Allah to shower upon him his blessings.<sup>104</sup>
4. Muhammad (PBUH), unlike other persons, is still imitated and followed by Muslims believers. Whatever exemplary life he lived has served as a model of life for Muslims. They adhere and live in accordance to his teaching. Many generations from his ministry up to now obey his teaching. He has served as model and example to many Muslim believers.
5. Muhammad (PBUH) used to praise Allah. His followers too took his path. Through him, Praises of every occasion have been set and practiced.
6. Fasting, charity and pilgrimage have been kept as genuine traditions in Islam.
7. Muhammad (PBUH) unlike many prophets is qualified with a very special respect and reverence, honour and obedience. It's said: *"there has never been nor will there ever be a man anywhere upon this earth who has received such love, respect, honour, and obedience in all matters-small and large alike-as has this Noble Prophet."*<sup>105</sup>
8. In various corners of the world, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has gotten a high popularity of believers. People of different race and colour have adhered to his religion.

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's Prophethood", 1.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "12 Proofs that Prophet Muhammad was a True Prophet", 1.

Many followed him because of his genuine attitude and truthfulness. Muslims did not follow his path out adopting the customs and traditions of the elders. Some were persecuted but despite every kind of persecution or humiliation, that did not fully discourage wholeheartedly the worshippers of Allah.

9. Universally, Muhammad (PBUH) is known as the founder of Islam. He alone has presented and described God as truly he is with total perfection. Muhammad (PBUH) taught that Allah has a tremendous knowledge and power over all<sup>106</sup>.

“It’s believed that it’s not in the capability and ability of any human being to bring about perfect laws promoting equality, justice, mercy and charity towards human activity on earth as the divine rules Muhammad brought in order to guide his disciples such as: selling and buying, renting, marriage and divorce, custody, testimony and all sorts of other contracts that regulate human life on earth.”<sup>107</sup>

According to Islamic belief, no one can conceive genuine moral principles like Muhammad (PBUH) did.

Muhammad taught good character and good manners towards parents, relatives, family, friends, animals and plants. And yet we can see that it’s impossible for a human being to grasp and teach people like Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This offers a proof that Muhammad did not teach the religion of submission on his own foundation. Allah sent him to go and preach his oneness to humankind and to observe his commandments.

The Islamic belief also states that the *level of inimitability of the divine law that was sent down upon Muhammad is of the same degree of inimitability of the Divine creation of the heavens and earth. For just as humanity cannot create this universe, in the same manner*

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. QUORA, “What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?”

<sup>107</sup> Cf. QUORA, “What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?”

humanity cannot bring forth a law like Allah's law that He sent down upon His servant and messenger Muhammad<sup>108</sup> (may Allah's blessings and PBUH).<sup>109</sup>

In addition to these stated twelve miracles of Muhammad we find some other miracles which some historians have put to our disposal and knowledge. Most of them are not in the Qur'an. They are said to be witnessed by his contemporaries and they have been kept in the hadiths. These miracles are here listed as follows:

Qur'an: for Muhammad, the Qur'an is his greatest miracle. It is a miracle for all future generations.

*Isra and Mi'raj, the night journey is also Muhammad's miracle.*<sup>110</sup>

*"For Ali b. Rabban al-Tabari, Muhammad's victory over his enemies is one of his miracles. And modern historians say that Muhammad's greatest miracles were what he achieved in the world in various fields such as religious, political, social, literary, military, etc."*<sup>111</sup>

*Muhammad moved miraculously from Mecca to Medina. He provided water to his soldiers after the battle of Tabouk. To his companion Uthman he said that a calamity would fall on him which was to be followed by his entering in paradise.*

*To his other companion Ammar b. Yasir he said that an unjust party would kill him and it happened to be so.*

*He prophesied that Allah will make peace between two large Muslim groups through Hasan b. Ali his grandson and it became so.*

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's Prophethood", 1

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Quran Tafsir Ibn Kathir, "Proof of the prophethood of Muhammad", 1-2.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. QUORA, "What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?"

<sup>111</sup> Cf. QUORA, "What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?"

*He prophesied that a man who is apparently fighting for a Muslim cause would merit hell; and of course this happened to one man who committed suicide in order to end his suffering caused by a wound which he got during battle.*

*He prophesied that Fatimah, his daughter, would be the first to die after his death and it happened as he said.*

*That he spit into Ali's eye that was sick and it recovered.*<sup>112</sup>

*That he caused rain in Medina during a drought.*<sup>113</sup>

All these proofs (they are too many and unsubstantiated) are meant to indicate that Muhammad was Allah's messenger. They show that Muhammad was not just someone who claimed to be Allah's messenger but one who clearly spoke about Allah and his religion Islam with divine knowledge.

### **3.4. Some Prophecies Attributed to Muhammad**<sup>114</sup>

Due to the various prophecies which were fulfilled in the lifetime of Muhammad (PBUH) today prophecies are still generally accepted as having recently fulfilled or being fulfilled in the name of Allah through his last prophet. The following prophecies are in one way or another attributed to Muhammad:

“Other nations will tear up and consume the resources of the Muslims like a group of people calling each other to a meal. This will happen, even though the Muslims will be great in numbers, but they will be very weak.”<sup>115</sup> Right in the early twentieth century this prophecy

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. QUORA, “What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?”

<sup>113</sup> Cf. A. IBRAHEEM “Miracles of Muhammad” 1.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 69.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. AL-BIDAYA WA ALNIHAYA, “Islam's prophecies for the future” 1-3.

came true. The European countries had carved up the Middle East and North Africa in order to have countries where they could easily exploit their resources.

It was said that the Muslim world would be divided into many groups and sects which would sound genuine but poorly behaving.

Interest was predicted to become a common thing that would attract everyone.

An indiscriminate killing would increase.

Taking excessive alcohol would become common.

That women would dress in shameful clothes and that promiscuity would become common as well.

That a competition between Muslims would take place in building mosques.

That people wouldn't care if they make money from permissible or impermissible sources.

People would feel like time is running faster. A year would end like a month, a month like a week, a week like a day and a day like an hour.

That the Arabs would compete in raising tall buildings. Eventually the tallest building in the world today is Burj Khalifain, found in the UAE.

That people would easily cut family relationships and reading the Qur'an would be a means to entertain people.<sup>116</sup>

It's said that Muhammad predicted that after his death, Muslims were to be ruled by a just caliphate for a period of thirty years after which the ruling system would be dynastic, hard to cope with because of tyranny and dictatorship.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. AL-BIDAYA WA ALNIHAYA, "Islam's prophecies for the future" 1-3.

Muhammad said that there will be twelve powerful caliphs who would rule and bring Muslims together. These caliphs are all descendants from the Quraish tribe. History says that five of these have ruled Muslims in the past thirty years. Meaning that there are still seven of them to come.

The coming of false prophets was prophesied. During this time the right person will be judged a liar and the wrong one will be lifted to honesty, truth and trust.<sup>118</sup>

There shall be no rain and plants shall die. This is true in some areas of the world whereby climate change alters rainfall patterns. This is the case in the Middle East.

The inhabitants of Iraq, Egypt and of Syria will face severe economic sanctions imposed to them by Europeans. After this will come a time of Mahdi who will establish justice and then they will have plentiful resources.

There will be years of earthquakes and catastrophes after the severe plague.

Before the Anti-Christ it was said that three trials would hit Muslims. The first is the trial of retreat and war; the second is of false happiness which would come from a descendant of Muhammad who will not be a genuine person. Thirdly there would be a calamity which would touch every person all over the Muslim world. And when people would start thinking it is over, the same thing will hit them again. Then finally people will be split into two groups. Pure belief will be found in one meanwhile hypocrisy will be found in the other. After this would have taken place, then at any time the Anti-Christ would appear.<sup>119</sup>

A period of war will be experienced with Europeans during which a number of them will be sent to prison. At that time many prisoners will convert to Islam and will certainly join the

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. AL-ALBANI, "Islam's prophecies for the future", 1.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. AL-BIDAYA WA ALNIHAYA, "Islam's prophecies for the future", 1-3.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. AL-BIDAYA WA ALNIHAYA, "Islam's prophecies for the future", 1-3.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 69.

Muslim army. But during the time of Mahdi there will be peace established between Europeans and the Muslims. And after many battles, Muslims will conquer and defeat the Europeans. They then also fight and defeat the Anti-Christ. And at the end, Jesus will return to the earth.<sup>120</sup>

Istanbul, the city modern day, will fall before the city of Rome.

These are some of so many prophecies which Muslims have been attributed to Muhammad (PBUH).

