

How Christians See Jesus
Keith Small article: 11 September 2007
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'*The Muslim Jesus*' which aired on ITV August 19th sought to dispel ignorance that many British people have toward Muslim beliefs about Jesus. I have found that many Muslims are also uninformed about the Jesus of the Bible and Christian belief. I am grateful to AWAAZ for the opportunity to present some basics about Jesus from a Christian perspective, and my hope is that it will increase understanding between faith communities and lead to deeper sympathy and tolerance.

The Bible says, "*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.*" (John 1:14, New Testament of the Holy Bible) This is one of the most important verses stating the Christian view of Jesus. But what does it mean? Are Christians claiming God morphed Himself into a human being, like some odd Star Trek or Dr. Who plot? God **changing into** a man? Have Christians taken a man and made him out to be god- like the Greek and Roman gods and goddesses? These are honest questions, but they are **not** the Bible's or the Christian view of Jesus. What does this verse mean, then?

This verse (and others) is saying that God somehow took on a full human nature without changing His basic nature as God. It doesn't explain **how** God did this. It just presents it as revelation to be received with humility. But **could** God really do this? Since God can do anything, the better question is '**Would** God do this?' The Bible says yes, He would, and did, out of love for his wayward creatures. And Christians have accepted that answer with gratitude and joy.

Another verse that helps us understand some of this is something Jesus said: '*God is spirit*' (John 4:24). By this He was stating that God is not limited by physical laws but has a spiritual nature. It stretches our minds, but if even we can conceive of spiritual beings possessing human bodies (for good or ill), who are we to limit the Almighty Loving and Wise God if He decided to do something much greater? And this is the testimony of the entire Bible- God is somehow able to enter time and space, interact with humans personally, inspire prophets and writers of Scripture, and even come and dwell among us for a time as a real human who is also, at the same time, fully God.

But how **could** God limit Himself this way? Ultimately the answer to that lies with God, but even a father limits his strength to play with his child. God can limit Himself voluntarily to meet us at our point of need. A better question is '**Has** God really done this?' The Bible's testimony is Yes! Christianity is based on the historical event that God did this in Jesus Christ. It is at the heart of the meaning of the title, Messiah ('Christ' in Greek), for Jesus. It is at the heart of how Jesus could die on the cross and rise from the dead in complete victory over sin, death, and Satan and all his forces.

The Bible's portrayal of Jesus being both fully God and fully human makes our normal reasoning inadequate. Questions on *The Muslim Jesus* program like, 'who was controlling the world if God was on the cross?' and others like, 'How could Jesus be God if he ate, slept, defecated, etc?' address only half the equation- his humanity. His deity is untouched by such concerns and such questions inadvertently force an un-biblical view of *only* humanity on Jesus that Christians and the Jesus of the Bible have never claimed.

Christians have not accepted this blindly but have sought to make sure that the historical testimony to these events is sound. The events were recorded in detail by eyewitnesses. The fact of the crucifixion was also confirmed by Jewish and Roman enemies of Jesus. And though enemies did not confirm the resurrection, they did recognize it was the firm belief of the earliest Christians- the ones who knew Jesus personally including his closest companions and his own mother, Mary. The first Christians also understood this to be what Jesus meant when he said, '*For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*' (John 3:16) They also came to understand that this was the mission of God's Messiah as it had been predicted by the prophets hundreds of years before. The Christian Jesus, the Biblical Jesus, revealed Himself to be a true human being and yet so much more.

**Thank you for considering this. May God bless you
Keith Small, Batley Evangelical Church**

How Muslims See Jesus
Mufti Yusuf Akudi article: 8 October, 2007
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After last month's article by Rev Keith Small, questions were asked from certain sections of the Muslim community requesting for clarity in terms of what are the real beliefs one should have in relation to Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him. 'The Muslim Jesus' aired on ITV in August raised quite a few eyebrows by many Muslims and Christians, who are truly unaware and uninformed about the Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him, of the Quran and the Muslim belief of the Prophets in general. Rev Keith was correct in having found that many Muslims are uninformed about the Jesus of the Bible and Christian belief. I would firstly like to thank him for the Christian perspective, I hope and pray that it will increase understanding between faith communities.

So what are the beliefs of the Muslim in relation to Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him? What are the teachings of the Holy Quran?

Before I start answering any of the above questions, a prerequisite for any constructive dialogue is that both communities should not learn about each other through sources that are unsympathetic, critical, or even hostile: they should rather try to formulate an honest idea as to how the other faith is seen in its own authentic scriptures and as practiced by those who are truly committed to it. The tenets of Islam are similar to those of other religions; the religion teaches unity, tolerance, respect for each other, sanctity of life and all good ethical values of human life. For Muslims religious tolerance is a serious religious obligation. They must be a force against all intolerance, even that which is promoted in the guise of tolerance and faith.

Muslims have deep respect and love for all the prophets and messengers whom the Almighty chose to convey his message to mankind. The names of many of them are already known to us from the Quran (Ebrahim/Abraham, Moosa/Moses, Haroon/Aaron, Nooh/Noah and others).

Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him, is mentioned by name in twenty-five places in the Holy Quran. He is also addressed with respect as: "Ibn Maryam" son of Mary; as Masih Messiah translated as Christ; "Abdullah" servant of Allah; "Rasulullah" Messenger of Allah. He is spoken of as "the word of God", as "the spirit of God", as a "sign of God", and numerous other epithets of honour spread over fifteen different chapters.

