

Jesus Prophet of Islam

Revised Edition

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and **Ahmad Thomson**



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Surely the similarity of Jesus with Allah is like the similarity of Adam. – He created him from dust, and then said to him: ‘Be!’ and he is.

This is the truth from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt.

(Qur'an: Surat Ali 'Imran – 3: 59-60)

Preface to the Revised Edition

Jesus, Prophet of Islam was originally written between 1975 and 1977. After the death of his wife, Colonel Muhammad 'Ata'ur-Rahim, *alehi rahma*, left everything in Pakistan behind him and came to London to complete his studies on the life of *sayyidina* 'Isa, peace be on him, and to write the book about him which he had always longed to write. Although Colonel Rahim had a good command of the English language and a wonderful sense of humour, his written English was not always grammatically correct. Having been born into a Muslim family and having been brought up as a Muslim, Colonel Rahim had no first-hand experience of what it is like to live and think like a Christian. Since English is my native tongue, and since I had received a Christian education, I was in a position to be of assistance – and had the good fortune to be chosen to help Colonel Rahim with his book.

The days that we spent working together on the growing book – not only structuring the material which Colonel Rahim had already gathered, but also conducting further research, principally in the British Library – were precious days indeed, and we both learned a great deal from each other, not only about the nature and history of Christianity, but also about the nature and history of Islam – and of life itself. Almost every line that came to be written was a source of discussion and argument, and while Colonel Rahim always welcomed my contributions and observations, and often agreed to incorporate them into the text, it was also amicably agreed that he would always have the final say as to what should go and what should stay.

Eventually the book was at last completed, painstakingly typed out by Maryam Toby, may she have peace in her grave, read and re-read for final corrections, finally typeset by Abdal-Hayy Moore and Abu'l-Qasim Spiker, and at last printed, published and distributed. Since that time, the book has rarely been out of print, al-

though the numerous typographical errors and a spurious alternative introduction which were introduced into subsequent editions greatly diminished the quality and content of the first edition.

Although the first edition of the book was, on the whole, well received, one of the few criticisms which was levelled at it from time to time was that it was in places too detailed – and accordingly a little boring – for the general reader. I also recall Colonel Rahim mentioning to me that as far as the chapter entitled *Jesus in the Qur'an* was concerned, there are many more *ayat* in the *Qur'an* that could have been included, especially those which are addressed directly towards the Christians and the 'People of the Book' – a term which refers generally to any group of people whose religion is based to a greater or lesser extent on a divine revelation revealed prior to the *Qur'an*, and which includes especially the Jews and the Christians.

It is with this criticism and with this comment of Colonel Rahim in mind, that I have ventured to revise the first edition – not only by shortening some of the longer passages and by increasing the number of *ayat* which are quoted from the *Qur'an*, but also by including additional material which has come to light during the last eighteen years. This has necessitated a partial re-structuring of the original material, with the addition of an additional chapter entitled *Trinitarian Christianity in Europe*.

In drawing attention to the additional material which appears in this revised edition, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the excerpts which are quoted from Dr. Maurice Bucaille's book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, which had not yet been published when the first edition of *Jesus, Prophet of Islam* was originally printed. Dr. Bucaille's scrupulous and impartial consideration regarding the authenticity, accuracy and reliability of the contents of both the *Bible* and the *Qur'an*, together with his rational analysis of whether or not they correspond with the empirical evidence gathered by the practitioners of science, are both informative and illuminating – and anyone who has not read his book should do so!

In presenting this revised edition to the general public, I hope not only that Colonel Rahim would approve of these changes if he were here to see them, but also that whoever reads this book will learn something of value from it and, above all, enjoy it. I certainly enjoyed helping to write the first edition with Colonel Rahim, and it has been a pleasure to revise the original text after so many years, reminding me as it has of what a very human, human being Colonel Rahim was.

Colonel Rahim's warmth and wisdom were extraordinary, and many of the long discussions which we shared and his sharp observations are still with me today. Anyone who ever had the good fortune to meet Colonel Rahim will remember him with deep affection. He was what his name indicated – a gift from a Compassionate Lord – and this revised edition is dedicated to his memory. May we meet again in the next world, in the Garden!

As with any book written by a human being, there are inevitably shortcomings and deficiencies in this book. Thousands of pages have been read in order that tens may be written. Hopefully this book will nevertheless complement the knowledge which the reader already possesses, giving fresh insight into what may have been unknown, or half-forgotten, or too readily assumed.