### **3.5. *Is Muhammad the Seal of Prophets?***

Muhammad is declared the last of prophets.<sup>121</sup> The Qur'an says he the last of the last of the prophetic models. He is the culmination of prophethood.<sup>122</sup> Here lays the Islamic doctrine. The Islamic profession of faith is one part of the doctrine which says, "*I witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.*"<sup>123</sup>

Muhammad's mission is considered to be the fulfilment of the mission of the previous prophets. All that was proclaimed to humanity by the previous prophets was perfected by the prophecy of Muhammad. Also, the original religion of humankind, Islam, was made complete and perfected through Muhammad, Allah's last messenger. During his time a community of Muslims was established. In addition we are taught that the Qur'an which is Allah's final guidance to humankind revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) 600 years after Prophet Isa (Jesus) who is the 'Seal of the Revelations.'<sup>124</sup>

### **3.6. *Was Muhammad's Prophethood Foreseen by Christianity?***

Despite the polemic arguments of Ahmed Deedat, Christians still withstand and maintain that nothing in the Bible is said about the Prophet Muhammad. However, due to the values and

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. AL-BIDAYA WA ALNIHAYA, "Islam's prophecies for the future", 1-3.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 87.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 88.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. M.A.S. ABDEL HALEEM, *The Qur'an*, 72.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 87.

virtues Muhammad brought to Islam and in view of dialogue between Christianity and Islam we tend to ask: “what should be the Christian attitude towards Muhammad?”

Muslims suggest that Christians should openly speak of Muhammad without distinguishing between the historical Muhammad and Muhammad of faith. They should observe the same respect and deep affection which their Muslim brothers and sisters manifest toward their prophet. It’s always sad on the side of Muslims to see that their Christian brothers and sisters object and refuse to recognise the prophethood of Muhammad, whereas, in the Islamic faith, Muslims recognise and acknowledge the prophethood of Jesus.

Christians should take into consideration the prophethood of Muhammad in order for them to appreciate the authentic value of his life and even the environment in which he lived. It’s suggested that they must firmly renounce all the circumstances whereby lack of respect has been shown, whereby insulting and unhelpful statements have been uttered on behalf of Muhammad (PBUH), and also where unconstructive speeches and incorrect writings have been clearly and publicly put to the knowledge of human persons. According to Borrmans, “these negative judgments which came out of former concern for polemics and apologetics, Christians should assess in an objective way, and in consonance with their faith, exactly what was the inspiration, the sincerity and Muhammad’s faithfulness making their judgment within the framework, first, of his personal response to the commands of God, and then, on a wider scale, that of the working of providence in world history.”<sup>125</sup>

Furthermore, Kateregga and Shenk suggest that when Christians look at Muhammad (PBUH) they need to evaluate him in the Christian way of witnessing of the love of God. Christians also should appreciate Muhammad (PBUH) and his mission just as Muhammad himself

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. BORRMANS, *The ‘manifesto’ of wise Islam. Structure, language, surprises and doubts*, 57.

accepts Jesus and his teaching. Christians are therefore urged to have Muhammad as a concern of every believer.<sup>126</sup>

#### **4. The Uniqueness of the Prophethood of Muhammad<sup>127</sup>**

As far as the uniqueness of Muhammad (PBUH) is concerned, scholars have pointed out many characteristics. However, we won't be able to mention all that has been put in order to mark his uniqueness inasmuch as his prophethood is concerned. Here follow some, of his unique characteristics as presented to us by Yasir Qadhi and Mamqasmi:

Muhammad (PBUH) as the last of the prophets of Islam, it's said that Allah chose him. After him no one was to appear here on earth. He was entrusted a message of Islamic monotheism which is for all humankind.

Even before Allah created Adam, he decreed his Messenger Muhammad (PBUH).

That Muhammad is the only prophet who has been sent to all and even to Jinn. He was a messenger to all humanity and his message was not a particular concern to any particular nation or city, clan or tribe.

He was given power to terrify his enemies even before he could reach them.

Allah gave him the largest *Ummah* (community). According to one Haddith, his *Ummah* will cover two-third of the *Jannah* (paradise).

The most powerful miracle in the entire world was given to Muhammad (PBUH). This miracle is the Qur'an. All people have witnessed to this particular and unique miracle.

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. KATERREGA – SHENK, “dis-moi ce que tu crois, un Musulman et un Chrétien en dialogue”, 47.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. QUORA, “What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?”

Meanwhile the previous miracles that were given to the previous prophets were only for the people of their time.

*That the night journey of Isra-wal-Maraj was only meant for Muhammad only because no other prophet was called to experience the presence of Allah<sup>128</sup>.*

*The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the leader of all humanity.*

*On the last day of judgement Muhammad will be the first to be resurrected.*

*The blessing of abundance (Al-Kauthar) has been given to him<sup>129</sup>.*

Muhammad (PBUH) will be the first among all to enter the *Jannah* after Adam guiding the *Ummah*. He has been blessed with the highest level of *Jannah*.<sup>130</sup>

*His prophethood is universal to all human generations.*

*He is the basis of Iman.*

*All insults addressed to the holy prophet of Allah constitute a Kufr.*

Allah's prophet Muhammad (PBUH) intervenes in the time of need.

*It's not allowed to call the name of the holy Prophet Muhammad "Yaa Muhammad" or Yaa Ahmada".*

*"He is the only and unique master of the Sharia.*

*He blessed childless people with children and healed some illnesses.*

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<sup>128</sup> QUORA, "What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?"

<sup>129</sup> QUORA, "What are the significance between Jesus and Muhammad?"

<sup>130</sup> Cf. YASIR QADHI, "The Uniqueness of Prophet Muhammad" 1-2.

*Muhammad (PBUH) was born miraculously circumcised.*

*His body had no shadow and flies never sat on his body or his clothes.*

*Obedience towards the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is compulsory to every Muslim.*

*Muhammad's entire life (PBUH) is a miracle in itself.*<sup>131</sup>

*That the Prophet Muhammad's Ummah is the greatest ever existed.*<sup>132</sup>

These are just few attributions and qualifications of the more we would be able to mention here. A lot is said about him but we chose some of many so as to understand why the prophet of Islam should be respected and accepted as God's only messenger.

## **Conclusion**

We now understand that Allah the almighty God, creator of all that exists, created human beings with a purpose. He created human beings to worship him alone and also to live a virtuous life which is based on his guidance and will. No one, however, can satisfy this purpose without receiving Allah's guidance. That's why, in order to make us be aware of this purpose, Allah appointed chosen individuals to communicate his message to all humanity. And these individuals are the so called "prophets;" the very first ones being Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (PBUH).

The Prophets that are venerated in Islam (*peace be upon them all*) lived a virtuous life full of exemplary and common characteristics.<sup>133</sup> These characteristics made of them exceptional human beings in the midst of their fellow brothers and sisters. They received revelation upon revelation from Allah the all-powerful God. They made proof of their noble character such

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. A. RAHMAN, "Signs of Muhammad's Prophethood", 1

<sup>132</sup> Cf. MAMQASMI, "The Uniqueness of Prophet Muhammad", 3.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. G. NEHLS, *Christians ask Muslims*, 89.

as, they never sought personal benefits like wealth, power or societal rank or status but they only did Allah's will.

The last prophet of Islam (PBUH) was the best example among his people in every aspect of life. He lived in total obedience to God, with excellent morals. He was truthful throughout his entire life. And for this reason, Muslims totally reject the attribution of major sins to Muhammad (PBUH). He was not divine but Allah utilised him as his instrument. He himself declared: *"I am only a man like you. It has been revealed to me that your God is One God."*<sup>134</sup> Allah gave him special qualities that made him unique as compared to other prophets. This uniqueness is proved by his persistence, his leadership, his wisdom, his courage, his patience and so forth. For that reason, Muslims call upon all believers to accept and acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad (PBUH).

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. Q. 18:110.

## CHAPTER THREE: PROPHETHOOD IN CHRISTIANITY

### Introduction

In terms of revelation and inspiration, prophecies were communicated to prophets who also put into writing what God revealed to them.<sup>135</sup> Many prophecies in the Bible have been fulfilled already, but many others are for the future moment. They are yet to be accomplished before Jesus' second coming on earth (*Parousia*). When studying the prophetic segments in the Holy Scriptures, it's very important to call to mind some major principles:

All that the biblical prophets wrote, they did it under divine inspiration. In other words, none of the biblical prophecies is the fruit of a personal imagination alone. True prophecy is a result of God's direct inspiration.

The realization of ancient prophecies is a clear sign that God is real and he will accomplish what he has promised in the future. Prophecies related to relativize world empires, for instance, including one among them naming in advance the next leader even before his birth, and this having been fulfilled, assures us that many other prophecies will come to their realization as promised.

Biblical prophecies lead us to have faith in God. This faith is demonstrated through obedience to God's laws. Despite many various judgements which would have affected the people and nations due to the disobedience to the divine laws, we believe that a good understanding of the divine grace will help us to live piously.

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 2-6.

## **1. Prophecy in the Holy Bible<sup>136</sup>**

What is prophecy according to the Bible? The Bible understands prophecy as a message that comes from God. It is a revelation from God. The Bible declares that prophets spoke on behalf of God guided by the Holy Spirit (2 P. 1:20-21). Thus, a prophet receives God's message and transmits it to others (Act. 3:18).

How did prophets receive information from God? God certainly used various methods to transmit his message to his people through prophets. Here are some methods which God used.

Written message: the book of Exodus tells how God used this method in order to transmit the Ten Commandments in a written form (Exodus 31:18).

Oral transmission through an angel: for instance, God, through an Angel gave to Moses a message which he was to give to Pharaoh in Egypt (Ex 3:2, 2, 10). When the choice of proper and convincing words was needed, God commanded his angels to dictate his message. For instance, when God said to Moses: "write for yourself these words, for it is according to these words that I conclude a covenant with you and Israel" (Ex 34:27).

