

مِنَ الطَّيْنِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَفْخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِي
وَتُثْرِي الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ تَخْرُجُ الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ
كَفَفْتُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَنْكَ إِذْ جِئْتَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
مِنْهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ

5:114 ‘Isa, the son of Mary said: “O Allah, our Lord, send down to us a table [spread with food] from the heaven to be for us a festival for the first of us and the last of us and a sign from You. And provide for us, and You are the best of providers.”

المائدة: ١١٤ - ١١٥

قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا أَنْزِلْ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ
تَكُونُ لَنَا عِيدًا لِأَوَّلِنَا وَآخِرِنَا وَآيَةً مِنْكَ وَارزُقْنَا وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ
الرَّازِقِينَ
قَالَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي مُنزِلُهَا عَلَيْكُمْ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بَعْدَ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنِّي أُعَذِّبُهُ عَذَابًا
لَا أُعَذِّبُهُ أَحَدًا مِنَ الْعَالَمِينَ

1.3 The Position of Jesus towards God

4:171 “O people of the scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. Al-Masih ‘Isa, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, ‘Three’; ... Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son neither in heaven nor on earth.”

النساء: ١٧١/٤

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ
إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى
مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِنْهُ فَآمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَلَا تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةً. انْتَهَوْا
خَيْرًا لَكُمْ. إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ. سُبْحَانَهُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ لَهُ مَا
فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ. وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا

5:17 “They have certainly disbelieved (*kaf-ara*) who say that Allah is al-Masih, the son of Mary” ...

المائدة: ١٧/٥

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قُلْ فَمَنْ يَمْلِكُ
مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ الْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمَّهُ وَمَنْ فِي
الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَاللَّهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا يَخْلُقُ
مَا يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

5:72 “They have certainly disbelieved who say, Allah is al-Masih, the son of Mary.” ...

5:73 “They have certainly disbelieved who say, Allah is the third of three.”

5:75 “Al-Masih, son of Mary, was not but a messenger ...”

المائدة: ٧٥ - ٧٢/٥

٧٢ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ
الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ
فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
٧٣ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ
وَاحِدٌ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ

٧٤ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ أَفَلَا يَتُوبُونَ إِلَى اللَّهِ
وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لَهُ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

٧٥ مَا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ
وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ كَانَا يَأْكُلَانِ الطَّعَامَ انظُرْ كَيْفَ نُبَيِّنُ لَهُمُ الْآيَاتِ
ثُمَّ انظُرْ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ

5:116 And when Allah will say: “O Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah? He will say, Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right.” ...

المائدة: ١١٦/٥

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي
وَأُمَّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ
مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقِّ إِنْ كُنْتُ فَالْتَهُ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعَلَّمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا
أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

1.4 Jesus‘ death and resurrection/ascension

19:33 “And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die and the day I am raised alive.”

مريم: ٣٣/١٩

وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

4:157 And they said: “We have killed the al-Masih ‘Isa, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” But they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but it was made to appear to them [like that]. And those who differ over it are in doubt about it. ... They did not kill him, for certain.

النساء: ١٥٧/٤

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا
قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلْبُوهُ وَلَكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي
شَكٍّ مِنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا ...
بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

3:55 Allah said: “O ‘Isa, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve ...”

آل عمران: ٥٤/٣ - ٥٥

٤٥ وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ
 ٥٥ إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنِي مَتْوَفِيكَ وَرَافِعِكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرِكَ
 مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى
 يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

2. The divine Christological titles in the Quran

In the Quran the person of Jesus is especially emphasizes through his different titles. But before moving on to tackle the core topics of Christology in Islam, we first want to have a look at the Christological titles of the person of Jesus available in the Quran.

