

Timurlenk Chekovikj, Elena Trencavska Chekovikj

JESUS AND MONOTHEISM, THE SIMILARITY AND RELATIONS BETWEEN EARLY JUDEO-CHRISTIAN CREDESCENCE AND ISLAM

The paper which is presented to the reader is written to answer important questions, both classical and modern. Nowadays, the science of Religious Studies and the history of religions, in general, provided numerous new facts for the scholars and wider audiences. There is also a need for interfaith connection and spiritual guidance toward God from both Islam and Christianity and respecting the values both religions have [Miner, 2014: 79-93].

After the explorations of Qumran and Nag-Hamadi manuscripts as well as many other new sources, many people began to rethink the history of early Christianity. At present, instead of the classical Textus Receptus for the New Testament, we have many critical editions like that's of Nestle-Eland which contains dozens of alternate readings for every chapter of the Gospel [Silva, 1995: 283]. Before the discovery of Nag Hammadi library researchers and scholars had to rely on what Gnostics' opponent said about Gnostic beliefs. The careful study can give us a basic idea of their views. Especially, *The Gospel of Thomas*, for instance, doesn't even mention the crucifixion and resurrection [Ehrman, 1945: 116-23]. In contrast to this, Qur'anic text has another textual story; the 'text-ology'; it isn't a matter for Qur'anic Studies since we have no other copy of the Qur'an instead of this which is read by Muslims in their everyday religious practice. The oldest Qur'an manuscripts are dating from between approximately AD 568 and 645, identified at the University of Birmingham; supporting the view that the text has undergone little or no alteration and that it can be dated to a point very close to the time it was understood to be revealed [Coughlan, 2020].

There are many modern critiques in the West, among them are Günter Lüling (1970), Patricia Crone and Michael Cook (1977), John Wansbrough (1977-1978), Yehuda Nevo (d. 1992), Christoph Luxenberg (2000) and many others, who assert that the master narrative about the origins of Islam and the Qur'an is historically unreliable, and does not clear what exactly happened to prompt the emergence of that new religion [Gerhard, 2008: 70-87]. Accordingly, there is no suspicion that this field of research requires an interdisciplinary endeavor, taking into account information from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, archaeological evidence, linguistic analysis and studies on contact and evolution of theological ideas.

In 60-ss of the previous century, a notable Harvard scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, wrote his book 'The Meaning and End of Religion' [Smith, 1963] to question the validity of the concept of religion; he rightly noticed, that, for example, Islam describes the term "deen" which essentially has a wider meaning than Religare/Religare. Deen usually covers political, social and economic code for the happiness of mankind, while the 'religion' is merely a kind of internal belief and more open to personal variation [Firth, 1948: 25-43]. Monotheism is the foundation of Islamic doctrine and it is also visible in traces at the mainstream theology of Judaism and Christianity, and thus they may give the same universal message of understanding in these religions [Armstrong, 2011].

The beginnings of these religions and their beliefs are so intertwined that scholars cannot but agree that borrowing between these religions is a fact that has not been denied by even the greatest skeptics. One of those theorists as John Toland [Toland, 1718] who in 1718 in his work pointed the title "*Nazarenus: or Islamic Jewish, Gentile, and Mahometan Christianity containing the history of the ancient Gospel of Barnabas and the modern Gospel of the Mahometans..*". For Toland, some of the fundamental doctrines of Islam are rooted in the "most ancient monuments of the Christian religion," and not in the views of the Nestorian monk Sergius [Toland, 139]. This theory of a potential link between Early Islam and Jewish-Christianity was anticipated for the first time by John Toland and Ferdinand Christian Baur, who set the concept of "*Jewish-Christianity*" [F. Stanley Jones, 1658]. John Toland in the 18th century pointed out that the ancient Jewish-Christianity had survived in Islam [Toland, 1718]. Hans-Joachim Schoeps comes to a similar conclusion: "*This entitles you to verify that this research is not new, but that their research was known for several centuries, from biblical researchers Francis David, Michael Servetus, Nojzer Adam and John Toland.*" [Schoeps, 1953: 219-224]. For example, Hans Kung says: "*Traditional and historical parallels between Judo-Christianity and Islam are inevitable.*" [Küng, 2007].

