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JESUS AS GOD’S WORD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN ISLAMIC AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES

Grant R. Kynaston*

Abstract: Both the Christian New Testament and the Qur’ān obscurely identify the figure of Jesus with the ‘Word’. While the term’s Biblical use is well-treated by, and indeed central to, Christological theology, modern treatments of the Islamic model are often reductive, refracted through Christian understandings. This article seeks to provide a more holistic account of Jesus’ title in Islam, highlighting the nuances in the term’s usage through a comparative framework. It considers the title’s connotations in Christianity and Islam, and how each conceptualised and developed them separately. This article concludes that, in both traditions, the term links Jesus to God’s revelation, and to His creative capacity; however, the religions’ distinct theological axioms differentiate the term’s true signification. Christianity considers these elements of divinity directly incarnated in Jesus, through hypostasis, whereas Islamic theology regards the title as a connotative appellation, applying these attributes of God to the Prophet Jesus only descriptively and contingently. This disparity demonstrates the distinct theological approaches taken in Christianity and Islam – obtaining different results, although applied to a notionally similar problem – as well as the importance of considering their intellectual traditions independently.

Keywords: *Jesus; theology; logos; Qur’anic tafsīr; Christology*

INTRODUCTION

As Räsänen wrote in 1980, “the Qur’ān must be explained by the Qur’ān and not by anything else.”¹ By the time of the Qur’ān’s revelation, Christianity had developed a complex ‘Christology’, seeking to explain the theological nature of Jesus² as presented in the Christian New Testament. A key element of this discourse consisted of exegetic analysis of the opening to the Gospel of John, in which Jesus is obscurely identified with the ‘Word’.³ Notably, this same title is found in the Qur’ān: Jesus is referred to as ‘*kalimah*’ in three verses,⁴ and

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¹ Heikki Räsänen, “The Portrait of Jesus in the Qur’ān: Reflection of a Biblical Scholar,” *The Muslim World* 70 (1980): 124.

² Throughout this article, the name ‘Jesus’ refers to both the Jesus of the Christian New Testament (Greek: *Iēsous*) and the Prophet Jesus in the Qur’ān (Arabic: *Īsā*). While each name has distinct connotations, each text refers to the same notional figure. Similarly, both the Christian *Mariam/Maria* and the Qur’anic *Maryam* are referred to as ‘Mary’, and both the Christian and Islamic conceptions of God/Allāh are referred to as ‘God’.

³ John 1:1-14.

⁴ Q 3:39, 3:45, 4:171 [Q = Qur’ān].

elsewhere is given the epithet ‘*kalimatuh* [i.e. *kalimat Allāh*]’. A common Christian approach identifies the Qur’anic terminology with the Johannine expression, and so polemically argues that the Qur’ān reveals Jesus’ divinity: thus, Marracius writes in the 17th century that “Christ is called the Word of God in the Qur’ān and by the Muslims... and by this name it is shown that he is not apart from God, as an action external to Him, but rather, he is a life-giving action from within Him.”⁵ However, this view fails to recognise the theological context and exegesis provided by the Qur’ān itself. This article seeks to delimit a uniquely Islamic conception of Jesus as Word, in juxtaposition to the Christian perspective. After reviewing the modern and classical literature on the topic, it first offers a treatment of the Christian concept of the Word in its historical context. Turning to Islam, it addresses the semantic range of the term ‘*kalimah*’ in the Qur’ān, and its specific usage in those verses pertaining to Jesus. On this basis, it proceeds to analyse the Islamic perspectives on the appellation’s meaning as discussed in the *tafsīr* texts, as well as these perspectives’ broader theological connotations. Overall, this article concludes that, although both Christian and Islamic traditions use the term to denote God’s creativity and revelation, the Islamic concept of *kalimah* eschews Christian hypostasis; rather, the Qur’ān favours connotative appellation, which, through indirect reference, attaches contingently to Jesus those features of God which Christianity considers directly incarnated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within Christianity, the centrality of Jesus has occasioned extensive Christological accounts examining his identification with the Word – ‘*logos*’ in Koine Greek – from the earliest days of the Church. The first extant extra-biblical commentary is by Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108), in his *Epistle to the Magnesians*,⁶ and the concept is explored with basic exegesis in the early writings by, among others, Justin Martyr (d. 165),⁷ Theophilus (d. 180),⁸ Athenagoras (d. 190),⁹ and Irenaeus (d. 202).¹⁰ This line of enquiry still occasions great academic interest in the modern period, and in particular, two key 20th century works provide expansive appraisals of Christological concepts. The first is Cullmann’s 1957 book *Christologie des Neuen Testaments* [“The Christology of the New Testament”], which was translated into English two years later.¹¹ This authoritative work examines comprehensively the full gamut of Christological expression, and categorises Christ’s titles. Specifically, Cullmann analyses those titles which refer to Jesus’ earthy, present, and future work, as well as those which refer to his pre-existence; pertinently, Cullmann here investigates “Jesus the Word” in a dedicated

⁵ Ludovicus Marracius, *Prodromus ad refutationem Corani*, 3.18.63: “...Christum vocari ab Alcorano et Mahumetanis Verbum Dei... et his nominibus ostendi non esse a Deo, ut opera ad extra, sed ut actus vitales ad intra.” All translations from the Christian Bible are from the New International Version (NIV). Otherwise, all other translations are by the present author, unless otherwise noted. For another example of Christian polemic, see Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1912), 8.

⁶ Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians*, 8.2: “...[he] who is His Word, proceeding from silence.”

⁷ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 61, 128-9.

⁸ Theophilus, *To Autolytus*, 1.7, 2.10, 15, 22.

⁹ Athenagoras, *Plea for the Christians*, 10, 18, 24.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 6, 45-7, 53, 55; *Adversus Haereses*, 2.25.3, 2.30.9, 3.8.3, 4.5.2-3, 4.6.2, 4.6.5, 5.22.1.

