

Lecture

**Overcoming the Muslim Western Divide  
Seven Bridges to the Common Ground**

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There are two traditional approaches dealing with East/West relations. The first typically restates the better-known commonalities of Islam and Christianity---history, the prophets, with particular emphasis on Abraham, Moses, Noah, Jesus, heaven, hell, last days, and so forth. While this is positive, it has not succeeded in bridging the ever-growing divide.

The other approach tends to focus on disagreements among the faiths and ultimately seeks to “convert” the other. They are very divisive.

Please join me on a journey of discovery, of what I believe is new information that while challenging our existing thinking and even our fixed prejudices, may serve as a vehicle to begin the overdue need to bridge the divide. The discoveries have to do with seeking to expand common ground among the Abrahamic faiths.

The concepts of this journey are drawn from over 24 years of traveling to nearly 130 countries. It is first hand knowledge and experience of what has and has not worked for me—and I learned from both and have paid a significant price for such efforts.

Allow me to anticipate some reactions to the very discussion of Islam and Christianity. This is not as much about what you and I already believe. It is more about issues that in the past 1400 years have been the root of discontent and mistrust between Muslims and Christians, between Islam and the West...and discovering how these very contentious issues can ironically become helpful in finding common ground. This journey of discovery has the potential to inspire new thinking sufficient to instigate a counter movement mitigating militancy within Islam and bigotry and ignorance in the Christian West.

**Need to Open Our Minds (*Ijtihad*)**

There is an Arabic word, *Ijtihad that means, as many of you know “to open ones mind”*.

This is a 500-year-old Islamic concept that is appropriate as we work to build bridges between Muslims and the West. Particularly since 9/11 Islam is experiencing a profound and historical time of reassessment.

What I am about to present to you now are the **three foundational BRIDGES and three Barriers that become Bridges** between the Holy Books of Islam and Christianity. Bridges that can enlarge the area of shared common ground.

The linguistic relationship between the Arabic of the Qur’an and the Aramaic (sometimes referred to as Syriac) of the New Testament is one of the most ignored and under researched areas of Holy Book studies.

This is in fact, our

***First Foundational Bridge to the common ground: The Linguistic Relationship between the Aramaic of Jesus and the Arabic of the Qur’an.***

When an Arabic speaking Muslim friend saw Mel Gibson’s movie, “Passion of Christ” with most of the dialogue in Aramaic, he was very surprised that he did not need most of the subtitles in English to understand the movie!

This is a critical Bridge Builder: sister languages, the Arabic and the Aramaic, the written language which was once the global language, stretching from the Near East to Malabar in India and East China.

It is intriguing to note that Dr. Sidney Griffiths, a Catholic Priest and noted Syriac scholar, says that “neither Qur’anic NOR Aramaic Scholars have seen fit to make the linguistic connection and it is about time that connection was made”.

Western academia has been primarily concentrated on Biblical Greek. What we need now is to consider the Aramaic/Syriac<sup>1</sup> New Testament written in the language Jesus actually spoke, as an additional tool for comparative analysis. I have found this an invaluable tool working with the Islamic world in seeking bridges to the common ground.

Muslims respect the similarity of words, meanings and relate to the Eastern traditions, and idiomatic nuances of the Aramaic. They are very similar to the Arabic of the Qur’an and the Hebrew of the Torah and can help unlock useful mysteries within the Eastern Holy Books.

### **The Prophet Muhammad and Aramaic**

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<sup>1</sup> *Chaldean-Arabic Dictionary*; (Beirut Babel Center, 1975)

Some Islamic historians tell us that trusted Assyrian and Syriac speaking believers in Jesus interacted with the Prophet Muhammad and likely read to him from the Aramaic Eastern Text. The very word Qur'an, which means "The Recital", is derived from an Aramaic/Syriac word *qiriana*.<sup>2</sup>

### **Original Revelation of the Holy Books (Why Muslims would be attracted to the Aramaic Gospel/Injil)**

The most compelling logic for use of the Aramaic New Testament in building bridges to the Common Ground deals with the Muslim view of "original revelation."