Visions: sometimes a prophet could receive a vision when he was fully awake and aware of himself (Is 1:1; Hab1:1). In some other cases, some were so alive that even someone who witnessed it took part in it (Lk 9:28-36; Rev. 22:17-21). In other cases, the prophet received a vision while in ecstasy (Acts 10:10-11; 22:17-21). God also communicated his message to the prophet through dreams (Dn 7:1; Acts 16:9-10).

Guided by a thought: God directed the thought of his messengers who transmitted his message. The message was God's but the prophet said it in his own way (2 Sam. 23: 1-2).

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<sup>136</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 55-79.

Prophecies: were they only predictions? No! Biblical prophecies were not just limited to prediction of future events. However, most of God's messages are about the future; but they have to be acted upon now. For example, God's prophets warned the people of Israel about their bad behaviours. By warning them, the prophets announced the blessings that they were to receive if they obeyed God. They also announced the curse that they were to undergo if they refused to obey (Jer. 25:4-36). The future of Israelites depended on their choice of conduct now (Dt. 30:19-20).

Examples of some biblical prophecies which were not about predictions:

Once when the Israelites asked for God's help, God sent a prophet to explain why he did not want to help them because of their disobedience (Jgs 6:6-10).

When Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman, he revealed to her things of her past which he only knew through divine revelation. She then saw in him a great prophet even though he did not predict anything (Jn. 4:17-19).

When Jesus was taken into custody, his enemies veiled his face and they beat him. They then asked him to prophesy who beat him. They did not ask him to say what was to happen in the future but to identify, through divine power, who it was who beat him (Luc 22:63-64).

## **2. Prophets of the Holy Bible and their Role**

Who are they?

Jeremiah and his disciples, Isaiah the suffering servant, Ezekiel and his prophecy over the dry bones that came to life again and many others are some of the prophetic characters found in the Bible. The great biblical prophets entered into the collective imaginary of non-understood visionaries. They appeared to be people who lived unsuccessfully. And this unsuccessfulness

became the reason and the cause that pushed them to denounce the establishment of their time.

There are two types of prophets in the history of Israel: the “ancient” who appeared with the first kings of Israel during the ninth century before Christ, such as Elijah, Elisha, Samuel, Nathan, Gad. These prophets did not write anything. Those who wrote something and to whom some oracles and biblical books were attributed are Isaiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, etc. However, it would be better to talk of schools or of prophetic influences because apart from some passages, these books were written over a long period by many different disciples. Around the third century before Christ, prophecy slowly disappeared and was somehow replaced by books of wisdom. According to the book of Maccabees, prophets are no more inspired (Mac. 9:27).

Prophecy is something characterising Israel. However, other nations too had the experience of prophecy. In Mesopotamia for instance, we hear about “*baru*” which means a seer or a diviner; but also about a “*muhu*”, a person who has ecstasies. Outwardly nothing distinguished them from one another. Biblical prophets advocated for justice and brotherhood concern as the primordial means to establish a relationship with God.

Nevertheless, biblical prophets are personally different from one another: Isaiah was an employee of the king, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests, and Amos was a farmer, Micha probably a provincial agent. They were much involved in political and religious affairs. It wouldn't be so simple to distinguish a true from a false prophet. The Bible too does not offer clear criteria in distinguishing the two kinds of prophets. The book of Deuteronomy offers the idea that a true prophet is the one whose word is verified in the future. In contrast with the prophets of the court who had the mission to abuse the political power and who were always contradicting themselves. They stood for injustice against oppression and idolatry.

What exactly was their role?

Their primordial role was not to announce the future but to be the critical conscience of Israel in action. Prophets spoke on behalf of God and in his name. They used expressions such as “*the Word of the Lord*”, “*Oracle of the Lord.*” Their task was to know God’s will whenever people encountered misfortune. The prophet therefore asked God what was the way forward for the survival of people. “I will stand on my guard post and station myself on the rampart; and I will keep watch to see what He will speak to me, and how I may reply when I am reproved” (Hab. 2:1).

Inserted in the political actuality of his time, the prophet, according to Ezekiel is a “watcher” (Ez. 33:7). The prophet was not just pleased to criticise the present time but he was to open perspectives or a new horizon.<sup>137</sup>

Biblical prophets also fought against two ideas which the people of Israel held before exile: the belief that was purely naïve and the idea that God would punish and abandon them if they refused to obey his commandments. They in fact forgot that it’s not God who abandons his people, it’s rather the people who turn away from God. But their God was always ready to forgive again his people.

Biblical prophets announced the coming of the Messiah. All that was about the Messiah (Jesus) was foretold by the biblical prophets. They defended the poor and the oppressed but also they announced the Messiah who was to bring light to the sinful Israel. This Messiah was coming to renew God’s covenant which was about permitting sinners to partake once again in God’s life.<sup>138</sup> In the Gospel according to John Philip say to Nathaniel “we have found the Messiah”: “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. Ez. 37.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, pp 48-50.

Moses spoke in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.””(Jn. 1:45).

### **3. Jesus the Prophet in History**

Jesus of Nazareth is known as a Jew from Galilee. He appears in the circle of John the Baptist before he did any ministry. He was followed by some disciples when he was preaching about the Kingdom of God. He carried on his ministry for about three years. In Galilee Jesus healed sick people<sup>139</sup> and exercised exorcism.<sup>140</sup> He also performed miracles. He went against political and religious authorities before he was arrested, condemned and crucified on a cross in Jerusalem during the Jewish Passover.<sup>141</sup>

The proclamation of his resurrection by his disciples who also recognised in him the Messiah and Christ gave birth to Christianity. For the Christians, Jesus is God’s Son. He is the Messiah who was foretold by the prophets.

His message, which has been transmitted by different Christian churches, influenced different cultures and civilisation.

#### **3.1. His Origin<sup>142</sup>**

Like Muhammad (PBUH), Moses was born of biological parents. But unlike these two prophets, Jesus was born of a Virgin. He was born without a biological father. Thus in accordance with natural law, the prophets Muhammad (PBUH) and Moses were born. Jesus however was miraculously born by the power of the Holy Spirit. He never married. He chose to live as celibate throughout his whole life. Contrary to Jesus, Muhammad (PBUH) and Moses married and begot children. Jesus “did not bring with him a new religion, new laws or

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 117-120.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 18-19.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 130-144.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 10-12.

new rules”<sup>143</sup> (Mt: 5:17-18). But both Moses and Muhammad (PBUH) made new laws and regulations.

However, despite his divine nature, Jesus was born from a human lineage (Lk 2:6-7). He descended from Abraham and from the tribe of Judah and of David’s family (Lk. 3:34; 1:69; Mt. 1:1; 1:3; 1:6). He was born in Bethlehem. (Mt. 1:18-32). *He fled to Egypt under the threat of King Herod.* He later on went to Galilee where he grew up; then to Jerusalem (Mt. 4:12-16; 21:4-5). He grew up as a man of unique character. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he was humble and modest. He never committed any sins (Mt. 4: 1; 1P. 2:21-24; Jn. 13:3-5).

Jesus’ ministry was prepared by a messenger, John the Baptist<sup>144</sup> (Lk. 1:76).<sup>145</sup> His ministry was marked by miracles and preaching (Lk. 4:16-31; Jn. 18:20). He suffered rejection, betrayal, abandonment, condemnation, insults and death on the cross (Lk. 19:47; Jn. 13:18-19; Mt. 26:31; 27:27; 57-60).

For humanity’s sake and salvation, Jesus offered himself freely. He took upon himself the sins of humankind. He was unjustly accused and stripped. But despite all his sufferings, he triumphed over death by being raised from the dead (Jn. 10:17-18; 2Cor. 5:21; 1 P. 3:18; Rom. 3:24; Lk. 24:36-44).

### **3.2. Biblical Proof of the Prophethood of Jesus<sup>146</sup>**

When we read Mathew and Mark, Luke and John, Jesus is presented as a prophet in one way or the other by the evangelists.<sup>147</sup> From his preaching in Nazareth up to his meeting with the two disciples of Emmaus, Jesus presents himself as a prophet; but in fact he is more than a

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<sup>143</sup> Cf. Matthew: 5:17-18.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 16.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 9-12.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 57-59.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 116.

prophet. In Nazareth Jesus speaks using the words of prophet Isaiah. Hearing him, his listeners are moved by the gracious message that comes from his mouth. He also told them that “a prophet is not always accepted in his own town;” thus referring to himself. Jesus recognises that no prophet is accepted by his own people. In Nain, after he had resurrected the widow’s son, the crowd shouted: "A great prophet has appeared among us; God has come to help his people" (Lk 7:16). When taking the route towards Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets, Jesus said that it’s not possible that a prophet should perish outside Jerusalem; “Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem” Lk.13:33-34). Again, the disciples of Emmaus affirmed that Jesus was a powerful prophet in words and actions before God and before people (Lk. 24:9).