It should perhaps be emphasised that the title of this book is not intended to be provocative. It has always been understood by the Muslims at least that the way of life which was embodied by all of the Prophets, may the blessings and peace of God be on them and on their families and companions and true followers, was essentially one and the same life-transaction, grounded in the worship of the One Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that exists, both in the Seen and in the Unseen worlds – the way of Islam. Like all the Prophets before him, Jesus, peace be on him, confirmed the Prophets who had come before him – especially Moses, peace be on him – and foretold the coming of the Prophet who would come after him – Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace – and as with all of the Prophets, the simple way of life that Jesus followed was the way of total submission to his Lord, the way of Islam. When the way of Islam is viewed from this perspective, then it is clear that not only Jesus, but indeed all the Prophets – and especially Muhammad – were Prophets of Islam. It is, when understood in this sense, impossible to make any distinction between them.

This prophetic way of life, the way of Islam, which has always been characterised by suppleness and by balance between outward form and inward content, has always been susceptible to being corrupted in two main ways: either people have made it too rigid, or they have made it too lax. If it is made too rigid, people end up with a system of rules which they then often try to avoid. If it is made too lax, then there are hardly any rules to avoid – but instead there is a lack of clarity which leads inevitably to confusion. Going to either of these two extremes makes it impossible for a human being to fully understand the nature of existence.

Whenever the balance of the middle way that leads between these two extremes has been lost, human society has tended to endlessly oscillate from one extreme to the other, from rigid orthodoxy to mushy liberalism, and back again – until, that is, Allah has sent another Prophet or Messenger to demonstrate what the middle way is and how its balance can be embodied and maintained.

It is in the light of this pattern of behaviour that the history of what became of Jesus's teaching in Europe can be understood, whether it be Paul's abandoning the Law which Jesus specifically said that he had come to uphold – not only the spirit of it, but also the letter of it – or the tyranny of the Mediaeval and Spanish Inquisitions, or the impetus of what has been labelled 'the Reformation', or the reaction to it – the Counter-Reformation, or the liberal all-embracing approach of the present ecumenical movement, or the ruthless genocide of the current Serbian crusaders, to name but a few of the most significant developments that have occurred within the Paulinian Christian religion during the last nineteen centuries.

It should also be emphasised that the underlying objective in writing *Jesus, Prophet of Islam* was always to increase not only the reader's but also the authors' understanding of Jesus, peace be on him – and not merely to enter that arena of argument and debate, which measures 'success' in terms of numbers of converts conscripted, in order to score points against the opposition. If you, the reader, learn as much as the authors did when this book was being written, or even if you simply learn something, or even one thing, of value – then the purpose of this book has been fulfilled.

Finally, I would like to thank my guide and teacher, *Shaykh* Abdal-Qadir al-Murabit, for it was through him that I came to embrace Islam, and it was thanks to him that I came to work with Colonel Rahim, and if it had not been for him, I could not have completed what I had started. *Al-hamdulillahi wa shukrulillah wa la howla wa la quwwata ila bi'llah* – Praise belongs to God and thanks belongs to God and there is no power and no strength except from God. And, as the Prophet Muhammad said, may God bless him and grant him peace, 'If you do not thank people – then you have not thanked God.'

Ahmad Thomson
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Chapter One

The Unitarian View and Christianity

Historical research has shown that the animism and idol worship of primitive peoples in the world is in all cases a regression from an original unitive belief, and that the One-God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam grew up in opposition to many-gods rather than evolving out of them. Thus in any tradition, the pure teaching is to be found at its beginning and what follows is necessarily a decline, and it is from this perspective that the history of Christianity should be viewed. It began with the belief in One God and was then corrupted, and the doctrine of the Trinity came to be accepted. The result was a confusion which led men more and more away from sanity.

In the first century after the disappearance of Jesus, peace be on him, those who followed him continued to affirm the Divine Unity. This is illustrated by the fact that the *Shepherd of Hermas*, written in about 90 AD was regarded as a book of Revelation by the Church. The first of the twelve commandments which it contains begins:

First of all, believe that God is One and that He created all things and organised them and out of what did not exist made all things to be, and He contains all things but alone is Himself uncontained ...¹

According to Theodore Zahn, the article of faith up until about 250 AD was, 'I believe in God, the Almighty.'² Between 180 and 210 AD the word 'Father' was added before 'the Almighty'. This was bitterly contested by a number of the leaders of the Church. Bishop Victor and Bishop Zephysius are on record as condemning this movement, since they regarded it an unthinkable sacrilege to add or subtract any word to the Scriptures.

