A Study of Muhammad’s Attitudes towards Christians from the Qur’an

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Abstract

This thesis intends to explore and understand Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians from the Qur’an. Clearly, Muhammad does not hold a consistent attitude towards Christians, but a recognition-denial pattern of attitudes is suggested according to the analysis of the Meccan Suras and the Medinan Suras in this thesis. Muhammad’s recognition and denial of Christians are believed to be driven from his personal interest and religious ideas. Inclusivism is Muhammad’s approach to promote Islam, by which he is able to claim his rightful prophethood, like all other Christian prophets. At the same time, Muhammad’s denial of the divinity of Jesus and the division of Christian communities ensures Islam to be the absolute right path.

Keywords: Muhammad, the Qur’an, Meccan Suras, Medinan Suras, Christology, Christians, Inclusiveness
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Introduction

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are complicated. Muhammad’s statements and attitudes towards Christians almost always have two sides, recognition and denial. His different attitudes result in different statements. For example, in the Meccan Sura (Chapter) 43 verse 64, Jesus is very admired and Muhammad’s attitude towards Christians is positive:

When Jesus came with clear signs he said, ‘I have brought you wisdom; I have come to clear up some of your differences for you. Be mindful of God and obey me: God is my Lord and your Lord. Serve him: this is the right path.’

However, in the Medinan Sura 4 verse 171, Muhammad displays a negative attitude towards Christians:

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God......do not speak of a ‘Trinity’ -- stop [this], that is better for you -- God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust.
What does this mean that Jesus is recognized as a prophet who indicates “the right path” and therefore should be “obeyed”? To what context does Muhammad show such a positive attitude? There is a sense of warning and rivalries in the Medinan Sura 4 in contrast to the Meccan Sura 43. It is the passage of negative attitude towards Christians versus the positive attitude while both passages are stripped off from the original suras and read side by side by Muslims. Anyone can quote verses from different standings to support their practice – whether to embrace each other or go against each other – and proclaim their position to be Muhammad’s teaching. Does any of these verses represent Muhammad’s thinking?

Muhammad does not hold a consistent attitude towards Christians but rather a fluid standing of different attitudes. His accusations or instructions to Christians are full of complexity and have to be examined carefully in order to reach a more fair understanding of his attitudes towards Christians. This could have an impact on the subsequent Islam-Christian relations. For instance, verses that are friendly to Christians are often adopted as the foundation for interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Islam:
We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has give you, so race to do good: you will all returned to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. (5:48)

The tone of religious unity in the Qur’an inspire Islamic scholars such as Muhammad Abduh to bring Christians and Muslims together in harmony.¹ Such an effort is definitely welcome to Christians. But it is discouraging that this kind of friendly attitude is not a universal phenomenon in the Islamic world.

The negative attitude from the Islamic world is more familiar to Christians, especially from the Wahhabists or the fundamentalists. Churches tend to be attacked by members from this radical movement, that is well supported by the Qur’an in verses such as:

The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, ‘God’s guidance is the only true guidance.’ If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you. (2:120)

They would dearly like you to reject faith, as they themselves have done, to be like them. So do not take them as allies until they migrate [to Medina] for God’s cause. It they turn [on you], then seize and kill them wherever you encounter them. Take none of them as an ally or supporter. (4:89)

Verses like these legitimate the actions of attack and could stimulate hatred among Christians towards Muslims, especially when the fundamentalists

¹ Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), was an Egyptian Islamic scholar. He was regarded as liberal reformer and also one of the key founders of Islamic Modernism.
propagate this kind of negative attitude. Yet, once again, does this specific verse truly represent what Muhammad believes?

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are far more complicated than an absolute dichotomy of positive or negative attitude. It is never a simple question of either amity or enmity, but rather a mixed attitude once the Qur’an is read carefully.

All the suras with reference to Christians must be read thoroughly in order to discern Muhammad’s attitudes in detail. Muhammad does not show one attitude at a time in a sura, but two attitudes may collide with each other in the same sura, and sometimes one after another in the same passage. His attitudes towards Christians become more complicated when the Christian Christology is regarded. In this study, Muhammad’s argument about Christology will be studied as an example of his manifesto, to determine to what context he decides to downplay Jesus’ status and for what purpose. His argument regarding Christology also shows his attitudes towards Christianity, which influences the way he treats Christians.
Overview of Chapters

This thesis shows the author’s intention to explore and understand the complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians. Chapters 1 and 2 critically explore every sura related to Christians or Christianity. Chapter 1 deals with all the Meccan suras, and chapter 2 analyzes all the Medinan suras. Crucial historical contexts are introduced in the first part of each chapter. The historical context is necessary before one dives into the Meccan or Medinan suras.

A thorough analysis of specific verses regarding Christians or Christianity follows after the introduction of historical context. Every sura in which Christians are mentioned or is related to Christianity is listed and studied case by case, to demonstrate the attitudes of Muhammad in that particular sura.

Chapter 3 articulates the complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes discovered in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and discusses the most likely causes of the complexity. Chapter 3 does not intend to explain Muhammad’s statements but understands him as a person and discusses his motives. Chapter 3 also demonstrates how the complexity emerges when there are changes to Muhammad’s identity and his experiences with the religious other.
Lastly, this thesis reflects on how Muhammad’s attitudes influence the contemporary Christian-Muslim interactions. It also reflects on the current Christian mission ministry and expects to bring new insights to those who have to deal with Muslims on a daily basis.

**Methodology**

This is a historical and comparative theological research mainly for the interpretation of the Qur’an. This thesis intends to perceive, discover, and describe how Muhammad’s positive and negative attitudes towards Christians are intertwined and interacted with one other. Some suras in Qur’an are friendly to Christians but some are not; this research compares these differences and how these differences appeared by tracing Muhammad’s attitudes within all the suras related to Christians or Christianity.

This research does not present the Christian Christological viewpoint, but Muhammad’s view of Jesus is discussed. In other words, no debate on Christology is involved. This thesis focuses mainly on the Qur'an as to what Muhammad says that includes his perspective of Jesus.

The research is based on English materials due to the author’s very limited
ability in Arabic or ancient Syriac. Studies on early Islam and Muhammad had been done for decades long before the rapid rise of comparative religions, and there are sufficient translations of the Qur’an and Muhammad’s biography in English available for reference, which open up the possibilities to study this topic in English.

The research does a close analysis of Muhammad’s statements and actions towards Christians as recorded in the Qur’an and his earliest biography, written by Ibn Ishaq. The main reference of Muhammad’s sayings in this study is the Qur’an translated by modern scholar M. A. S. Abdel Haleem for his useful and informative introduction not only to understand the Qur’an and the Islamic faith generally, but also to grasp the big picture of every sura. The Study Quran edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al is used as supporting resource for its abundant commentary and minor comparison on text translation.

The author is aware of the importance of the Hadith (narrations of the

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sayings, actions, and tacit approval of Muhammad) in the life of a Muslim, and how much the Hadith along with the sunna (practice of Muhammad), and ijma (consensus of scholars) shape the history and thoughts of the Islamic faith. Focusing only on the Qur’an might not be able to portray Muhammad’s attitudes in full, but it is essential to begin with the Qur’an for its founding and defining stature in the Islamic faith. A single concept might be interpreted through the weaving of the Qur’an, the Hadith, the sunna and also ijma, but the Qur’an holds the defining stature. Therefore, this study is the initial step that serves to build a foundation to comprehend Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians. Further studies including more sources as stated above, should be done separately for a complete study of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians.
Chapter 1: The Meccan Suras

The Qur’an is the most reliable source to understand Muhammad. One could never bypass this compilation of Muhammad’s revelation and claim to know him. It is necessary to study all his revelations and preaching regarding Christians in detail to further understand his attitudes towards Christians.

This chapter intends to study every Meccan sura that is related to Christians to figure out Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians right from the beginning of his career as a prophet. Verses will be compared accordingly from each sura where Christianity is mentioned. Suras where “People of the Book” and “Children of Israel” are mentioned by Muhammad will be analyzed according to the context of the specific sura in order to determine which of the subjects he is mentioning. If the context and subject of “People of the Book” and “Children of Israel” are undetermined, the sura will be regarded as having an overlapping issue covering Christians and Jews at the same time. Each sura is analyzed as a complete unit.
1.1 Related Historical Context

The Meccan Suras consist of all the revelations revealed to Muhammad at the early phase of his prophethood, in another words, before the Hijra where he moved to Yathrib – later Medina – from Mecca. The first revelation that came to Muhammad during one of his retreats in the cave is called Hira outside Mecca. That is the revelatory event recorded in Sura 96, where the archangel Gabriel visited him during his deep contemplation and demanded three times that Muhammad “read/recite” his revelation.

The visitation of Gabriel brought Muhammad great fear. According to Ibn Ishaq, the first thing that came into Muhammad’s mind was suicide after the initial revelation: “I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest.”5 It happened so suddenly that Muhammad had no preparation for the call at all. He hated idolatry and soothsayers, and Muhammad was afraid that the revelation might make him one of them, or otherwise that he was mad.6

Eventually, Muhammad accepted his prophethood after a period of rejection

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5 Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, 106.
and began to preach the revelation. His harsh refutation of polytheism brought him many enemies, especially from his own clan, the Quraysh, who served as the wardens of the Ka’ba in Mecca. Muhammad consistently warned the polytheist Arabs to renounce their paganism and return to the one true God, Allah, by following the right path which was revealed to him. Muhammad did not gain much attention. Many conflicts occurred between Muhammad himself and the larger Arabian communities. Three main contexts need to be understood in order to know Muhammad better.

1.1.1 The Qur’an and Its Compilation

The Qur’an is the recorded text of Muhammad’s preaching about the revelation given to him throughout his career as a prophet. He did not write it by himself, but it was recorded by his followers soon after he spoke it. From the perspective of the Qur’an, the final purpose of revelation is to bring people to Islam and worship the one true God proclaimed by Muhammad.

The Qur’an is believed to be the revelations given to Muhammad by God through the archangel Gabriel from 610 C.E. until his death in 632 C.E. There are a total of 144 suras varying in length from the shortest of 3 verses to the longest of 286 verses. The first effort to compile the Qur’anic suras happened during the
reign of Abu Bakr – the first caliph (632-634) – on the suggestion of Umar (who was to become the second caliph). All the suras were categorized according to how they were to be read by the Prophet and believers.\textsuperscript{7} They were not equal in length. The earlier suras, which came to Muhammad during his earlier prophethood, were shorter, and the length of the suras grew gradually as Muhammad became more experienced in his prophethood.

It is impossible to date all the suras in the Qur’an precisely because they were not compiled in a chronological fashion. It is only possible to distinguish the particular sura that was revealed to Muhammad before Hijra (Meccan Sura) or after Hijra (Medinan Sura).\textsuperscript{8} The differences are not reflected in the order of the compilation of the suras. For example, the first sura in the Qur’an is unidentified, but the following four suras are all Medinan Suras. Then it is followed by two Meccan Suras and later another two Medinan Suras again. There is no clear formula for the formation of the suras.

The later suras are located in the front of the Qur’an and the earlier suras are placed near the end of the Qur’an, which is in a reverse chronological order. It

\textsuperscript{7} Haleem, \textit{The Qur’an}, xvii.

\textsuperscript{8} According to scholars some sura contains verses from Mecca and Medina at the same time.
must be borne in mind that all the suras are unable to be dated, and hence the reverse order of the Qur’an can only serve as a rough understanding regarding the timeline of all the suras. For example, it is believed that Sura 38 was revealed to Muhammad right after Sura 54, while Sura 39 was revealed to Muhammad after Sura 34, but Suras 39 to 43 were revealed to Muhammad directly one after another. So the order of the suras should never be understood chronologically.

In Muslim thought and practice, the order of the suras is not important.

Table 1 contains a list of the main theme of each of the suras. It does not project every detail in the specific sura. For example, the concept of “Believers” is mentioned in Sura 9, but it is not the main theme for Sura 9. Hence, “Believers” will not occur in Table 1, but it will be listed in another table to indicate where the concept of “Believers” did occur.

Table 1. Main Theme of Suras

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meccan Suras</th>
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| 4 | 11 | Warning | 5 | I. Pledges from Jews and Christians |
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| 5 | 12 | Encourage Muhammad | 8 | I. Badr |
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| 6 | 14 | Refute Idolaters | 9 | Recruitment for Tabuk |

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| 8 | 16 | I. Polytheists | 22 | I. Sacred Rite by Abraham |
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| 9 | 17 | Unable to Produce Miracles | 24 | I. Aisha’s Scandal |
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| 10 | 18 | I. Moses | 33 | I. Battle of the Trench |
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| 11 | 19 | I. Mary and Jesus | 47 | I. War |
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1.1.2 Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum and Abraha

Pre-Islamic Arabia was closely related to the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum (also known as the Kingdom of Axum). Inhabitants on both land interact frequently. A brief knowledge about the Ethiopian Kingdom might as well contributes to the understanding of the historical context of Meccan Suras and Pre-Islamic Arabia.

The Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum was located at the western bank of the Red Sea. The Kingdom used the name "Ethiopia" as early as the fourth century. A narrow Bab-el-Mandeb or the Mandeb Strait was the only barrier between Maddaban of Himyar and Ethiopia. The Mandeb Strait did not keep Himyarites away from Aksumites.

In fact, the Kingdom of Aksum continually extended its political power and economic influences across the Red Sea. The Kingdom of Aksum traded frequently with the Arabs and the Aksumites were not unfamiliar to the Arabs.

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The Monophysite church is the dominant Christian sect in the Aksumites kingdom. Together with the Egyptian Coptic Church, they spread religious influences across the Red Sea to Western Arabia.

Around 520 C.E., the Himyarites kingdom in South Arabia oppressed and persecuted the Christian communities in the kingdom, particularly at Najran, churches were destroyed by the army. The Himyar King at that time – Dhu Nawas – had converted to Judaism not long before. The persecution was intended to wipe out the connection between the Himyarite Christians – although Monophysite – and the Eastern Roman Empire. The attacks resulted in the alliance between Byzantine and Aksum. The emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire – Justinian – urged King Kaleb from the Aksumites kingdom to send an expedition across the Red Sea to overthrow Dhu Nawas. Kaleb took on the duty to rescue the Himyarites Christians and his army defeated and slew Dhu Nawas.

Not long after the victory, an Aksumite general named Abraha was appointed as the governor in South Arabia. Abraha actively promoted the Christian faith within the Arabian Peninsula. He built a beautiful church in Sa’na to serve as a pilgrim center. In his letter to the Aksumite king, Abraha wrote:

“I have built a church for you, O King, such as has not been built for any king
before you. I shall not rest until I have diverted the Arabs’ pilgrimage to it.”