Truly, it would be so realistic to only see a prophet in the person of Jesus. Because, as any prophets, he spoke on behalf of God and proclaimed the message of salvation which he himself bore in his human flesh just as John the Baptist. The Evangelist Luke tells us that Jesus is more than a prophet and with him the prophets and the Law find their end. “The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the Kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it”; Lk. 16:16. Why? Because Jesus is the Son of God (Lk. 1: 35). His way of interpreting the Scriptures is very different from that of the prophets who preceded him. Those who listen to him are not misled. They listen and they confirm that Jesus has extra-ordinary power as compared to other prophets.

Through his preaching and his miracles Jesus distinguishes himself from other prophets. He does not focus on just announcing the salvation which is to come but he speaks about it as something which is already present. Also, when Jesus cures the sick, when he forgives sins or when he raises up the dead, he predicts his victory over sin and all evil which will be

accomplished in his death and resurrection. He is the Saviour. This is what the angel, at his birth, announced to the shepherds: “*Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord*” (Lk. 2:11). Saviour, Christ and Lord, Jesus is therefore more than a prophet.

Furthermore, Jesus asked his disciples: “what do people say that I am?” They answered: “some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets” (Mt 16:14). Today just as yesterday, there are those who only see in Jesus a simple preacher or a prophet. Interestingly enough, Jesus asked the same question to his disciples: “And you, who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:15). Peter, as their spokesperson, professed that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God. He meant in this case that Jesus is more than a prophet.<sup>148</sup>

Thus, after the explanation above, is Jesus a prophet? Certainly yes! Nothing but a prophet? No! Peter confessed that Jesus is more than a prophet. The Bible says that Jesus is both human and God. In his lifetime Jesus made proof of actions which are unique to God. He has a divine name. He forgave sins and yet forgiving sins belongs to God alone. He also transformed life. He is one with God the Father in a perfect unity. He was righteous and just. He alone on earth lived without sin. The Qur’an also testifies of the sinless nature of Jesus in its Surat 19. Jesus raised the dead and cured the paralytic, he healed the blind and he purified the people with leprosy. He chased demons and calmed the wind. He fed thousands of people with only five loafs and two fish.

### **3.3. *Jesus’ Miracles as Proof of his Prophethood in History***

During his earthly ministry Jesus certainly performed many miracles. We will not be able to touch all the miracles Jesus did in order to prove his prophethood.<sup>149</sup> But we will hereby focus on the seven miracles that John the Evangelist presents to us in his Gospel. John calls

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 55-79.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 35-38.

these miracles “signs” in order for us to understand God’s action accomplished in each and everyone’s life. These seven miracles are as follows:

The first miracle Jesus did is the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11).<sup>150</sup> Through this miracle, Jesus inaugurates a new relationship with his people. This relationship presents Jesus as a bridegroom. New wine here means the fullness of life and joy. And this relation is built, not on religiosity, but on the happiness he brought into the wedding feast.

The second miracle is the healing of the centurion’s son (Jn. 4:43-ff). In this miracle John portrays the power of the word of Jesus.

The third miracle is about the man with infirmity at Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-16). Someone who was unwell for thirty eight years is healed on the Sabbath. Jesus goes beyond and against the Jewish rule and performs a miracle. He shows mercy to the suffering.<sup>151</sup>

The fourth miracle is the multiplication of bread (Jn. 6:1-13). Jesus fed thousands of people after he had felt compassion on them.<sup>152</sup> This miracle is still being experienced in the Holy Eucharist all over the entire world. The bread which is his body is still being shared each and every moment in the world. Those who partook in that miracle were fed and after they were satisfied, they gathered the left overs. The multiplication of the bread today, according to me, should be understood as the miracle of miracles. It is the eternal miracle because this bread is still being shared among people in every hour of each day. It is shared and it will never finish. It is the bread of life, Jesus, who offered himself to us as a living sacrifice.

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<sup>150</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 64.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 18.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 84-86.

The fifth miracle is the walking on the water (Jn. 6:16-21). This is a miracle of time and space. When we read carefully, we understand that the disciples were in on the lake when a storm caught the boat. But surprisingly, when Jesus touched the boat, they realised that they had coasted on the other side of the lake. Jesus here is in control of everything and in every life circumstance of the believer.

The healing of the blind man constitutes the sixth (Jn. 9). Here Jesus rejects the link between sickness and fatality. He is the true light which enlightens human understanding.

The seventh miracle is the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn. 11). Through this event Jesus presents himself as the resurrection. He invites all believers to have faith in the resurrection at the last time. Death therefore is nothing for whoever believes in Jesus who has power over death.

These seven miracles and many others constitute both a prophetic and a Christological proof that, not only was Jesus a prophet but, he was more than prophet.<sup>153</sup> In so many circumstances, Jesus, unlike other prophets, made use of expressions like: "...says the Lord God", "...the Lord commands". He acted with full authority and responsibility. He spoke in his own name. He said for instance: "it was said to you" but "I say to you..."<sup>154</sup> This shows that Jesus, despite that he acted as a prophet, showed an extraordinary power that he had from God.

#### **3.4. *Are there some Prophecies Attributed to Jesus?***

As far as the prophethood of Jesus is concerned, it's not convincing that there were prophecies that were attributed to him. Much of what we know is about prophecies that were fulfilled by Jesus Christ. What was foretold about the Messiah in the Holy Scriptures was fulfilled by Jesus Christ. It was said in the prophecies that the messiah would be born of a virgin woman. This took place as was said before. This messiah was to be born in Bethlehem

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 55.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. M.D. HOOKER, *Signs of a Prophet, the prophetic actions of Jesus*, 55.

and it came to be so. The Messiah was to be a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus certainly came from the line of these three ancestors. His tribe was predicted as to be that of Judah. This happened as it was said. He would be a heir of the David's kingdom. And his kingdom was to have no end. This same Messiah was to be called Emmanuel, which means "God with us." This happen as it was said. Furthermore, the messiah was to be rejected by his own people and of course it happened to Jesus as it was said.

Exercising his prophetic mission, Jesus was not accepted by his own people. His coming into the world was predicted by a messenger, John the Baptist. Even before John the Baptist announced his coming, Elijah was to precede him in order to prophesy the coming of the Messiah into the world. The messiah also was to be declared "Son of God" (Mt. 3:16-17). He was to bring light to Israel and to the nations in Galilee. His mission would be to heal the broken-hearted. In the order of Melchizedek, the messiah would be known as high priest. He would be betrayed, falsely accused and be crucified on a cross. His death was to be for the expiation of people's sins. And after his death, he was to rise from the dead.

All the above took place as it was prophesied by the former prophets so that everyone might believe that Jesus Christ came to fulfil what was foretold.

### **3.5. *Is Jesus the Last of Prophets in Christianity?***

Unlike Muhammad (PBUH), the last prophet of Allah, Jesus is not said to be the last of the prophets.<sup>155</sup> He is rather fulfils the law and the prophets.<sup>156</sup> The term "fulfilment" here means to fill up or to bring to full expression or again to complete. But was the law fulfilled? Jesus brought the law to its full meaning.<sup>157</sup> In his preaching, Jesus insisted on the prophets and law. Jesus never came to abolish the law. He rather came to bring to its completion. He taught

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<sup>155</sup> R.C. STEDMAN, "The 400 years between the Old and New Testament", 1.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 23-24.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. R. WARDEN, "How did Jesus Christ fulfil the Law and the Prophets?" 1-4.

obedience to the law. This means that he came to amplify its meaning and application. He in fact made more binding the law for a greater benefit.

### **3.6. How Jesus' Prophethood is Accepted in Islam**

In Qur'an Jesus is called "prophet of God", "messiah", "word of God", "eminent spirit from God", "servant of God". "His birth is believed to be miraculous from the Virgin Mary. His name appears in the Qur'an more than the one of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). His mother's name too appears thirty one times in the Qur'an. Jesus is also qualified as "Messiah, Son of Mary" in the Qur'an. This qualification is found very often in the Holy Qur'an. He is the messiah who was expected by the Jews. As a prophet, sent by God, Jesus falls in the line of the prophets of the Old Testament, thus, in the continuity of the Law of Moses."<sup>158</sup>

Jesus, the Jewish prophet, universalizes the message of Prophet Moses. He says: "*I have come so that you may fully comprehend what Moses taught you*".<sup>159</sup> In the Islamic belief, Jesus is a fatherless man, created by God's word. He is a creature. He has a particularity to be a human being different from every other human being. He is fatherless just as Adam was born out of nothing, if not through God's word. He is the word that took flesh. In Islamic tradition, Jesus is the product of the word. He is God's action and a creative word. The expression "the word became flesh" is well accepted in Islam. However, this is not accepted as through birth but through creation. Thus, Jesus is not God's. He is not also Joseph's adoptive son. He is the son of Mary, immaculate and virgin. According to Muslim tradition, parents transfer the biological fact but not the soul. Thus, there is no transmission of fault because the new born is always a fruit of three parents: the father, the mother and the angel who brings the soul. In Islam there is only God and the spirit who bring God's revelation to

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<sup>158</sup>Cf. Z. BASSAM, "Refuting the argument that the only Duty of the Messenger is to simply deliver the Qur'an", 1ff.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. A. HETZE, "Jésus le prophète de l'Islam" 1-2.

the prophet. This spirit is under God's subordination. In Islam, Jesus is believed to have been the only one who never experienced any corruptions of sin.