The following divine Christological titles are found in the Quran:

- ‘Isa عيسى: Sura 3:52,55,59; 43:63;
- ‘Isa ibnu Maryam عيسى ابن مريم: Sura 2:87,253; 5:78,112,114,116; 19:34; 61:6,14;
- al-Masih المسيح: Sura 4:172
- al-Masihu ibnu Maryam المسيح ابن مريم: Sura 5:17,72,75; 9:31
- al-Masihu ‘Isa ibnu Maryam المسيح عيسى ابن مريم: Sura 3:45; 4:157,171

The most frequent term in the Quran is ‘Isa (عيسى) “Jesus” followed by al-Masih (المسيح) “the Christ” which is the second most frequent term. Each of these two titles can either appear alone or in combination with his other designations, the most frequent supplement being *ibnu Maryam* (ابن مريم) “son of Mary”.

2.1 The Christological title: ‘Isa عيسى

The title ‘Isa in the Quran designates the biblical name “Jesus”. Attempting to explain the term ‘Isa through Hebrew semantic has not been successful in the past. Therefore the origin of this name has to be sought elsewhere.

Before the rise of Islam the use of the Arabic language was mostly limited to the Arabian Peninsula. However, the Arabic speaking Christians who lived in this area at this time employed the Aramaic language to a large extent, which was until this date the dominant language in the entire Middle East. By the middle of the 5th century AD the Aramaic Peshitta Bible was in wide circulation.¹ Hence it can be assumed that *the roots of this Christological title in the Arabic language have to be sought in the Aramaic language.*

It is notable that many Christians in the Middle East bear the name ‘Isa as family name. An adaptation of the names of Christians to their Islamic surroundings can mostly be ruled out, since this family name does not appear in North Africa as Aramaic was not pre-dominant in this region. Therefore, the usage of this name remained limited to the Middle East.

Christians who lived in the Middle East and bore the name ‘Isa as family name, mostly belong to the old oriental churches in the region. To them belong the Maronites, the Syrian-Orthodox and the Chaldeans (Iraq). These churches belong to the Aramaic or Syriac language tradition which was dominant in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq before the rise of Islam.

The Syriac language divides into a “Western” and an “Eastern” branch which have many things in common. However, their pronunciation tradition is different. Hence, the Aramaic name “Jesus” (يَسُوع) is pronounced *Yesh(u/o)* ‘ in Western Aramaic but *Isha* ‘ in Eastern Aramaic, where the initial *ye* changes into an *i* and the long *u/o* at the end into a long *a*.

As becomes evident through comparison with other Aramaic loan-words in Arabic², a foreign sounding name like *Isha* ‘ could have become spelled in a hypercorrect way by Arabs. Thus the pronunciation of the initial *i* may have been

increased through the addition of an initial 'Ayin (ع). However, the main problem remains how to explain the change of the final 'Ayin into a final 'Alif. For explaining this phenomenon one has to resort to the Aramaic dialect of the Babylonian Jews, in which original 'Ayin often becomes an 'Alif.³ In contrast, the change of *Shin* to *s* is self-evident according to Arabic sound laws. Hence it can be assumed, that the name 'Isa stems from an area where Eastern Aramaic dialects were spoken.

Additionally one has to consider the fact, that the Eastern Syriac/Aramaic language, which employed the term *Isha'*, was mainly at home in Iraq and Iran, the so-called Persis. Now, since southern Iraq borders with the Arabian Peninsula and what is today Basra (in Sassanid times *Vaheštābād Ardašīr*) used to be a major city and had trade routes to Medina and Makka in pre-Islamic Arabia as well as during the rise of Islam (see map), it may thus be assumed that the term 'Isa spread from the Eastern Syriac/Aramaic language in the Persis into the Arabian Peninsula and from there found its way into the Quran.

2.2 The Christological title: *al-Masih* الْمَسِيحُ
The divine title *al-Masih* corresponds in Arabic spelling with the biblical title "the Messiah". This title was taken over without major linguistic changes from Hebrew through Aramaic into Arabic. Only the sibilant *Shin* was altered into a simple *s*. Therefore the actual Messianic title for the person of Jesus is retained in the Koran without changes.