¹¹ Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959).

section.¹² The second is the work of Bultmann: also writing in German, he applies a similarly exegetic approach to Christological notions, and his 1926 book *Jesus*, translated into English with the new title *Jesus and the Word* in 1934, examines the various themes in the teachings and message of Jesus as reported in the New Testament.¹³ While recent years have seen more scholarship focussing more on the notion of the ‘historical Jesus’ than Christology *per se*, general academic works on the topic have subsisted, including, among others, Bockmuehl’s 2001 edited companion, including essays from leading scholars,¹⁴ Higton and Ford’s 2002 critical collection of readings,¹⁵ and more specifically on Jesus as revelation, Dotolo’s 2006 treatment.¹⁶

Islamic scholarship, however, lacks an equivalent theological discipline of ‘Christology’ regarding the Prophet Jesus. As such, in the classical tradition, the notion of Jesus as *kalimah* was explored primarily in *tafsīr* texts: the relevant Qur’anic verses are treated in all the major commentaries throughout Islamic scholarship, including those by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923),¹⁷ al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144),¹⁸ al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210),¹⁹ and the Jalālayn (9th/15th century).²⁰ From the beginning of the 20th century, however, Western scholarship began to apply the techniques of Christology to Jesus in Islam, producing a number of comprehensive works.²¹ However, these were typically comparative, interpreting the Islamic prophet in opposition to, or through the lens of, the Christian model. The first such work in English was Zwemer’s 1912 book *The Moslem Christ*,²² and this was followed by similar texts by Robson,²³ Parrinder,²⁴ and Cragg.²⁵ Of particular note, however, is Räsänen’s 1971 German monograph, *Das Koranische Jesusbild: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Korans* [“The Qur’anic Depiction of Jesus: A Contribution on the Qur’ān’s Theology”], which strives to provide a comprehensive account of Jesus’ depiction in the Qur’ān derived only from the Islamic sources.²⁶ Indeed, in

¹² Ibid., 249-69.

¹³ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1934). See also Rudolf Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (London: SCM Press, 1969).

¹⁴ Markus Bockmuehl, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Jesus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ David F. Ford and Mike Higton, *Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Carmelo Dotolo, *The Christian Revelation: Word, Event and Mystery* (Aurora, CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2006).

¹⁷ Abū Ja’far Muḥammad ibn Ja’ir al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān* [“Collection of Statements on the Interpretation of the Qur’ān”] (Cairo, 1904).

¹⁸ Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl* [“The Revealer of the Truths of Revelation”] (Cairo, 1935).

¹⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maḥātib al-ghayb* [“Keys to the Unseen”] (Cairo, 1906).

²⁰ Jalālayn (Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī), *Tafsīr* [“Interpretation”] (Cairo, [undated]).

²¹ For more comprehensive bibliographies, see Georges C. Anawati, “‘Īsā,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Don Wisner, *The Islamic Jesus: An Annotated Bibliography of Sources in English and French* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977).

²² Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*. Zwemer’s work was preceded in German by Gerock (1839) and Rosch (1876), and in French by Manneval (1867), Sayous (1880) and Blochet (1903) (cited in Anawati, “‘Īsā”).

²³ James Robson, *Christ in Islam* (London: John Murray, 1929).

²⁴ Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1965).

²⁵ Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985).

²⁶ Heikki Räsänen, *Das Koranische Jesusbild: Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Korans* [“The Qur’anic Depiction of Jesus: A Contribution on the Qur’ān’s Theology”] (Helsinki: Schriften der Finnischen Gesellschaft für Missiologie und Ökumenik XX, 1971).

recent years, scholarly works with a less comparative focus have come to the fore: for example, Khalidi's 2001 book *The Muslim Jesus* offers a collection of Jesus' reported sayings sourced solely from within the Muslim tradition, with Christian echoes only noted where relevant.²⁷ However, none of these works consider the Qur'ān's application of *kalimah* to Jesus in great detail, merely appending brief analyses to the broader discussion. A key exception is the 1948 monograph by O'Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God*.²⁸ While the author explicitly adopts a Christian perspective, filtering his analysis through the putative "influence exercised by Christianity on the founder of the last world-religion",²⁹ his examination of the Qur'anic notion of *kalimah* in light of the Christian *logos* evinces a rigorous textual approach.

Recently, scholars have sought to deconstruct the comparative, sometimes polemical, interpretative dynamic regarding Jesus in the Christian and Islamic traditions. This trend is evident in some modern treatments of Jesus in Islam – such as Cragg's work, noted above, and later in Leirvik's 2010 book³⁰ – but in recent years this comparative approach to Jesus has become the focus of a separate body of work: discussions of Christian-Muslim dialogue on Jesus are central to both Siddiqui's 2013 book *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*,³¹ and Beaumont and Singh's 2018 book *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*.³² This trend arises within a broader renewed interest in comparative Christian-Muslim theology, explored in recent works by Goddard,³³ Zein,³⁴ and Renard.³⁵ As such, this article's analysis is within the recent comparative, anti-polemical trend in theological studies. The present study seeks to draw out the key themes inherent in the appellation of 'Word', as it developed in each tradition. Importantly, therefore, it begins with the premise that, while interreligious dialogue has always been a central feature to both Christianity and Islam, each tradition has an essentially distinct, internally developed approach to Jesus in general, and to this title in particular.

CHRISTIANITY: JESUS AS THE *LOGOS*

The Gospel of John in the New Testament opens with the following powerful statement of theological doctrine:³⁶

1:1 In the beginning was the Word ("*logos*"), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... 14 The Word became flesh

²⁷ Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Thomas O'Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept of the Word of God* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1948).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰ Oddbørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (London: Continuum, 2010).

³¹ Mona Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

³² Ivor Mark Beaumont and David Emmanuel Singh, *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018).

³³ Hugh Goddard, *Muslim Perceptions of Christianity* (London: Grey Seal, 1996).

³⁴ M. Faruk Zein, *Christianity, Islam and Orientalism* (London: Saqi, 2003).

³⁵ John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

³⁶ John 1:1-3, 1:14.

and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

This personification of the *logos* is not common in the New Testament, appearing in only two other locations.³⁷ The first is at the opening of 1 John,³⁸ an epistle thought by scholars to be written by the author of the Gospel:³⁹

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

The second is in the Book of Revelation: “He [the Heavenly Warrior, Jesus] is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.”⁴⁰ In all of these cases, there is an identification between the abstracted principle of the Word, and Jesus. Moreover, in John’s Gospel and epistle, this Word is given certain characteristics: the Word is co-eternal with God (albeit in a complex ontological relationship); the Word relates to creation and to life; and the Word is made tangible in the human form of Jesus. To coalesce these qualities into theological statements, it is necessary to proceed in two stages, first analysing the concept’s history in prior religious philosophy, before discussing the concept’s application to Jesus in the Gospel.