They opposed the tendency to regard Jesus as divine. They laid great stress on the Unity of God as expressed in the original teachings of Jesus and asserted that although he was a prophet, he was essentially a man like other men, even if highly favoured by his Lord. The same faith was held by the Churches which had sprung up in North Africa and West Asia.

It must always be remembered that Jesus, peace be on him, was sent specifically to the Tribe of Israel – that is, to the twelve tribes of the Tribe of Israel, who were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, who was also known as Israel. The teachings of Jesus were intended for those who claimed to be following Moses, but who no longer had access to his original teachings. Thus Jesus was given knowledge of the original *Torah* which had been revealed to Moses, and he always emphasised that he had come to uphold the law of Moses and not to change it even by one jot or tittle.

As soon as the teachings of Jesus spread beyond the Tribe of Israel, they began to be radically altered, especially in Europe and America, where this process of change has continued without interruption up until the present day, so that now the Christian priesthood caters for women priests as well as men – who are equally ‘free’ to be lesbians or homosexuals, in spite of what the *Bible* has to say about such matters!

Thus as the teaching of Jesus spread out beyond the Holy Land, it came into contact with other cultures and into conflict with those in authority. It began to be assimilated and adapted by these cultures and was also altered to diminish persecution by the rulers. In Greece, especially, it became metamorphosed, both by its being expressed in a new language for the first time, and by its realignment with the ideas and philosophy of that culture. It was the many-gods viewpoint of the Greeks which largely contributed to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, together with the gradual elevation of Jesus by some, notably Paul of Tarsus, from being a Prophet of God to somehow being a separate yet indivisible part of God.

It was only after the Councils of Nicea in 325 AD and of Constantinople in 381 AD that the doctrine of the Trinity was declared to be an essential part of orthodox Christian belief. Even then some of those who signed the creed did not believe in it, as they could find no authority for it in the Scriptures. Athanasius, who is considered to be the father of this creed, was himself not altogether

sure of its truth. He admits that, 'Whenever he forced his understanding to meditate on the divinity of Jesus, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves – that the more he wrote the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts.' At one point he even wrote, 'There are not three but ONE GOD.' His belief in the doctrine of the Trinity was not based so much on conviction as on policy and apparent necessity.

That this historic decision was based just as much on political expediency as on the faulty reasoning of philosophy is shown by the part played by Constantine, the pagan emperor of Rome, who presided over the council of Nicea. The growing communities of Christians were a force whose opposition he had no wish for, who weakened his Empire and whose support would be invaluable in strengthening it. By remodelling Christianity, he hoped to gain the Church's support and at the same time end the confusion which had arisen within it and which was the source of yet more conflict within his Empire.

The process by which he partially achieved this aim may be illustrated by an incident which occurred in the Second World War. Once, as the time for the Muslim festival of the 'Id drew near, propaganda from Tokyo began to concentrate on an 'Id prayer that was going to be held in Singapore, then under Japanese occupation. It would be an historic occasion, it was announced, and its effect would be felt throughout the Muslim world. This sudden emphasis on the prayer abruptly stopped after a few days.

The mystery was solved when a Japanese prisoner was taken in a skirmish and interrogated. He said that Tojo, the head of the Japanese government, was planning to take on the role of the greatest Muslim reformer of modern times. He had a scheme to adjust the teachings of Islam to the requirements of the modern age. It had therefore become necessary, according to him, that the Muslims, instead of facing Makka in prayer, should start facing Tokyo, which would become the future centre of Islam under Tojo. The Muslims refused to accept this reorientation of Islam, and so the whole project was dropped. As a result, there was no 'Id prayer allowed in Singapore that year.

Tojo had realised the importance of Islam and he wanted to use it as a means to further his imperialistic designs, but he was unsuccessful. Constantine succeeded where Tojo failed. Rome replaced Jerusalem as the centre of Pauline Christianity.