If one considers the image which the Quran conveys about the person of Jesus, one has to realize that it is very fragmentary compared to the biblical witness. Likewise one also has to notice that the Quran, in comparison with the Bible, is distorted in major points in its Christological statements. Furthermore, the Quran is completely lacking references to the Messiah of the Old Testament so that it is

impossible to obtain a correct understanding of the Messianic concept and its function in the Old and New Testament.⁴

Therefore we have to realize that the traditions concerning the person of Jesus in the Quran are mainly related to the New Testament. The ignorance about the Messianic references to the Old Testament is so grave that Islamic theology is not able to exactly determine the meaning of the term *al-Masih* (Messiah) from its historical context and from which roots ("the anointed") this term comes from. Hence, in any dialog or discussion with a Muslim firstly the Messianic tradition of the Old Testament has to be described so that the position of the Messiah in the biblical history of salvation can be clarified which then is completed in the revelation of the New Testament.

Yet it is important that the term *al-Masih* actually exists in the Quran and that a bridge can be built between the Bible and Quran through this term without alienating a Muslim. But we have to be aware that the understanding of the Messianism of Jesus in the Quran is always in the sense of a *mortal* human being whereas the *divine* character of Jesus, which is the basis of our Christian faith, is excluded.⁵

2.3 The Christological title: *al-Masih* 'Isa *ibnu Maryam* الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ

The third Christological title *ibnu Maryam* (son of Mary) usually stands in connection with *al-Masih* or 'Isa or both. This title designates the *parental* origin of the person of Jesus rather than his divinity. Likewise this title also has to be understood as a fixed term as it appears in 3:45: "O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be al-Masih 'Isa, the son of Mary ...".

Hence the *virgin birth* seems to be rooted in this fixed title.

The reason why the Quran uses *Maryam* for Mary is based on a historical misunderstanding. In Sura Maryam (19:27-28) we read about the following event:

19:27 Then she brought him (the child she bore) to her people, carrying him. They said, “O Mary (Arabic: *Maryam*), you have certainly done a thing unprecedented.”

19:28 “O sister of Harun (bibl. Aaron), your father was not a man of evil, nor was your mother unchaste.”

مریم: ۲۷/۱۹ - ۲۸

۷۲ فَأَتَتْ بِهِ قَوْمَهَا تَحْمِلُهُ قَالُوا يَا مَرْيَمُ لَقَدْ جِئْتِ شَيْئًا فَرِيًّا
 ۸۲ يَا أُخْتُ هَارُونَ مَا كَانَ أَبُوكَ امْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَمَا كَانَتْ أُمُّكَ بَعْثًا

This statement shows us that the name *Mary*, the mother of Jesus, was confused with the name of *Maryam*, the sister of Moses and Aaron, in the Old Testament.⁶ Hence the name *Maryam* became established in the Quran for the mother of Jesus. However, this name has also become employed for the mother of Jesus in the Arabic Bible in accordance with the traditions of the Arabic language.

3. Interpreting Christology in the Quran

In order to be able to interpret and survey the Christological treatises in the Quran correctly



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NabateensRoutes.png#/media/File:NabateensRoutes.png>

it is not enough to consult an Arabic dictionary and merely translate every word. As has been demonstrated in the interpretation of the Christological titles of the Quran it requires quite some research in order to be able to classify the Islamic interpretation as well as to backup one's own exegesis objectively in order to appropriately deal with the Islamic exegetes.

Sadly a lot of arbitrariness has sprung up in the past years in the Christian occident which does not allow an objective weighing of the interpretation and communication of contents.⁷ Wrong or incompatible comparison with the Historical-critical method of Western theology have brought fourth many arbitrary interpretations which are rather dilettante than scientific, since they cannot be deducted from the Arabic language. Too much Western *self-conception* was read into the exegesis and interpretation of the Quranic words both from the side of liberal as well as from the side of conservative theologians. The existing approaches have not allowed to correctly understand and classify the own perception which Islam has made for itself about the Quran.

In this contribution we want to give a short overview on the interpretation of the three Christological core topics in order to determine the possibilities of interpretation. At the end the consequences of these topics will be considered.

3.1 His birth from the virgin Mary

3:45 The angels said: "O Mary, indeed Allah gives you good tidings of a word from Him, whose name will be al-Masih 'Isa, the son of Mary - distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah]".