Earlier Philosophical Treatments of the Logos

John’s use of this terminology must be read in light of its contemporaneous signification: in opening with the term ‘Word’ without further context, the Gospel writer presumes prior familiarity with the concept. The term’s direct forebear is the equivalent concept in Hellenistic Judaism, propounded most influentially by Philo of Alexandria (d. 50). However, Philo’s position too must be considered with regard to the contextual viewpoints that underlie it. In his seminal study, Cullmann identifies two such perspectives.⁴¹ The earlier is that which he describes as the “genuine Old Testament form”,⁴² the *davar Yahweh* referred to throughout the Hebrew Bible.⁴³ This Word is fundamentally creative and self-reflective: it is used to describe the creative commands God gives in Genesis 1,⁴⁴ and so mediates between God and His Creation. Similarly, the Psalms refer to the Word’s creative capacity (“By the word of the Lord, the heavens were made”),⁴⁵ as well as its effect on creation (“He [God] sent out his word and

³⁷ See Cullmann, *Christology*, 249.

³⁸ 1 John 1.

³⁹ Stephen Harris, *Understanding the Bible* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1985) 355-356. Accordingly, throughout this article, ‘John’ is used to refer to the author of both Gospel and epistle, but without drawing any conclusions on their historical identity.

⁴⁰ Rev. 19:13.

⁴¹ See generally Cullmann, *Christology*, 251-8.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴³ See William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 67-68, def. 4.

⁴⁴ Gen. 1:3: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

⁴⁵ Ps. 33:6.

healed them”).⁴⁶ Notably, however, this concept is not personified: it is but an instrumentality of God.⁴⁷ Cullmann summarises this usage as “the side of God turned towards the world.”⁴⁸

This is quite distinct from the second perspective, which finds its roots in Greek philosophy, particularly in the work of the Stoic philosopher Zeno of Citium (4th-3rd century BCE), drawing on the earlier work of Heraclitus (6th-5th century BCE). In these earlier Greek authors, the term ‘*logos*’ connotes reasoning as abstracted concept: it described the cosmic law which pervaded the universe, and which was also reflected in human intellect.⁴⁹ Thus, Heraclitus writes that “all things happen according to this *logos*”, and that “the *logos* is common.”⁵⁰ It was only this principle, the philosophers held, that acted upon inanimate matter, and so was responsible for all activity in the universe. The Stoic idea of a ‘world soul’, however, is quite alien to the Johannine articulation: it is fundamentally abstract – if not pantheistic – and impersonal.

Both perspectives, however, informed Philo’s work, which saw the Word reach its most complete articulation prior to John’s writings.⁵¹ Hellenistic Jewish scholars had already equated the Word with Wisdom as a guiding principle for the Universe, considering it a divine hypostasis: as such, they wrote of the ‘Word’, rather than ‘the Word of God’, personifying it as God’s agent.⁵² Indeed, in the Book of Wisdom, the author refers to “Your all-powerful Word.”⁵³ However, Philo reintroduced the feature of *logos* connoting the mediation between man and God: while the Stoic universalism pervades his writing,⁵⁴ *logos* serves as Philo’s solution to the theological problem of bridging transcendence and immanence.⁵⁵ Mediation requires that *logos* be somehow fundamental to the Universe; thus, following the Stoics, Philo writes that “[*logos*] is neither uncreated, like God, nor created, like us.”⁵⁶ At the time of the composition of John’s Gospel, therefore, the term ‘Word’ bears connotations of God’s direct creative power, as well as His mechanism for guiding the Universe as a whole. Both of these are reflected in Philo’s conception of the Word as the mediating factor between God and His Creation.

⁴⁶ Ps. 107:20.

⁴⁷ Cf. Isa. 55:10-11, where God’s word is compared in pseudo-personification with the force of rain and snow.

⁴⁸ Cullmann, *Christology*, 255.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 251. See also Jonas Adelin Jørgensen, “‘Word of God’ and ‘Spirit of God’ in Christian and Islamic Christologies: A Starting Point for Interreligious Dialogue?” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 20, no. 4 (2009): 391. In this sense, *logos* is most like the Islamic notion of *ḥikmah*, considered below.

⁵⁰ See G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1957) 187-8, fr. 197, 198.

⁵¹ Harris, *Understanding the Bible*, 302-10; O’Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept*, 12.

⁵² Jørgensen, “‘Word of God’ and ‘Spirit of God’,” 391 n 12; Cullmann, *Christology*, 256-7. See, on Wisdom, Prov. 8:22-26; Wisd. 7:26.

⁵³ Wisd. 18:15.

⁵⁴ Cullmann, *Christology*, 256. See also H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 1057-9 ‘*logos*’, def. X.

⁵⁵ O’Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept*, 12.

⁵⁶ See J. Lebreton, *Les origines du dogme de la Trinité* [“The Origins of the Dogma of the Trinity”] (Paris: G. Beanchesne, 1927) 249. This conclusion reflects the early Islamic disputes between the Mu’tazilites and Ash‘arites, regarding the created nature of God’s attributes: see further below on how this dispute related to *kalām* in particular.

Identifying Jesus with Logos

John's account of the Word, while informed by his predecessors, is distinct in one vital regard: the phenomenon he describes has become incarnate.⁵⁷ As such, while features of pre-Christian thought contextualise the Biblical accounts, their significance is profoundly affected by their humanation in Jesus. Two primary elements of this perspective – though inextricably linked – are considered separately here: the first is the notion of the Word as God's revelation, and the second the Word as the divine person, in hypostasis.

The first of these readings regards the Word as an instance of the divine utterance. In the first instance, this connotes the *content* of divine revelation, the instructions God gives to His Prophets. Accordingly, in other books of the New Testament, the phrase "*ho logos tou theou*" ("the Word of God") regularly refers to the preaching of the Gospel itself; for example, in the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel writer uses the term of Jesus' mission: "They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left... and he preached the word ("*ton logon*") to them."⁵⁸ In the Gospel of John itself, the word '*logos*' commonly connotes a concrete word or saying of Jesus,⁵⁹ as well as the Gospel as a whole.⁶⁰ The significance of the incarnation of the Word, then, is in the humanation of revelation itself: Jesus does not receive and proclaim divine revelation; rather, he *embodies* it.⁶¹ In Christian thought, this distinguishes Jesus from the Prophet Moses, through whom God spoke by passing down to him His Law;⁶² Jesus rather *is* God's Word, through whom and by whom God speaks.⁶³ Such a mode of revelation is qualitatively distinct, as it effectively bridges the gap between man and God. This is expressed clearly by Dotolo:⁶⁴

To understand revelation as the word of God means to affirm that listening is a decisive experience, without which existence is incapable of opening itself to the encounter with God and with other human beings.