Abraha intended to compete with the previous pilgrimage center, Mecca, and attract the pilgrims to Sa’na. The church in Sa’na was a threat to Mecca as the pilgrimage center and the commercial center, because the religious activities and commercial activities depended on one another. The church in Sa’na seemed to fulfil Abraha’s intention, until a Meccan came to Sa’na and vandalized the church in rage.

Map 1. Geographical Location of Axum and Pre-Islamic Arabia.

10 Alfred Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, 21.

11 Alfred Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, 22.

12 Mostaql Test, “Message of the Prophet to Non-Muslim King,” Know Muhammad,
1.1.3 Religious Diversity in Pre-Islamic Mecca

Mecca was a “combination of pilgrim center and marketplace” long before the emergence of Islam.\textsuperscript{13} The holy feature of Mecca as the pilgrim center granted it the status of sanctuary within which no bloodshed was permitted. The status of sanctuary in turn provided a platform for traders to trade safely, which boosted the growth of Mecca as a city. While more and more traders from different religious backgrounds gathered at Mecca, they also brought the deities they worshipped into Mecca and settled the deities in the Ka’ba. The status of the Ka’ba became more important as the number of deities grew and more pilgrims were attracted to Mecca, whereby the economic activities increased as well. This is the cycle that helps Mecca to stand as the most important city in the Arabian Peninsula.

Polytheism in Mecca

Polytheism, which was the dominant religious feature among the Arabs, allowed the presence of over a hundred of deities in the Ka’ba to be possible,

even the image of Jesus and Mary were said to be found in the Ka’ba. There were
sign of litholatry, or fetishism, among the Arabs.\(^{14}\) The earliest record of the
veneration of the “sacred stone” can be found in the testimony of Maximus of
Tyre and Clement of Alexandria.\(^{15}\) One should be aware that the phenomenon of
stone veneration is more complicated than it looks. The “stone” is not venerated
for itself but rather the force or being that dwells in it is worshiped. Therefore
each stone in the Ka’ba – whether it is in the rough stone shape or carved into
faces and personalities – represents a certain god worshiped by a certain group
of worshipers.

The litholatry was closely related to the local deities, but not all local deities
existed in the form of a stone. Some of these gods were originally tribal ancestors,
legendary heroes or natural forces such as rain, storm, or star which were
eventually elevated to the status of deity. Among these gods, three goddesses
were specifically mentioned in the Qur’an. They were three “daughters of God
(Allah)” – al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat – venerated by the tribe of Quraysh and

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42.

\(^{15}\) See references in G. E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam: A Study in Cultural Orientation*,
their alliance tribes. Manat was a goddess of fate and fortune without an astral character, while al-Lat and al-Uzza probably represented two phases of the planet Venus – evening and morning. These gods and goddesses – along with Hubal, the chief deity of Ka’ba and the principal God, Allah – together formed the polytheist backdrop of Mecca.

**Monotheism in Mecca**

Apart from this, monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism too shed their influences all around the Arab Peninsula and Mecca. Jewish community can be found throughout the peninsula, especially in Yemen where the Himyar king Dhu Nawas converted to Judaism, and also the city of Yathrib (later Medina), which played an important role in the history of Islam. The number of Jews inhabiting in this region increased following the destruction of the second temple. The conversion of Dhu Nawas and multiple Jewish communities established within the peninsula suggested the proselytization of Judaism in Arabia.

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Christians began to move actively across the desert, and both Dyophysite and Monophysite churches flourished along the peninsula’s trade route after they were condemned as heretics by the Council of Chalcedon. The pro-Monophysite Ghassanid kingdom (which serves as client state to the Eastern Roman Empire) and the pro-Dyophysite Lakhmid kingdom (serves as client state to the Sasanian Empire) made a great contribution to the spread of Christianity throughout Arabia by supporting mission activities in the southern part of the peninsula. Desert monasticism from the desert of Egypt and the invasion of the Aksumite kingdom also contributed to the expansion of Christianity.

Arabic speaking Jews and Christians called the one true God “Allah,” which was also used by polytheists throughout the Arab Peninsula to indicate the supreme God – the one who creates and preserves the world.\(^{17}\) Christian Arabs thence regarded the “Allah” in the Ka’ba as the same God they worshipped. They called their God “the Lord of the Ka’ba,” and in consequence

\(^{17}\) Muhammad ask the unbelievers about who creates the world and who preserves them over their hardship more than once in the Qur’an, to urges them return to the one true God who sent the revelation to him and join him in the religious revolution. Cf Sura 21: 61 and 63, Sura 17: 69, Sura 29: 65, and Sura 31: 31.
they occasionally participated in the cult celebration in Mecca.\textsuperscript{18} 

Zoroastrianism’s existence in the Arabian peninsula was caused by the active participation of the Sasanian Empire in Arabia. The Sasanian Empire strove to extend its military and economic power in Arabia to compete with the Eastern Roman Empire. There were temples constructed by Iranian colonists at a mining site in Najd which proved the existence of Zoroastrianism.\textsuperscript{19} 

Zoroastrianism was never a stranger to the Arabs, with traders and soldiers going back and forth between Iraq and the Hijaz. Zoroastrianism was more tolerant of other religions compared to Judaism and Christianity. This special feature encouraged its followers to embrace different cultures and religions. Zoroastrianism was closely tied to the Iranian culture, especially the ruling class, and not a religion that engaged eagerly in missionary activities. Therefore, its believers and influences were less than other religions in this region.

To what extent polytheism competed with monotheism is unclear. But the coexistence itself was enough to cause reflection and confusion to the Arabs. The many religions being contested within the peninsula cultivated the religious soil

\textsuperscript{18} Andrae, Mohammed, 31.

\textsuperscript{19} Berkey, The Formation of Islam, 47.
among the Arabs and prepared the chance for Muhammad to rise. The thick flavor of religion that occurred in Mecca shaped Muhammad and brought about the emergence of Islam. Muhammad dealt with this complexity for his whole life.

Map 2. Arabia before the Muslim Conquests.²⁰

²⁰ Malise Ruthven and Azim Nanji, Historical Atlas of Islam (Cambridge, Massachusetts:
Map 3. The Religious Diversity in Western Arabia Prior to Islam.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} “The Hejaz Region Prior to Islam,” Historical Atlas of the Mediterranean, accessed
1.2 Analysis of Christian Related Meccan Suras

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christian are complicated. Scholars like W. Montgomery Watt, Kenneth Cragg, and Marshall Hodgson had dedicated their whole life to understand Islam as a religion and Muhammad as a person for non-Muslims. Exclusiveness and inclusiveness are intertwined in Muhammad’s sayings; therefore, his attitudes are always disputable among scholars.22

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians do not represent only the exclusiveness or inclusiveness but these often happen at the same time. The term “intermingle” is not enough to explain the complexity because the integration of his attitudes is differed from sura to sura. The inclusiveness and the exclusiveness interact with each other in multiple patterns depending on the targeted subject.

The inclusiveness in the Qur'an is often projected by Muhammad’s acceptance or recognition of Jesus and Christians; while the exclusiveness is

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shown through his denial of Christian Doctrine and his criticism regarding Christians misbehavior. The emergence of Muhammad’s attitudes can be determined through the analysis in every sura related to Christians.

Five different combinations of inclusive and exclusive attitudes can be spotted in the Meccan Suras. Table 2 shows where is the particular sura that consists the content related to Christians.

Table 2: List of Christian Related Suras

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1.2.1 Christians as Negative Example: Sura 105 and Sura 106

The earliest suras that are related to Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are Sura 105 and Sura 106. They are distinct suras, but are connected grammatically. Consequently, it will be wise to read both suras together in order to better understand them:

Do you [Prophet] not see how your Lord dealt with the army of the elephant? Did He not utterly confound their plans? He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay: He made them [like] cropped stubble. (105:1-5)
[He did this] to make the Quraysh feel secure, secure in their winter and summer journeys. So let them worship the Lord of this House: who provides them with food to ward off hunger, safety to ward off fear. (106: 1-4)

The first Christians-related-event in the Qur’an is seen as the “army of the elephant” in Sura 105, which alludes to the army of Abraha. Abraha invaded Mecca in 570 C.E. by war elephants, so that his army is referred as the “army of the elephant”.

Abraha was furious when the church he build in Sa’na was vandalized by a Meccan and marched his army of war elephants towards Mecca. Abdul Muttalib – the warden of the Ka’ba, the sheikh (leader) of Quraysh, and also the paternal grandfather of Muhammad, visited Abraha with other tribe leaders to negotiate peace when Abraha arrived. However, Abraha insisted that he wanted to destroy the Ka’ba as revenge for his church’s destruction and the negotiation failed. Abdul Muttalib returned to his tribe and ordered the Qurayshi tribesmen retreat to the mountains outside of Mecca.25

23 Or ‘so that they should remain accustomed to their trade journeys, and not stop them’, Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 438.

24 The Ka’ba.

25 For further details, see Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 21-28.
Before Abraha began his invasion, smallpox spread among his army and many died. This incident is recounted in 105:3-4, “He sent ranks of birds against them, pelting them with pellets of hard-baked clay.” Abraha’s campaign failed, and the Meccans’ repulse of their enemy strengthened their national pride.26

Abraha’s failed attack occurred right before Muhammad was born, and since Muhammad was related to the warden in Ka’ba, it is probable that Muhammad was familiar with this incident.

Even though the “army of the elephant” is mentioned in Sura 105, neither Sura 105 nor Sura 106 serve as a response to this incident. Rather, Sura 105 and Sura 106 serve to remind Muhammad and the Meccans of God’s grace pouring on them. Both suras want Muhammad and the Meccans to be grateful and recognize that the “Lord of this House” is the Lord who protects them from the “army of the elephant,” who is the same God that Muhammad proclaimed and called people to believe in. The message from both suras is clear: be mindful of the true God.

While the “Army of the elephant” is not the main subject in Sura 105, it

serves as a negative example about Christians. Abraha’s army bears the identity of Christians and represents the Christian community. In this sura, the Christians represented by Abraha are negative representation of those who threaten Meccan life and economy. This invasion discredits Christians and Ethiopians in the eye of the Meccans, and consequently, of the Muslims later.\(^\text{27}\) Against all odds, it is God who protected them from the great “army of the elephant,” the Christian army.

1.2.2 Denying Jesus’ Divinity but Recognizing Jesus’ Prophethood: Sura 43

In Sura 43, verses 57–65 are directly related to Christians:

When the son of Mary is cited as an example, your [P]eople laugh and jeer, saying, ‘Are our gods better or him?’\(^\text{28}\) – they cite him only to challenge you: they are a contentious people – but he is only a servant. We favoured and made an example for the Children of Israel: if it had been Our will, We could have made you angels, succeeding one another on earth.\(^\text{29}\) This gives knowledge of the Hour:\(^\text{30}\) do not doubt it. Follow Me for this is the right path; do not let Satan hinder you, for he is your sworn enemy. When Jesus came with clear signs he said, ‘I have brought you wisdom; I have come to clear up some of your differences for you. Be mindful of God and obey me: God is my Lord and your Lord. Serve Him: this is the straight path.’ Yet still the


\(^{28}\) Here the ‘gods’ refer to the angels, whom Meccan worshipped as the daughters of God and superior to Jesus – indicated as ‘him’ in this verse – whom they considered to be another god worshipped by Christians as the “Son of God”, further references see Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 318.

\(^{29}\) Just as God was able to create Jesus without a father, Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 319.

\(^{30}\) Refer to the Qur’an or Jesus.
different factions among them disagreed – woe to the evildoers: they will suffer the torment of a grievous day! - (43:57-65)

Two kind of attitudes appear in these verses regarding Christians. The first is seen as Muhammad’s disagreement with the sayings of the “offspring of God.”

Verses 57-59 are Muhammad’s answer to the challenge raised by Meccan’s idolaters. The Meccans worship three goddesses as “daughters of God” among other idols. They “liken the Christian worship of Jesus to their worship of their own idols,” as Jesus is regarded as the “son of God” by Christians.31 The Meccans did not understand why Muhammad furiously rebuked their veneration of these goddesses but held Jesus in high regard, while their goddesses and Jesus were both the “offspring of God.”

However, two reasons might explain why Muhammad rebukes the veneration of their goddesses. The first thing is their attribution of “daughter” to God. Muhammad’s displeasure with this claim is clearly shown in verses 15 to 17:

Yet they assign some of His own servants to Him as offspring! Man is clearly ungrateful! Has He taken daughters for Himself and favoured you with sons? When one of them is given news of the birth of a daughter, such as he so readily ascribes to the Lord of Mercy, his face grows dark and he is filled with gloom – (43:15-17)

It would be improper to assume from this passage that Muhammad honors

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males over females. But rather, he points out the Meccan attitude toward the birth of a daughter. Meccans did not regard having a daughter as something honorable, as seen in that even the pious person’s “face [would] grow dark” and be “filled with gloom.” If they did not regard having a “daughter” as something honorable, why did they ascribe three “daughters” to the highest God?

Muhammad criticizes them because they ascribed the least favorable “daughters” to the God who deserves all praise and honor. Consequently, this ascription is an act of disgrace to Muhammad.

The second reason for Muhammad to rebuke their veneration of the “daughters of God” is that Muhammad does not believe any god or goddess might share God’s divinity. On this matter, he treats the Meccan idolaters and Christians in the same way as he thoroughly opposes any belief in the “offspring of God.” In verses 81, 82, and 86, Muhammad says:

Say [Prophet], ‘If the Lord of Mercy [truly] had offspring I would be the first to worship [them], but – (82) exalted be the Lord of the heavens and earth, the Lord of the Throne – He is far above their false descriptions.’ (43:81-82)

Those gods they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, unlike those who bore witness to the truth and recognized it. (43:86)

To regard someone as the “offspring of God” – whether it is the three goddesses

32 Or him.
or Jesus – is the “false descriptions.”

Muhammad believes that all creation is God’s servant. No one, neither angels nor Jesus, possess the slightest authority to intercede between humanity and God, because all creation belongs to God and is fully subordinate to his authority. This belief clashes with the Christian confession that Jesus is the Holy Son of God, the only one who can intercede between sinful humanity and God, “for there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus…… (1 Tim 2:5).”

Thus, the second reason for Muhammad to oppose the veneration of the “daughters of God” is the same as his opposition to the Christian belief of Jesus as the Son of God. This shapes his first attitude towards Christianity in this sura. Muhammad rejects any kind of “offspring of God,” and rebukes this belief no matter it is from the polytheistic Meccans confession or Christians. Muhammad’s statement that “but he [Jesus] is only a servant… favoured and made an example for the Children of Israel (43:59)” – does not intend to fight against the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God, but Muhammad makes it clear that he holds the same opposing attitude towards the belief in the “offspring of God.” Thus, he denies Jesus’ divinity but agrees with Jesus’ prophethood and that Jesus is a sign
of the end of time.