The Holy Quran honours this great Messenger of the Almighty. The very nature of the birth of Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him, is so special that God compares the uniqueness of his creation to that of the first man and prophet, Adam peace be upon him.

Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is. (AaI' Imran 3:59). Isa (Jesus) peace be upon him, is considered one of five great prophets sent by The Almighty to man. He is worthy of the

utmost honour and respect as a prophet of Allah to the Children of Israel. He was neither an incarnation of God nor God's son, and he *never* claimed to be. We believe that Jesus was a human being, miraculously born of a virgin, and that he was a prophet and messenger of the Almighty. He miraculously spoke as a baby in the cradle, and later performed other miracles such as healing the sick and raising the dead by the grace of Almighty.

He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; And He hath made me blessed whosoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live; (He) hath made-me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; So peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (Maryam 19:26-33).

To deny that Jesus was a prophet of God is to disbelieve in Islam. According to Islam, Jesus peace be upon him was not crucified but was raised up to be with God until a time in the future when God will return him to earth to complete his mission. He did not die for the sins of mankind; each person will be accountable for his/her deeds before The Almighty on the Day of Judgment. No one can pay for the sins of others. The Quran confirms that Jesus was raised up by God, and the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him reassured us that Jesus peace be upon him will be sent down to earth once again before the Day of Judgment in order to re-establish justice and the proper worship of the one Creator.

That they rejected Faith; that they uttered against Mary a grave false charge. And because" of their saying: We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger they slew him not nor crucified him, but, it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is exalted in Power, Wise. (An-Nisaa' 4:156-158).

Christians and Muslims comprise nearly half of the world's population. The nature of the relationship between these two communities is of considerable significance for the welfare of the whole human family. I would just like to end with a quote from Hans Kung described by the former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord George Carey as the greatest living theologian: "The options have become clear: rivalry amongst the religions, a clash of civilizations, war between nations, or a dialogue of civilizations and peace between the religions as a harbinger of peace among nations. Faced with a deadly threat to all humankind, shouldn't we demolish the walls of prejudice stone by stone and build bridges of dialogue, including bridges to Islam, rather than erect new barriers of hatred, vengeance, and hostility?"

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**Keith Small Response to
Mufti Yusuf Akudi Article
(not published)**

I read with great interest Mufti Yusuf's October response to my brief article on the Christian view of Jesus in the September Awaaz. I am grateful for many things he wrote. First, his presentation of the Islamic view of Jesus was excellent for the amount of information it conveyed in so brief an article. Second, I am very grateful for the kind and respectful attitude with which he wrote. Third, and most of all, I am grateful for his clear words that Christians and Muslims need to be a force against intolerance so that we can contribute to each others welfare and to the welfare of the entire human family.

After reading his words I came away with a question that I think we all need to consider carefully. If we are to be forces for good to each other, how should we handle it when the other person's holy book contains words that sound to us as being very intolerant? This has been a longstanding problem between Christians and Muslims, and it happens between us and people of other faith groups and of no faith as well. How do we promote peace to each other when we are upset, or even offended by what someone else says from deep and well-intentioned religious conviction based on the clear teachings of their holy book?

What do I mean? Mufti Yusuf very simply presented the Qur'anic teaching concerning Jesus- that he was not crucified unto death, that he never rose from the dead, and that Jesus is only a man, just a prophet, that he never died for the sins of mankind, and especially, that he was never God incarnate nor God's son in any way, and that he never claimed to be. Personally, these things which the Qur'an teaches and which Muslims proclaim cause me and many Christians great offence and come across as very intolerant. And, I suspect that when I affirm the foundational teachings of the Bible concerning Jesus being God Incarnate and the only Saviour for mankind many Muslims find the teaching of the Bible offensive, as well as my actions and words proclaiming these teachings. How can we live with this mutual offence? How do we keep these offensive things which we find in each other's holy books from encouraging 'hatred, vengeance, and hostility?' By making such speech illegal defining it as a hate crime? By making any critical comments about Jesus or Muhammad or the Bible or the Qur'an illegal? I can't help but think there must be a better way, and there is.

First of all we can do it by doing what the respected Mufti and myself are attempting to do in these articles. We are talking and sharing views while seeking a better understanding of each other in honesty before God. Second, we are choosing to hold our feelings of offence in check and not act on them out of respect and sympathy for a fellow human being. May I also suggest a third step?

I think we must take a step back and ask ourselves and each other questions like, could I be wrong? Could my religion and forefathers be wrong? Is there evidence I have not considered? One of the strengths of our society is that everyone has the freedom to ask these kinds of questions. But more than this being an issue of what a society says we can

or cannot do, these are questions we must ask before God for the sake of our souls and our personal integrity of belief. We must adopt an attitude of humility, be willing to question beliefs, and be willing to change our mind if we find our beliefs are wrong. We must also graciously extend this freedom to each other. Only when we are humble and willing to allow ourselves and others the freedom to seek truth and change their minds will we be truly tolerant toward one another, at least in regard to these eternally important religious issues.

Readers, have you asked yourselves these questions? Can you grant me the room to ask them for myself, and of you? If we can do this for each other, I think we will only gain from the effort and find we have a more tolerant attitude toward one another. I also think we can agree, to our shame, that in the histories of both of our faiths there have been people and times when intolerant attitudes were held by the majority and people with sincere questions could not pursue truth. Let us work so that our time in this century is not such an era.

May we each take advantage of the opportunities God gives us to seek Truth and to live with grace and humility according to what we find.

**Thank you for considering this. May God bless you
Keith Small, Batley Evangelical Church**