Huge parts of both Islam and Christianity are dedicated to the personality of Jesus and the development of his image. Today, comparing the Qur'anic vision of Isa to the early Christian sources, we may see many similar stories (for example, the Qur'anic narration about birds created from the clay is also found in *Infancy Gospel of*

Thomas (140 AD) and *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour* (400 AD) []¹. We will divide this thesis into a chapter about the historicity of the links between early Christian belief and Islam, Jesus as a Prophet in both scriptures, early Christianity as a source for good Christian-Islam relations in the future.

For Muslims, all the prophets – those mentioned in the Old Testament, New Testament and the Qur'an and those which are not known to us by their names – called to the obedience of one God. Accordingly, this is the faith of Ibrahim (Abraham), as the Qur'an says: (Qur'an 2:135): They say, "Be Jews or Christians [so] you will be guided." Say, "Rather, [we follow] the religion of Abraham, inclining toward truth, and he was not of the polytheists." Christians and Jews in the Qur'an are considered *People of the Book* and Muslims generally view these books (i.e the Bible, or parts of it) as having been corrupted, altered and interpolated over time. This is not an exaggerated view because many Christian scholars support this. Among them, prof. Barth Erhman, a bible scholar who said: "I realized that at the time we had over 5,000 manuscripts of the New Testament, and no two of them are exactly alike. The scribes were changing them, sometimes in big ways, but lots of times in little ways. And it finally occurred to me that if I really thought that God had inspired this text ... If he went to the trouble of inspiring the text, why didn't he go to the trouble of preserving the text? Why did he allow scribes to change it?" [Kinlaw, 2020]

This once again opens a debate about over and over again rereading the Bible and the manuscript, and challenges the fact which in some part can overcome the differences between Islam and Christianity and lead to consent about the status of Jesus. The position *People of the Book* is beneficial to support Christians and Jews in belief in the scriptures they appreciate, thus giving a kind of respect which modern atheists are lacking. Patricia Crone says that "Jewish Christianity" is a modern term for the beliefs of those followers of Jesus who saw devotion to Jesus as part of God's covenant with Israel, not as a transfer of God's promise of salvation from the Jews to the gentiles [Crone, 2015: 225-253]. Accordingly, some of them regarded Jesus as a prophet, others saw him as a heavenly power, but all retained their Jewish identity and continued to observe the law [Broadhead, 2007: 22-52].

This is based on a notion of belief of Jesus as a messiah and prophet of God and nothing else comes in aspect. There were Christians who followed some aspects of the law such as circumcision, Sabbath-observance, avoidance of pork and alcohol (Ethiopian Christians and many Syrian Christians); so there is nothing strange in the first call of Muhammed to his followers to flee from the persecution of the ruling Quraysh tribe of Mecca in the Ethiopian Christian Kingdom. The Aksumite monarch who received the followers of Muhammed is known in Islamic sources as the Negus or historically recognized as king Armah who reigned 614–631 [Elfasi, 1988]. When the king heard some recitation of the chapter of Mary from the Qur'an, he exclaimed: "verily, this (Qur'an) and what Jesus brought (Gospel) has come from the same source of light" [Lings, 2006: 81-84]. So he protected the Muslims as followers of the same belief and practice. This is the kind of phenomenon we should refer to when we want to explain the presence of "Jewish Christian" ideas of the Qur'an [Dye, 2018: 11-29].

Gospels identified "Jesus the prophet" (Matthew 21:11). He spoke of himself as a prophet: "No prophet is accepted in his own native place" (Luke 4:24). Nearly 600 years before the advent of Islam, Christianity already faced groups and beliefs that were not always in agreement with the Church and its dogma. The new energy crushed the already wide tendencies and divided thinking which was introduced after the council of Nicaea. This was in an era when different Christian movements gradually faded away, and its Judean nature and Old Testament teaching melted into the four canonical Gospels and epistles of Paul presented and explained by the official Roman church. Some of the notable scholars like Robert Eisenman, Barth Erhman, Robert Price and others, rejected Pauline Christian's ideology and offer some other views [Eisenman, 1998].