According to Muhammad, Jesus is favoured by God and is the example for “the Children of Israel.” Additionally, Muhammad affirms Jesus’ work because Muhammad wants to claim that both himself and Jesus point to “the right path,” which is the core feature of a prophet. “The right path” proclaimed by Muhammad in verse 61 and “the straight path” proclaimed by Jesus is the only way to the true God. 33 By equating himself with Jesus, Muhammad affirms Jesus’ status as a prophet; he also emphasizes that his revelation is equal to Jesus’ proclamation. Consequently, he argues that those who follow Jesus have no reason to reject Muhammad because both of them serve the same God.

Besides, Muhammad affirms that the return of Jesus signals the end of time. “The Hour” mentioned in verse 61 refers to the time when Jesus would return to the earth and begin the judgment. This is the unique feature that only Jesus holds in representing and initiating the end of time and the Judgment Day. Jesus alone can bring the End to all things and no other prophets, even Muhammad, can do this. Muhammad attributes this distinctive role to Jesus, which is the strongest

33 Some other version has no different on both verses and translates both into “a straight path.”
statement he makes in this sura in agreement with Christian doctrine.

1.2.3 Promoting Religious Unity and Criticizing Religious Division: Sura 42

In Sura 42, the main theme in connection with Christianity is the universality of revelation in the Qur’an. Muhammad emphasizes that his revelation is the same as what is revealed to previous prophets in Judaism and Christianity.

Muhammad calls for unity of people who believe in the same God, as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus believed:

In matters of faith, He has laid down for you [people] the same commandment that He gave Noah, which We have revealed to you [Muhammad] and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus: ‘Uphold the faith and do not divide into factions within it’ (42:13a)

So [Prophet] call people to that faith and follow the straight path as you have been commanded. Do not go by what they desire, but say, ‘I believe in whatever Scripture God has sent down. I am commanded to bring justice between you. God is our Lord and your Lord – to us our deeds and to you yours, so let there be no argument between us and you – God will gather us together, and to Him we shall return.’ (42:15)

Both verses 13 and 15 show that Muhammad agrees that the revelation given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus is the truth and straight path. He affirms not only their statuses as prophets, but also what they had proclaimed is legitimate as God’s authority. This is a bold statement by Muhammad; by stating that “I believe in whatever Scripture God has sent down,” Muhammad displays
his intent to embrace both Judaism and Christianity. He confirms the validity of these scriptures as revelations from God and Muhammad attempts to become the peacemaker between the two communities, in which painful memories towards one another remain existed.

What Muhammad disagrees with is the rivalry between Judaism and Christianity or their enmity towards Muhammad. He believes that both the Jews and Christians worship the same God, but these faith communities simply could not get along well. He criticizes their separation from each other and their doubts on Muhammad’s prophethood:

They divided, out of rivalry, only after knowledge had come to them, and, if it had not been for a decree already passed by your Lord to reprieve them until an appointed time, they would already have been judged. Those after them, who inherited the Scripture, are in disquieting doubt about it. (42:14) As for those who argue about God after He has been acknowledged, their argument has no weight with their Lord: anger will fall upon them and agonizing torment awaits them. (42:16)

If verses 13 and 15 show what Muhammad agrees with, then verses 14 and 16 demonstrate what Muhammad disagrees with. He disagrees with their division, and believes that they were further divided when Muhammad declared himself as one of the prophets and the same revelation was given to Muhammad as to previous prophets, which is the “knowledge” mention in verse 14.
Muhammad believes that the Jews and Christians envied one another, and most importantly, they envied Muhammad because of his prophethood and the revelation given to him.

Although Muhammad is aware of their enmity, he still calls for unity in this sura. Attitudes of “recognition and denial” are intertwined in this sura in which Muhammad acknowledges the universality of revelation. He believes that it is God who gathers them – the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims – and all of them will return to God. Consequently, he believes that it is better to put down their arguments for that will only bring “anger” and “agonizing torment.”

1.2.4 Recognizing Christians as Believers, Denying the Divinity of Other Gods, Criticizing Religious Division: Sura 30

Sura 30 is the only sura in the Qur’an that mentions a political event beyond the Arabian Peninsula during Muhammad’s period. The clashes of the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman Empire, with the Sassanian Empire from 602 C.E. to 628 C.E. marks the final collision between the two great empires. During the first period of the wars, the Eastern Roman Empire suffered multiple loses.

Under the ruler King Khorow II (or Khusraw Parwiz), the Sassanian army successfully conquered parts of Syria and Damascus in 613 C.E. while taking
Jerusalem in 614 C.E. Then in 618 C.E., another Sassanian army invaded and conquered Egypt in the same year when the Monophysite Christians living there decided not to resist the Sassanian army. This army moved northward and laid siege to Constantinople; numerous wars erupted along the Eastern Roman Empire’s frontier from Mesopotamia, Levant, Egypt and even Constantinople itself.

All these wars benefited the Sassanian Empire and defeated the Eastern Roman Empire. However, Muhammad thought differently. In verses 2-5, Muhammad said: “The Byzantine have been defeated in a nearby land. They will reverse their defeat with a victory in a few years’ time – God is in command, first and last. On that day, the believers will rejoice at God’s help” (30:2-5). The Eastern Roman Empire (who embraced Christianity) defeated the Sassanian Empire (who embrace Zoroastrianism and also tolerated every kind of religion) battle after battle, but Muhammad believed that they would “reverse their defeat” in the near future because they are followers of the true God. Thus, the defeat of the Eastern Roman Empire was celebrated by the pagan Arabs, but grieved by

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the Muslims.

At this point of Muhammad’s life – although the exact date is unclear – he considered Christians to be on his side. Thus, while he shared the grief of the humiliating defeat of the Eastern Roman Empire, he believed God would help them because “God is in command” and “the believers [would] rejoice at God’s help” when their defeat was reversed. The “believers” here refer to both Muslims and Christians from the Eastern Roman Empire. Christians were considered as the followers of true religion compared to the polytheists Arabs. Consequently, Muhammad supported the Eastern Roman Empire as well as Christianity.

In this sura, Christians are included in the sphere of “believers,” and it is the friendliest sura towards Christians. The negative attitude appears later when Muhammad rebukes the concept of “intercessors between God and human” and “God’s partners.” He also criticizes the division of the religious community as he does in both Sura 43 and Sura 42. These criticisms first appear in verses 12-13, then verses 28-35, and lastly in verse 40:

On the Day of the Hour arrives, the guilty will despair and they will have no intercessors among those partners they ascribed to God – they will deny these partners. (30:12-13)
He gives you this example, drawn from your own lives: do you make your slaves full partners with an equal share in what We have given you? Do you fear them as you fear each other? This is how We make Our messages clear to those who use their reason. And still the idolaters follow their own desires without any knowledge. Who can guide those God leaves to stray, who have no one to help them? So [Prophet] as a man of pure faith, stand firm and true in your devotion to the religion. This is the natural disposition God instilled in mankind – there is no altering God’s creation – and this is the right religion, though most people do not realize it. Turn to Him alone, all of you. Be mindful of Him; keep up the prayer; do not join those who ascribe partners to God, those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing in their own. When something happens to people, they cry to their Lord and turn to Him for help, but not sooner does He let them taste His blessing than – lo and behold! – some of them ascribe partners to their Lord, showing no gratitude for what We have given them. ‘Take your pleasure! You will come to know.’ Did We send them down any authority that sanctions the partners they ascribe to God? (30:28-35)

It is God who created you and provided for you, who will cause you to die and then give you life again. Which of your ‘partners’ can do any one of these things? Glory be to God, and exalted be He above the partners they attribute to Him. (30:40)

The first subject that Muhammad denies in these verses is the idea of “God’s partners.” Muhammad believes that God is unreachable, and therefore it is impossible for any person or god to intercede on behalf of human beings. This criticism highlights the call for repentance in verses 30-31, where Muhammad shows idolaters the right religion by pointing out their misconceptions.

Another subject which Muhammad criticizes is the division of the religious community. This occurs in verse 32: “those who divide their religion into sects,
with each party rejoicing in their own.” It is clear that Muhammad is pointing his finger to the idolaters in verse 29, but, “those who divide their religion into sects,” can be applied to Christians as well. Thus, the whole section from verses 12-40 are definitely referencing the idolaters, but the condition is also applicable to the Christian community; the criticism should be applied to Christians.

The Eastern Roman Empire mentioned at the beginning of this sura – represented the Orthodox Christian – the most distant Christian denomination from the Arabs. The closer denominations were the Monophysite Churches (including Coptic Churches from Egypt) and the Dyophysite Churches. There were also other smaller Christian denominations that dwelled at the edge of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Arabic speaking Maronite Church, as well as Arianism and Donatism that once emerged as the main denominations in North Afrika, and many monasteries along the deserts from Egypt to Syria.35

Each of these monasteries was a small community, while the other aforementioned denominations formed bigger communities. All of these various communities together formed the broad community of Christianity, despite

every community has their own liturgical system and theological nuances.

Consequently, the wide spectrum of Christianity during Muhammad’s time fit
the label of “those who divide their religion into sects, with each party rejoicing
in their own.”

However, referring to God as the Father and the Son is totally unacceptable
to Muhammad.36 Dividing the religious community into multiple factions further
violates God’s command. These two issues result in the negative attitudes which
can be seen in Muhammad’s writings along with his friendly tone towards
Christians.

1.2.5 Recognition of Jesus’ Prophethood, Denial of Jesus’ Divinity, Criticizing
Religious Division: Sura 23, Sura 21, Sura 19, and Sura 6

Sura 23, Sura 21, and Sura 6 consist of the same composition of

Muhammad’s attitudes. In these suras, Muhammad recognizes Jesus’
prophethood, but he strongly emphasizes that Jesus is nothing more than mortal,
which is opposed to the core of Christian belief. Similarly, as it is seen in several
suras, Muhammad criticizes the division of religious community.

Sura 23

Sura 23 describes the quality of believers in contrast to the idolaters. In this sura, Muhammad includes previous prophets such as Noah, Moses, and Jesus into the sphere of believers. He retells their stories and acknowledges their authority as prophets, in order to expose the ignorance of the idolaters or disbelievers. Muhammad blames that the idolaters never recognized the authority of God’s messengers and they accused the prophets of liars in these stories just as his contemporary disbelievers do to Muhammad.

Jesus is mentioned indirectly in verse 50 as the “son of Mary” after the stories of Noah and Moses: “We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign; We gave them shelter on a peaceful hillside with flowing water.” The miraculous birth of Jesus and the protection provided by God during their exile proves that God had chosen Jesus as a prophet. Muhammad remains his affirmation of Jesus’s prophethood here by listing Jesus in the line of prophets.

But this sura also contains a tone that is unfriendly towards Christians. Following the affirmation of Jesus’ prophethood is a message for all messengers

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37 The sign and God’s providence for Mary and Jesus is recorded in Sura 19, will be discussed in later section.
– including Muhammad himself: “Messengers, eat good things and do good deeds: I am well aware of what you do. This community of yours is one – and I am your Lord: be mindful of Me” (23:51-52). The first part of this message instructs God’s messengers to behave virtuously. The second part of this message emphasizes the “oneness” of the faith community. This is the prerequisite for the community gathered by prophets which belongs to God. The “oneness” not only represents the one true God but commands all prophets to be unified as one.

Muhammad believes that the unity of the faith community is crucial, hence any faction is prohibited. Also, because the scope of “faith community” is extended to communities gathered by previous prophets, likewise the prohibition is extended to the previous faith communities. However, as is discussed in Sura 30, Christians were divided into different denominations during Muhammad’s period. These factions were not unknown to the Arabs. Muhammad plainly refuted the division once again in this sura after he delivered a message to all prophets: “but they have split their community into sects, each rejoicing in their own. So [Muhammad,] leave them for a while steeped [in their ignorance].” (23:53-54) Unlike the criticism in Sura 30,
Muhammad was ordered to “leave” those who split their community in this sura.

The criticism does not end here. Muhammad further depicts the true qualities of true believers in the following verses:

Those who stand in awe of their Lord, who believes in His messages, who do not ascribe partners to Him, who always give with hearts that tremble at the thought that they must return to Him, are the ones who race toward good things, and they will be the first to get them. (23:57-61)

Among these qualities, those “who do not ascribe partners to Him” (23:59) stand in the middle as one of the most important qualities of true believers. The same criticism repeats in verses 90-91 and verse 117:

The fact is, we brought them the truth and they are lying. God has never had a child. Nor is there any god beside Him – if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside and tried to overcome the others. (23:90-91)

Whoever prays to another god alongside Him – a god for whose existence he has no evidence – will face his reckoning with his Lord. Those who reject the truth will not prosper. (23:117)

Muhammad gives reasons for his understanding of absolute monotheism in verses 90-91. He believes that if there are other gods who are able to match the status of the highest God, then there will be a competition among them, alluding that the supremacy of the God is open for contest and suggesting that the highest God is changeable, which inevitably leads to polytheism. This idea is unacceptable for Muhammad because it defiles the holiness of God and is
therefore a blasphemous and heretical idea. Those who do not believe in the absoluteness of God reject the truth; they “will not prosper” and would be judged by God.

This criticism targets at the idolaters in Mecca who venerated the “daughters of God.” Also, since Christians believe that Jesus is the only Son of God, the criticism can be applied to Christians as well. Muhammad does not point his finger directly to Christians in this matter, but he indeed accuses those who worship someone besides God – whether it is the daughters of God or the Son of God – of being liars.

Sura 21

Many prophets are mentioned in this sura from verse 48 to verse 91, who had the same experience with Muhammad as they were rejected and mocked by idolaters and accused of being mad person or liars. The common experience of the prophets provides Muhammad the strength to face the criticism and suspicion from his people and endure all the negative attitudes that are thrown at him. The stories of previous prophets are meant to put Muhammad in the line of authentic prophets, who are called to declare God’s revelations. Thus, Muhammad’s sayings are legitimate since his status as an authentic prophet is
justified.