Jesus is a prophet and an example of holiness. Unlike other prophets who experienced sin, Jesus is distinguished by his origins and his status. Other prophets committed sin but Jesus did not. Though he was criticised and even falsely accused, Jesus did not mingle himself with sin. He is the best example of holiness in everything.

Muslim believers, however, are also waiting the second coming of Jesus. Some texts affirm that Jesus will come again to dwell among human beings. During that time peace will reign on the earth.<sup>160</sup> Some eschatological conceptions affirm that Jesus will come again but some people believe that those conceptions are not authentic and that Jesus has been elevated into heaven once and for all.

Unlike Christians, Muslims are convinced that Jesus never died. Some say that he might have been crucified only and that he fainted but he did not die. Some others say that someone else was crucified in his place. Some again say that he died but he will rise with others to bring peace on earth. This is the Jesus who performed miracles, not as God but as a human being.

#### **4. The Uniqueness of Jesus and of his Prophethood**

What would be the reason for the uniqueness of Jesus? There are surely many reasons. But we will try to give some reasons for which Jesus and his way of being prophet are unique. First, Jesus is presented as a man unique in the history of humanity. Second, Jesus is seen as a great personality in whatever he did. In four major elements we present here below the uniqueness of Jesus.

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<sup>160</sup> Cf. A. HETZE, "Jésus le prophète de l'Islam" 1-2.

#### **4.1. Jesus' Virgin-Birth**

Jesus' life is unique and exceptional because of being born of a virgin. In the whole history of humankind, Jesus is the only one who was born in an extraordinary manner.

#### **4.2. The Sinless Nature of Jesus**

No one in the whole history of human beings lived on earth without sin except Jesus. He lived in total holiness. All his deeds, his conducts and behaviours were guided and controlled by the Spirit of God who enables one not to do evil. Both the Bible and the Qur'an testify that Jesus was born without sin and he lived his entire life on earth without sin.<sup>161</sup>

#### **4.3. Jesus' Ascension**

Jesus began his life in a very strange and miraculous way. However, surprisingly enough, he ended his life in an even more strange way, dying on a cross. He was buried but did not return to dust like any other human being. He rather ascended into heaven where he is seated at the right hand of his Father. No one has gone into heaven, the dwelling of the most high as both the Bible and the Qur'an testify. This, no doubt, simply constitutes his uniqueness. He is the only one who went to be with the Master of the whole universe, God. With him he shares the eternal joy and happiness. And since no other person has ever been granted such benefit and merit, there is no doubt that Jesus is unique.

#### **4.4. Jesus' Second Coming**

Both Christians and Muslims are awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>162</sup> They all believe that Jesus alone is the one who will come to judge the human race. These two Religions may differ in things they expect Jesus to realize and to accomplish when he comes again. But in a real sense, Christians and Muslims expect Jesus to come and judge the

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. D.C. DULING, *Jesus Christ through History*, 38-43.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. A. DAWOOD, "Signs of the last day", 1.

earth.<sup>163</sup> And this is what makes the uniqueness of Jesus, differentiating him from every other person that has ever existed in the world. No one on earth has ever gotten a history like that of Jesus Christ. His history is so unique that you can never read of someone else such an extraordinary beginning or end of life. Of all who ever existed, Jesus is the only one who is awaited by both Muslims and Christians. No one can be compared with him. He is unique in everything. Jesus' eminent greatness is not a result of people's favour but is the effect of the special will of God.<sup>164</sup> The uniqueness of Jesus results from God alone. It is through his will and power that we human beings have been privileged to receive grace upon grace. God the Father has been made known through Jesus Christ.

But why, of all people, did the almighty God choose to clothe Jesus with such wonderful uniqueness? What is his life all about? What kind of nature has he that no one has ever resembled him in every aspect of his life? And finally, who exactly is this Jesus?

Looking at other prophets, one can easily explain and comprehend who they are and where they came from, their origin and their state of life. Their understanding as prophet comes out clearly. But Jesus makes a difference. The understanding of his prophethood and his personality in its entirety surpasses every prophet that ever existed. Unlike many prophets who were ordinary men and who shared in common every human reality except prophecy, Jesus' prophethood is beyond measure. Both Christians and Muslims should see something which is beyond Jesus' prophethood. No human being equals him in any aspects of physical and spiritual life.

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<sup>163</sup> Cf. R. HORSLEY, *The Prophet Jesus and The Renewal of Israel*, moving beyond a diversionary debate, 28-30.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. A. HETZE, "Jésus le prophète de l'Islam" 1-2.

According to the Qur'an, other messengers like Jesus went before him.<sup>165</sup> But obviously Jesus was more than a messenger. Regarding his miraculous birth, earthly life and his expected second coming, there will be no justification to say that Jesus was a messenger like any other. God chose that he should be born through the power of the Holy Spirit unlike any other prophet or messenger. In righteous ways God led him without blemish. Other messengers and prophets, born of flesh, died and returned to dust. But God took Jesus to live with him in his glory.<sup>166</sup> No prophet or messenger will come back to take control of the world and to judge humankind except Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Prophethood in Christianity as in Islam has been understood as God's work entrusted to chosen human beings. Prophecy is God's revelation that portrays and contains God's message for his people. Prophets who were chosen by God did prophesy in his name. Though some were misunderstood, genuine prophets kept God's message alive in its entirety without any corruptions. They warned their listeners mostly about future realities so that they could change their way of living in the now of their lives. They tried to live an exemplary and righteous life despite various challenges they encountered.

The coming of Jesus on earth appeared, to many people, as the presence of a great prophet and messenger. Christians not only saw in Jesus Christ a great prophet but a messiah and Son of God. However, Muslims on their side regarded Jesus as a simple human being who got much favour from God and more than any other prophet. They hold on to Jesus' human origin while Christians believe and confess that Jesus came from heaven. He is of divine origin.

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<sup>165</sup> Cf. Q. 5.75.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Jn. 16.28.

In some passages of the Bible Jesus presents himself as a prophet. But beyond that, this same Jesus tells people that he came from heaven for the salvation of humankind. In his preaching Jesus showed that he came from God the Father. And he with the Father are one. His miracles become proofs of a great prophet and even of more than a prophet. No prophet before him performed miracles as he did in his lifetime. Those who heard him preaching confessed that no one had ever spoken like him. His listeners said that he spoke with authority, an authority that no preacher, no messenger or prophet ever had. He challenged both the religious and the political authority.

Unlike Muhammad (PBUH) who had some prophecies attributed to him, Jesus did not have prophecies attributed to him. He rather fulfilled prophecies which were spoken about him. He came for the fulfilment of the law and the prophets. Furthermore, Jesus was not seen as one who came to end prophecy. He rather foretold the coming of Muhammad (PBUH). His prophethood is much accepted and respected by every true Muslim. He was born of Mary and lived a righteous life.

God sent Jesus into the world through a virginal conception. Through the action of the Holy Spirit Jesus became man. In his entire earthly ministry Jesus proved that he was a prophet and yet more than a prophet, he was one with God. In his prophetic actions he showed that he was of divine origin. And all that he did in his lifetime became a proof of his uniqueness as compared to the other prophets. Before and after Jesus no prophet is to be compared with him. No prophet on earth has lived a prophetic life that surpasses the one of Jesus.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FOR ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

### Introduction

The words of Blosser highlight the necessity of dialogue between Christians and Muslims: *“If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world’s inhabitants.”*<sup>167</sup> This implies that if there is no dialogue between Christians and Muslims, then the world and our common future will be obviously at risk. Christians should always agree that the love of God and of the neighbour constitute the two very important commandments of their beliefs.<sup>168</sup>

### *What does “Inter-religious Dialogue mean? What is it?”*

Inter-religious dialogue points to all constructive and positive inter-religious relations that should exist between individuals. “This dialogue refers to a poly-centric process of exchange of experiences, knowledge, cultures and civilisations; [...] it is the search for solution, clarification and peace based on mutual understanding, which entails openness, progress of knowledge and peacefulness.”<sup>169</sup> These relations must also bind communities of faith which are guided by mutual acceptance, respect and understanding while remaining in perfect obedience to the truth and human freedom.

Inter-religious dialogue also refers to interfaith dialogue. This means that people of different beliefs come together in respect and mutual understanding, living together and cooperating

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. C. BLOSSER, “A Common Word and Christian-Muslim Dialogue” 1.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. C. BLOSSER, “A Common Word and Christian-Muslim Dialogue” 1.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 15-18.

with one another despite their different origins, race or nationality. The expression “inter-religious dialogue” refers also to the healthy interaction between individuals or institutions of different religious traditions and at different levels. However, no belief is to be privileged over the other. All the parties remain independent with their own belief while allowing the others to freely practice theirs. It is the right of each and every one to practice or to freely express and confess their own faith.

Inter-religious dialogue or inter-faith dialogue does not imply only talks or words. Its further meaning includes building relationships that favour all the parties. In other words, it’s a human interaction which takes place between groups of people or communities. This can also take place between individuals. For instance, between students in schools, colleagues working in the same company, between workmates, neighbours, and so forth. At this level dialogue does not mean something that is academic or official. It is rather part of human’s daily life during which people, without even any plans, interact with one another.