آل عمران: ٤٥/٣
 إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ

The birth of Jesus in the Quran is understood as a birth from the virgin Mary. She received the message of his birth from one or several angels and it is announced to her that the person of Jesus will play a distinguished role both in this life as well as hereafter.

However, the main fact remains unmentioned that according to the gospel of Luke the angel Gabriel said to Mary, that Jesus will be begotten through the *power* of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35) and therefore will be called "the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:32). Nevertheless the Quran seems to indicate this biblical message, however, in a very altered and weakened form. In Sura al Nissa we read:

4:171 O People of the Scripture, do not commit excess in your religion or say about Allah except the truth. Al-Masih 'Isa, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a spirit from Him. ...

النساء: ١٧١/٤
 يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ أَلْقَاهَا إِلَى مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِّنْهُ.

Despite the fact that in this context of dispute with the Christians the biblical revelation regarding Jesus is combated and it is stated that JESUS is „not“ the son of God, the Quran still retains the biblical tradition that Jesus stems from the Word of God or *himself* is the Word of God.⁸ In the second part of 4:171 it is also indicated that the person of Jesus has something to do with the Holy Spirit. Yet, the precise statement is missing how the Quran sees this affiliation to the Spirit of God.

Of course these imprecise statements in the Quran allow for many possibilities of interpretation, which also blossomed in Islamic tradition. Still the agreement was reached, that the person of Jesus is not to be regarded as born "of God"⁹, but as a *human* person, who came into being through a creative act of God, similar to Adam:

3:59 Indeed, the example of ‘Isa to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, “Be,”¹⁰ and he was.

آل عمران: ٥٩/٣

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ

However, in this act the question of the relationship between the person of Jesus and the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit remains unanswered. This fact has led to uncertain interpretations of the spirit or Holy Spirit in Islamic theology, which we will not explicate here. It is enough to mention that the absence of the question regarding the relationship between JESUS and the Holy Spirit has led to a critical *anti-Christian* development in Islamic theology especially in comparison with Romans 4:3, where Paul explains this power of the Spirit as the basis for the resurrection of JESUS from the dead. Also in relation to his miracles the Quran lacks a decisive connection to the authority of Jesus as we will see in the following section.

3.2 The authority of Jesus

2:87 “... and We gave ‘Isa, the son of Mary, clear proofs and supported him with the Holy Spirit.”

البقرة: ٨٧/٢

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَىٰ الْكِتَابَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَىٰ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰ أَنْفُسُكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ فَفَرِيقًا كَذَّبْتُمْ وَقَرِيقًا تَقْتُلُونَ

5:110 “O ‘Isa, Son of Mary, remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Holy Spirit and you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and [remember] when I taught you writing and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and when you designed from clay [what was] like the form of a bird with My permission, then you breathed into it, and it became a bird with My permission; and you healed the blind and the leper with My permission; and when you brought forth the dead with My permission;”

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَىٰ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ اذْكُرْ نِعْمَتِي عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَتِكَ إِذْ أَيَّدتْكَ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ تُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَإِذْ عَلَّمْتُكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَإِذْ تَخْلُقُ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ بِإِذْنِي فَتَنْفُخُ فِيهَا فَتَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِي وَتُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَةَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ بِإِذْنِي وَإِذْ كَفَفْتُ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَنْكَ إِذْ جُنَّتْهُمْ بِالْبَيْنَاتِ فَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ

A distinctive attribution which Jesus receives in the Quran is his ability to perform miracles. These miracles happen with the permission of Allah and the support of the Holy Spirit. However, the miracles here are portrayed very generally and not in the context of a narrative as we see it in the gospels. The reader thus does not obtain any salvation-historical aspect of the miracles of Jesus and cannot attribute these miracles of Jesus to his authority as in the reports of the evangelists.¹¹

When the Baptist sent to ask Jesus whether he is the promised Messiah, he sent him the following answer (Lk 7,22): “the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed ...”. This was the sign of the Messianic age according to the prophecy in Isaiah 61:1f. Hence a circle is closed here in order to emphasize the Messianic authority of Jesus and his power to enforce the kingdom of God.