This sentiment is also captured in the earlier writings of Irenaeus:⁶⁵

By Law and Prophets, the Word proclaimed himself and the Father: and the whole people alike heard; but all did not believe. And through this same Word, made visible and tangible, the Father was displayed, although all did not believe in him

This is highly reminiscent of Philo's conception of the Word as a mode of mediation: by becoming human, the Word of God's revelation directly interacts with mankind, and in so doing, proclaims the central Christian call to repentance.

⁵⁷ John 1:14; 1 John 1:1.

⁵⁸ Mark 2:2. See also Gal. 6:6; Col. 4:3; Mark 4:14ff, 8:32; Luke 1:2; Acts 4:29, 4:31, 8:4, 10:44, 16:6.

⁵⁹ See John 2:22, 19:8.

⁶⁰ John 17:14.

⁶¹ Beaumont and Singh, *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*, 58.

⁶² See John 1:17-18.

⁶³ Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, 53; Cullmann, *Christology*, 259; Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding*, 291.

⁶⁴ See Dotolo, *The Christian Revelation*, i-ii.

⁶⁵ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.6.5, quoted in Beaumont and Singh, *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*, 58.

The second reading concerns hypostasis. In both his Gospel and his epistle, John prefaces his identification of Jesus and *logos* with a reference to its eternal nature, using the words “*en archēi*” (“in the beginning”) or “*ap’ archēs*” (“from the beginning”) at the opening of each text.⁶⁶ Beaumont and Singh recognise the clear intertextuality with the opening of the Book of Genesis:⁶⁷ “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”⁶⁸ Indeed, Genesis in the Septuagint – the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament, dated to the 3rd century BCE – opens with the same Greek collocation as John’s Gospel, “*en archēi*”.⁶⁹ Thus, John emphasises the co-eternal nature of the Word and God, and thereby adopts the identification of the Word with God’s very being, an idea already prevalent among Hellenistic Jewish philosophers. Indeed, John does not write ‘*ho logos tou theou*’ in his Gospel’s prologue, but rather follows the philosophers in referring to the Word *in abstracto*.⁷⁰ The content of this identity looks back to the Stoic concept of universalism: God exercises entire control over His Creation in a personal capacity, and this capacity is conceptualised as His *logos*, a form of underlying natural law. As Cullmann notes, this use of the Word constitutes “the utilisation of contemporary speculations about divine hypostasis to express not a syncretistic but a genuine Christian universalism.”⁷¹ Within this universalism – God’s governance of all Creation – falls the revelatory function already addressed, as does the creative act: *logos* regularly refers to creation, both in the epistles,⁷² and in the Gospel of John itself, as quoted above.⁷³ This draws on the broader intertextuality with the Book of Genesis, and refers by extension to the Old Testament concept of the creative *davar Yahweh*.

Returning to the Word’s co-eternality with God, Christian thought took this to connote co-existence. Accordingly, the Word, in Christian orthodoxy, is neither created (as the Arians held) nor divine emanation (per Origen).⁷⁴ Rather, it is merely *of* God, a feature of God’s Existence. This borrows further from Philo’s work: the Word is cast as a fundamental feature of the Universe in the manner of God Himself, although, contrary to Philo, one that is uncreated. Accordingly, on this reading, the incarnation of the Word is the very representation of God among mankind – the divine person made immanent – and so is, in a fundamental sense, *both* created *and* uncreated.⁷⁵ John acknowledges this, writing: “No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.”⁷⁶ The Gospel writer also distinguishes this existential element of the Word from its revelatory element: John 1:1 looks to the Word as the *being* of God, while John 1:14 concerns the *function*

⁶⁶ John 1:1; 1 John 1:1. See also John 1:2.

⁶⁷ Beaumont and Singh, *Jesus in Muslim-Christian Conversation*, 55.

⁶⁸ Gen. 1:1.

⁶⁹ Note that “*en tēi archēi*” (i.e. with the definite article) was another, almost synonymous, collocation available to the Gospel writer.

⁷⁰ Cullmann, *Christology*, 262-3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁷² 2 Peter 3:5, 3:7.

⁷³ John 1:3.

⁷⁴ Cullmann, *Christology*, 265.

⁷⁵ O’Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept*, 14; Jørgensen, “‘Word of God’ and ‘Spirit of God’,” 391.

⁷⁶ John 1:18.

of the Word in revelation or, by extension, in creation.⁷⁷ This, in turn, offers a resolution to the paradox at the heart of John's Christology, that the Word both is *with* God (“*ho logos ēn pros ton theon*”) and *is* God (“*theos ēn ho logos*”).⁷⁸ The Word is coterminous with God insofar as they are co-existent, but God is *more* than the Word, as He is able to operate outside of that capacity conferred by *logos*; in other words, God may act otherwise than through creation, revelation, or universal governance more generally. Significantly, this is confirmed in the following saying of Jesus – the incarnate *logos* – as reported by John: “*ho Patēr meizōn mou estin*” (“The Father is greater than I.”)⁷⁹

To conclude, the Word according to Christian orthodoxy has two elements. First, it is God's revelation, communicated through His Prophets and, subsequently, incarnated in Jesus, such that Jesus' life *becomes* revelation. Second, and in a broader sense, it is God's capacity to govern the Universe, through – among other means – creation, natural law and revelation. This broader sense goes to God's very being, which is organised in a hypostatic relationship, actualised on earth in the Word's incarnation as Jesus.

ISLAM: JESUS AS *KALIMAH*

About five centuries after John wrote his Gospel, Qur'anic material was revealed referring to Jesus – the same notional figure – granting him the same title, ‘*kalimah*’. However, the Qur'ān sets this terminology within a very distinct theological setting, such that the term's connotations are necessarily different. This article first explores the distinct semantic range of the word *kalimah* in the Arabic of the Qur'ān. It then proceeds to analyse the approaches taken by *tafsīr* scholars in interpreting the term as applied to Jesus. This discussion is contextualised against broader theological concerns, and compared with the Christian concepts of which they are reminiscent.