Islam holds that God, through the angel Gabriel, spoke the revelation to the Prophet Mohammed in Arabic and is considered the official language of "The Recital". Thus, the only accepted written version is Arabic.

Consistent with Islamic logic, since Jesus revealed the Gospel in Aramaic, the ONLY "Holy" written version of the Gospel to the Muslim would be the Aramaic.

It is helpful to note that Aramaic was the first written Semitic script of the three, followed by Hebrew and finally Arabic.<sup>3</sup>

This ever widening "gulf" separating the two sides is unfortunate, but it is my hope that studying the related Semitic languages of the East will serve as a key foundation, providing evidence that both faiths have more in common than not.

### **Second Foundational Bridge to the Common Ground: Could Allah & God be the Same Deity?**

Every chapter of the Qur'an except one begins with: "In the Name of Allah the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."

This is one of the most painful misunderstandings among Christians. Polls indicate that the vast majority of Christians universally feel that Allah is not the same God as the God of the Hebrews, or Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Ishmael.

Many noted US Christian preachers have reinforced this idea by stating that "The God of Islam is not the same God." Televangelist Benny Hinn also commented, "This is not a war between Arabs and Jews. It's a war between God and the devil."

I recall speaking to an assembly of seminary students in Lancaster Bible College in PA a few years ago. When questioned, their view, rightly or wrongly, was unanimous that Allah was a false god and in fact, derived from a Moon-god of ancient East.

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<sup>2</sup> *A Summary of the Qur'an*, by Daniel Scot; P. 8.

<sup>3</sup> The first alphabet was invented by Canaanites, later called Phoenicians. All subsequent alphabets are related in some way to this.

The Apostle Paul faced similar challenges with the Greek pagans as described in Acts 17. Paul used an idol to reflect the true God. While “some mocked...many followed and surrendered” to God. The point being, that the origins of a name do not always reflect on the later application.

### **Is the English, Greek & Latin “god” Pagan?**

For example, the origin of the English word “God” has more historic baggage than Semitic words, such as *Allah*. “God” is derived from a proto-Germanic pagan word for a water god (pronounced “*gut*”).

Moreover, “*Theos*” (where we derive theology, theologian, etc.) has a heathen Greek origin with Indo-European root “*dhes*”.

Finally the popular Latin words in Spanish “*dios*” and French “*dieu*” is totally pagan based on the Greek god Zeus. It has its origin in the early Latin Vulgate version of the Bible.

So, while thousands of years ago, the ancient origin of Allah may have been perhaps based on a Moon-god, the real question is: “What does the present use of the word mean today?”

For over 500 years before the Prophet Mohammed, Arab Christians and even some Jews in the Arabian Peninsula used the word “Allah” for God. How about the nearly 20 million of Christian Arabs who use Allah every day as their Arabic word for God? Do they remotely consider that they are praying to a Moon -god?

### **What About the Hebrew Name of “God”?**

The general Hebrew term for God is “*El*.” It is a shortened version or root of *Elohim*<sup>4</sup>. It is used throughout the Old Testament over 2,300 times. *El* was an ancient Canaanite name for a pagan deity.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Aramaic Name for “God”**

The Aramaic word for God is “*Elahh*,” or “*Alaha*,”<sup>6</sup> also derived from the root “*El*.” Jesus, an Aramaic speaker, would naturally use *Alaha* just as all the other nearly five million Aramaic speakers do today.

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<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word translated "God" (*elohim*) is a plural noun denoting majesty, and the writers of Scripture used it as an honorific title. Though it is a plural in form, it is singular in meaning when referring to the true God. This name represents the Creator's transcendent relationship to His creation. Notes on Genesis 2005 Edition by; Dr. Thomas L. Constable

<sup>5</sup> “Lecture Notes on The Names Of God” By: M. James Sawyer , Th.M., Ph.D.