3.3 The relationship of Jesus with God

5:17 “They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allah is al-Masih, the son of Mary.”

المائدة: ١٧/٥

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ قُلْ فَمَنْ يَمْلِكُ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا إِنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَأُمُّهُ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

5:72 “They have certainly disbelieved who say that Allah is al-Masih, the son of Mary.”

5:73 “They have certainly disbelieved who say: ‘Allah is the third of three’.”

المائدة: ٧٢/٥ - ٧٣

٧٢ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ يَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَن يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
٧٣ لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَإِن لَّمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ ٤٧ لَيَمَسَّنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

The Quran gives a *radical* denial of any kind of approximation or assimilation of the Person of Jesus to God. This is considered شرك (shirk), the equation of another being with Allah, which is regarded as the greatest sin in Islam (kufir).

Hence, there is absolutely no room for an alternative interpretation. In Sura 5, Al-Maida, those who equate the person of Jesus with God are acclaimed three times as (kuffaar), which means that according to Islamic law they have to be accused of the gravest apostasy and ungodliness. This trifold condemnation in the Quran is considered final in Islamic law and cannot be revoked in any way.¹²

The denial of Jesus being the son of God goes so far in the Quran, that a story is portrayed where 'Isa supposedly denies his divinity himself:

5:116 When Allah will say: "O 'Isa, Son of Mary, did you say to the people: Take me and my mother as deities besides Allah?" He will say: "Exalted are You! It was not for me to say that to which I have no right."

المائدة: ١١٦/٥

وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمَّيَ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قَالِ سُبْحَانَكَ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَقُولَ مَا لَيْسَ لِي بِحَقٍّ إِنْ كُنْتُ قُلْتُهُ فَقَدْ عَلِمْتَهُ تَعْلَمَ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَلَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

Of course this attitude of the Quran completely contradicts the biblical revelation as we can read it in John 14:8–11:

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said

to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

(Λέγει αὐτῷ Φίλιππος· κύριε, δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα, καὶ ἀρκεῖ ἡμῖν. λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· τοσοῦτω χρόνω μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἔγνωκάς με, Φίλιππε; ὁ ἑωρακῶς ἐμὲ ἑώρακεν τὸν πατέρα· πῶς σὺ λέγεις· δεῖξον ἡμῖν τὸν πατέρα; οὐ πιστεύεις ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί ἐστιν; τὰ ῥήματα ἃ ἐγὼ λέγω ὑμῖν ἀπ' ἑμαντοῦ οὐ λαλῶ, ὁ δὲ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοὶ μένων ποιεῖ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ. πιστεύετε μοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ ἐν ἐμοί· εἰ δὲ μή, διὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ πιστεύετε).

Hence, the Christology of the Quran completely contradicts that Jesus is the son of God and from the perspective of the Bible there is no possibility of approximation to the Quranic text.

3.4 Jesus' death and resurrection or ascension

Considering the issue of Jesus' death and resurrection or ascension, there are three decisive verses in the Quran which do not give us a uniform picture.

On the one hand there is Sura 19:33 where it says that the person of Jesus was born like a *normal* human being, who will die and be raised (from the dead) later on:

19:33 And peace is on me the day I was born and the day I will die (amouta) and the day I am raised alive.

مریم: ٣٣/١٩

وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا

However, this verse is in contradiction to the Quranic statement in 4:157, where it says: 4:157 And they said: “Indeed, we have killed al-Masih ‘Isa, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.” And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but it was made to resemble (him) to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. ... And they did not kill him, for certain.

النساء: ١٥٧/٤
 وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَّبُوهُ وَلَٰكِنْ شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا
 بَلْ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

This discrepancy has led to a great controversy within Islamic theology on the one hand and between Christians and Muslims on the other hand. For either the person of Jesus dies like any other normal being or he does not. However, with this statement the Quran explicitly denies the crucifixion and *killing*¹³ of Jesus. According to Islamic understanding a messenger of Allah cannot be a martyr; otherwise the reputation of the omnipotent Allah, who has power over everything, would be in danger.