The Qur'anic Terminology

It is necessary, in the first instance, to identify the lexical significance of the term under examination. The Arabic word *kalimah* is derived from the trilateral stem *kāf - lām - fā*, which appears 75 times in the Qur'ān.⁸⁰ This root has the base meaning of ‘speech’ or ‘expression’.⁸¹ It occurs 24 times as a verb (‘to speak’),⁸² and once as a *maṣdar*.⁸³ Two discrete nouns are formed from the root: *kalām*, which appears four times,⁸⁴ and *kalimah* – the subject of this

⁷⁷ Cullmann, *Christology*, 265.

⁷⁸ John 1:1.

⁷⁹ John 14:28.

⁸⁰ For all the statistical analyses of Qur'anic Arabic in this article, the author has relied on the following tool: “Quran Dictionary,” The Quranic Arabic Corpus, accessed September 21, 2018, <http://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp>.

⁸¹ Abdul Mannan Omar, *Dictionary of the Holy Qur'ān* (Noor Foundation International, 2005) 496.

⁸² 20 times in Form II (*kallama*): Q 2:118, 2:174, 2:253, 2:174, 2:253, 3:41, 3:46, 3:77, 4:164, 5:110, 6:111, 7:148, 12:54, 13:31, 19:10, 19:26, 19:29, 23:108, 27:82, 36:65, 45:51. Four times in Form V (*takallama*): Q 11:105, 24:16, 30:35, 78:38.

⁸³ Form II (*taklīm*): Q 4:164.

⁸⁴ Q 2:75, 7:144, 9:6, 48:15.

study – which appears 28 times in the singular,⁸⁵ 14 times in the sound plural *kalimāt*,⁸⁶ and four times in the broken plural *kalim*.⁸⁷ Turning first to the term *kalām*, the use of the singular noun in the Qu’rān connotes only revelation, twice of the Torah, and twice of the Qu’rān itself. In three of the four cases, it is collocated as ‘*kalām Allāh*’, and in two of these it is paired with the verb *sama’a*.⁸⁸ Thus, the term seems to refer to the revelation as delivered orally, rather than as written down. In the broken plural of the noun *kalimah* – *kalim* – the sense is once again of words of revelation: in three of the four instances, it is collocated as part of the phrase “*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima min ba’di/’an mawāḍi’ih*” (“they distort words from their proper meanings”), in each case concerning the covenant made with the Jews.⁸⁹ Only once does *kalim* refer merely to concrete words.⁹⁰ The sound plural *kalimāt*, however, has a broader semantic range. Its semantic range encapsulates two main areas: first, the words of revelation – both written,⁹¹ and revealed orally⁹² – or divine inspiration – such as to Mary;⁹³ and second, God’s undertakings, invariably in the collocation “*lā mubaddila/tabdīla li-kalimāti Allāh*” (“there is no changing God’s words”).⁹⁴ Thus, in these forms, there is also a clear emphasis in the pattern of usage: the words are regularly those of God Himself, often in the sense of revelation.

The singular *kalimah* bears a greater range of connotations. O’Shaughnessy usefully categorises these into three main categories (excluding those pertaining to Jesus).⁹⁵ The first category – the most common by far, at half of all usages – conveys God’s divine decree or command. This decree is either granting victory or bounty to the Muslims;⁹⁶ the decree of judgement on the Day of Resurrection – often in the collocation “*ḥaqqat kalimatu ... ‘alá...*”⁹⁷ – or the decree delaying requital until that Day – often in the collocation “*wa-law lā kalimatun sabaqat min rabbik*”.⁹⁸ The second most common category is its use to refer to the profession of belief. This meaning occurs six times, and twice in a collocation referring to the *shahādah* in particular: once as “*kalimatan bāqiyah*”,⁹⁹ and once as “*kalimata al-taqwā*”.¹⁰⁰ The final category are the three remaining miscellaneous usages: at Q 3:64, it means ‘agreement’; at Q 18:5, ‘statement’; and at Q 23:100, a ‘mere word’, said in vain. Nonetheless, once again, the word *kalimah* is regularly referable back to God, denoting His decree or the profession of His

⁸⁵ Q 3:39, 3:45, 3:64, 4:171, 6:115, 7:137, 9:40 (twice), 9:74, 10:19, 10:33, 10:96, 11:110, 11:119, 14:24, 14:26, 18:5, 20:129, 23:100, 37:171, 39:19, 39:71, 40:6, 41:45, 42:21, 43:28, 48:26.

⁸⁶ Q 2:37, 2:124, 6:34, 6:115, 7:158, 8:7, 10:64, 10:82, 18:27, 18:109 (twice), 31:27, 42:24, 66:12.

⁸⁷ Q 4:46, 5:13, 5:41, 35:10.

⁸⁸ Q 2:75, 9:6.

⁸⁹ Q 5:41 reads “*min ba’d*”, while Q 4:46 and 5:13 both read “*an*”. Note that all *tashkīl*, in particular those reflecting *i’rāb*, are retained in the transliteration of direct quotations from the Qu’rān.

⁹⁰ Q 35:10.

⁹¹ See, e.g., both uses in Q 8:109.

⁹² See, e.g. Q 7:158.

⁹³ Q 66:12.

⁹⁴ Q 6:34, 6:115, Q 10:64, Q 18:27.

⁹⁵ O’Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept*, 17-9. Note, however, that O’Shaughnessy’s work regularly cites the incorrect verse number. As such, all pinpoint references have been collected by the present author.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Q 37:171, 7:137.

⁹⁷ Q 10:33, 39:19, 39:71, 40:6.

⁹⁸ Six times: Q 10:19, 11:110, 20:129, 37:171, 41:45, 42:21.

⁹⁹ Q 43:28.

¹⁰⁰ Q 48:26.

religion. Taken jointly with the meanings of the word in the plural, the word's semantic range typically connotes acts of divine speech, rather than human words or sayings.