<sup>6</sup> The determined form, meaning “the God,” although in later Syriac when the determined forms lose their force, “Alaha becomes the normally way of saying “God”.

**It would surprise many people to know that even Jesus used this form for God in Matt. 24:47 when he cried out in the Aramaic language, “*El-i, El-i*”, meaning “my God, my God.”**

### **The Arabic Name for “God”**

The Arabic word for God *Allah* is also derived from the Aramaic/Hebrew root word, *El*. It is a contraction of *Al* and *Ilah*, which literally means “the God.”

So, the Arabic Allah is rooted in the same Semitic word for God as the Hebrew and Aramaic. In fact, if one were to remove all the vowel markings (Semitic languages are all consonants and use markings to make vowels) from the Arabic *Al-Ilahi* and Hebrew *El-ohm*, they both mean “the God”. Remove the plural of the words and they are transliterated nearly identically as *Al-Alh*.

### **Third Foundational Bridge to the Common Ground: Jesus in the Qur’an**

It never ceases amaze me the stunned reactions of Christians and Muslims when the vast Qur’anic references to Jesus are read to them. They number as high as 110. The typical reaction from a Muslim is that Jesus is venerated as a prophet of God and one cannot be a Muslim without believing in him.

Simply quoting some of these verses in the Qur’an can create uproar in both communities. For example in the Muslim Holy Book, Jesus is:

- Supernaturally conceived through the Holy Spirit
- Sinless/pure
- Messiah
- Spirit of God
- Word of God
- Word of Truth
- Clear Sign to all Men
- Healed the sick, blind & leper
- Rose the dead (Arabic: *uba’athu*)
- Breathed life into clay
- Died (Arabic: *amutu*)
- Taken up where he is near to God
- Returning as a Witness on Judgment Day...just to mention a few.

Now to the:

### **First Barrier that becomes a Bridge to the Common Ground: The “Heresy” of Jesus as the “Son of God”; can it be Overcome in Islam & Christianity?**

Muslims intensely believe that the notion of the “sonship” of Jesus Christ is heresy and blasphemy.

The Christian's corresponding view is that the Muslim is "hell bound" for not believing Jesus is the son of God.

Is it possible to work out such seemingly antithetical positions between two great faiths? I think we can through the use of Aramaic.

I had the rare privilege to sit with an Iranian Ayatollah at the request of a mutual friend to discuss common links in the two Holy Books. To my alarm, my American friend began my introduction by telling him "Mark has this thought that Jesus is the Son of God in the Qur'an and I wanted to know if you agreed with him." I was horrified, knowing full well the Muslim view of this issue.

After spending a few minutes apologizing for raising such a controversial issue at our first meeting we plunged right into the meat of the matter.

What is truly remarkable is that the Qur'an's Arabic and Injil's Aramaic actually use identical verbiage in outlining the supernatural conception of Jesus the Messiah.<sup>7</sup> If an American Congressman and an Iranian Ayatollah can even come close to a "meeting of the minds" on such an issue, there is hope for everyone. How did we get that far?

### **The Begotten Issue**

We began with reading what the Qur'an says about the matter. "He neither **begets** nor is **begotten**." *Lum yalid wa lum yuulud*. Sura 112:3

And Sura 19:92 says; it is "Not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget (**take**) a son." *Wama yanbaghee lilrrahmani ya-ttakhitha waladan*.

### **Jesus not Conceived by Sexual Intercourse**

Just what do these verses mean? "Begotten" used here in the Arabic are male forms. They all mean "birthed from him" in a sexual fashion. There is also a female form *teled* which means "birthed from her", which could be interpreted there was no "him".

The Greek Bible uses one word for "begotten" *gennao*<sup>8</sup>, which holds no gender in the way the Semitic languages do. This has led Muslims to assume the Bible suggests sexual intercourse occurred between God and Mary, causing the birth of Jesus, since the same word, begotten, is used for Jesus, as well as every other man or woman "birthed on the earth.