What actually happened with the person of Jesus is therefore resolved with the following verse in Islamic scholarship:

3:55 ... Allah said: “O ‘Isa, indeed I *meet* you and raise you to Myself and purify you from those who disbelieve and make those who follow you [in submission to Allah alone] superior to those who disbelieve (the Jews) ...”

آل عمران: ٥٤/٣ - ٥٥
 وَمَكَرُوا وَمَكَرَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرٌ الْمَاكِرِينَ
 إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنِي مَرْيَمَ قُلْ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ فَآمُرُكَ أَنْ تَقُولَ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ الْفُورَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

In this verse the Arabic verb **مُتَوَفِّيكَ** (*mutawaffika*) plays a major role. Therefore we need to analyze this verb and define its meaning.

Arabic verbs are formed according to ten stems (see chart). The basic stem (or 1st form) of this verb is *وَفِيَ* (*wafa*) and means “to fulfill” or “to be faithful”. The 5th form of this verb is *تَوَفَّى* (*tawaffa*). As an *intransitive* verb (without an object) it means “to die”. However, as a *transitive* verb it means “to meet someone” or “to reply to someone”.

The participle **مُتَوَفِّيكَ** (*mutawaffika*) in this Quranic verse corresponds with the 5th form but also has the pronominal suffix *-ka* (*you*), an appended accusative object, which results in a transitive meaning of this verb. Hence the meaning of this transitive verbal form does not agree with the reflexive meaning of the *intransitive* verb. From a hermeneutical perspective such an exposition would be desirable in order to indicate the message of the gospels. However from a grammatical point of view it is not permissible and completely wrong.

In the Quran there is another verse with the same verb *tawaffa* in the 5th form. This verbal form also has an appended pronominal suffix *-kum* and thus obtains the transitive meaning “to meet you (plural)”:

6:60 And it is He who **meets** you by night and knows what you have committed by day. وهو الذي يتوفاكم بالليل ويعلم ما جرحتم بالنهار. (الأنعام ٦: ٦٠)

Since the *transitive* form of the verb *tawaffa* cannot be reconciled with the *intransitive* meaning “to die”, Islamic scholarship was divided for over 1000 years as on how to correctly understand this word, while being fully aware of the gospels’ message. But however an individual exegete might translate this verb, the Islamic tradition has compiled a large list of possible interpretation over the last centuries, which investigate the possible explanations of this verse.

One of the foremost Islamic historians and Koran exegetes, al Tabari, has collected 22

possible interpretations for this verse, of which three variants¹⁴ are of the opinion, that the death and the resurrection of Christ is indicated here. However, these variants are taken from the interpretation of Christians. Hence the Christian interpretation, from Islamic perspective, is in the minority. Still, this verbal construction caused severe problems in Islamic exegesis which even reach into the field of Eschatology.¹⁵ Yet, all Quran exegetes came to the conclusion that this verse has to be understood in the sense of an encounter with or the ascension of the person of Jesus to Allah, but not in the sense of the actual death of his person. This assumption is backed up with 4:157, where it is stated that the Jews did not kill Jesus. Hence the circle of Islamic interpretations closes that Jesus was not killed by the Jews (and hence did not die) but was saved or "cleansed from their hands" by Allah and was raised to him.¹⁶

However, 19:33 directly contradicts these two verses, for here the statement explicitly states that Jesus is to die (*amouta*). Therefore, most of Islamic exegetes have explained, that the Quran in this verse denotes Jesus, after having been raised to Allah according to 3:55, would return at the end of times in order to become active for Allah again and then die.¹⁷ Only in this case would verse 19:33 be fulfilled.¹⁸

4. Conclusion

1. The Koran contains a limited Christological tradition on the Person of Jesus. This Christological tradition, however, is inconsistent with the biblical tradition and has big gaps. Especially the Christological reference to the Old Testament is completely missing or is partially based on extra-biblical tradition.
2. From the perspective of Christian theology the Christological tradition in the Koran leads to a great mismatch with biblical

interpretation. As matter of fact, the communication of the Christology of the Koran leads to a distorted picture of the true goal of biblical salvation-history.