In Sura 21, Muhammad refutes the Meccans’ distrust and rebukes their ignorance and ridicule. His attitudes towards Christians are similar to previous suras where he shows both his recognition and denial. In this sura, he gives criticism before acknowledgement, which is slightly different from previous suras. Here he criticizes the belief of “God’s children” and the separation of the faith community:

And they say, ‘The Lord of Mercy has taken offspring for Himself.’ May He be exalted! No! They are only His honoured servants: they do not speak before He speaks and they act by His command. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede without His permission – indeed they themselves stand in awe of Him. If any of them were to claim, ‘I am a god beside Him,’ We would reward them with Hell: this is how we reward evildoers. (21:26-29)

This is another sura where Muhammad’s criticism is translatable from idolaters to Christians. Muhammad rejects the claim that there is any “god” other than the one true God. He regards all gods who claim a place besides God in terms of the daughter or son, as nothing more than God’s creation and God’s servants. However, he also sees that it is possible to intercede between humans and God, as long as God permits. In this sura, he preserves the possibility of human interceding only under God’s will and absolute authority.
The second part of Muhammad’s criticism is attached to his acknowledgement of Jesus’ prophethood in verses 91 to 93:

Remember the one who guarded her chastity.\(^{38}\) We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people. [Messengers], this community of yours is one single community and I am your Lord, so serve Me. They have torn their unity apart, but they will all return to Us. (21:91-93)

Mary and Jesus are linked together whenever Muhammad recounts the story of Jesus’ miraculous birth in the Qur’an. The virgin birth of Jesus is not only the evidence of Jesus’ identity as the chosen prophet, but the emphasis of Mary’s chastity.

Muhammad criticizes the separation of religious communities (the communities of previous prophets) right after he affirms the virgin birth, that is criticizing Christians – the community gathered around Jesus. The pluralism of Christian sects shows their disobedience. Because of the division, Muhammad believes that Christians violate God’s command that is to be united as one single faith community, the same command that was given to Muhammad multiple times in the Qur’an, including this sura. Consequently, Muhammad is expected to implement this command to the community he gathered and to avoid

\(^{38}\) “Her” refers to Mary, as recorded in 66:12: “and Mary, daughter of ‘Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit. She accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and Scriptures: she was truly devout.”
repeating the division of the Christian community. Despite the factions among Christians, Muhammad believes that all faith communities who believe in the same true God would be united by God at the Judgment Day.

**Sura 19**

Sura 19 consists the longest record of Christians in the Meccan Suras by telling the stories of Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus. This sura recounts the story of Mary’s virgin conception and the miraculous birth of Jesus in detail:

Mention in the Qur’an the story of Mary……. We sent Our spirit to appear before her in the form of a perfected man. She said, ‘I seek the Lord of Mercy’s protection against you: if you have any fear of Him [do not approach]! but he said, ‘I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.’ She said, ‘How can I have a son when no man has touched me? I have not been unchaste,’ and he said, ‘This is what your Lord said: “It is easy for Me – We shall make him a sign to all people, a blessing from Us.”’ And so it was ordained: she conceived him. She withdrew to a distant place and, when the pains of childbirth drove her to [cling to] the trunk of a palm tree, she exclaimed, ‘I wish I had been dead and forgotten long before all this!’ but a voice cried to her from below, ‘Do not worry: your Lord has provided a stream at your feet and, if you shake the trunk of the palm tree towards you, it will deliver fresh ripe dates for you, so eat, drink, be glad, and say to anyone you may see…….’ (19:16-26)

This story echoes with the story in the Gospel of Matthew 1:18-25 and the Gospel of Luke 1:26-38 but with the addition of Mary’s suffering from the childbirth and how God took care of her.

The whole story is wrapped with miracles and these miracles are important
signs to prove Jesus’ prophethood. These miracles of Jesus’ virgin birth and God’s providence onto Mary are said to be “clear sign” by Muhammad throughout the Qur’an when he is confirming Jesus’ prophethood. Jesus is therefore meant to be a vehicle of God’s messages to mankind, and the birth of Jesus is a symbol of God’s grace because God is guiding humanity to the path of salvation through Jesus.

The following story of Jesus speaks about his infancy is unknown to Christians but recorded in the Qur’an:

She went back to her people carrying the child, and they said, ‘Mary! You have done something terrible! Sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man; your mother was not unchaste!’ She pointed at him. They said, ‘How can we converse with an infant?’ [But] he said: ‘I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet; made me blessed wherever I may be. He commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live, to cherish my mother. He did not make me domineering or graceless. Peace was on me the day I was born, and will be on me the day I die and the day I am raised to life again.’ Such was Jesus, son of Mary.

[This is] a statement of the Truth about which they are in doubt: it would not befit God to have a child. He is far above that: when He decrees something, He says only, ‘Be’ and it is. ‘God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him: that is a straight path.’ But factions have differed among themselves. What suffering will come to those who obscure the truth when a dreadful Day arrives! (19:27-37)

Mary’s name in Hebrew form, Miryam, represents directly to Moses’ sister – Miriam hence she is regarded as Moses’ sister in the Qur’an. The focus shifts

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from Mary to Jesus when he speaks to absolve Mary from any accusation. The first proclamation by Jesus is his servanthood in relation to God. He emphasizes his human nature as God’s servant and he is inferior to God.

Jesus’ divinity is denied by himself and this is the “truth” according to Muhammad. Muhammad confirms Jesus’ proclamation and further argues that God does not need to have a child – which refutes the Christian Christology in this case. Jesus’ statement is repeated again to highlight his servanthood rather than divinity.

Division of faith communities is criticized by Muhammad in the following verse. The context refers either to the Jews who rejected Jesus’ prophethood (cf 4:155-157) or Christians who were divided because of their debates about Jesus’ nature and origins.

**Sura 6**

Sura 6 was revealed to Muhammad in his later period in Mecca. During this period, he already gained some support from the Meccans, although not much, and he had many encounters with the Meccan pagans. At this point, Muhammad is more experienced with his prophethood, and the length of this sura is much longer than in previous suras.
Muhammad first denies the role of “intercessor,” or one who can intercede between God and humanity, in verse 51: “Use the Qur’an to warn those who fear being gathered before their Lord – they will have no one but Him to protect them and no one to intercede – so that they may beware.” Here he rejects completely the idea of an intercessor just as he does in 30:12, but differently than what he says in 21:28, where an intercessor is possible only if God permits.

Then Muhammad mentions a long line of earlier prophets, including Jesus:

We gave him Isaac and Jacob, each of whom We guided, as We had guided Noah before, and among his descendants were David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron – in this way We reward those who do good – Zachariah, John, Jesus, and Elijah – every one of them was righteous – Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot. We favoured each one of them over other people, and also some of their forefathers, their offspring, and their brothers: We choose them and guided them on a straight path. Such is God’s guidance, with which He guides whichever of His servants He will. If they had associated other gods with Him, all their deeds would have come to nothing. Those are the ones to whom We gave the Scripture, wisdom, and prophethood. Even if these people now disbelieve in them, We have entrusted them to other who do not disbelieve. Those were the people God guided, ‘[Prophet], follow the guidance they received.’ Say, ‘I ask no reward for it from you: it is a lesson for all people.’ (6:84-90)

Once again Muhammad affirms Jesus’ status as prophet by placing him among the prophets and even compliments Jesus as “righteous” in verse 85, alongside with Zachariah, John, and Elijah. Muhammad emphasizes that all these prophets are merely God’s “servants” in verse 88. Therefore, all their deeds
- merits or virtues - would come in vain if they ascribe other gods with the
divinity of the true God, not to mention that they associate themselves with God.
Thus, Muhammad denies the Meccan’s belief in the “daughters of God” as well
as Jesus’ divinity once and for all.

Again, Muhammad criticizes the separation of religious community in this
sura: “As for those who have divided their religion and broken up into factions,
have nothing to do with them [Prophet]. Their case rests with God: in time He
will tell them about their deeds.” (6:159) This criticism is not unfamiliar to his
followers now since he already pointed out the same matter in 30:32 and 42:13-14.
Although the object of this criticism is unclear, it may be easily applied to the
Jews, Christians, or idolaters, since all of them are mentioned in this sura. Unlike
the criticism of the “intercessor”, Muhammad is consistent in his criticism
regarding the separation of religious community. He insists that all believers of
the true God should stay united; they were once united by the earlier prophets
and now they should be united under his guidance.
Chapter 2: The Medinan Suras

Muhammad’s effort to convey the messages revealed to him by God receive little acceptance by the Meccans. They paid not much attention to Muhammad’s preaching until he “spoke disparagingly of their gods.” The Meccans expressed their displeasure first to Muhammad’s uncle, Abu Talib. Abu Talib love Muhammad so he withholds the pressure and allowed Muhammad to continue with his mission.

His proclamation of radical monotheism clashes fiercely with the religious view of his Qurayshi tribe who were the warden of the Ka’ba. His teaching that emphasized on social justice were also a challenge for the Meccans. Grew up as orphan and poor, Muhammad understood the struggle of the poverty-stricken people. He constantly stood up for them and urged the Meccans to share their wealth with those who need.

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39 Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 118.

40 Abu Talib was Muhammad’s uncle. He took Muhammad into his care after his father, Muhammad’s grandfather, Abdul Muttalib died. Muhammad was under Abdul Muttalib care after his mother died. In this context the Meccans looks for Muhammad’s direct guardian and urged him to punish Muhammad or at least forbid him to preach anymore.
The merchants and the noble in the city were unease with Muhammad’s teaching and also the expansion of his influences increase day by day. More and more people from the lower classes were attracted by Muhammad’s messages thence supported him. The tension became more and more intense in the city and the Qurayshi harassed the Muslims whenever they got the chance. They attacked every clan with Muslim in it, imprisoned them, beat them, forbid them from eat or drink, exposed them under the burning sun of Mecca, and lastly offered them a chance to be free with the condition of gave up their new religion and return to the worship of “daughters of God.”

The intensity remains for another ten years until Muhammad see his movement had reached the deadlock. The persecution did not show any sign of decreasing. In 619 CE, Muhammad’s wealthy wife, Khadija, who changed his life and also the first follower of his new religious movement died. Just a little bit soon after Khadija death, Muhammad’s uncle – Abu Talib who risk himself in defends of Muhammad died too. Everything just does not seem to be in favor with him. It was in this frustration where the most important turning point came to Muhammad, the Hijra.

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41 Guillaume, The Life of Muhammad, 143-144.
2.1 The Hijra

The Hijra literally means “migration.” The first Hijra happened in 619 CE where the persecution escalated to life-threatening high. Muhammad instructed some of his followers to move to Abyssinia – that is the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum which were once threatened to destroy the Ka’ba. Muhammad said the Ethiopian King “will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country” therefore it is for their safety to moved there.\(^{42}\)

Muhammad did not move to Abyssinia with his followers but remained in Mecca and continue to preach and helped those who need. Around 620 CE, six men from Yathrib (later called Medina), mainly from Khazraj tribe, met Muhammad on their way to pilgrimage. They listened to Muhammad’s preaching and were attracted by him.\(^{43}\) Two years later a delegation of about seventy-five men came to Mecca and invited him to relocate to Yathrib. The Yathribites hoping he could help them to reconcile the Aws tribe and the Khazraj tribe who had been engaged in hostile fight for years.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, 146.

\(^{43}\) Andrae, *Mohammed*, 187.

Muhammad agreed to the invitation and after a series of planning, Muhammad migrated to Yathrib with his followers in 622 CE. This year of 622 were designated as the official starting point of the Islamic calendar. From this point forward, Muhammad was no more a religious figure but a prophet with political power. He now need to judge and also administrate the city of Yathrib. The revelation conveyed by Muhammad added the aspects of law, governance principle, war, and many more. The word of “law” or “lawful” only emerges in Medinan Suras and never in Meccan Suras. The changes displayed in his life and identity definitely projected in his messages.

2.2 Muhammad’s Attitudes Towards Christians

Unlike the Meccan suras where multiple suras present similar themes and can be grouped together, the nuances between suras in Medinan suras are greater than Meccan suras. This results in each of the Medinan suras that will be discussed below being presented respectively in order to fully illustrate Muhammad’s attitude in these suras. Similar to the Meccan suras, Muhammad’s combination of a “recognition – denial” attitude is expressed in most of the Medinan suras related to Christians with few exceptions.
Table 3: List of Christian Related Medinan Suras

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2.2.1 Mary and Jesus as the Chosen One: Sura 66

Mary and Jesus are inseparable in the Qur’an. Whenever Mary is mentioned Jesus will be mentioned, but not vice versa. Sura 66 deals with family issues and gives clear examples from Muhammad’s family. This sura is also known as “The Sura of the Prophet (Surat al-Nabi).”⁴⁵ In this sura, Muhammad provides examples of disbelieving women and also presents a model of a pious women. Among those examples, Mary stands as one of the good examples, as seen in verse 12: “and Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit. She accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and Scriptures: she was truly devout.”

The Bible does not provide any detail about Mary’s parents, but according to the Qur’an, she is the daughter of Imran and Moses’ sister. This might be a

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confusion caused by the extra-Biblical literature *Infancy Gospel of James*. Mary’s father in Gospel of James is Joachim, which means “he who Yahweh set up,” where the Hebrew word “Imran” has the similar meaning of “erect”, “build”, or “set up.” The name “Joachim” might be translated into “Imran” and thence Mary is the “daughter of Imran.”

Since then the family tree of Mary is mixed with Moses’ family in the Qur’an because of two coincidences. First, Mary’s father “Imran” is mistaken for Moses’ father – “Amran.” By sharing the same name with Miriam and having the same father with Moses, Mary becomes the sister of Moses and Aaron in the Qur’an.

Mary is highly regarded as the model of a pious woman in the Qur’an not only because of her direct relation with two most prominent prophets, the sister of Moses and mother of Jesus, but also by her submission to God. She “accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and Scriptures,” therefore God chose her to become the mother of Jesus and God performed the miracle of virgin birth on her. Both Mary and Jesus were chosen to represent the best example of believers.

46 The story of Mary’s birth is recorded in 3:33-37.
2.2.2 Recognizing Jesus’ Prophethood: Sura 61

Sura 61 deals with the authority of true prophet. It demonstrates that Jesus as the rightful prophet was confirming the previous revelations and prophesying in the succession of Muhammad. It is common in the Qur'an that when a new prophet emerges, the prophet would testify the authentication of previous revelation. It aligns the prophets with one another since they all receive the revelation from the same God.

Jesus first appears in verse 6:

Jesus, son of Mary, said, ‘Children of Israel, I am sent to you by God, confirming the Torah that came before me and bringing good news of a messenger to follow me whose name will be Ahmad.’ Yet when he came to them with clear signs, they said, ‘This is obviously sorcery.’
The name “Ahmad” is a name similar to “Muhammad” and is understood by Muslims as another name given to their Prophet.\(^47\) According to W. Wilson Cash, the specific verse that Muslims refers to is “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7).” Muslims believe that the “advocate” refers to Muhammad, but this claim might actually be caused by the confusion emerging from the translation.