***What are the aims and purpose of dialogue?***

Dialogue aims at creating healthy relations and mutual understanding between people. “It provides stability and cohesion within society; it gives people a social identity. It also provides a collective conscience-morality; it causes socialization and allows social control. It also teaches key values, which regulate people’s behaviour, and it gives a meaning and purpose to life.”<sup>170</sup> Inter-religious dialogue is then between people of different religions.

Engaged in dialogue, Muslims and Christians manage to identify causes that are or can be source of tension between them. Instead of these to be just religious issues they are often also or even more political, social and economic.

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<sup>170</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 13-15.

Dialogue helps people to have confidence and strength to deal with tensions and issues that divide believers. It builds understanding and unity among people.

Dialogue at large is a strategy that helps individuals and communities to break down stereotypes or barriers of suspicion, prejudices and mistrust.

***What does inter-religious dialogue not entail? What is it not?***

Inter-religious dialogue does not aim at abolishing differences of faith in order to promote one common faith. "It is not a mere argumentation, contention, controversy, dissention, and conflict. It is not coming out on top after a debate or winning. It is not negotiating away one's convictions or basic assumptions. It has nothing to do with the basic teaching of the Church. It is not a mere intellectual exercise or contest."<sup>171</sup> It is also not about converting others but allowing each one to remain true to his or her own belief. This dialogue does not aim at arguments or attacks in disapproving the other's faith. It's rather developing more mutual trust and understanding.

***Why must Christians and Muslims dialogue?***

In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI addressed delegates from different countries saying that "Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue between Muslims and Christians cannot be reduced to an optional extra. It is, in fact, a vital necessity, on which in large measure our future depends."<sup>172</sup>

In 2007, one year after, Muslim scholars from different corners of the world on their side also sent a message to the Christian world saying "Muslims and Christians together make up over half the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious

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<sup>171</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 62.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. C. BLOSSER, "A Common Word and Christian-Muslim Dialogue" 1.

communities, there can be no meaningful peace among people. The future of the world depends on peaceful atmosphere the Christians and Muslims will make among themselves."<sup>173</sup>

These two concerns constitute a major need for both Christians and Muslims to put their hands together with the aim of bringing up peace and harmony in the world. To live in peace is the right of every human person. This is not linked to any religions, race or nations. Both Muslims and Christians are called to dialogue today more than even before in order to address problems and challenges which are the causes of divisions between religions. Dialogue is an imperative fact between both Muslims and Christians because of their popularity in the world. Despite their different approaches of praying to God, this God is one and the same. In 1985 Pope John Paul II, concerned with peace among religions, addressed more than 80, 000 Muslims in Casablanca and he said:

We believe in the one and Living God who created the world... In a world which desires unity and peace, but experiences a thousand tensions and conflicts, should not believers favour friendship between the men and the peoples who form one single community on earth?...Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is today more urgent than ever. It flows from fidelity to God. Sometimes, in the past, we have opposed and even exhausted each other in polemics and in wars ... I believe that today God invites us to change old practices. We must respect each other and we must stimulate each other in good works on the path to righteousness.<sup>174</sup>

Thus, interreligious dialogue which is an interaction between two or more faiths is very important. This is because it builds mutual understanding and makes a great contribution in creating integrated communities which aim at a common purpose.

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. C. BLOSSER, "A Common Word and Christian-Muslim Dialogue" 1.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. C. BLOSSER, "A Common Word and Christian-Muslim Dialogue" 1.

### **1. Common Understanding of Prophethood in Islam and Christianity, a Tool for Interreligious Dialogue**

Inasmuch as prophethood is concerned, there are many similarities and a common understanding in Islam and in Christianity. For instance, both the Bible and the Qur'an contain teachings and commandments, warnings and reproaches, instructions and encouragement. In many narratives we find that the same events are characterised by the same personalities. These two religions agree that prophecy is God's gift which is given to those God has chosen as his own. Therefore, no one can be a prophet unless he is appointed by God. He alone sends the prophet to proclaim his divine message to his people. It's not by conquest nor by inheritance that someone can become a prophet. Christians and Muslims both agree that God set a criterion for appointing his prophets (Deut. 13:1-5; Surah 16:36). Prophets of both religions invite their listeners to the worship of God. Monotheism was the primordial reality they taught. They instructed their listeners to worship One God in truth and to put all their trust in him. These prophecies on worship of the true God and of monotheism continuously led the people to a life pleasing to God. Basically, prophets of Islam and Christianity had the role to warn and alert the people on things which were to happen. However, they also uttered prophecies of encouragement. They acted as intercessors and seers of the future. They were foretellers and healers of the sick. They advised their people and they performed miracles. They taught God's will. They were given inspirations by God through the Scriptures and the Qur'an. There is a common agreement that the Torah, for instance, was revealed to Moses. The Psalms or *Zabur* are believed to be written by David. Prophets of both religions also taught that the life we live here on earth is temporary. But life after death is everlasting to all those who conduct themselves in a virtuous way. To their listeners they taught the reality of the last judgement which will determine the inheritance of heaven or hell. In Christianity as in Islam, prophets lived a model life which made them

different from other people. They were characterised by truthfulness, knowledge, trustworthiness and nobility. Because of these characteristics, prophets were able to carry on successfully their task of delivering God's message without altering it. They certainly faced trials and persecution in their lifetime. But without giving up their work, they faithfully and steadfastly surrendered themselves to God. Their life was eminently worthy.

Nevertheless, in both religions, prophets also came across people who rejected their message and who refused to welcome their advices and directions. Furthermore, we also encounter in both Islam and Christianity teachings false prophets. We previously discussed some criteria which help one to identify and distinguish a false from a true prophet. This, in Islam as in Christianity, is accepted and agreed upon. Finally, these religions are both living in hope for the second coming of Jesus.<sup>175</sup>

These common understandings found in both Christianity and in Islam constitute tools that are at the service of inter-religious dialogue. They bring together the two religions in a common understanding, respect and acceptance.

## **2. Some Disagreements on Prophethood in Islam and in Christianity, Challenges for Inter-religious Dialogue**

Though we mentioned some similarities found in both Islam and Christianity, there are as well differences in doctrines and beliefs. Prophecy is a concept which we find used in both the Old and the New Testament. This New Testament prophecy offers a way and continuity to the Old Testament prophecy in the contemporary world. In Islam however, Muhammad (PBUH) ends prophecy. No other prophets shall appear after him. He who claims prophecy after him is a cheater and an imposter.

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. M. M. TAYVIAH, "A comparative study of the concept of prophecy in Christianity and Islam".

However, although Muslims accept and believe that Jesus Christ is a prophet of Allah, Christians in their turn do not stand with them in affirming the prophethood of Muhammad. The Bible does not mention his existence. Christians believe that God did not only appoint men as prophets. He also chose women such as Hilda, Miriam and Anna. On Islamic side, the Qur'an does not mention any female prophets. The Bible talks about classical prophets who are identified as Minor and Major Prophets.<sup>176</sup> But this does not mean that prophets are ranked so as to compare and find out who is superior to other. In fact between Major and Minor prophets there is no superiority or inferiority.<sup>177</sup> All the prophets in Christianity are equal to one another. Prophets in Islam are ranked. Some are far superior to others.

As we have defined the term "prophet" in the paragraphs above, we have come to the understanding that a prophet is a messenger<sup>178</sup>, a seer<sup>179</sup> and a servant of God.<sup>180</sup> Despite all these qualifications that are attributed to prophethood, the prophet is not different from other people. His work, his actions and activities may differ. But he accomplishes every human duty and requirement like every other person. In Islam, however, we find a difference between a messenger and a prophet. All messengers are prophets. But all prophets are not messengers. This is because messengers who have been sent by God deliver a new divine reality to the people. Prophets in their turn keep the people warned about what is to happen in the future or in the actual moment.

### **3. Some Obstacles Encountered in Dialogue**

Often a tendency of generalization of perceptions on the level of Islam or Christianity is observed. On the side of Christians we find the tendency to consider every Muslim as a terrorist. Or again, that all Muslims are in support of terrorism in the world. On the side of

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<sup>176</sup>Cf. M.J.J. MENKEN-M. STEVE, *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament*, 27.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. M.J.J. MENKEN-M. STEVE, *The Minor Prophets in the New Testament*, 27-115.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 148-165.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 83-95.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. J. LINDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 182-197.

Islam there can be a tendency that all Christian believers are immoral, decadent and unjust. But the true fact is that these conceptions are not realistic, are not based on facts and cannot be proved. Obviously not every Muslim is a terrorist. Also, it's not every Christian who is immoral or unjust. The majority of both Muslims and Christians are none of these generalizations. Thus, these preconceived judgements must be overcome through dialogue. And this kind of generalization can only be overcome through contact and interaction.

No doubt, the major factor to understand well how Christians and Muslims view each other is history. Our common history holds a variety of peaceful and consistent experiences. But at the same time it is marked by armed conflicts and a mutual vilification. There are clear evidences that there have been a manifestation of injustice and atrocities among Muslims and Christians. Negative and painful experiences can help us to educate ourselves but they are not something we should hold on to. These historical events where polemic arguments and debates were held among Christians and Muslims are obviously to be remembered but not to be relived. These debates and arguments often focused on how faith is practiced in one religion as compared to how it is lived in the other. Islamic faith or Christian faith was either disproved, discredited or denigrated by the believers, all in favour of their respective religions. These kinds of arguments, however, are not constructive. They actually oppose dialogue which calls for a true understanding of each other's religion. None of the religions should be twisted or exaggerated out of biasness.