The English translations also use one word to describe how all humans are begotten, including Jesus. Therefore, this genderless- challenged Greek word translated into the

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<sup>7</sup> See Luke 1:34, Matthew 1:18 and Suras 21:91 and 66:12.

<sup>8</sup> *Stong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* word # 1080

single English word “begotten” creates a problem for Muslims when describing the birth of Jesus.

Aly Gawhary expresses this dilemma in his Book Christ in Islam stating; “The Muslim takes exception to the word “begotten,” because begetting is an animal act, belonging to the lower animal functions of sex. How can we attribute such a lowly capacity to God?”<sup>9</sup>

This is understandably blasphemous in Islam, *but also a blasphemy within orthodox Christianity*. This confusing term is one reason some Muslims discredit the Greek translation as “distorted” and “corrupted.”

### **The Aramaic Language Sheds Light in the Problem**

The exception to this universal male form of “begotten” is in the Aramaic version of the Bible. The Gospel establishes the genealogy of Jesus by an extensive listing of who was begotten by whom, from Abraham all the way to Joseph, the husband of Mary (See Matthew 1:1-16). However, please pay special attention to the Aramaic word used in Matthew 1:

*yalad*, or *awled* is a word nearly identical to the Qur’anic word used in the cited verses and is a male stem meaning “from him”. This suggests birth sexually through a male and is used when describing every birth in the whole chronology of Matthew ***EXCEPT*** for Jesus the Messiah! In Matthew 1:16, after the **repeated** use of *yalad* from verses 1-16, the **Aramaic word** interestingly, and **significantly, changes** to:

***ettled which is a female stem “meaning from her” implying the birth of Jesus was supernatural through only a female.***<sup>10</sup> This form of “begotten” may **suggest there was no male or sexual intercourse in the birthing process**. This is totally consistent with the Qur’anic representation of the conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

One of the most popular Christian verses in the Bible is: “For God so loved the world He gave His only **begotten** Son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life...” Aramaic translator Dr. George Lamsa points out the Aramaic word *ykhidaya*, used here is different from any other human birthing process.<sup>11</sup> It means “the only one”, “unique”.<sup>12</sup>

The same word is also used in its Hebrew form *ykhiday* in a prophetic verse about the Messiah in Zechariah 12:10:

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<sup>9</sup> *Christ in Islam* by Aly S. Gawhary, p. 29, Cairo, Egypt.

<sup>10</sup> The original Aramaic *ettled* (begotten) used in a female verb form, suggests a spiritually (Arabic: *nafakhna*) breathed (Arabic: *feehi min*) from the Spirit of God (***Rouhallah***) or in more simple terms, a miraculous conception.

<sup>11</sup> *More Light on the Gospel*, Dr. George Lamsa, p.120.

<sup>12</sup> The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (Hebrew, Aramaic & English) by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver & G.A. Briggs, p. 402.

“They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced...as they mourn for an **only son**...”  
Also Psalms 2:7 uses the Hebrew *Y’lidi-cha* when referring to the birth of the Messiah.<sup>13</sup>

The Aramaic and Hebrew translations consistently choose words and word forms for Jesus as the “begotten” that demonstrate a clear difference in how he was “begotten” compared to everyone else in human history.

### **The Dead Sea Scrolls “Secret” of the “son of God” Unearthed**

This term “son of God” is even used in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran.<sup>14</sup> One particular verse **written in Aramaic**, speaks of the Messiah as “the son of God” and refer to him as the “son of the Most High” and as the “chosen one”.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Conception of Jesus...New Common Ground**

Now that we understand how Jesus **was not** “begotten” in the Qur’an, are there Semantic linguistic similarities in the Holy Books that present how he **was** conceived? They are in fact, surprising.