Jewish Christians were marginalized in the years after Jesus's resurrection, to be described by patristic authors of the third and fourth centuries under the names of Ebionites, Nazoreans, and Elchasaites [Klijn, 1973]. One of them is Monarchianism which Christological position opposed the doctrine of an independent, personal subsistence of the Logos and affirmed the sole deity of God the Father. Thus, it represented one reasonable monotheistic view from point of Islam.

Later, two types of Monarchianism developed were Adoptionist and Modalistic. The emergence of this movement during the 2nd century and circulated into the 3rd century was generally regarded as a heresy by the mainstream of Christian theology after establishment in the 4th century. Monarchianism [Faulkner, 1910: 331-344] held that Christ was a mere man, miraculously conceived, constituted the view Muslims later acknowledged from the Qur'an viewpoint. This perspective was taught at Rome at the end of the 2nd century by Theodotus and taught somewhat later by Artemon. About 260 a.d. it was again taught by Paul of Samosata [Philips, 1996]. But these beliefs didn't survive because the main Christian doctrine neglected different beliefs as false and forbade

¹ The closest pre-Islamic parallel is in "The Infancy Story of Thomas," S. 22-4 where the infant Jesus creates twelve sparrows from clay on the sabbath. Translation in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, I (London: S.C.M., 1973), 392. The miracle found in Qur'an is the creation of birds from clay which is referred to in Surah 3:49 and again in Surah 5:110.

their occurrences in the Christendom. Nontrinitarians, such as Unitarians, Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Latter-Day Saints even today reject any immaculate conception and do not recognize Marian titles such as «Mother of God» [Gallagher, 2006]. In the past, this special relationship was recognized and Muslims displayed tolerance towards Unitarians. Suleiman I, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, supported the monarchy of John Sigismund, the only Unitarian king in history. Historian Susan Ritchie argues that there is a direct influence of Islamic tolerance on the Edict of Torda, which was the “first modern articulation of the principle of religious toleration by Europeans at the level of state rule.” [Greenwood, 2011].

Rejecting these beliefs led to some questions and scholars were reasonably looking for an answer. It is logical that in some stances, some scholars accuse the belief of Jesus as divine to be based on polytheism from Egyptian mythology and syncretism where Jesus replaced Chorus, while Isis is replaced by the worship of Mary [Griffiths, 1975]. In the first century, the cult of Mithra made great progress in Rome [Timothy, 1999]. Accordingly, Mithra died, was buried in a cave tomb, and was resurrected from there. This is very similar to the belief of the “resurrection” of Jesus [Higgins, 2012: 71-90]. Certainly, it is a very well known fact that many of those holidays that were praised from then citizens of Rome and that were of pagan origin, were replaced with a celebration of the Christian martyrs and preachers [Reynolds, 1993]. But even if we don't come to this conclusion, all historical facts point to the volatility of the sources and the transferred beliefs from the early Christian period, as well as the diversity of the beliefs that existed. According to Stroumsa: “One of the most striking parallels between the Pseudo-Clementine writings and the Qur'ān is probably Peter's claim, in the Homilies, that ‘God is one, and there is no God beside Him.

Some of the early Christians regarded Jesus as a prophet, others saw him as a heavenly power, but maintained their Jewish identity and continued to observe the law. For example, the day of Sabbath was appointed for the weekly worship of God. The Jews disobeyed this Divine commandment as repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an (4:47; 7:163; 16:124). This is in line with a famous passage in the Jewish Christian section of the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*, in which we are told that the only difference between the authors and “those of our people who do not believe” or, as the Latin version puts it, ‘between us who believe in Jesus and the unbelieving Jews,’ is that ‘we’ believe Jesus to be the prophet foretold by Moses and the eternal Christ whereas the unbelieving Jews do not [Crone, 2015: 225-253].