It is in this context that one must situate a reading of the three verses which feature the singular noun *kalimah* referring to Jesus. These verses are centrally relevant to this study, and are worth quoting at length:

Q 3:39: *Fa-nādat'hu al-malā'ikatu wa-huwa qa'ā'imun yuṣallī fī al-mihrābi anna Allāha yubashshiruka bi-Yahyá muṣaddiqan bi-kalimatin min Allāhi wa-sayyidan wa-ḥaṣūran wa-nabiyyan min al-ṣāliḥīn.*

Q 3:45: *Idh qālat al-malā'ikatu yā Maryamu inna Allāha yubashshiruki bi-kalimatin minhu ismuhu al-masīhu 'Īsá ibnu Maryama wajīhan fī al-dunyā wa-al-akhirati wa-min al-muqarribīn.*

Q 4:171: *Yā ahla al-kitābi lā taghlū fī dīnikum wa-lā taqūlū 'alā Allāhi illā al-ḥaqq. Innamā al-masīhu 'Īsá ibnu Maryama rasūlu Allāhi wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā Maryama wa-rūḥun minhu fa-āminū billāhi wa-rusulihī wa-lā taqūlū thalāthah...*

Two linguistic comments must be made before addressing these verses' meaning. First, in both Q 3:39 and Q 3:45, the word *kalimah* is indefinite, evident in its nunation. This may be significantly compared with the Christian usage: there, where the Word was referred to without direct reference to God – that is, not as 'His Word' or 'God's Word' – it was invariably accompanied by the *definite* article (i.e. "ho logos"). This indicates *prima facie* that the explicit personification of the Word found in Hellenistic Judaism and John's Gospel is not exhibited here. Second, the possessive pronoun attached to "ismuh" in Q 3:45 is masculine singular, rather than the feminine singular expected after the feminine noun *kalimah*. This irregularity can be seen by comparison with Q 4:171, where the pronoun attached to the verb in "alqāhā" is feminine, referring directly to "kalimatuh". This indicates that, while not personified *per se*, the term 'kalimah' does indeed refer to Jesus: the use of the masculine pronoun indicates a two-layered analysis of *kalimah*, with "ismuh" referring to a male person – namely, Jesus – that underlies the grammatically feminine 'word'. This ground alone is sufficient to refute the conjecture of al-Ṭabarī, that *kalimah* denotes nothing more than the concrete words of the angel's message to Mary.¹⁰¹ While, as noted above, *kalimah* can refer to specific occasions of divine speech, this cannot be the case here. Indeed, the identity of *kalimah* and Jesus is confirmed also at Q 4:171, by the apposition of "kalimatuh" and "'Īsá", both in the nominative case. al-Ṭabarī's argument, that *kalimah* means 'message' even in this later verse,¹⁰² is equally untenable: the term is included in a list of appellations, and the verb "alqā" is not usually used of delivering a message.¹⁰³

Finally, it is worth noting that this language was also used by the Prophet Muḥammad writing in his personal capacity. One example is found in his letter to Armah, the Christian Negus of Abyssinia, in which Ibn Ishāq reports he wrote: "wa-ashhadu anna 'Īsá ibna

¹⁰¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3.168-9. See also Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 33.

¹⁰² al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 6.21.

¹⁰³ See Omar, *Dictionary*, 516.

*Maryama rūḥu Allāhi wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā Maryam...*¹⁰⁴ Here, the Prophet references the Qurʾān directly – in particular, Q 4:171 – but replaces the collocation ‘*rasūl Allāh*’ with ‘*rūḥ Allāh*’: this refers to Jesus’ creation by the life-giving spirit of God,¹⁰⁵ as well as his capacity as the spirit’s vehicle.¹⁰⁶ This latter notion is given content at Q 2:253: “*wa-ataynā ʿĪsā ibna Maryama al-bayyināti wa-ayyadnāhu birūḥi al-quḍus.*” Accordingly, the *rūḥ* is properly distinct from, and independent of, Jesus: by inhabiting him, it merely connotes the divine assistance God offered Jesus in his communication of revelation.

Exegesis of the Kalimah-Jesus Verses

Turning to the exegesis of these verses, it is important to re-emphasise here the importance of conducting this analysis by reference only to the Qurʾān itself: the Johannine conception of Jesus as the Word cannot be considered to directly inform the use of the appellation here.¹⁰⁷ In particular, the Qurʾān clearly conceives of the *kalimah* as created, and not as a personalised agent of creation.¹⁰⁸ This is seen both directly in Q 3:39 and 3:45, in the description of the word’s source – “*min Allāh*” or “*minhu*” – and indirectly elsewhere the Qurʾān: as Khalidī notes, the Jesus of the Qurʾān is “embroiled in polemic”,¹⁰⁹ as it is necessary for him to be cleansed of the notionally false, Christian beliefs of his followers (“*wa-muṭahhituka min alladhīna kafarū*”).¹¹⁰ As such, the Qurʾān actively posits Jesus’ lack of divinity: this is seen in Q 4:171 above – “*wa-lā taqūlū thalāthah*” – as well as in the following dialogue between God and Jesus: “*wa-idh qāla Allāhu yā ʿĪsā ibna Maryama anta qulta lil-nāsi ittakhidhūnī wa-ummīya ilāhayni min dūni Allāh? qāla subḥānak...*”¹¹¹ As such, the theological exegesis of these verses must rely only on direct *tafsīr* of the Qurʾānic text. Accordingly, the *tafsīr* texts provide two key theological interpretations to the use of the word *kalimah* in these verses.

The first theological interpretation aligns the word *kalimah* with Jesus’ revelation, his book *Injīl*; that Jesus brought a scripture is confirmed in the Qurʾān,¹¹² as are the scriptures of other Prophets.¹¹³ This explanation is found throughout the work of the scholars. al-Ṭabarī, in addition to the conjecture rebutted above, also offers a gloss on “*muṣaddiqan bi-kalimatīn min Allāh*” in Q 3:39, as connoting approval of Jesus’ laws and conduct, and notes that the Basra school considers it a dialectal phrase expressing support of a text, normally of a poem, but here of the *Injīl*.¹¹⁴ al-Zamakhsharī offers a similar gloss, explaining the same phrase as ‘believing in a scripture from God’.¹¹⁵ Finally, al-Rāzī, who offers five separate glosses on these verses,

¹⁰⁴ See Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996) 657.

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., Q 15:29 (concerning Adam).

¹⁰⁶ Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ*, 24.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 27-9; Siddiqui, *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*, 54.

¹⁰⁸ Räsänen, *Das Koranische Jesusbild*, 31ff.