This degeneration of the pure One-God teachings of Jesus, which resulted inevitably in the acceptance of a many-god Christianity, never went unchallenged. When, in 325 AD., the doctrine of Trinity was officially proposed as the orthodox Christian doctrine, Arius, one of the leaders of the Christians in North Africa, stood up against the combined might of Constantine and the Catholic Church and reminded them that Jesus had always affirmed the Divine Unity. Constantine tried to crush the troublesome One-God people with all the force and brutality at his command, but he failed. Although, ironically, Constantine himself died a Unitarian, the doctrine of Trinity eventually became officially accepted as the basis of Christianity in Europe.

This doctrine caused much confusion among people, many of whom were told to believe it without trying to understand it. Yet it was not possible to stop people from trying to prove and explain it intellectually. Broadly speaking, three schools of thought developed. The first is associated with St. Augustine, who lived in the early 5th century and was of the view that the doctrine could not be proved but could be illustrated. St. Victor, who lived in the 12th century, is associated with the second school, who believed that the doctrine could both be demonstrated and illustrated. And the 14th century saw the growth of the third school, which believed that the doctrine of Trinity could be neither illustrated nor proved, but should be blindly accepted and believed.

Although the books into which Jesus's teaching had gone were either completely destroyed, suppressed, or changed in order to avoid any blatant contradictions of the doctrine, a good deal of truth remained in the ones which survived, and therefore to sustain belief in the doctrine of Trinity, there was a shift in emphasis from what the Scriptures said to what the leaders of the Church said. The doctrine, it was asserted, was based on the special revelation made to the Church, the 'Bride of Jesus'. Thus, for instance, Fra Fulgentio was reprimanded by the Pope in a letter saying, 'Preaching of the Scriptures is a suspicious thing. He who keeps close to the Scriptures will ruin the Catholic faith.' In his next letter he was more explicit, warning against too much insistence on the Scriptures, '... which is a book if anyone keeps close to, he will quite destroy the Catholic Church.'³

The effective abandoning of the teaching of Jesus was largely due to the complete obscuring of his historical reality. The Church

made their religion not only independent of the Scriptures but also independent of Jesus, so that the man Jesus became confused with a mythological Christ. Belief in Jesus, however, does not necessarily mean belief in a resurrected Christ. Whereas the immediate followers of Jesus had based their lives on his example, Pauline Christianity was based on a belief in Christ after his supposed crucifixion – and the life and teaching of Jesus while he was alive was no longer considered to be so important.

As the established Church distanced itself further and further from the teaching of Jesus, so its leaders became more involved in the affairs of those in authority over the land. As the distinctions between what Jesus had taught and what those in authority desired became blurred and began to merge into each other, the Church, while asserting its separateness from the State, became more and more identified with it, and grew in power. Whereas in the early days the Church was subject to imperial power, once it had compromised itself completely, the position was reversed.

There was always opposition to these deviations from what Jesus had taught. As the Church became more powerful, it became very dangerous to deny the Trinity, and led to almost certain death. Although Luther left the Roman Church, his revolt was only against the authority of the Pope, rather than against the fundamental doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. The result was that he founded a new Church and became its head. All the basic Christian doctrines, however, were accepted, and remained. This led to the establishment of a number of Reformed Churches and sects, but pre-Reformation Christianity remained undisturbed. These two main bodies of the Pauline Church have continued to exist up to the present day.

In North Africa and West Asia the teachings of Arius were accepted by the majority of the people who readily embraced Islam when it later came to them. Because they had held to the doctrine of One-God and the pure teaching of Jesus, they recognised Islam as the truth.

In Europe the thread of Unitarianism within Christianity has never been broken, and the movement has in fact grown in strength, surviving the continual and brutal persecution of the established Churches in the past and their indifference today.

More and more people are now aware that the Christianity they know has little to do with the original teaching of Jesus. During

the last two centuries the research of the historians has left little room for faith in the Christian 'mysteries', but the proven fact that the Christ of the established Church has almost nothing to do with the Jesus of history does not in itself help Christians towards the Truth.