Muslims and Christians both believe that Jesus was born to Mary²/Mary, a virgin (Qur'an, 3:42)². There is a striking similarity about the mother of Jesus, Mary, in both the Qur'an and the New Testament. In the *Gospel of the birth of Mary*, [Foster, 2020: 175-175] there is the reference given by Faustus, Bishop of Ryes from Provence, where he directly states that Mary was from the Leviticus tribe. Further passage of the New Testament Apocrypha states that angels fed Mary during her stay in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is in accordance with Qur'anic verses 3:37. The Gospel according to Luke, and Surah 19 begin with an account of the visitation of an angel upon Zakariya (Zecharias) and “Good News of the birth of Yahya (John)”, followed by the account of the annunciation. It mentions how Mary was informed by an angel that she would become the mother of Jesus through the actions of God alone [Jackson, 2003: 73].

The Qur'an considers Jesus to be al-Masih, the Arabic term for Messiah, sent to guide the Children of Israel (banī isrā'īl in Arabic) with a new revelation: al-Injīl (Arabic for “the Gospel”) [McDowell, 2013]. The main sources about the life of Jesus are found in the four Gospels of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The story of his miraculous birth and early childhood in the texts of the New Testament can be found only in Matthew and Luke Gospel.

In the Gospel according to Luke, it is described how the interaction between Mary and the Holy Spirit happened. “And Mary said to the angel: “How will it be when I do not know the man?” The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that is born will be holy and will be called Son of God³ “(Luke 1: 34-35) In the Old Testament, angels, just and pious men, and the kings of Israel are all called “sons of God.” As applied to Jesus, the term is a reference to his role as the Messiah, the King chosen by God [Dictionary, 1994].

With this act, Mary got something “holy” with the direct intervention of God through the Holy Spirit, one of the Three. But the fact that we can see from this text, however, leaves us space for different interpretations

² There is an interesting saying in Islamic sources about the importance of Mary. She is described as a chaste and pure woman.”Behold! the angels said: “O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee- chosen thee above the women of all nations..”(Qur'an, 3:42) The Messenger said: “The best of its women is Khadijah daughter of Khuwailid, and the best of its women is Mary daughter of 'Imran.” Imam Ahmad said that Abu Hureyra, r.a narrated that Prophet Muhammad said: “Satan grabs every child when is born, so that is why they are crying so loud. This is not only the case with Mary and her son Jesus”.

³ The term “Son of God” should not be confused with the term “God the Son” (Greek: Θεός ὁ υἱός), the second Person of the Trinity in Christian theology. The doctrine of the Trinity identifies Jesus as God the Son, identical in essence but distinct in person with regard to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (the first and third Persons of the Trinity).

about the act of creation of Jesus. Islam confirms and reaffirms the virgin birth of Jesus but does not perceive this as a direct act of conception, but as a *miraculous act of creation*, caused by an order of God. However, the *miraculous birth* of Jesus is compared to something akin to the creation of Adam. Just as Jesus was without a father, so likewise, Adam was created from the earth, but without a father or mother. “Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him, “Be,” and he was.”(Qur’an, 3:59) “The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers. And do not say, “Three”; desist – it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. And sufficient is Allah as Disposer of affairs.” (Qur’an; En Nisa, 171)

Both Muslims and Christians agree that Jesus had a unique and divine mission and ministry. He brought God’s message to the people. In various places through the New Testament (for example, Matthew 13:53-57), Jesus describes Himself as a prophet. Likewise in the Qur’an (19:30), Jesus describes Himself as a prophet. The devout Muslims believe that Jesus is God’s servant and prophet, His creation, who breathed *Word* in Merry.

Qur’anic words: “The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah and His word which He directed to Mary and a soul [created at a command] from Him.” means the one word that was delivered to Mary when God said: “Be!” and Jesus was created by the help of the word “Be” (as Adam) and he himself is not the word “Be”, but with it, he came to existence. “Be” is the Word of God and is not a being, nor it is created word of God.