The media has often played a biased role. In many cases the media does not show interest in the positive side of these two religions. Many times the media has portrayed Islam as a fanatical doctrine in which Muslims believe in violence and terrorism. In reality this is not real or just. Islam rejects terrorism and it does not support everyone who is involved in acts that violate human right and dignity. This kind of generalization is to be condemned because

stereotypical conceptions are false. They promote polarisation. Only true dialogue among Christians and Muslims is the means to cast out false conceptions and stereotypes.

Moreover, self-sufficiency too constitutes another challenge and obstacle to dialogue. This becomes an obstacle mainly when we are convinced that Muslims and Christians have absolutely nothing to offer each other. If Christians believe that they have nothing to learn from Muslims, then a wall, instead of a bridge, is created between these two monotheistic religions. It is clearly stated in our Scriptures and even in our traditions that dialogue entails something that calls for understanding and unity, harmony and peace. Though in various ways, we turn to worship the same God.<sup>181</sup> By serving our brothers and sisters we serve God too. This is a clear common reality that should lead us all into a deep collaboration with one another. By promoting this cooperation among Muslims and Christians we become agents of justice and peace wherever we are. We become, to a great extent, promoters of a better world where everybody feels at home. We ought to do so because we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

Nevertheless, some other difficulties which we encounter in dialogue are due to the fact that the same words or terminology may be used but these may at the same time carry a different connotation or understanding. This obviously brings about misunderstanding and confusion. It prevents and blocks exchanges that would have led to successful and fruitful dialogue. While dialoguing, it's always very important to make sure others comprehend and understand the vocabulary we use. Terms such as "fasting", "prayer", and "scriptures" and so on must be well grasped. Once we all have a common understanding then there will be no doubt a peaceful and desirable dialogue. In relation to prophethood, dialogue will be possible and

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<sup>181</sup>Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 6-8.

fruitful if both religions are engaged in a common understanding of what prophethood entails in all its aspects.

#### **4. Prophethood, a Framework for Theological Dialogue<sup>182</sup>**

The Second Vatican council urged all Catholics to dialogue. They are called to recognize, to preserve and to accept or at least consider the prophetic and spiritual, moral and socio-cultural values which are found in Islam and in the other religions. All are called to sincerely protect and promote social justice and moral values, peace and freedom. This is of great importance because in a world where Christians represent less than two percent of the population in some countries, it is indispensable that we collaborate with everyone in order to achieve our common objectives. It's well known that in the course of history, many religions, Christianity included, became source of division, of oppression and of conflict. Today the entire world is in need of establishing positive and constructive relations with believers of other religions. Common elements and God's messages that derive from a prophetic heritage urge us to create bonds which give a common base of ethical values that are universally accepted.

Dialogue is an activity that has its motivations, dignity and demands. It should not constitute a strategy to convert others. To be a religious person today is to be interreligious. This is because a positive relationship with other believers of different denominations is a requirement in a world of religious pluralism.<sup>183</sup> The Catholic Church recommends four types or ways of dialogue:<sup>184</sup>

***The first is a dialogue of life:*** a prophetic dialogue among people of different beliefs would lead to a significant improvement. By such a dialogue people will live with a spirit of

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<sup>182</sup>Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 62.

<sup>183</sup>Cf. P. MOUSSA, "Le dialogue interreligieux : fondements et défis" 1-8.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. F.J. EILERS, *Inter-religious Dialogue as Communication*, 24, 45-53.

openness and of good relationship with the neighbourhood. They will feel free to share their joys and sorrow, their problems and their human preoccupations.

**The second is a dialogue of action:** engaged in this kind of dialogue, Christians and Muslims are urged to collaborate in order to achieve an integral development for the common good and benefit of all. They will also work for the total freedom of all human beings.

**The third is a dialogue of religious experience:** through this type of dialogue people, rooted in their religious traditions, will come to share their spiritual richness; for instance, things concerning prayer and contemplation, faith and appropriate means that help people seeking the Absolute. It will also help Christians and Muslims to look at their religious beliefs in common such as believing in one God and the fact that all are God's creatures.<sup>185</sup> Christians and Muslims both believe in God almighty who made heaven and earth. They all acknowledge the power of Jesus Christ who was miraculously conceived and was born of the Virgin Mary and ascended into heaven. Furthermore, they also profess their faith in the forgiveness of sins and in the resurrection and in life everlasting.<sup>186</sup> Thus both Christians and Muslims are all God's creatures and out of their free will they submit themselves to God. They shall find salvation if we make good use of their free will. Otherwise, there shall be a time of judgement upon what they lived. A respect for life and for God's creation must be observed. Mutual help among Muslims and Christians must be promoted on daily basis.<sup>187</sup>

**Dialogue of theological exchange:** through this form of dialogue everyone seeks to deepen not only his or her understanding of faith but also to appreciate the spiritual values that are found in each other's belief. This as well will be appropriate to be established with the

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 54.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 54.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 54.

religions which have a written tradition because they express a divine sense of transcendence which must be respected due to the spiritual and human values that they contain.<sup>188</sup>

We must confess that Islam has become a universal religion. Despite rivalries, conflicts and even wars of passed centuries which made dialogue a complicated matter, the Church advocates for a mutual tolerance among Christians and Muslims.

### **5. In Search of the Fruits of Interreligious Dialogue**

For a Christian, Christianity is not just one window in addition to others that opens on the mystery of God. According to the Christian faith, Christ is the fullness of God's revelation, and the total self-giving that God offers to humankind. This affirmation, however, can certainly lead to the impression that a Christian does not need to make a necessary effort to know what gives life to Muslim believers in their religion. In fact, for Christians, every religious approach is under the Gospel of Christ. Islam, just like other religions, while presenting the presence of God to human beings, imparts also on Christians and their experience of faith.

This is found very well summarised in the document "*Dialogue et Annonce*": "The fullness of truth received in Jesus Christ does not offer to the Christian a guarantee that he has fully assimilated it. In fact, the truth is not something that one possesses, but a person by whom one must allow one be possessed by. While keeping intact their identity, Christians must be ready to learn and to receive others (Muslims) and through them the positive values of their beliefs and traditions. Through dialogue they can conquer prejudices, false conceptions and even sometimes accept that the understanding of their faith needs to be purified."<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Cf. P. MOUSSA, "Le dialogue interreligieux : fondements et défis" 1-8.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Z. ABDELAZIZ "Dialogue et annonce," n. 49.

Obviously meetings of interreligious dialogue can never be unfruitful: they surprise, they trouble, and they make one renounce the prejudices that were considered to be true. Thus, meetings based on the principals of interreligious dialogue offer a chance to those involved to come to beneficial transformations. Through these meetings, the way Christians look on Muslims or on other believers and vice versa can be modified in the sense that was not expected. Their self-evaluation is likely to be modified. In other words, they may come to realize a deep understanding of their own identity. Whatever be the case, all meetings in which Muslims and Christians participate in view of a common goal, if these are led in an atmosphere of confidence and friendship, can only enrich their human and spiritual experience which will surely help each one to stand more firm in their own faith.

Lived and experienced in a spirit of humility, the interreligious dialogue is an opportunity to deepen one's faith. It creates a way for *kenosis*, a humble letting go of superiority so as to come to a transformation. In times of doubt it allows to maintain the essential, of one's faith and to go more deeply into the core values of one's tradition. Dialogue offers a possibility to reflect, to revise and to renew the old conceptions and come to a new way which opens doors to others without discrimination and prejudices. Interreligious dialogue invites all, and in this particular case Muslims and Christians, to discover the dimension of mystery in every religion and the importance of non-discursive dialogue and of silence.<sup>190</sup> It invites one to rediscover the value of mysticism and esteem the mystics in one's own religion and in that of our dialogue partner. Furthermore, it encourages all to be more present in prayer especially silent prayer of the month or the swirling dance of the Sufis rather than to utter words and concepts only (Mt 6:6). It predisposes the rediscovery of the apophatic tradition. It manifests the relativity of words used to express spiritual experiences. In some circumstances, praying together can results in or move into an inter-religious dialogue. We must say once more that

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<sup>190</sup>Cf. F.J. EILERS, *Inter-religious Dialogue as Communication*, 31-41.

inter-religious dialogue invites both Christians and Muslims to open themselves to the action of God's spirit. It allows them to go beyond a vision that is far too much institutional and self-centred; a vision that equally runs the risk of the separation from veritable issues of the actual world in its diversity.<sup>191</sup>

### **Conclusion**

After exploring how inter-religious dialogue constitutes a tool for a common and mutual acceptance Christians between and Muslims, we went further to see some challenges that are encountered in the meetings of people of different beliefs. We have then realized that inter-religious dialogue must be based on structures that enhance sustainable collaboration and a culture of trust, cooperation and continuous sharing among religious communities. This envisages the coming together of religious people for a common purpose and goal. After the challenges we have pointed out some specific obstacles that constitute a gap between Christians and Muslims.