Luke 1:34-35 says: “Then Mary said to the angel, how can this be, for no man has known me. The angel answered and said to her, The **Spirit of God** (Aramaic: *Rohka Alaha*) will come and the power of the Highest will rest on you; therefore the one to be born of you is holy and he will be called the Son of God.”<sup>16</sup>

Qur’an in sura 21:91 and 66:12 both state: “We breathed into her our Spirit (Arabic: *Ruhina* or *Rouh Allah*) and made her son a sign to all mankind.”

Hence, Jesus was conceived in both Holy Books through the “Spirit of God”.

Qur’anic Arabic: Spirit of God: **Rouh Allah** or Holy Spirit: **Rouh al-Qudus**<sup>17</sup>  
Gospel Aramaic: Spirit of God: **Rohka Alaha** or Holy Spirit: **Rohka d’qudsha**<sup>18</sup>  
Torah Hebrew: Spirit of God: **Rohah Elohem** or Holy Spirit: **Rohah d’ Qadash**<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Hebrew causes the word “born” [y-l-d] to be divided into seven stems (Paal, Piel, Hiphil, Niphal, Pual, Hophal, Hithpael). The first stem (Paal) is used for the mother who gives birth (*yaladi* or *teled*). **This stem is the only stem used for a female giving birth.** The other stems (Hiphil, Niphal, Pual) are used in the scriptures for males giving birth, that is, for male-impregnated births. (And the remaining stems are not relevant, with Piel meaning midwife, Hithpael meaning pedigree/bloodline and Hophal meaning gender neutral usage.

<sup>14</sup> 4Q246

<sup>15</sup> 4Q534-536 “He will be called son of God, and they will call him son of the Most High. Like the sparks 2 of a vision, so will their kingdom be; they will rule several years over 3 the earth and crush everything; a people will crush another people, and a city another city. 4 *Blank* Until the people of God arises and makes everyone rest from the sword. 5 His kingdom will be an eternal kingdom, and all his paths in truth and upright[tness]”

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 1:18 also uses the Aramaic: *Rohka Alaha*.

<sup>17</sup> Holy’ or ‘Holy Spirit’ appears approximately 24 times in the Qur’an

<sup>18</sup> Holy’, the five words from the Injil translated as ‘Holy’ occurs about 167 times.

<sup>19</sup> Holy’, the six words from the Old Testament translated as ‘Holy’ occurs at least 342 times.



## The “Conception” of the Messiah a “sign”

Isaiah 7:14 prophesied about Jesus, “Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a **sign**; behold, a **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”.

This Hebrew prophesy is identical to the many in the Gospels and the Qur’an such as Sura in 21:91 “And she who guarded her chastity, so we breathed into her Our Spirit and made her son a **sign** to all mankind.”

## God’s Power to Speak things into “Being”

Other Suras in the Qur’an such as 3:47, 3:59, 19:20 and 19:35 use the equivalent of the “to be” verb (Arabic: *fa kun*)<sup>20</sup> when referring to the conception of Jesus. As in Hebrew, Arabic does not technically have a “to be” verb. This is a very important concept in Islam. Jesus was conceived by this command. The Qur’an uses both the “Spirit of God” and the “to be” command as part of a miraculous process in the conception of Jesus, who was also as Isaiah points out “a sign”.

In conclusion, is possible for Muslims and Christians to agree that Jesus was conceived by the Spirit of God and *not* sexually. He had no father and was birthed through a command of God by a virgin named Mary. In *this spiritual* context, Jesus could allegorically be considered the “Son of God” in the same custom the Arabs might say one who lives near the Nile as “the son of the Nile” or a traveler as “son of the road” (Qur’an 2:177). While no Muslim would hurry to share this new “revelation” in public, the process of building bridges of friendship through education and understanding can begin.