While Christians say: “Jesus is the Spirit of God and His Word, of his being, like when you say that this is a part of that curtain!”, Muslims say: Jesus is created by God’s command: “Be!” And he is not the Word itself. Word is what the Exalted pronounced, i.e. “Be”. Expressions and “spirit(soul) from Him” is to say that the wisdom of God in him and found his soul (Rooh). Islam rejects the trinitarian splitting of the unitarian God and gives a new definition by presenting 99 names of God and attributes. In this meaning, the Spirit of God becomes an attribute. Ruh al-qudus, “the holy spirit” or “spirit of holiness” and “Al-Quddis” as one of the 99 Names of God in Islam. His ‘Only-begotten son’ becomes a slave of God and God Servant [Gamard, 1996].

So, the Qur’an has said explicitly, that the soul of the Messiah is created, and for other souls, it is pointless to discuss their origin. God is the one who sent the spirit to Mary – and His spirit is His slave and Prophet, attached to Himself, but that does not mean that it was not created. “Then We sent to her Our Angel, and he represented himself to her as a well-proportioned man....” (Qur’an, 19:17) “He will speak to the people in the cradle and in maturity and will be of the righteous.” (Qur’an, Ali Imran, 47)

Also when Muhammad speaks about the virtues of Jesus he says: “There is no one more truthful in speech, nor in fulfilling of promises, that sky has covered and the earth has carried, than Abu Dharr, the likeness of ‘Eisa bin Mariam.” So ‘Umar bin Al-Khattab said, as if out of envy: “So do you acknowledge that for him, O Messenger of Allah?” He said: “Yes, so acknowledge it.”⁴ According to the gospels (The Gospel of Mark (6:3) and the Gospel of Matthew (13:55-56), Jesus had four brothers (James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas), and several sisters.

If we looked for Jesus’s genuine “successor” in Jerusalem, it would be his brother James⁵ who, according to the writings of Paul and the Acts was mentioned as respectable “pillar” of the late Jesus movement. Church historian of Caesarea, Eusebius, spares no praise when he is talking about James whom people have long called “righteous” because of his outstanding virtues and he was referring to the testimony of Clement of Alexandria. Clement in his Hypostasis, [Edwards, 2000: 159-177] in the sixth book, says: “After the Savior resurrection, Peter, James, and John didn’t pass the right of priority because the Savior chose James the Just to be bishop of Jerusalem.” Eusebius more than twice emphasizes that the apostles chose James as head of the Jerusalem community, and he names fourteen of his followers in Jerusalem, including some other relatives of Jesus. The last of those church leaders, Judas Kyriakos, lived in Jerusalem during the rebellion and rule of Bar Kohaba (134-135 AD). His surname Kyriakos (literally “the Lord”) suggests that he was in some kind of kinship with Jesus. The role of Jesus’ family is clearly emphasized in the Book of Acts [Tannehill, 1977: 386-405], where, even in one of the first chapters, where the apostles mentioned meeting with the mother of Jesus and his brothers. But in

⁴ Jami Tirmidhi, Hasan (Darussalam), English reference, : Vol. 1, Book 46, Hadith 3802

⁵ The English Bible translations traditionally distinguish between the Old Testament using Jacob and James in the New Testament. The other names are: James son of Zebedee and brother of John (one of the twelve, tradition calls him James the Greater) (Mark 3.17; Matt 10.3; Luke 6.14; Acts 1.13), James son of Alpheus (another of the twelve) (Mark 3.18; Matt 10.3; Luke 6.15; Acts 1.13), Jacob the younger or the less (Mark 15.40; 16.1; Matt 27.56; Luke 24.10), James the father of Jude (who was one of the twelve) (Luke 6.16; Acts 1.13) and James the brother of the author of the Epistle of Jude (Jude 1.1). These names could of course refer to the same people. Patrick J. Hartin, James of Jerusalem: Heir to Jesus of Nazareth (ed. Barbara Green; Interfaces; Colledgeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 2.

this place, unlike Eusebius (via the writings of Clement), there is no mention of the James leadership among the followers of Christ.

Early Christians eventually remained divided groups, along with other groups (such as the Gnostics) rejected as heretical by the new church fathers like Irenaeus (130-202 A.D.). Ebonites initially were the first Jews who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Christ) [Cohn-Sherbok, 2000].