¹⁰⁹ Khalidī, *The Muslim Jesus*, 12.

¹¹⁰ Q 3:55.

¹¹¹ Q 5:116.

¹¹² Q 5:46: “*wa-ataynāhu al-Injīla fīhi hudān wa-nūr...*” See further Beaumont and Singh (2018) 53-5.

¹¹³ See, e.g., Q 87:19: “*ṣuḥufi Ibrāhīm wa-Mūsā.*”

¹¹⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 3.157.

¹¹⁵ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1.188.

suggests this reading obliquely in his *tafsīr*: he posits that Jesus received the name *kalimah* because Jesus was like a word, insofar as he guided mankind to the truth, and similarly, because his actions and sayings had the characteristics of God's Word, or revelation.¹¹⁶ This latter reading is supported by the more recent lexicographer al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790): he defines the expression '*kalimat Allāh*' as one whose words help the religion, by analogy with the expressions '*sayf Allāh*' and '*asad Allāh*', used of people who support the cause of religion through their courage.¹¹⁷

This is an apt reading, as it aligns directly with the usage of the lexis *kalimah* throughout the Qur'ān to refer to God's revelation. Moreover, this mode of addressing Jesus indirectly as his book is comparable to the title '*rūḥ Allāh*': in each case, Jesus is a vessel for something conveyed from God to him to bear. Finally, the emphasis on Jesus' book is in keeping with the Qur'ān's general approach to this Prophet within the contemporaneous polemic, as noted above. It is important, however, to distinguish this reading from the Christian concept of the incarnate Revelation. While the Christian Jesus becomes a physical revelation in his humanation, in Islam, Jesus remains a vehicle by which God presents His Word to mankind, like the Prophet Moses in both religious traditions. In any case, however, both traditions emphasise the use of Jesus as a mediator between God and mankind, and in each case, he is the instrument by which God expresses revelation through His attribute of speech. This conception of revelation as God's Speech is explicitly acknowledged in the Islamic tradition, particularly as it pertains to the book revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad; as far as this latter revelation is concerned, Imām Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) explicitly notes: "*wa-al-Qur'ān kalām Allāh.*"¹¹⁸ Thus, the Christian and Muslim conceptions of the Word are quite similar in his regard, notwithstanding the Christian notion of incarnation: in both instances, the address indicates Jesus' functionality regarding God's revelation.

The second theological interpretation gives a more literal reading to the word *kalimah*, by identifying the concrete 'word' being referred to. Scholars regularly suggested candidates for this word: al-Ṭabarī refers to a report from Ibn 'Abbās to the effect that the *kalimah* is the name 'Īsā itself,¹¹⁹ while al-Rāzī identified the word with the text of the prediction of *al-Masīḥ* in the earlier Hebrew scriptures, such that those recognising the fulfillment of the prophesy would declare of Jesus that he was *that word*.¹²⁰

However, the most theologically reasoned, and well-accepted, of these identifications was the association of Jesus with the imperative verb '*kun*' ('Be!'). This relates to his conception: the Qur'ān says that Mary gives birth to Jesus while remaining virgin,¹²¹ and the primary cause of Jesus' birth was therefore a direct creative command from God Himself.¹²² The concrete

¹¹⁶ al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-ghayb*, 2.441.

¹¹⁷ See Omar, *Dictionary*, 495.

¹¹⁸ Abū al-Muntahā al-Maghniṣāwī, *Imām Abū Ḥanīfa's Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar Explained, Compiled and Translated with an Introduction by Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf Mangera* (London: White Thread Press, 2007) 89.

¹¹⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, 3.168.

¹²⁰ al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṣin al-ghayb*, 2.441. See also Omar, *Dictionary*, 495.

¹²¹ See, e.g., Q 3:47, 66:12.

¹²² See further Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 33.

word of the command is expressed throughout the Qur’ān in the collocation “*kun fa-yakūn*”.¹²³ This phrase is central to classical Islamic scholarship on the use of *kalām* to refer to God’s attribute of creation, rather than revelation. Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) expressed the majority Sunni position, that the imperative ‘*kun*’ is not necessary for creation to take place, which is rather dependent on His attributes of *tjād* and *takwīn*.¹²⁴ However, it was the position of Sarakhsī (d. 490/1096), among others, that the ‘utterance’ of the word ‘*kun*’ indicates the attribute of *kalām*, but without knowledge of how this is achieved, such that the ‘*kun fa-yakūn*’ verses are *mutashābihāt*; the word’s simplicity merely indicates the ease of the creative process.¹²⁵ Significantly, this entails that, while the precise nature of the identification is beyond human knowledge, creation may be conceptualised as a sort of ‘speech act’ – that is, as *kalām* proper – enacted through ‘uttering’ the *kalimah* ‘*kun*’. In any case, while the act of creation does not always require *kalām*, ‘*kun*’ always connotes creation in the Qur’ān. As such, the identification of the title ‘*kalimah*’ with ‘*kun*’ follows naturally upon considering the creation of Jesus himself.

The scholars articulate the theology of this identification in various ways. al-Ṭabarī refers to the comments of the Companion Qatādah (d. 120/738), who said that the collocation “*wa-kalimatuhu alqāhā ilā Maryam*” in Q 4:171 reflected God directly impregnating Mary with His decree ‘*kun*’.¹²⁶ Similarly, al-Zamakhsharī notes on both Q 3:39 and Q 4:171 that Jesus came into being by the word of God alone, by His command (*amr*), without the need for the mediation of a father’s sperm.¹²⁷ Similar explanations are given by al-Rāzī,¹²⁸ and by the Jalālayn, who note succinctly that that Jesus was named ‘word’ simply because he was created by a word.¹²⁹ Finally, the *tafsīr* of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) introduces a new element: in glossing the phrase “*muṣaddiqan bi-kalimatīn min Allāh*” in Q 3:39, he writes that Jesus resembles those things which constitute the ‘universe of decree’ (“*‘ālam al-amr*”).¹³⁰ This concept encapsulates a special category of created things that are unrelated to pre-existing matter or causes: rather, such things are *primary* creations, brought about *solely* by God’s command. This notion seems to be the subject of Q 17:85: “*wa-yas’alūnaka ‘an al-rūḥi qul al-rūḥu min amri rabbī*”. Indeed, al-Bayḍāwī gives the same explanation of this latter verse as he does Q 3:39, writing that the soul exists only by God’s command, without the need for pre-existing matter from which it may be generated.¹³¹ This provides an effective link to the collocation of “*wa-kalimatuhu ... warūḥun minhu*” in Q 4:171: both Jesus himself, as personified in “*kalimatuh*”, and the spirit which he bears, are part of ‘*‘ālam al-amr*’, being the results of primary creation. Thus, the appellation *kalimah* is given to Jesus in particular because

¹²³ Q 2:117, 3:47, 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82, 40:68.