The present dilemma of the Christians is illustrated by what the Church historians of this present century have written. The fundamental difficulty is, as pointed out by Adolf Harnack, that, 'By the fourth century the living Gospel had been masked in Greek philosophy. It was the historians' mission to pluck off the mask and thus reveal how different had been the original contours of the faith beneath.' But then Harnack points out the difficulty of actually fulfilling this task by saying that if the doctrinal mask is worn long enough then it can reshape the face of religion:

The mask acquires a life of its own – the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, infallibility, and all propositions seconding these dogmas, were the product of historic decisions and of situations that might have turned out quite differently ... nevertheless ... early or late, product or reshaping force, this dogma remains what it has been from the beginning, a bad habit of intellectualization which the Christian picked up from the Greek when he fled from the Jews.⁴

Harnack enlarges on his theme in another book, where he observes:

The fourth Gospel does not emanate or profess to emanate from the apostle John, who cannot be taken as an historical authority ... the author of the fourth Gospel acted with sovereign freedom, transposed events and put them in a strange light. He drew up the discussions himself and illustrated great thoughts with imaginary situations.

He further refers to the work of the famous Christian historian, David Strauss, whom he describes as having 'almost destroyed the historic credibility not only of the fourth but also of the first three Gospels as well.'⁵

According to Johannes Lehmann, another historian, the writers of the four accepted Gospels describe a different Jesus from the

one who can be identified by historic reality. Lehmann quotes Heinz Zahrnt who points out the consequences of this:

If historical research could prove that an irreconcilable antithesis exists between the historical Jesus and Christ as preached, and therefore that belief in Jesus has no support in Jesus himself, that would not only be absolutely fatal theologically, as N.A. Dahl says, but would also mean the end of all Christology. Yet I am convinced that even then we theologians would be able to find a way out – was there ever a time when we couldn't? – but we are either lying now or would be lying then.⁶

While these few short quotations illustrate the dilemma Christianity is in today, the words of Zahrnt also demonstrate something far more serious which underlies this: that it is possible to get so involved with the details of what became of Jesus's teaching and the Churches and sects which followed after him, that the original purpose of his teaching is overlooked or forgotten.

Thus Theodore Zahn, for instance, illustrates the bitter conflicts within the established Churches. He points out that the Roman Catholics accuse the Greek Orthodox Church of remodelling the text of the holy Scriptures by additions and subtractions with good and bad intentions, that the Greeks in turn point out that the Catholics themselves in places depart very far from the original text, and that, in spite of their differences, they combine to accuse the non-conformist Christians of deviating from 'the true way' and condemn them as heretics, while the heretics in their turn accuse the Catholics of 'having recoined the Truth like forgers.' He concludes, 'Do not facts support these accusations?'⁷

And in the process, Jesus himself, peace be on him, is completely forgotten. And even those who are aware of the degeneration that has taken place and who wish in all sincerity to return to and live by the original teaching of Jesus are prevented from doing so because the original teaching in its totality has disappeared and is irrecoverable. As Erasmus pointed out:

The ancients philosophised very little about divine things ... Formerly faith was in life rather than in profession of creeds ... When faith came to be in writings rather than in hearts, then there were almost as many

faiths as men. Articles increased and sincerity decreased. Contentions grew hot and love grew cold. The doctrine of Christ which at first knew no hair-splitting came to depend on the aid of philosophy. This was the first stage in the decline of the Church.

Thus the Church was forced to explain what could not be expressed in words, and recourse was taken by both sides to win the support of the Emperor. Erasmus, commenting on this, continued:

The injection of the authority of the Emperor into this affair did not greatly aid the sincerity of faith ... When faith is in the mouth rather than in the heart, when the solid knowledge of sacred Scriptures fails us, nevertheless by terrorisation we drive men to believe what they do not believe, to love what they do not love, to know what they do not know. That which is forced cannot be sincere.⁸

Erasmus understood that the first Christians, the immediate followers of Jesus, had a recognition of the Unity which they never had to express, and that when his teaching spread and conflict between the Churches grew up, then the men of understanding were forced to try and explain their knowledge of Reality. They had by then lost the teaching of Jesus in its totality and the language of Unity that went with it. They only had recourse to the vocabulary and terminology of Greek philosophy which looked not to Unity but to a tripartite view of existence. And so simple and pure trust in Reality became inevitably couched in a language foreign to Jesus, and led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, with the deification of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Confusion and schism were the inevitable results which followed once people lost sight of the Unity of Existence.

This understanding is essential for anyone who wants to know who Jesus was and what he really taught, as is the realisation that once people no longer have recourse to all the everyday actions of a Prophet, which are no less than the embodiment of his teaching, then they are in loss, whether they believe in the doctrine of the Trinity or vocally affirm the Divine Unity.