## Second Barrier that becomes a Bridge to the Common Ground: The Trinity

The following Suras seem to conflict with the Bible and have created centuries of division:

**Sura 4:171** “And say not three (*thalatha*). Desist, it is better for you: Allah is only one God...”

**Sura 5:73** “Disbelievers are who say Allah is the third of the three, and there is no god but the one God.”

## The Qur’an and 99 names (attributes) of God

The Qur’an ascribes as many as 99 different names to Allah in order to describe the vast/limitless attributes of His nature. While these are considered *sifat* (Arabic for divine attributes) they dogmatically hold to monotheism. Ancient Eastern Christians also believed in one God with many attributes, instead of many concept of “persons”.

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<sup>20</sup> The Aramaic equivalent word is *kum*. The "N" and "M" alternate depending on dialect and tense. "N" typically would occur in passive or existential (existence) states, for example, while "M" occurs often in actions.

“Person” does not appear in the Aramaic Bible on the context of God, the Holy Spirit, or Jesus.

It is interesting to note that the Bible has 46 attributes of God, such as love, just, wise omnipresent, all of which are essentially similar attributes of Allah in the Qur’an.<sup>21</sup> There are also 24 names of God, such as Jehovah, Yahweh, Elohem, et al. Yet, similar to the Muslim, few Jews or Christians would claim any more than one God.

However, the three primary words central to this discussion are God/Father, Son/Christ/Jesus and Holy Spirit/Spirit of God. These are all frequently used and are identical in the Arabic of the Qur’an, the Aramaic of the New Testament and the Hebrew of the Torah. These Holy Books routinely refer to:

<b>English</b>	<b>Arabic</b>	<b>Aramaic</b>	<b>Hebrew</b>
God	<i>Allah</i>	<i>Alaha</i> ),	<i>Elohem</i>
Holy Spirit	<i>Rouh al-Qudus</i>	<i>Rohka d’qudsha</i>	<i>Rouah ha Kadoish</i>
[(or Spirit of God)]	<i>Rouh Allah</i>	<i>Rohka Alaha</i>	<i>Rouah ha Elohem]</i>
Jesus Christ	<i>Isa Mesiah</i>	<i>Eshoo Meshikha</i>	<i>Messiah</i>

Since the Holy Books use all three indistinguishable words in their respective Semitic languages, where then is the division? It must lie in the interpretation and interactional aspects of each of these terms.

The term “Trinity” however, is never mentioned in the Bible, but was adopted in the Fourth Century, just after the Council of Nicaea, which the Roman Emperor Constantine assembled in A.D. 325.<sup>22</sup> To fathom the infinite nature of God and His divine character attributes is daunting. Perhaps, this is the perplexity that has led to such grave misunderstandings.

St. Ephrem wrote in the fourth century:

“Dogmatic “definitions” can be actually blasphemous when these definitions touch upon some aspect of God’s Being; for, by trying to “define” God, one is in effect attempting to contain the Uncontainable, to limit the Limitless.”

After countless discussions with learned Christians asking questions from every angle I can think of, at the end of the day, they lament that our ability to grasp the actual interaction among the three is really “a mystery”. Perhaps Ephrem was right, however these three are in the all the Semitic Holy Books and can be considered at least divine attributes...any deeper understanding must be left to the few lucky ones who can comprehend the infinite.

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<sup>21</sup> Dakes Annotated Reference Bible, p.51, concordance.

<sup>22</sup> See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Fourth Edition, by ‘]p]0p’]0’/-]0’p-  
“The doctrine is not explicitly taught in the New Testament, the idea of the Trinity has been inferred from the Gospel of St. John.”

### **Third Barrier that becomes a Bridge to the Common Ground: the “Deity” of Jesus?**

The possibility of Jesus holding any aspect of deity is another critical issue dividing Islam and Christianity, yet a form of agreement is achievable. Most of the faithful agree that the flesh/body of Jesus was finite and no different from any other human, except that he was born sinless or pure as the Qur’an states. Muslims feel passionately that if Jesus was Allah, his normal human bodily functions are beyond Allah’s majesty to engage in.