According to Robert L. Wilken [Wilken, 2005] in the book *The spirit of early Christian Thought: Seeking the face of God*, there were other Jewish and Christian sects, including Nazarenes, symmachians, and elkesaites. Because it is difficult to distinguish them one from another, he suggests that Ebonites can be used as a general term for any form of Judeo-Christianity that emphasizes respect for Jewish law. Robert L. Wilken writes: "The revival of Judeo-Christianity existed until the late fourth century, encouraged by Jewish messianic movement⁶ and little is known about Ebonites". Wilken tells us about Ebonites that: "These Christians eventually became a separate group, along with other groups, and were rejected as heretical by the new "great" church." This shows that the so-called "heretical" church was rejected by the "new" Christians. In other words, the former followers of Christ's teachings were condemned by later followers. For the Nazoreans, Jesus was, rather than God's Son, a prophet, the last of a long chain of true prophets, starting with Adam, in which each prophet is preceded by a false prophet. Moreover, Jesus had not died on the cross; the heresiographers often associate this Docetism with other doctrines of Jewish Christian groups⁷.

John Toland concludes: "Once the Nazarenes and ebonite's, were unanimously recognized by all church historians that they were the first Christians, and those who believed among the Jews, who were their people and were apostles of Jesus, with whom he lived and died and who have witnessed his work, considering this, I say how was it possible for them to be first before all others (because they were regarded as the first heretics) who were to form wrong conceptions and doctrines about Jesus? And how can Gentiles who believed in Jesus after his death, who got the preaching and information of people who never knew Jesus, have a proper understanding of the doctrine of Jesus, or where they could get the right information, except Jews." [Toland, 1718: 73-76].

According to Epiphany and James F. White until 135 AD, Christians everywhere adored Passover, regardless of the day of the week [White, 1993]. James White concludes that there is a group of Quartodecimans who attempted to preserve the celebration of Christmas on the day of Passover and this movement lasted until the fifth century in Asia Minor. The years from 70 AD to 135 AD, were perilous times for Ebonites and Nazarenes. Orthodox Christians believe that Jesus is Lord and Son of God in a unique way: he remains forever distinct from the rest of humanity whom he came to save. Yet the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas relates that as soon as Thomas recognizes him, Jesus says to Thomas that they have both received their being from the same source: Jesus said, 'I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become drunk from the bubbling stream which I have measured out. ... He who will drink from my mouth will become as I am: I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him.' (the Gospel of Thomas 13 & 108)

One of these gospels is the Marcion Testament of Luke, known only as The Gospel according to Marcion. It is a version of the Gospel according to Luke, and it dates back to the II century. The author of this Gospel is Marcion of Sinope, who included the first New Testament canon.

The Gospel according to the Hebrews (lat. Evangelium Hebraeorum) is a lost Gospel which is known through the texts of the Church Fathers. According to some, it is the Jewish Gospel according to Matthew. Regarding the gospels, Ebionites have acknowledged only the Gospel of Matthew and only the Jewish version. According to Nikefor, this work consisted of 2,200 rows, or 300 less than the canonical Gospel of Matthew that we know today. Epiphanius claims that the Ebionites version does not contain the full text of Matthew [Häkkinen, 2005: 247-278]. Today this Gospel is known only in fragments.

It is often among Jewish Christians (or in Jewish Christian texts or traditions) that we can find some easily identifiable Gnostic theologoumena, such as Docetism. Acts of John is a docetic gospel. It is a collection of narratives and traditions ascribed to John the Apostle, who was the author of the Gospel of John. It is long known

⁶ The messianic Jews maintained relations with other Jews, and other gentiles Christians, although they were not welcome in both camps. They followed the law, insisted on circumcision, kept the Sabbath and Jewish holidays, celebrated (Yom Kippur, Passover) and also adhered to the observing of the Old Testament dietary laws (e.g., abstinence from pork) and other Jewish customs. They rejected Paul because of his denigration of Jewish law. They looked on Jesus as a prophet, an outstanding man in the line of Jewish prophets. They justify their lifestyle by following the example of Jesus' life. Jesus was circumcised, respected the Saturday, celebrated Jewish holidays, and taught that all the commandments of the law should be followed. He celebrated Easter on the same day when the Jews celebrated Passover and referred to the city of Jerusalem in high esteem.