3. That is why Christology in the Koran is not sufficient to explain biblical salvation history or even support its recognition. On the contrary, the theological gaps as well as the contradicting reception of the Christology have led to major theological disputes and misinterpretations in Islam.
4. However, the Christology in the Koran may serve as a means to communicate the rudimentary context of biblical Christology to an interested Muslim. But it cannot lead to a Christian faith since the salvation-historical JESUS is explicitly denied.
5. Due to the fact that the second person of the Trinitarian revelation of the New Testament is explicitly denied in the Koran, the Trinitarian revelation structure of salvation-history can neither be determined exegetically in the Koran nor perceived by faith.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Cf. K. and B. Aland, *Der Text des Neuen Testaments* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, ²1989), 203.
- 2 Cf. K. Vollers „Ueber die lautliche Steigerung bei Lehnwörtern im Arabischen“, *ZDMG* 45 (1891): 352–356 im Zusammenhang mit S. Fraenkel, *Die aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden: Brill, 1886).
- 3 Cf. M. Sokoloff, “Jewish Babylonian Aramaic,” in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, ed. by S. Weninger (Berlin: De Gruyter/Mouton, 2011), 660–670, here 662.
- 4 The prophecy of the Messiah takes its ‘concret course through the promise to king

- David (cf. 2 Sam 7:13f) and then materializes in the person of Jesus Christ.
- 5 Essentially the same applies to Judaism, which sees an earthly man in the Messiah and not one who comes from heaven. Cf. the article by P. Wassermann “Son of God and Son of Man,” in *STT* 3 (2008): 17–24.
 - 6 This misunderstanding is bypassed in Islamic theology by stating that Mohammed called her sister of Aaron in the sense of purity and dignity. For thus argues Abu Kathir: „Her father and her mother were dignified people who prayed to God and abstained from impurity“ (*Al-Tafsir li-ibn Kathir*, Surat Maryam, Aya 28).
 - 7 Cf. in this regard 3.4 (especially Footnote 13).
 - 8 Cf. Joh 1:1–2.
 - 9 The church councils of Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451) have introduced the terminology “true God from true God, begotten not made” (Θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα οὐ ποιηθέντα) in order to describe Jesus not as a creature but as of the same being as God.
 - 10 Cf. also Joh 1:3.
 - 11 The anointing, which the Messiah receives through the Holy Spirit (cf. Joh 1:32–34) and which defines him as “the Christ” (*hamašiah*) is not used here. Therefore the entire Messianic character of JESUS, which develops into an eternal covenant through the relationship with God and the presence of the Holy Spirit is essentially absent in the Quran (cf. 2 Sam 7:14–16; Jes 61:1–2; Joh 17:1–3). Hence Christian pre-conceptions cannot at all be applied to Quran exegesis. This, however, has again and again been undertaken in the West.
 - 12 This *absoulte* denial of the Trinity of God factually makes any theological approximation of the so-called Abrahamic religions impossible.
 - 13 Regarding this cf. S. Schreiner, „Die Bedeutung des Todes Jesu nach der Überlieferung des Korans,“ in *Die jüdische Bibel in islamischer Auslegung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 232–233 where the subject of the death of Jesus is treated very generally. However, the understanding of dying which is assumed in the word *mutawafika* is not to be mingled with the Jews’ claim of killing Jesus (*qatalna*) in 4:157. Dying (*amuta*) in 19:33 and being killed 4:157 are two different subject matters, which are treated differently in the Quran.
 - 14 *Al-Tabari* 7141-7143
 - 15 *Al-Tabari* 7144 and 7145
 - 16 *Al-Tabari* 7146-7148
 - 17 Cf. *Al-Tabari* 7144-7145
 - 18 However, this interpretation neither is based on a Quranic verse nor on any tradition which can directly be traced back to Mohammed.