Since the Qur’an points out that the Allah’s Spirit (Arabic: *Rouh Allah*) supernaturally conceived Jesus through a virgin and the same Spirit resides within him, can one reasonably conclude that the Spirit of Jesus holds some aspect of deification? Perhaps at least as a starting point, one of the eternal attributes of Allah?

Some Sufi mystics for centuries have suggested that if, Allah’s “Word” was in the Qur’an (Arabic: *hulul*, meaning “taking up residence”), why could it not also be *hulul*, or incarnate in Jesus? He was also referred to in the Qur’an as the “Word of God” (Arabic: *Kalimatu Allah*).

Perhaps this prompted renown Islamic scholar Dr. Joseph Cumming of Yale to state, “Both the Gospel and Qur’an indicate that God’s *kalima* which he caused to be manifest in the womb of Virgin Mary... is not something which God created or originated...since God in his love, wanted to reveal himself to humankind, he determined that his *kalam* should be manifest in the form of human flesh”<sup>23</sup>

In this light, the Qur’an indicates only two sacred Words “came down from heaven (Arabic: *nuzzilat*); the first was the **Holy Qur’an** and the second, **Isa al Messiah**.

Further, one could retort that we all possess eternal “spirits,” so what is the difference between the Spirit in Jesus and the spirit in all other people? Our spirit, while eternal, is corrupted and in the “image” (copy, or facsimile) of Allah, but not Allah’s. Since Jesus was “sinless” and “pure”<sup>24</sup> (Arabic: *Zakiyyah*), and “without vanity or wickedness”,<sup>25</sup> could Jesus’ Spirit be said to possess the complete, pure, undefiled Spirit of Allah?

The Arabic for “create” is *Khalaka*. This Qur’anic word is limited to two contexts in their Holy Book. The first, when Allah “creates” and the second when Jesus “creates”. Jesus used his “breath” to literally “create” or turn clay (mud) into a “living bird.”<sup>26</sup> What “breath” has the authority and power to conceive life other than Allah’s?

Most Muslim scholars, whom I have discussed this with, agree that the Spirit in Jesus was at least a divine attribute from Allah, and his flesh human, and the contribution of

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<sup>23</sup> Aramaic for “became flesh”: *eth-bassar* is very similar to the Qur’anic Arabic: *bsahar*.

<sup>24</sup> Sura 19:19

<sup>25</sup> Sura 19:32

<sup>26</sup> Suras 3:49 and 5:110-113

Mary. This position is close to where many Christians themselves tend to fall and at least an effective beginning of new common ground with Islam.

### **Conclusion**

Crusades, Ottoman Conquests, slavery, colonization and the like have created an ever-growing fissure between Muslims and the West that seems unbridgeable.

This paper hopes to challenge men and women of influence in the East and West to venture outside the comfort zone of their religious perceptions and revisit how we think about ourselves, our faiths, our cultures, and in the end, each other.

The goal of the bridges effort is not to debate, convert, or impose our positions. In fact, what I have presented are perhaps to some, views and strategies for both sides of the divide to study and consider their relevance for themselves.

These bridge-building techniques can, we know first hand, initiate a thawing of relationships between the East and the West. Further, it can lead to the seeding of a movement without guns and tanks that will affect the core of human nature and passion--the heart.

Perhaps just the process of lovingly and excitedly discussing the challenges with what the Muslims call the "Christian Jesus" will in a way release the mystical power behind the name that has so influenced the world over the last 2,000 years.

Indeed this vastly expanded common ground can serve to bring us closer together; as friends, prayer partners, even brothers and sisters, yet allowing people of both faiths to retain their cultures and traditions. This process can stem the tide of religious militancy and mistrust. Otherwise, we are doomed to face the unimaginable impact of continuing conflict between the two.

Ours is a simple but difficult objective: that each of us—believers and non-believers, Muslim and Christians—not burden our future with the misunderstandings and mistrust of the past.