Moreover, prophethood has been presented as a framework for theological dialogue. Here we understand that no one among believers possesses the fullness of truth of the true God. Some types of dialogue therefore have been suggested so as to enhance cooperation, collaboration and mutual tolerance among Christians and Muslims. Once these ideals are achieved, then the whole world shall become a home for everybody.<sup>192</sup>

Healthy dialogue among Muslims and Christians will always lead to a positive future where all the people will find meaning in their life. Inter-religious dialogue hence will put an end to the false conceptions, prejudices and judgemental critique that would exist between Muslims and Christians. Both Muslims and Christians will cease to look at one another with intolerance and with suspicion. Their differences will not need to be a basis for

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<sup>191</sup>Cf. F.J. EILERS, *Inter-religious Dialogue as Communication*, 44-45.

<sup>192</sup>Cf. F.J. EILERS, *Inter-religious Dialogue as Communication*, 41.

misunderstanding. They will rather become a platform for the future that can be mutually enriching. Islam as religion has a lot to offer a world corrupted by cynicism, disintegration and loss of faith. Nevertheless, this can only be proved when a universal tolerance among Muslims and Christians and other believers alike is being practiced. But also, an appreciation of their differences, uniqueness and willingness to accept and understand each other will bring about peace of believers.<sup>193</sup>

In the world today we realize that efforts are being made in the field of collaboration among Christians and Muslims. As a sign of this, in some parts of the African world for instance, Muslims and Christians are strengthening their collaboration by doing together some activities. This acceptance and cooperation is mainly witnessed in schools and in hospitals, in Christian institutions and in medical centres, where Muslims and Christians work alongside each other.<sup>194</sup>

Do Christians and Muslims need further cooperation today? Yes indeed. Collaboration and cooperation must be manifested and lived in public as well as in private areas such as enterprises or associations, groups or clubs, politics and economy, integrity of creation and fighting human trafficking.

Is theological dialogue necessary among Muslims and Christians? Yes, but this might seem to be the most difficult task to deal with because of mutual mistrust.<sup>195</sup> But then what should be the goal or the aim of this kind of dialogue? In all truth, the aim can't be to destroy others' stand or to convince them of errors. Otherwise it will always be a gathering of merely

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<sup>193</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 56.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 56.

<sup>195</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 62.

arguments and polemics. Clarification of ideas through listening to each other and through respectful dialogue should be what interreligious dialogue aims at.<sup>196</sup>

We should always keep in mind that there is something to be gained while discussing our religious differences. We should indeed encourage ourselves, both as good Muslims and good Christians, to obey God and his will.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Cf. M. MOLONEY, *Dialogue with Islam*, 57.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 64-65.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Focussed on “prophethood in Islam and in Christianity”, this long essay offers some insights and clarifications in a comparative understanding of prophethood not only for both Muslims and Christians but also for all believers and non-believers alike. Prophethood, in various dimensions has been presented as a function which, in the past, served as mediation between God and the people. Prophets arose because of many crises of different kinds which people experienced.<sup>198</sup> Immorality, selfishness and carelessness of individuals showed their disdain for them as the chosen people. The fear of God became less and many lived an unrighteous life which did not please God. Instead of having faith in the one and unique God, people created for themselves some other divinities which they cherished and adored. A monotheistic nation, such as Israel, became polytheistic. They lost patience and perseverance in all sorts of difficulties and challenges they came across on their journey. They broke the covenant and the promises they made to God. They searched for satisfaction elsewhere in view of fulfilling their desires and longing.

However, although God saw that his people disobeyed him, he did not want to destroy them all. In his mercy, compassion and kindness, God gave another chance to his people. Through different ways and in various circumstances, God spoke to his people. First he spoke to some individuals whom he chose to go and reach out to human creatures. These, upon hearing the call from God in their inmost being they went out to proclaim the divine message. These chosen people are those we have called in this essay “prophets”. They received the divine

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<sup>198</sup>Cf. J. BLENKINSOPP, *A history of Prophecy in Israel*, 149-160.

revelation and they spoke on behalf of God.<sup>199</sup> As men of God, they proclaimed what God commanded them. And as servants of God, the prophets lived a righteous and virtuous life.

However, not all prophets were sent by God. Some went in their own name and decided to deceive the crowds. They uttered lies in the name of God. In brief, they were false prophets. Their prophecies were never fulfilled because they didn't come from God. True prophets were messengers of God.<sup>200</sup> They were seers, visionaries and recipients of divine revelation.<sup>201</sup> They acted as the ones bringing the people back to life by giving them hope for a better life.<sup>202</sup>

In the Islamic belief prophets are presented as God's Messengers. Abraham, Moses, Noah and many others are accepted and affirmed as Allah's Messengers.<sup>203</sup> God trusted them and he thus entrusted to them his message for the conversion of the entire world. Islam teaches that Prophets or Messengers existed and they were sent by God. Their role and task were to warn the people and to tell them what the will of God was. They lived among and with their brothers and sisters. They were given a mission to fulfil.

Muhammad however concluded the prophecy. After him no other prophet is accepted in Islam. He is believed to be the only and last messenger of Allah who was sent to preach Islam as the religion of total submission. Thus prophethood in Islam is understood as a mission or a task or again as a mission which is given by God. It had a beginning with the former prophets and it met its end with Muhammad (PBUH).

Nevertheless, as the letter to the Hebrews says: "in the former days God spoke to his people through prophets, and in the latter days he has spoken to us through his own

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<sup>199</sup>Cf. T.H.ROBINSON, *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*, 28-37.

<sup>200</sup>Cf. J. UNDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 148-164.

<sup>201</sup>Cf. J. UNDBLOM, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 83-108.

<sup>202</sup>Cf. R. E. CLEMENTS, *Old Testament Prophecy, From Oracle to Canon*, 123-126.

<sup>203</sup>Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, 50-51.

Son.<sup>204</sup> Christianity presents Jesus as prophet and as messenger.<sup>205</sup> Born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus came on earth with a specific mission. He came to save the world. Christians do not only see a prophet in Jesus Christ. He is more than a prophet because he is God's Son and he is one with him. His prophethood goes beyond every other prophecy. He prophesied what he himself was to accomplish. Hence prophethood in Christianity is in general understood as it is in Islam. But with the coming of Jesus into the world prophethood got a deeper meaning in people's eyes. With Jesus is the foundation of Christianity. To belong to him and to his Church one must be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

As far as prophethood is concerned, Islam and Christianity do come together in agreement on some prophetic issues. But at the same time they also differ and even disagree on some other issues that are cited and claimed to be prophetic. Upon disagreements in their belief, there often develops some tensions, polemics and false accusations. For instance, some Christians often accuse Muslims of being terrorists and violent. They are called advocates of violence wherever they are found. This however is generally a wrong accusation. Concluding like that on the part of Muslims is not fair and does not create an atmosphere of peace. Not every Muslim is a terrorist. Therefore Christians must let go of their false conceptions and prejudices, their criticism and judgements.

On the other hand, some Muslims also judge and even condemn Christians as they wrongfully see them as non-believers.<sup>206</sup> They are considered non-believers simply because they do not worship Allah in Muhammad's manner. They are worshippers of idols and they are impure. Honestly such criticism and judgements always lead to divisions and hatred.

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<sup>204</sup> Cf. Heb. 1:1.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. L. CHELLAIAN, *Jesus as Prophet in Christianity and in Islam*, 68-194.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, 80-81.

This long essay, in its fourth chapter, is reminding everyone to embrace dialogue. This is the only remedy and the only means to create an atmosphere of peace among religions. Thus, inter-religious dialogue must be much valued. It has been said before that “there shall be no peace in the world without peace among Muslims and Christians.” Through inter-religious dialogue Christians and Muslims will come to know each other. Listening to each other, together they will come to a mutual understanding and respect. Inter-religious dialogue will allow them to share their beliefs. They will then explain to each other their different views and understanding of the divine. And further, both will understand that they are all God’s children and that division and enmity will lead them unto a wrong path of no return. But dialogue will always open a field of peace and harmony.<sup>207</sup> It will create an atmosphere of joy and happiness of being together as worshippers of the same God. In dialogue all come to an agreement which becomes the basis for a better world where everyone feels at home with one another and with God.

I therefore recommend inter-religious dialogue to be given more opportunities among Muslims and Christians. It will serve as a prophetic strategy in dealing with challenges and misunderstanding, false perceptions and wrong accusations, prejudices and judgemental ideas for both religions.<sup>208</sup> By dialoguing, both Christians and Muslims will be able to foresee whatever issues might occur in the future. But more specifically, inter-religious dialogue will help to create, already now, a home of peace, justice and love.<sup>209</sup> By embracing it, Muslims and Christians shall be true prophets and advocates of God’s will in the entire world. Their prophethood will serve as a testimony and a witness of unity and love to all other believers.

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<sup>207</sup> Cf. F.J. EILERS, *Inter-religious Dialogue as Communication*, 11-31.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. F.N. MVUMBI, *Interfaith Dialogue: Towards a Culture of Working Together*, 64-65.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. M. BORRMANS, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, 32-33.

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