It arose through a confusion of Greek words. He had heard of the Paraclete (παράκλητος) referred to in St. John 16: 7, and he confused the word with (περικλωτός) -- the praised. Now Mohammed in Arabic carries much the same meaning as “pericytos” does in Greek, as it is derived from the verb “to praise,” but it has not the remotest connection with the word used in St. John’s Gospel for the Comforter. Through this error the whole of the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit was lost to Islam, and commentators assert that by the term “the Holy Spirit” the prophet meant the Angel Gabriel.\(^48\)


Thus, it is from the mouth of Jesus that Muslims believe that Muhammad is the rightful prophet. Also, from this very verse, Muslims accuse Christians of distorting the Bible by changing “περικλυτός” to “παράκλητος” in order to deny Muhammad’s prophethood.

There is no controversy about Muhammad’s prophethood according to this sura. The sign is clear that if someone rejects such a clear sign, he or she is inventing lies as stated in verse 7: “Who could be more wrong than someone who invents lies against God when called to submit to Him?” Rejection of such a clear proof is a rebellion against God’s revelation and hence can be regarded as disbeliever.

Thus, if someone truly believes in God and God’s prophet, one will strive to help the prophet and will be rewarded:

You who believe, be God’s helpers. As Jesus, son of Mary, said to the disciples, ‘Who will come with me to help God?’ The disciples said, ‘We shall be God’s helpers.’ Some of the Children of Israel believed and some disbeliefed: We supported the believers against their enemy and they were the ones who came out on top. (61:14)
The relationship between Jesus and his disciples are demonstrated as the paradigm of true believers who will help God’s prophet as they are helping God. Muhammad urges his followers to stand with him just as Jesus’ disciples, because Jesus is recognized as a rightful prophet and is cited to establish the interactive pattern between a prophet and his followers.

2.2.3 Recognition of Jesus’ Prophethood, Criticism of Christians’ Monasticism:

Sura 57

Sura 57 gives instructions about the right conduct of believers and it mentions previous prophets only in the last section of this sura. Muhammad affirms previous prophets as rightful, but he condemns their followers for their misconduct at the same time:

We sent Noah and Abraham, and gave prophethood and scripture to their offspring: among them there were some who were rightly guided, but many were lawbreakers. We sent other messengers to follow in their footsteps. After those We sent Jesus, son of Mary: We gave him the Gospel and put compassion and mercy into the hearts of his followers. But monasticism was something they invented – We did not ordain it for them – only to seek God’s pleasure, and even so, they did not observe it properly. So We gave a reward to those of them who believed, but many of them were lawbreakers. (57:26-27)
The Jews and Christians are mentioned one after another and both communities are condemned for their misconduct even though they are guided by rightful prophets and Holy Scriptures. Muhammad shows his respect to previous prophets consistently, but he charges both the Jews and Christians of wrongdoings. The case with the Jews is unclear, but the accusation for Christians is obvious.

Muhammad criticizes Christians for inventing monasticism. The Christian monastic movement was well known throughout the desert area. The monks devoted themselves with exaggerated asceticism, and their dramatic lifestyle unintentionally attracted people who were full with curiosity to gather around them. Symeon Stylites, the Syrian monk, once converted a massed tribe of Arabics when the Arabs visited him, which resulted in mass burning of their idols.\(^49\) The extreme practice is a unique characteristic of early Christianity, but it is disapproved by Muhammad.

\(^{49}\) McGuckin, *The Path of Christianity*, 393.
In 2:143 Muhammad lays down the principle of Islamic lifestyle: “Thus did We make you a middle community.” Muhammad disapproves the extreme lifestyle promoted by Christian ascetics and accuses them of inventing monasticism. Muhammad even criticizes Christians because they do not conduct their asceticism properly, which, in his view, is breaking the law. The ideal lifestyle should be moderate. The life of ascetics clearly does not fit Muhammad’s teaching.

2.2.4 Hostility Towards Christians, Denial of Jesus’ Divinity, Criticism of Christians and the Religious Authorities: Sura 9

Sura 9 deals mostly with the matter of politics and wars between Muslims and non-Muslims. Unlike the previous suras related to Christians, Muhammad’s attitude in this sura shows his criticism and hostility begins to develop:

Believers, those who ascribe partners to God are truly unclean: do not let them come near the Sacred Mosque after this year… Fight those of the People of the Book who do not [truly] believe in God and the Last Day, who do not forbid what God and His Messenger have forbidden, who do not obey the rule of justice, until they pay the tax and agree to submit. (9:28-29)


51 Commentators in the past generally understood this sentence to mean those who pay should be humiliated when paying. But the context to this instruction presume that they were unwilling to pay, and the clause simply means they should submit to paying this tax, see Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 118.
The hostility can be seen in verse 28 where Muhammad forbids those who “ascribe partners to God” to enter into Mecca. While those who “ascribe partners to God” can be referred to idolaters, it is more likely to imply the Jews and Christians since they are the main subjects in this paragraph.

The practice of collecting “Jizya” or the tax from non-Muslims is based on the instruction by Muhammad in verse 29. Etymologically, “Jizya” means “payment in return,” where the payment is made by non-Muslims in return for the protection of the Muslim. While Muhammad remains friendly towards Christians in previous discussions, he does not continue to regard Christians as friends in this sura when he calls his followers to “fight” them (including the Jews) if Christians fail to meet the condition he lists.

The hostility continues when Muhammad tries to prove that the Jews and Christians are among the idolaters because they venerate Ezra (for the Jews) and Jesus (for Christians):

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52 Haleem, *The Qur’an*, 118.
The Jews said, ‘Ezra is the son of God,’ and the Christians said, ‘The Messiah is the son of God’: they said this with their own mouths, repeating what earlier disbelievers had said. May God confound them! How far astray they have been led! They take their rabbis and their monks as lords, as well as Christ, the son of Mary. But they were commanded to serve only one God: there is no god but Him; He is far above whatever they set up as His partners.....Believers, many rabbis and monks wrongfully consume people’s possessions and turn people away from God’s path. [Prophet], tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God’s cause that they will have a grievous punishment: on the Day it is heated up in Hell’s Fire and used to brand their foreheads, sides, and backs, they will be told, ‘This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Now feel the pain of what you hoarded!’ (9:30-35)

Christians are regarded as “disbelievers” because their insistence that Jesus is “the Son of God” which is also ascribing a partner to God. In Muhammad’s view, their submission to religious authorities is seen as worshipping them. He charges them of making their religious authorities their “lords” because they listen to these authorities rather than seeking guidance from God alone.

This is Muhammad’s new accusation. He did not criticize the religious authorities before. Muhammad disagrees with the hierarchy of authority in the Christian community which bounds the believers with the human authority and not God’s power. These religious authorities (monks in this case) seem to collect money from the believers according to Muhammad, and he did not forbid that

53 This might refer to a certain group who, possibly at the time of the Prophet or earlier, made this claim, see Haleem, The Qur’an, 119.
here. What concerns him is their misuse of the money, as Muhammad condemns them for abusing people in the name of religion and gaining wealth for their own benefits. Their punishment is severe as recorded in verse 35.

2.2.5 Criticism of Christians’ Wrongdoing, Denial of Jesus’ Divinity and Doctrine of the Trinity, Recognized Jesus’ Prophethood, Call for Religious Unity,

Recognized Christians as Friend: Sura 5

Muhammad speaks abundantly about lawful and unlawful conducts in Sura 5. There are lengthy amounts of his verdicts concerning the behavior of different faith communities – the idolaters, Jews, and Christians – but his accusations point to those who were given revelations as he had. The subject of his verdict is clear from passage to passage as a similar pattern emerges and shows his verdict: he judges the Jews before he denounces Christians. Even so, nuances can be spotted in his criticisms.

Muhammad accuses both the Jews and Christians of breaking their pledges from verse 12 to verse 14, where verses 12 and 13 are directed to the Jews and verse 14 to Christians:

We also took a pledge from those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ but they too forgot some of what they were told to remember, so We stirred up enmity and hatred among them until the Day of Resurrection, when God will tell them what they have done. (5:14)
While the Jews are criticized for breaking the pledge, probably the Pledge of Aqaba or their alliance with Muhammad, Christians are condemned for forgetting “what they were told to remember.” Muhammad does not give further details about the issue here, but their misconduct caused them to be filled with “enmity and hatred” among themselves. Whatever they have forgotten is be restored by God only at the Day of Resurrection when everything comes to the end. Before that, they will continually fight among themselves because of the unceasing enmity and hatred.

In the following section of the same passage, Muhammad determines to guide Christians away from their doctrine of Christology by pointing out that Jesus is only human and not “the Son of God,”

People of the Book, Our Messenger has come to make clear to you much of what you have kept hidden of the Scripture, and to overlook much [you have done]……Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, the son of Mary,’ are defying the truth. Say, ‘If it had been God’s will, could anyone have prevented Him from destroying the Messiah, son of Mary, together with his mother and everyone else on earth? ….. (5:15-17)
Christians are believed to be clueless because something is missing in their
Scripture, so that their understanding of their religion is incomplete. Muhammad
gives the example of Jesus’ divinity as something that confused Christians
because for him Jesus is not God, but humanity. God is the almighty God; if God
can “destroy” Jesus, which means Jesus is destroyable, then Jesus is not God. If
Jesus is God, and God cannot destroy him, then Jesus is more powerful than God,
which means God is no longer the almighty God. This is completely illogical, and
therefore Muhammad insists that Christians are defying the truth. He needs to
guide them to the correct belief, which is the very core duty of a prophet.

As in most of the Christian-related-suras, Muhammad does indeed
recognize Jesus as one of the rightful prophets. The Gospel Jesus preaches is
believed to be the message from God:

We sent Jesus, son of Mary, in their footsteps, to confirm the Torah that had
been sent before him: We gave him the Gospel with guidance, light, and
confirmation of the Torah already revealed – a guide and lesson for those
who take heed of God. So let the followers of the Gospel judge according to
what God has sent down in it. Those who do not judge according to what
God has revealed are lawbreakers. (5:46-47)
This paragraph affirms the authentication of Gospel as Torah. The Gospel is the guidance delivered by God; therefore, Muhammad urges the Christian community to follow the Gospel and to judge according to the Gospel.

As the Gospel and Torah, Muhammad proclaims that the Qur’an is also a message sent from God. While affirming the credibility of previous scriptures, the Qur’an holds another privilege – the final authority over previous scriptures:

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them: so judge between them according to what God has sent down……We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about. (5:48)

Muhammad finds some teachings confusing and illogical in previous scriptures– such as Christology and the Trinity – which leads him to believe that Christians are not well informed about the nature of God. He believes that he has more to contribute to the construction of faith for the Jewish and Christian community, and also because he is the latest prophet among all prophets, the revelation he has received is more complete and clearer than the previous scriptures.
Muhammad is well aware of the diversity of the faith community. While believing the revelation he preached is the most complete revelation, he acknowledges the diversity of religions, believing that it is God who creates and allows the diversity. The wide range of religions is meant to bring humanity to “do good” instead of fight for religious supremacy. This is the verse often quoted to promote the religious inclusiveness of Islam in the Qur’an.

The inclusiveness of Muhammad in this sura is hard to understand because right after he calls for interreligious unity, he exposes the tension and distrust among different faith communities:

You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as allies: they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them—God does not guide such wrongdoers......You who believe, do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it—whether people who were given the Scripture before you, or disbelievers—and be mindful of God if you are true believers. When you make the call to prayer, they ridicule it and make fun of it: this is because they are people who do not reason. Say [Prophet], ‘People of the Book, do you resent us for any reason other than the fact that we believe in God, in what has been sent down to us, and in what was sent before us, while most of you are disobedient?’ (5:51-59)

Muhammad warns his followers not to establish any alliance with the Jews and Christians because “they are allies only to each other.” These two communities will only show genuine friendship towards their own companion, Jews to Jews and Christians to Christians. However, this verse does not encourage Muslims to
fight against these communities because it would be violating the inclusiveness shown by Muhammad in verse 48. Thus, this verse should be interpreted as Muhammad’s warning to Muslims not to join the Jews or Christians to turn against the Muslim camp.\textsuperscript{54}

The call to prayer is a new practice for Muslims as well as the Medinans. It started two years after the Hijra when Muhammad’s companions expressed the need of a call to work as a public announcement of the time of prayer.\textsuperscript{55} Their new practice obviously creates some unfriendly responses from the Medinans which causes Muhammad to criticize the Medinans here.

Muhammad sincerely believes that he belongs to the Abrahamic religion, and therefore the resentment and rejection from the Jewish community truly puzzles him. Their rejection of Muhammad reveals their disobedience to God because the Jewish community rejects God’s messenger. For this reason, Muhammad feels sorry for their disobedience and keeps reminding them to obey their scriptures and repent for their own good:

\textsuperscript{54} Haleem, \textit{The Qur’an}, 189.

\textsuperscript{55} Nasr, \textit{The Study Quran}, 309.
If only the People of the Book would believe and be mindful of God, We would take away their sins and bring them into the Gardens of Delight. If they had upheld the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have been given abundance from above and from below: some of them are on the right course, but many of them do evil. (5:65-66)

68 Say, ‘People of the Book, you have no true basis [for your religion] unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and that which has been sent down to you from your Lord,’ but what has been sent down to you [Prophet] from your Lord is sure to increase many of them in their insolence and defiance: do not worry about those who defy [God]. 69 For the [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Sabians, and the Christians – those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds – there is no fear: they will not grieve. (5:68-69)

Muhammad perceives himself not only to warn disbelievers about God’s punishment so that they may repent, but he has the responsibility to remind “the People of the Book,” the Jews and Christians in this case, to live their life according to their scriptures and follow God’s instructions for them, to “uphold” their scriptures. In his opinion, “some” of those “People of the Book” already strayed from God and bluntly defied God’s will.

In spite of all the warning and criticism, Muhammad lays down this rule to demonstrate that real believers – those who believed in God and the Last Day, and do good deeds – and those who fit these rules can live peacefully. Thus, they will have no fear towards Muslims or the Judgment Day, because they will
receive salvation and live in the paradise.\textsuperscript{56} This is the highest reward a human can gain, and it is available for Christians.