¹²⁴ See al-Maghnīsāwī, *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar*, 79.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹²⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, 3.168, 6.21.

¹²⁷ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1.188, 1.315.

¹²⁸ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 2.441

¹²⁹ Jalālayn, *Tafsīr*, 44.

¹³⁰ ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta’wīl* [“The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation”] (Cairo, 1926) 56.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

his creation is unlike that of most humans: he is a primary, rather than a secondary, recipient of the creative command, and so may be addressed by that referent.

It is important to situate this reasoning within, and distinguish it from, the polemical debates which took place in the first centuries following the Prophet Muḥammad concerning the created nature of God's attributes, and, in particular, His *kalām*. Early disputes between the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites concerned the eternal nature of *kalām* as realised in revelation, and how this attribute applied to the revealed text of the Qur'ān: the dominant Ash'ari perspective distinguished *kalām nafsi* – God's internal speech, His eternal attribute – from *kalām lafzī* – the representation of this speech in the Creation as sounds and letters.¹³² As the concept of *kalām* came to encapsulate creation as well, it was important to consider the creative command 'kun' as being, itself, uncreated, a form of *kalām nafsi*.¹³³ However, although being identified with the creative command, the Prophet Jesus himself is *created*: he is not synonymous or co-existent with 'kun', but rather is named so because he exists as a *result* of it. This can be distinguished from the Christian concept of the *logos*. First, although both Islamic *kalām* and Christian *logos* entail God's creative capacity, they are not perfectly synonymous: the Christian model is more expansive than the Islamic, with the latter situating the rest of the Christian term's semantic range in other concepts. The Islamic notion of *ḥikmah* – an element of God's Essence, in his capacity as *al-Ḥakīm* –¹³⁴ captures the primary passive sense of *logos* as the wisdom underlying creation: for example, in his *tafsīr* on Q 2:32, al-Zamakhsharī explains God's *ḥikmah* as His knowing the benefits (*al-maṣāliḥ*) of creating humans as His viceroy on earth.¹³⁵ In its active sense, however, *logos* also connotes God's exercise of His Will, as *amr*,¹³⁶ and when this command is exercised through *ḥikmah*, it entails God's Governance (*rububiyyah*), in a holistic sense.¹³⁷ It is thus this triad of divine attributes, not *kalām*, which is closest to the model of universalism first conceptualised by the Stoics: the Islamic intellectual tradition developed a distinct, albeit overlapping, conceptual taxonomy to that found in Greek, and later, Christian thought. Indeed, the semantic range of *logos* encapsulates yet other divine attributes within Islamic theology, including *takwīn*, *razq*, *iḥyā'* and *imātah*, and, in its purely descriptive sense, *sakīnah*.¹³⁸

Second, however, and more importantly, the Christian and Islamic concepts differ in how they are applied to Jesus. In Islam, the identification of Jesus with the '*kalimat Allāh*' is primarily figurative: the appellation reflects the unique nature of Jesus' birth, such that he may be addressed by reference to that word – 'kun' – by which he was made, itself only a metonymic expression related to God's eternal attribute of *kalām*. In other words, the Qur'ān resists the

¹³² See al-Maghnīsāwī, *Al-Fiqh Al-Akbar*, 90-3.

¹³³ O'Shaughnessy, *The Koranic Concept*, 60-1.

¹³⁴ See, e.g., Q 2:32, 2:129, 12:100, 14:4, 62:1.

¹³⁵ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1.271-272. On *ḥikmah*, see also al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān* (Damascus, 1992) 249: "[hiyya] 'iṣābat al-ḥaqq bi-al-'ilm wa-al-'aql."

¹³⁶ See Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, 250-1.

¹³⁷ Compare the collocation of *ḥikmah* and *mulk* at Q 2:251 (as applied to David). On the connotations of *ḥikmah*, see further Hikmet Yaman, "The Concept of *Ḥikmah* in Early Islamic Thought" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2008).

¹³⁸ On *sakīnah*, see Q 2:24, 9:26, 9:40, 48:4, 48:18, 48:26.

interpretation that Jesus bears the divine attribute; he is merely the *result* of that creative attribute. In Christianity, however, Jesus shares a much closer relationship with the Word: he constitutes God's attribute of universal governance and creation made flesh, as Jesus is the divine personage made human in hypostasis. While the *logos* does not exhaust the extent of God's divinity – the Word is only *with* God, after all – the Christian Jesus is referred to as the *logos* because, being divine himself, he literally bears the relevant attribute.

CONCLUSION

Overall, while each scripture arose in a distinct theological context, there are strong *prima facie* similarities in the two religions' identification of Jesus as God's Word. In each case, the term has a dual meaning. On the one hand, it refers to Jesus' role in God's revelation, acting as a mediator between the transcendent and the immanent by conveying God's Law and Speech to mankind. On the other, the concept invokes God's creative capacity, and addresses the relationship between this attribute and Jesus.

However, beyond these general likenesses, the actual content of the relationship between Word and Jesus is quite distinct in the two traditions, as required by the respective religions' theologies. In Christianity, Jesus is both attributes made incarnate: he is revelation made tangible, rather than scriptural, and embodies in a literal sense God's mode of governance over the Universe, the *logos*. This relies on Christian hypostasis, considering Jesus an element of the Godhead made flesh. In Islam, the Qur'ān make no such claims regarding Jesus' divinity. Rather, Jesus' relationship with the name '*kalimat Allāh*' is indirect on both counts: he is a word of God only insofar as he comes bearing a revealed book, and he reflects creative *kalām* only insofar as he is a direct result of the creative command. Thus, this comparison serves as an effective case study of the religions' independent traditions, and exposes the difficulties in considering each tradition only through the epistemological lens of the other. Even when applying the same terminology to the same figure, each of Islam and Christianity develops its theology recursively, applying the theological axioms of its own scripture to the question at hand.

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