Whoever “believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds” are qualified for the ultimate reward, but believers in the divine nature of Jesus or the Trinitarian God is defying God, Muhammad stresses this point again in this sura:

Those who say, ‘God is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ have defied God. The Messiah himself said, ‘Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord.’ If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him from the Garden, and Hell will be his home. No one will help such evildoers. (5:72)

Those people who say that God is the third of three are defying [the truth]: there is only One God…… The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger; other messengers had come and gone before him; his mother was a virtuous woman; both ate food [like other mortals]. See how clear We make these signs for them; see how deluded they are…… Say, ‘People of the Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion …… Those Children of Israel who defied [God] were rejected through the words of David, and Jesus, son of Mary, because they disobeyed, they persistently overstepped the limits……(5:73-78)

Instead of Muhammad denies the doctrine of Christology, it is Jesus himself who forbids the belief of Christology. Jesus’ statement of “God is my lord and your lord” appears multiple times in the Qur’an, and every time Jesus makes this

\textsuperscript{56} Nasr, \textit{The Study Quran}, 315.
statement, he is emphasizing his humanity as the same as every human.\[57\]

Muhammad claims that Jesus stresses his submission to God because Jesus is just a servant chosen by God and shared none of God’s divinity. Whoever believes the “false” doctrine of Christology will be regarded as “disbelievers,” and thus, loses their salvation according to the Qur’an.

In the next paragraph, it is the doctrine of the Trinity that is denied by Muhammad. He emphasizes that Jesus is nothing more than a human, just as all the rightful prophets sent by God are all humanity. Not only Jesus’ human nature but Mary’s human nature is emphasized here. Muhammad denies any divinity ascribed to either of them, because they need to eat like mortal being, they are not God in any sense. His denial of Mary’s divinity is alluding the “Trinity” which he understands as being composed by “God, Jesus, and Mary” instead of the Christian understanding of “God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit.” Muhammad’s understanding of the Trinity might be mislead by Arabian Christians, given that Mariology was popular in early Christianity. This demonstrates that the orthodox understanding of the Trinity was incorrect in the Arabian Peninsula. The defected doctrine of the Trinity is similar to polytheism,

\[57\] See 3:51, 5:117, 19:36, 43:64.
which causes Muhammad to find the doctrine “overstepped the limits” and therefore it is deemed to be incorrect.

This strict denial of Christology and the Trinity is followed by a friendly attitude designated to Christians:

You [Prophet] are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance, and when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears because they recognize the Truth [in it]. They say, ‘Our Lord, we believe, so count us amongst the witnesses. (5:82-83)

The kindness is shown to Christians because they treat the Muslims and Muhammad well, compare to the Jews and idolaters. Christians in this context were much closer to Muslims and were not included in the sphere of those who “associate other deities with God,” unlike the previous discussion where Christians were constantly criticized for their belief in Christology and the Triune God.

This is clearly contradicted to Muhammad’s earlier attitudes toward Christians. Muhammad’s affection is opposed to his refutation and mistrust towards Christians due to their misbehavior and false doctrines. This verse may be from Muhammad’s earlier message when he was fond of Christians because
of their support and earlier assistance. Yet, this shift in opinions demonstrates the complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians.

The complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes appear again in a long line of verses which show the intermingling of Muhammad’s “recognition – denial” attitude:

On the Day when God assembles all the messengers and asks, ‘What response did you receive?’ they will say, ‘We do not have that knowledge: You alone know things that cannot be seen.’ Then God will say, ‘Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour to you and to your mother: how I strengthened you with the holy spirit, so that you spoke to people in your infancy and as a grown man…… (5:109-110a)

The complete section begins from verse 109 and ends at verse 115, listing all the miracles Jesus once performed, some of which are unfamiliar to Christians. This section emphasizes Jesus’ dependence on God because he is only a human without any power to perform miracle; every miracle that Jesus performed solely relied on God’s will. “How……by my leave” is repeated again and again to underline the prerequisite of miracles: God’s will.

Thus, Muhammad denies Jesus divinity indirectly for Jesus has no power to perform miracles, while it is God who performs the miracle through Jesus.

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58 For example, talked to people when Jesus still an infant, and breathed into a clay bird and bring it to life. See 5:110.
However, Muhammad recognizes Jesus’ prophethood because he is God’s “favour.” The “recognition – denial” attitude occurs within this text, which again echoes with 5:82-83, where Muhammad recognizes Christians as close friends and refutes Jesus’ divinity.

Muhammad continues his denial of the doctrine of the Trinity right after he denies Jesus’ divinity. The doctrine of the Trinity has to be explained once Christology is mentioned:

When God says, ‘Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to people, “Take me and my mother as two gods alongside God”? he will say, ‘May You be exalted! I would never say what I had no right to say – if I had said such a thing You would have known it: You know all that is within me…… I told them only what You commanded me to: “Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.” (5:116-117)

Once again the denial of the Trinity is from Jesus’ mouth, set by Muhammad, so that it is Jesus himself who denies the doctrine of the Trinity as he denies the doctrine of Christology in verse 72. Muhammad clearly describes the composition of Trinity God as “God, Jesus, and Mary” in verse 116, which reflects his understanding of the doctrine. Consequently, it is Jesus who denies it, and therefore the blame of inventing such a distorted doctrine lays on Christians’ shoulders.
2.2.6 Recognition of Jesus’ Prophethood, Denial of Jesus’ Death, Divinity, and the Christian’s Doctrine of Trinity: Sura 4

Sura 4 begins and ends with many instructions regarding the inheritance and marriage laws. A large part of this sura deals with instructions for the legislation problems of war, and also the tensions of Muslims with non-Muslims in Medina. This sura is the most important and fundamental source for Islamic jurisprudence.\(^{59}\) Verses concerning Christians appear at the later part of this sura:

And so for breaking their pledge, for rejecting God’s revelations, for unjustly killing their prophets, for saying ‘Our minds are closed’ – No! God has sealed them in their disbelief, so they believe only a little – and because they disbelieved and uttered a terrible slander against Mary, and said, ‘We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of God.’ (They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear like that to them; those that disagreed about him are full of doubt, with no knowledge to follow, only supposition: they certainly did not kill him – God raised him up to Himself. God is almighty and wise. There is not one of the People of the Book who will not believe in [Jesus] before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them.) \(^{4:155-159}\)

This statement is targeted at condemning the Jews in the first place for their rejection of the rightful prophets such as Jesus and Muhammad. They first “uttered a terrible slander against Mary” by denying her virginity and asserting

\(^{59}\) Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 188.
that Jesus was an illegitimate child. \(^{60}\) Then they proudly admit they killed Jesus, the “Messenger of God” to mock and dismiss his prophethood. Muhammad denies their wrongdoing by saying their ignorance is a punishment from God. The Jews did wrong because God “sealed” their mind and forbidden them from receiving new revelations from Jesus and Muhammad, and hence they were excluded from the sphere of believers. Jesus’ prophethood is not affected by the Jews.

After he profoundly rebukes the Jews, Muhammad quickly added another section to deny the death of Jesus. He asserts that the Jews failed to kill Jesus because God “raised him up” before he died on the cross. While this obviously violated the Christian belief of Jesus death, Muhammad claimed that it is their “supposition” because the whole incident “was made to appear like that to them.”

Another combination of the “recognition—denial” attitude appears in this sura after the previous set. Muhammad affirms Jesus as one of God’s messengers in the long line of prophets:

We have sent revelation to you [Prophet] as We did to Noah and the prophets after him, to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon— to David We gave the book [of Psalms] …… To Moses God spoke directly. They were messengers bearing good news and warning, so that mankind would have no excuse before God, once the messengers had been sent……(4:163-165)

Similar lists of prophets are presented by Muhammad to affirm their prophethood and also connect himself to the long line of prophets. These prophets are the rightful prophets whom Muslims ought to accept. He claims that prophets bring the messages of God, they warn humanity and help humanity to be aware of the existence of God, so that they are well informed about God and their decisions to repent or reject the prophets.

Following the recognition is Muhammad’s denial of the doctrine of Trinity:

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’— stop [this], that is better for you— God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God, nor would the angels who are close to Him…… (4:171-172)

While the Jews are condemned for their rejection of Jesus and killing him, Christians are warned not to “go to excess” in their belief. Muhammad strongly emphasizes the human nature of Jesus and his prophethood while admonishes

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Christians to stop believing in the “Trinity.” The “Trinity” represents three gods instead of one, and suggests a belief of polytheism in the monotheistic religion and therefore it should be obliterated. Muhammad agrees to the prophethood of Jesus and claims that Jesus’ teaching should be obeyed, but it would go too far if one worships him as the Son of God. Jesus would not lose his honor even if he is regarded only as a human servant of God. Thus, there is no need to lift Jesus up to the status of God.

2.2.7 Confirming Gospel’s Authority, Recognizes Jesus’ Prophethood, Denies Jesus’ divinity, Promotes Religious Inclusiveness: Sura 3

According to the Islamic tradition, the first part of Sura 3 narrates a lengthy conversation between Muhammad and a Christian delegation from Najran.62 The delegation tries to preach the Christian belief to Muhammad and Muhammad answers them with what had revealed to him:

God: there is no god but Him, the Ever Living, the Ever Watchful. Step by step, He has sent the Scripture down to you [Prophet] with the Truth, confirming what went before: He sent down the Torah and the Gospel earlier as a guide for people and He has sent down the distinction [between right and wrong]. Those who deny God’s revelations will suffer severe torment: God is almighty and capable of retribution. (3:2-4)

62 Nasr, The Study Quran, 126.
This message begins with Muhammad’s definition of God and the Abrahamic religion. Muhammad acknowledges the Gospel as God’s revelation and therefore it bears the same defining authority over believers’ life and faith.

The definition of “Islam” can be broad or narrow in the following verses:

True Religion, in God’s eyes, is islam: [devotion to Him alone]. Those who were given the Scripture disagreed out of rivalry, only after they had been given knowledge– if anyone denies God’s revelations, God is swift to take account – if they argue with you [Prophet], say, ‘I have devoted myself to God alone and so have my followers.’ Ask those who were given the Scripture, as well as those without one, ‘Do you too devote yourselves to Him alone?’ If they do, they will be guided, but if they turn away, your only duty is to convey the message. God is aware of His servants. (3:19-20)

Islam is exclusive when it points only to the religion preached by Muhammad; it can be inclusive at the same time by referring to all who devote themselves to God. Muhammad raises the Qur’an to be equal with the Torah and the Gospel, but himself is not accepted as he expects. Both the Jews and the Christians do not recognize him as a new prophet, nor is the preaching of Muhammad accepted as God’s revelation. Muhammad points to God as the ultimate concern in order to persuade other faith communities to join him. He tries to find a common ground for him to stand with those holding the scriptures and he warns them not to deny his revelation recklessly.
Muhammad refutes the delegation by quoting the previous revelation to emphasize Jesus’ servanthood as humanity and denies Jesus’ divinity:

The angels said, ‘Mary, God gives you news of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, who will be held in honour in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to God. He will speak to people in his infancy and in his adulthood. He will be one of the righteous.’ She said, ‘My Lord, how can I have a son when no man has touched me?’ [The angel] said, ‘This is how God creates what He will: when He has ordained something, He only says, “Be”, and it is. He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, He will send him as a messenger to the Children of Israel: ...... I have come to confirm the truth of the Torah which preceded me, and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. Be mindful of God, obey me: God is my Lord and your Lord, so serve Him—that is a straight path.’” (3:45-51)

Similar miracles are narrated in 5:109-115 and 19:16-26 about the virgin birth and the list of miracles Jesus performed. On the one hand, Jesus’ prophethood is affirmed, and on the other hand his divinity is denied. Jesus is especially chosen by God to be a prophet who conveys God’s messages. But Jesus is inferior to God, it is God who guides Jesus.
All miracles are performed by God’s will, not Jesus’ will. The ultimate authority is in God’s hand and Jesus have no power in this matter. Notice the phrase “God is my Lord and your Lord” appears again. This phrase is specially designated to declare Jesus’ humanity and denies his divinity in the Qur’an.

Jesus stands before God just as every human does and God is superior to all of them.

Jesus’ divinity is completely refuted, but he remains as a model in the following narration:

When Jesus realized they [still] did not believe, he said, ‘Who will help me in God’s cause?’ The disciples said, ‘We will be God’s helpers; we believe in God—witness our devotion to Him. Lord, we believe in what You have revealed and we follow the messenger: record us among those who bear witness [to the Truth].’ (3:52-53)

The relationship of Jesus and his disciples is recognized by Muhammad to be a model for him and his followers as it is in 61:14. Jesus’ disciples submit themselves to him as they do to God. In this context, God’s prophet represents God, and to obey the prophet is obeying God.

The recognition or inclusiveness in Muhammad begins to rise in the following verse:
God said, ‘Jesus, I will take you back and raise you up to Me: I will purify you of the disbelievers. To the Day of Resurrection I will make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieved. Then you will all return to Me and I will judge between you regarding your differences. (3:55)

Jesus is clearly favored by God. God promises to “take you back and raise you up to Me,” which is the foundation for Muhammad to deny Jesus’ death in 4:157.

Christians are credited here because they follow Jesus and they will be favored by God, too. Muhammad shows his universalism by confirming the final destination of all humanity. He notices the difference between Christians and Muslims but Muhammad believes that all of them are in God’s salvation.

Muhammad strives to promote the universality under the condition of rejecting Jesus’ divinity:

We relate to you [Muhammad] this revelation, a decisive statement. In God’s eyes Jesus is just like Adam: He created him from dust, said to him, ‘Be’, and he was …… This is the truth of the matter: there is no god but God; God is the Exalted, the Decider.’ …… Say, ‘People of the Book, let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.’ …… (3:58-64)
Jesus’ equality with Adam is highlighted. They are both human beings, created by God. God alone is Godself and no one can share God’s divinity. This is Muhammad’s only prerequisite before establishing a shared statement with Christians. He intends to make the mutual agreement with Christians although what he suggests violates the very core of Christianity. However, Muhammad sincerely offers his friendship to Christian in this context.

Muhammad is rejected by Christians is expected since Christology is an uncompromisable doctrine. Their rejection clearly creates some frustration for Muhammad:

People of the Book, why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater…… (3:65-67)

Muhammad could not understand the reason for the Jews and Christians to fight for Abraham’s religion. Both communities insist that Abraham belongs to their communities respectively. Muhammad argues that neither Judaism nor Christianity occur during Abraham’s time. If they cannot share the Abrahamic root with each other, let alone to share it with the Muslims.
Muhammad criticizes their ignorance because they failed to recognize Abraham devotes himself fully to God and not to the religion of Christian of Judaism. Muhammad refutes their fight to claim their ownership on Abraham’s legacy. Considering the word “devoted” (translated into “submitted” or “surrender” in other version) is the literal meaning of “Islam,” Muhammad alludes that he is the rightful heir of Abraham legacy, or “Islam” is the correct naming for all the Abrahamic religion.63

Muhammad pushes the boundary of religion to the widest:

Say [Muhammad], ‘We [Muslims] believe in God and in what has been sent down to us and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes. We believe in what has been given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of the [prophets]. It is to Him that we devote ourselves.’ If anyone seeks a religion other than [Islam] complete devotion to God, it will not be accepted from him: he will be one of the losers in the Hereafter. (3:84-85)

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Muhammad applies the inclusiveness to the maximum to include all previous prophets into the wider meaning of “Islam,” which means those who fully devote themselves to God. He includes all the Jews and Christians into the sphere of believers as the Muslims. He decides not to choose a side between the Jews and the Christians hence he believes in all their prophets and their scriptures. Muhammad understands that it is meaningless to compete for the religious exclusiveness; therefore he promotes the universalism and asserts whoever devote themselves to the true God will be granted salvation.

2.2.8 Promotes Religious Inclusiveness, Recognizes Jesus’ Prophethood and Christian’s Scripture, Criticizes Christians for Denying the Qur’an: Sura 2

Sura 2 is the longest sura in the Qur’an. Its timeframe stretches from the first two years after the Hijra to the last month before Muhammad died. It contains almost every aspect of theology, law, ethics, spiritual life and many more in Muhammad’s life.

The first section that related to the Christians promotes the inclusiveness. Muhammad draws a large circle to define the meaning of “believers,”

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The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians⁶⁵ – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve. (2:62)

As long as one “believe in God and the Last Day and do good,” one is considered a believer and can enjoy all the rewards promised by God. The sphere of believers is very wide and this verse provides a common ground for interreligious dialogue.

Recognizing other prophets is a step that Muhammad needs to take since he already includes them into the sphere of believers:

We gave Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others? (2:87)

Moses and Jesus are recognized as authentic prophets who receive the revelation from God. Anyone who believes in the messages they proclaim is in safe hand. Muhammad defends the authentication of Moses and Jesus while confronting those who do not recognize their prophethood. Muhammad criticizes those who reject God’s prophets for their misbehavior.

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⁶⁵ The Sabians were a monotheistic religious community. See Asad, *The Message of the Quran*, 40 and 49.
Muhammad is aware that other faith communities are trying to promote an exclusive religion by claiming the privilege to enter Paradise:

They also say, ‘No one will enter Paradise unless he is a Jew or a Christian.’ This is their own wishful thinking. [Prophet], say, ‘Produce your evidence, if you are telling the truth.’ In fact, any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve. The Jews say, ‘The Christians have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ and the Christians say, ‘The Jews have no ground whatsoever to stand on,’ though they both read the Scripture, and those who have no knowledge say the same; God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences. (2:111-113)

Their effort is contradicted to Muhammad’s proposition at 2:62; therefore he refutes their claim as “wishful thinking.” Muhammad rather pushes for a wider definition of “believers” than narrowing the sphere. He repeats his proposition “any who direct themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord” in verse 112 in order to build a broader community of faith.

Muhammad obviously detests with the constant dispute between the Jews and Christians for their superiority and advises them to lay their case to God.

The “recognition – denial” attitude occurs after Muhammad promotes the religious inclusiveness. He emphasizes the prerequisite of this inclusiveness:

They have asserted, ‘God has a child.’ May He be exalted! No! Everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him, everything devoutly obeys His will. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He says only, ‘Be,’ and it is. (2:116-117)
He denies Jesus’ divinity and strongly refutes the saying of “God has a child.”

God is the creator of all things, God does not give birth to anything, nor does God grow anything. Muhammad could not accept the idea that God possesses a child because a partner will need to be ascribed to God firstly: “How could He have children when He has no spouse……” (6:101) God creates by giving commands and no partner is needed. Since God has no spouse, it will be impossible for Jesus to become God’s child. The belief in Jesus as the Son of God implies that God possess a spouse. God has a spouse and a child is the idea of polytheism; therefore the Christian Christology is blasphemous to Muhammad.

Muhammad explicitly expresses his determination to seek for interreligious unity. He continues to promote the universality of religions:

The Jews and the Christians will never be pleased with you unless you follow their ways. Say, ‘God’s guidance is the only true guidance.’ If you were to follow their desires after the knowledge that has come to you, you would find no one to protect you from God or help you. (2:120)

They say, ‘Become Jews or Christians, and you will be rightly guided.’ Say [Prophet], ‘No, [ours is] the religion of Abraham, the upright, who did not worship any god besides God.’ So [you believers], say, ‘We believe in God and in what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we devote ourselves to Him.’ (2:135-136)

Muhammad knows that the Jews and Christians hold their identity strongly.
He needs to persuade them to broaden the definition of “believer” for them to coexist. A greatest common divisor is necessary to serve as a common platform for all the faith communities to meet and converse. Muhammad’s solution is pointing to “God’s guidance is the only true guidance” instead of “Moses’ guidance” or “Jesus’ guidance” or even “Muhammad’s guidance.” He chooses not to give preferential treatment to any communities but recognizes all their prophets and scriptures as he does in 3:84.

Muhammad’s effort is not welcome to the Jews and Christians. His proposal is remarkable but the prerequisite is unacceptable for the Jews and Christians:

Say [Prophet] [to the Jews and Christians], ‘How can you argue with us about God when He is our Lord and your Lord? Our deeds belong to us, and yours to you. We devote ourselves entirely to Him. Or are you saying that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?’ [Prophet], ask them, ‘Who knows better: you or God? Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God? God is not unmindful of what you do.’ (2:139-140)
Muhammad insists that the revelation he received is as authentic as in the Jews and Christians. They are all equal before God because God creates them as “humanity,” not “Jews,” “Christians,” or “Muslims.” Muhammad criticizes the distinction they invent for themselves and for each other because all the previous prophets died long before the religious distinction emerges. They are all non-Jewish and non-Christian but God’s servants.

Based on this argument Muhammad makes his manifesto:

Mankind was a single community, then God sent prophets to bring good news and warning, and with them He sent the Scripture with the Truth, to judge between people in their disagreements. It was only those to whom it was given who disagreed about it after clear signs had come to them, because of rivalry between them. So by His leave God guided the believers to the truth they had differed about: God guides whoever He will to a straight path. (2:213)

Human beings are all equal because God is their ruler. The duty of prophets is “to bring good news and warning,” which is the God’s messages to prevent them from worshipping the wrong one(s). The distinction between the faith communities is created out of their “rivalry,” but not their submission to God.

The distinction is unnecessary in Muhammad’s opinion.
Muhammad believes the disputation between the Jews and Christians could be avoided if God prevents them because clear messages are already given to them:

We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank; We gave Jesus, son of Mary, Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. If God had so willed, their successors would not have fought each other after they had been brought clear signs. But they disagreed: some believed and some disbelieved. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He will. (2:153)

God treats his prophets differently. God speaks to Moses directly (cf. 4:164) and Jesus is bestowed with the Holy Spirit. Jesus and Moses are more favorable to God. Their followers are allowed to fight against each other due to God’s permission although the messages are already given to them by their prophets.

To align with the main theme in this sura about the Jews and Christians, Muhammad might be instructing them to coexist peacefully and acknowledge each other as true “believers.”

This is a possible assumption because Muhammad summarizes this sura by promoting universalism:

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord, as do the faithful. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers. ‘We make no distinction between any of His messengers,’ they say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!’ (2:285)
Muhammad makes his stand clearly: he accepts all the faith communities as believers, he recognizes all prophets before him as being sent by God, and he believes all their scriptures are revealed by God through their prophets.

Muhammad aspires to maximize religious inclusiveness and achieve a mutual recognition with the Jews and Christians in this sura although he denies Jesus’ divinity.
Chapter 3: The Foundation of Muhammad’s Attitudes Towards Christians and Its Misappropriation

It is impossible to generalize Muhammad’s attitude towards Christians and come out with a monotonous framework of either an amity/inclusive attitude or an enmity/exclusive attitude. The inclusiveness and exclusiveness seem to highly contradict to each other but Muhammad successfully mixes them together without compromise any.

From all the suras that related to Christian in the Qur’an, it is certain that Muhammad’s attitudes are not always solid but flows between the amity/inclusive attitude and enmity/exclusive attitude. The only obvious pattern of his attitude is the “recognition – denial” set that occurs frequently. The “recognition – denial” set of attitudes can be recognized in most of the suras as Muhammad’s attitude towards Christian, but this is not the only attitude pattern shown by Muhammad. Muhammad’s attitudes can be summarized in the table below according to their frequency shown in the Qur’an:

Table 4. The Composition of Muhammad’s Attitudes Towards Christians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Muhammad’s Attitudes</th>
<th>Amity</th>
<th>Enmity</th>
<th>Recognition – Denial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sura</td>
<td>66, 61</td>
<td>105, 9</td>
<td>57, 43, 42, 30, 23, 21, 19, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total suras</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “recognition – denial” set of attitudes can be found almost in every Christian related sura, but not in all Christian related suras. The suras of inclusiveness like Sura 66 and Sura 61 show only Muhammad’s recognition towards Jesus and Mary hence only amity is seen; likewise, the suras of exclusiveness like Sura 105 and Sura 9 show only Muhammad’s hostility towards Christians and hence only enmity is seen.

The “recognition – denial” attitudes are shown in most of the Christian related suras demonstrated a more complicated and vivid combination of both the inclusive and exclusive attitudes. The recognition and denial attitudes of Muhammad have to be observed side by side since both attitudes appear in the same sura. Either recognition or denial attitude can be identified in those suras and there is a sense of interdependence of both attitudes towards each other. Often times the recognition prepares the table for Muhammad to lay his denial or criticism. Likewise, after he denies or criticizes certain aspects of Christians, he will not fail to recognize Jesus’ prophethood or Christians as believers.
In those suras where the “recognition – denial” attitudes are shown, Muhammad consciously applies his recognition and denial simultaneously in that particular sura in order to achieve balance. But the appearance of recognition and denial simultaneously is not a phenomenon of equalitarianism. The “recognition – denial” attitudes do not mean to demonstrates solely the balance. A relation of primary and secondary can be spotted between this set of attitudes.

The denial or criticism are legitimate only with the existence of the recognition. There is a primary and secondary relationship between the recognition and the denial. The recognition is the root for the denial to take place. The attitude pattern of “Recognizes Jesus’ Prophethood, Denies Jesus’ Divinity, Criticizes Religious Division” are the best example to demonstrate the “root” concept since this set of attitudes fit four suras among all the Christian related Meccan suras.
In this particular set of attitudes, Muhammad’s criticism and denial could not stand if he does not recognize Jesus’ prophethood. Muhammad continuously retell the story of Jesus to emphasizes he is one of the rightful prophets. Muhammad recognizes Jesus is chosen by God to convey the revelation without hesitant: “[But] he said: ‘I am a servant of God. He has granted me the Scripture; made me a prophet; made me blessed wherever I may be.’” 66 (19:30-31) It is on this basis that Muhammad denies the doctrine of Christology because Jesus is merely human and his servanthood is contradicted to his divinity according to Muhammad.

Another phrase stand align with this proposition is the typical proclamation of Jesus: “God is my Lord and your Lord.” (19:36) Jesus proclaims his equality with human being because he is created by God too. He stands before God like every other people but not stand with God and confront human beings. Muhammad’s denial of Christology take place if only the prophethood and servanthood of Jesus are firm. If there is slightest possibility for Muhammad to believes Jesus is the Son of God as Christians do – which clashes with his recognition of Jesus as a human prophet – his denial will be invalid.

66 Jesus is the one who speaks in this case.
Muhammad consider himself equal with Jesus in the sense of a prophet. He receives revelation from God as Jesus did, and he conveys the messages to people as Jesus did. His prophethood is as valid and authentic as Jesus’ prophethood. Based on this proposition Christians has no right to reject him if they accept Jesus as God’s messenger.

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are complicated not only because of his attitudes swings between amity and enmity, but even when he demonstrates the “recognition – denial” set of attitudes, the components of the attitude set are often composed by different combination of recognition and denial. However, a foundation lays before Muhammad for him to build his denial and criticism, which is his recognition. The model of inclusive attitude serves as the foundation for his exclusive attitude can also be found in Muhammad’s narrative of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book.”
3.1 From Children of Israel to People of the Book

A shift can be derived from the general address designated to the circle of the Jews and Christians. Muhammad uses two general address to indicates other faith communities, pointed to the Jews and Christians most of the time.67 Below is the table showing where the assinocation of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book” occur respectively:

Table 5. The Assignation of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Meccan Suras</th>
<th>Medinan Suras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children of Israel</td>
<td>7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 28, 32, 40, 44, 45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of the Book</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3, 4, 9, 57, 59, 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 28, 29, 32, 40, 44, 45</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 9, 57, 59, 98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Muhammad uses the same title to address both communities consistently with only one exception in both case. He addresses both the Jews and Christians as “Children of Israel” in Meccan Suras while addressing them as “People of the Book” in Medinan Suras. Both titles can be equally handed to the Jews and Christians simultaneously. The precise subject depends very much on the context of the certain paragraph to determine which of the group is indicated, although sometimes it includes both groups.

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67 Sabians and Zoroastrians occasionally. The subject will be focused on the Jews and Christians in the discussion.
3.1.1 Children of Israel

The title of “Children of Israel” commonly used by Muhammad when he addressed both the Jews and Christians in a wider sense. Below are the examples of the different subject addressed by Muhammad with the same title:

Jews:
We gave Moses guidance and passed down the Scripture to the Children of Israel, as a guide and a reminder to people of understanding. (40:53-54)

Christians:
When the son of Mary is cited as an example, your people [Prophet] laugh and jeer, saying, ‘Are our gods better or him?’- they cite him only to challenge you: they are a contentious people – but he is only a servant We favoured and made an example for the Children of Israel: if it had been Our will, We could have made you angels, succeeding one another on earth. (43:57-60)

“Children of Israel” referring to the Jews at verses 40:53-54 when Moses is mentioned; while the same title refers to Christians at verses 43:57-60 when Jesus is the focus of this paragraph. The subject of “Children of Israel” is fluid therefore the context has to be examined carefully. If the subject is undetermined it could be both communities are mentioned by Muhammad.

Muhammad’s attitudes swing from sura to sura too when he mentions “Children of Israel” in the texts. Both amity and enmity might have shown to the “Children of Israel”: 
Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you and favoured you over other people. Guard yourselves against a Day when no soul will stand in place of another, no intercession will be accepted for it, nor any ransom; nor will they be helped. Remember when We saved you from Pharaoh’s people, who subjected you to terrible torment, slaughtering your sons and sparing only your women (2:47-49)

“Children of Israel” is God’s favorite at verses 2:47-49. They are told to remember God’s providence onto them and the narration is full with love and amity.

“Children of Israel” in this section definitely enjoy God’s grace and they can fully rely on God because God protects them from their enemy (Pharaoh in this context).

The other group of “Children of Israel” do not enjoy so much a privilege compares to the group in 2:47-49:

Truly, this Quran explains to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about……. You cannot make the dead hear, you cannot make the deaf listen to your call when they turn their backs and leave, you cannot guide the blind out of their error……. (27:76-81)

The “Children of Israel” at verses 27:76-81 are denounced as “dead,” “deaf,” and “blind” because they reject the Qur’an. Muhammad is convinced that the Qur’an contains clear messages compare to previous revelations but this group of “Children of Israel” does not listen to Muhammad and hence are reprimanded.
3.1.2 People of the Book

The indicated subject and the attitudes represented are ambiguous under the title of “People of the Book.” Similar to the title of “Children of Israel,” “People of the Book” can be designated to both the Jews and Christians too. Once again, the indicated subject has to be determined depends on the context:

Jews:
Except for what Israel made unlawful for himself, all food was lawful to the Children of Israel before the Torah was revealed...... Say, ‘People of the Book, why do you reject God’s revelations? God witnesses everything you do.’ Say, ‘People of the Book, why do you turn the believers away from God’s path and try to make it crooked, when you yourselves [should be] witnesses to the [truth]? God is not heedless of anything you do.’ (3:93-99)

Christians:
The Messiah, son of Mary, was only a messenger...... Say, ‘People of the Book, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion and do not follow the whims of those who went astray before you...... (5:75-77)

The subjects at verses 3:93-98 are the Jews because the Torah is mentioned.

Christians could be included in this context if the Gospel is mentioned as well.

Most of the time the Torah and the Gospel are mentioned together whenever the title of “People of the Book” is addressed (cf. 9:111, 7:157, 5:110). While in this particular paragraph the subject can be determined as the Jews since the Gospel which represents Christians does not appears together.
On the other hand, the designated subject at verses 5:75-77 is Christians because Jesus is mentioned before Muhammad addresses them. Another hint is the phrase “do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religion.” This is a warning or reminder dedicated especially to Christians in the Qur’an. The Christian belief of Christology and Trinity is regarded as “excess in religion (4:171).” Whenever Muhammad refutes the “People of the Book” not to “overstep” or “excess,” he is indicating Christians.

The attitudes designated to the title of “People of the Book” are uncertain. Muhammad commends them in some contexts while refutes them in other contexts:

Some of the People of the Book believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God’s revelation for a small price. (3:199)

The “People of the Book” at 3:199 are highly praises for their good behavior. Muhammad recognizes their humbleness and loyalty to God. This group of “People of the Book” are depicted as the model of believers. They are humble and loyal because they believe in God and Scripture, which is the basic requirement for a believer.
The same designation group of “People of the Book” are depicted with enmity in another text:

Some of the People of the Book would dearly love to lead you [believers] astray, but they only lead themselves astray, though they do not realize it. People of the Book, why do you deny God’s revelations when you can see they are true? People of the Book, why do you mix truth with falsehood? Why do you hide the truth when you recognize it? (3:69-71)

This specific group of “People of the Book” is reprimanded because they deny Muhammad’s revelation. They are reluctant to recognize Muhammad as the prophet of God and also hide the prophecy about the coming of Muhammad. This particular group of “People of the Book” might be persecuted because of their misbehavior.

3.1.3 Commonality of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book”

The designation of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book” might represents different communities as well as reflects different attitudes pointing to them by Muhammad. But there is a commonality within these designations and the commonality could uncover the core of Muhammad’s attitudes regarding Christians.
The subject of both designations is uncertain and the attitudes they bear are complicated and hard to determine sometimes, but both designations possess a concept of “common ground” or “common root” in their meaning. The “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book” both indicate the “otherness” in compare to the Muslims. But both “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book” share the same root with the Muslims and it is this foundation that Muhammad establish the “otherness” in both designations.

Muhammad believe it was Abraham and Ishmael who built the foundation of Ka’ba in Mecca and also the founder of monotheistic religion in Arab:

As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed], ‘Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing. Our Lord, make us devoted to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful. Our Lord, make a messenger of their own rise up from among them, to recite Your revelations to them, teach them the Scripture and wisdom, and purify them: You are the Mighty, the Wise.’ (2:127-129)

Abraham together with Ishmael begin the worship of true God in Arab and they are the first who chose Mecca to set up their house of prayer. They leave the false religion of polytheism and devote themselves to God. Believes in the God, Scripture, and prophet is the common ground for the “Children of Israel” and the Muslims.
Further down the root is Abraham himself. Both the Jews and Christians are referred to as “Children of Israel” and the Muslims inherit the religion from Ishmael. Both Israel and Ishmael are the close kin to Abraham. Therefore, even if the “Children of Israel” and the Muslims are the different groups of believers, but all of them share the Abrahamic root, “God speaks the truth, so follow Abraham’s religion: he had true faith and he was never an idolater.” (3:95) It is the root of Abraham that allows the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims to coexist peacefully with amity.

Same application can be applied to the designation of “People of the Book.” All the communities of Jews, Christians, and Muslims possess their Holy Scripture respectively. According to Muhammad, these Scriptures derive from the complete revelation called “Source of Scripture”:

God erases or confirms whatever He will, and the source of Scripture is with Him. (13:39)

By the Scripture that makes things clear, We have made it a Quran in Arabic so that you [people] may understand. It is truly exalted in the Source of Scripture kept with Us, and full of wisdom. (43:2-4)

This is truly a glorious Quran [written] on a preserved Tablet. (85:21-22)

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68 “Source of Scripture” literally means “Mother of Scripture,” Haleem, The Qur’an, 316.
69 Identified with “Mother of Scripture” and “Source of Scripture,” Haleem, The Qur’an, 316.
The “Source of Scripture” or the “Mother of Scripture” is the source of all revelations that God keeps in heaven. It is the original manuscript for all Scriptures, all the written Scriptures derived from this original copy.

All religions with the revealed Scripture share a common root from the “Source of Scripture” where their distinctions are minor because they have the same root. The “otherness” is less significance. Both designation of “Children of Israel” and “People of the Book” reflect the significance of the same root or the common foundation. The “otherness” of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is possible because of the commonality they share. All these communities are built on the same foundation therefore their coexistence is possible.
3.1.4 A Pattern of “Commonality” in Muhammad’s Attitudes

Derived from the pattern of “commonality,” Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians also build on a specific foundation. Throughout the Qur’an, Muhammad never cease to criticize Christians’ behaviors and denies their doctrine of Christology and Trinity. Muhammad introduces the inclusive and exclusive attitudes in various patterns in the Qur’an, but he never failed to recognize Christians as “believers” in his messages. His denial and criticism does not equal to exclusiveness, but rather the exclusiveness is built on the recognition of Christians.

The pattern of Muhammad’s “recognition – denial” attitudes constantly appear whenever he speaks about Christians. The rotation of recognition and denial/criticism is the only consistent pattern of attitudes projected by Muhammad. Derived from these suras which related to Christians, the “recognition – denial” attitudes are demonstrating a mutuality, with the recognition or the inclusiveness serve as the foundation for the denial or exclusiveness.
3.2 A Reflection from Malaysia’s Christians

As a Malaysian it is surprise to understand the complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are way beyond imagination. His enmity towards Christians are so profound that people often neglected the complexity and only focused on his enmity towards Christians as their daily application.

For example, the prohibition of using “Allah” in non-Muslims publications – including the Malay Bible – creates a huge controversy among religious communities in Malaysia since 2007. This event creates tensions between Muslim community and Christian community. The event exposes the very issue in Malaysian society – the hostility among religious communities. Malaysia government claims that the language used by Malay speaking Christians to express their faith is too similar with the language used in Islamic religion, which confused some Muslims and resulted in their conversion to Christian. Malaysia authorities then seized more than 20,000 Malay Bibles for their usage of “Allah” to refer “God” in the Bible.

Malaysia churches strongly opposed to the government’s accusation and seizure, hence decided to bring the case to the court. High court judge ruled in favour to Christian in 2010 and immediately 10 churches were vandalized and
one of them gutted by fire. Court of Appeal overturned the ruling at 2013 and forbid Malaysia Churches to use the word “Allah” in all of their publications. Since then Malaysia authority continually seized Malay Bible or indigenous Bible that uses “Allah” from Bible Society of Malaysia.70

In a society where interreligious tension is a norm it is hard to imagine there are more than enmity in Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians. It appears that Muhammad does not intentionally to go against or twists Christian doctrine in order to build his own community. It is more like he has no correct understanding regarding Christian theology and what he knows is what he had been told.

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Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians that shows more amity than enmity is a very good foundation for Christians to understand the true teaching of the Qur’an. It will inspire more Christians to study Muhammad more carefully and put all the prejudice aside. Muhammad’s attitude towards Christians are definitely different than his successors who has a kingdom or government to rule. The hermeneutics can be very bias once it is motivated by politics.

Despite of Muhammad’s inclusive attitude towards Christians, it is necessary to ask ourselves are we ready to accept the prerequisite offered by Muhammad to push for interreligious unity? The Qur’an is ready to accept all who devote themselves to the true God as believers, but is it possible for Christians to join if the Christian Doctrine of Christology and Trinity need to be discarded? The decision might not be positive but bearing in mind the openness is already established by Muhammad, the interreligious dialogue therefore should be done center by the doctrines that were once rejected by Muhammad.
Conclusion

Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians started to emerge right at the beginning of his career as a prophet. Christian related incident such as the invasion of Abraha already recorded in the Qur’an. But Sura 105 is the only sura that projected Christians as a negative example who challenge and sabotage Mecca’s status as pilgrimage center.

Apart from Sura 105, the remaining 7 Meccan Suras all consists a mix attitudes of amity and enmity. To spell his attitudes more precisely, Muhammad projected a combination of attitudes that can be identified as a set of “recognition – denial” attitudes. This set of attitudes pattern can be found in almost every Christian related suras. Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christians are not a monotonous attitude but a complicated combination of different pattern sets of attitudes. The pattern of “recognition – denial” set of attitudes consists minor nuance from sura to sura but all of them still fit in this particular set.
The “recognition – denial” set of attitudes could not be understood as a fix model because the differences of the attitude patterns are crucial. The constitution of different attitude patterns in those “recognition – denial” set of attitudes is decomposable. For example, the pattern of “recognition – denial” set of attitudes in Sura 43 are the combine attitudes of “Denies Jesus’ Divinity but Recognizes Jesus’ Prophethood” while the pattern of “recognition – denial” set of attitudes in Sura 30 is “Recognizing Christians as Believers, Denying the Divinity of Other Gods, Criticizes Religious Division.” The subjects of both recognition and denial in these suras are different. Muhammad recognizes Jesus’ prophethood in Sura 43 but the subject change to “Christians” as believers in Sura 30. Likewise for the denial attitude. Muhammad denies Jesus’ divinity in Sura 43 but the subject denied by Muhammad changes to the divinity of other gods while criticizes the division of religious community at the same time.
The “recognition – denial” set of attitudes emerge slowly throughout the Meccan Suras. A rather constant pattern of “recognition – denial” set of attitudes occurs where four suras share a same pattern of “recognition – denial” set of attitudes. Sura 23, Sura 21, Sura 19, and Sura 6 share the combination of “Recognition of Jesus’ Prophethood, Denial of Jesus’ Divinity, Criticizes Religious Division” attitudes in the texts.

More constant set of “recognition – denial” attitudes is expected to emerge in the Medinan Suras. But to the contrary, none of the Medinan Suras share a same set of “recognition – denial” attitude patterns. Unlike the Meccan Suras with only one sura which do not project the “recognition – denial” attitudes set, there are three out of eight Christian related Medinan Suras that could not be categorized into the “recognition – denial” set of attitudes.
Sura 66, Sura 61, and Sura 9 all possess only one particular attitude related to Christian. Muhammad displays a single attitude of amity or inclusive towards Christian in Sura 66 and Sura 61. He depicts Mary and Jesus as the chosen one by God in Sura 66 while recognizing Jesus’ prophethood in Sura 61 without any enmity. The greatest enmity Muhammad shown to Christians located in Sura 9. His words are hostile against Christians in addition to his denial of Jesus’ divinity and criticizes Christians and their religious authorities with harsh words. Muhammad treated Christians as the absolute religious other in this sura, which violate his inclusiveness towards Christians in all other suras.

The Medinan Suras portraying another set of “recognition – denial” attitudes pattern compares to Meccan Suras. More subjects are dealt in these suras. A combine of four attitudes can be found in three suras: Sura 4, Sura 3, and Sura 2. Longest combination of attitudes found in Sura 5 where there are six different attitudes that constitute the set of “recognition – denial” attitude patterns.
There are twelve out of sixteen Christian related suras that project the “recognition – denial” set of attitudes in total. There are two suras that consist only amity towards Christian and an equal of two suras that consist only enmity towards Christian. A relation of primary and secondary can be spotted between the set of “recognition – denial” attitude patterns. Muhammad’s attitude towards Christian mostly constitute by both recognition and denial.

The denial takes on the recognition as the root to develop and grows. It is to say the denial is only valid with the existence of the recognition. It is the attitude of recognition that allow the denial to be possible for Muhammad. The recognition is the foundation of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christian in this study. He constantly includes Christians into the sphere of “believers” and recognize Jesus as the rightful prophet. Christians are “excess” or “overstep” in their religious belief therefore Muhammad determine to help them to get back to the right path.
Christian community should not equate the enmity shown by Islamic government to Muhammad. Muhammad possess inclusive and amity attitudes towards Christian according to the Qur’an, although the enmity and exclusive attitudes often appear at the same time. But the enmity or exclusiveness in the Qur’an does not provide firm ground for Islamic government to mistreating Christian community because the enmity and exclusive attitudes are subject to the amity and inclusive attitudes. Muslim community or Islamic authority could not ignore the amity and inclusive attitudes shown by Muhammad if they treated the Qur’an seriously.

Recognizing the complexity of Muhammad’s attitudes towards Christian provide Christians with a whole new understanding of Muhammad and the Qur’an. Often times it is the enmity shown by radical Islamic groups that prevent Christians to take an effort to understand the Muslims. This is a very dangerous move because misunderstanding will only grow greater and greater if both communities of faith could not interact. Christians have to realize the enmity shown by radical Islamic groups or even Islamic government does not represent Muhammad and even the true teaching consists in the Qur’an.
Taking effort to study the Qur’an or Islamic religion is critical for Christians. It builds a bridge between two communities, at least creating a common ground for dialogues or discussion to take part if the hermeneutics of the Qur’an have been distorted by political motivation. If there are Muslims or certain groups who show too much of enmity towards Christian, it is not Muhammad’s initial intension but their leader who lead them to this very condition to fit their political motivation. Above all the chaos, it is the amity and inclusiveness shown by Muhammad to serve as a breakthrough point for Christians to communicate with Muslims.
Bibliography