⁷ On the Nazoreans, see especially Pritz, Nazarene Jewish Christianity. Cf. Mimouni, "Les Nazoréens". Cf. idem., Le judéo-christianisme ancien. Two recent studies: Skarsaune and Hvalvik, eds., Jewish Believers in Jesus, as well as Jackson-McCabe, ed., Jewish Christianity Reconsidered.

in fragmentary form. Together with the Acts of Paul, it is considered one of the most significant of the apostolic Acts in the New Testament Apocrypha. It was condemned as a Gnostic heresy by the Church.

Paul wrote epistles to the earliest Christian communities, later introduced as a part of the New Testament. The choice of today's four gospels was imposed in the conference of Nicaea in 325 after Christ, under the patronage of Emperor Constantine for political reasons. Literally, hundreds of gospels and religious writings were considered "Apocrypha" and destroyed. Some of them were written by the apostles of Jesus, rather than students who never met Jesus, as was Paul. The oldest copies of the Greek Gospels available today date from III to IV century after the rising of Jesus to heaven. Dead Sea Scrolls, however, match the historical time of John "the Baptist".

J.R. Harris was quoting Aristedos, early Christian apologists who said: "The Early Christian worship, in the beginning, was of purer monotheism even than that of the Jews." He emphasizes: "The origin, history and special character of Ebonites is the subject of intense debate in recent years. Ebonites existed in the earliest period of Christian history, where most of the Christians were Jews and some of them continued to observe Jewish law." [Thurston, 1986: 133-143].

After the V century onwards Judeo-Christians lived in small groups or as individuals. Based on Pseudo-Clementine documents, many historians have concluded that the whole Law of Moses was required for the salvation of the people. At that time, the Catholic Church began to call them heretics, primarily due to their continued respect for the Sabbath, Passover, and annual Sabbaths, and because of the regulations related to nutrition. The next crisis period came at a time of the Roman emperor Constantine, who was "baptized" in the name of the Catholic Church [Pohlsander, 2002]. In the IV and V century, according to sources that are attributed to the Nazarenes (or remnants of them) by Shlomo Pines, the Nazarenes unsuccessfully waged war campaigns against Romans (Catholics) because they left the Mosaic Law and replaced it by other laws and customs. They also attacked the Christology of the Catholic Church due to emphasis on the person of Christ as God, as opposed to their belief in Christ as Prophet. John Tolland in his paper "Nazarenes.." mentions Plotinus, who lived in the IV century said that he had read a book called *Acts of the apostles* that is associated with the traditions of Peter, John, Andrew, Thomas, and Paul. Among other things, the book states that Jesus was not crucified, but someone else was in his place. Even the apostles were mocking at those who believed that Jesus died on the cross [Toland, 1718]. H.M. Gwatkin in his book *Early Church history* says: "Stumbling block of early Christianity was not the divinity of Jesus but his crucifixion." [Gwatkin, 1912]

Cerinthus, a contemporary of Peter, Paul and John, also denied that Christ died on the cross and that Christ suffered because he is a spiritual being. He believed that the man Jesus was crucified and that he will be raised from dead along with the other people on Judgment Day. Carpocratians also believed that Jesus didn't die on the cross, but according to them, there was another person who has replaced him. Also, in the early Christian community existed a sect called Docetae which considered that Jesus hasn't had a real physical body, but an apparent body. Therefore, the crucifix was an illusion, so it was not real [Leonard George, 1995: 47-48]. According to Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*, the Egyptian Gnostic Christian Basilides (2nd century) held the view that Christ was not crucified, but was replaced by Simon of Cyrene. However, both Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus denied that Basilides held this view. But the substitutionist idea in general form is quite clearly expressed in the Gnostic Nag Hammadi documents *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter* and *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* [Watt, 2013]. All these notions of crucifixion differ from orthodox Christian beliefs, showing that there were different beliefs among the first followers of Jesus.

Edward Gibbon says: "scarce and suspicious materials of ecclesiastical history don't allow us to dispel the dark cloud overhanging during the early years of the Church." [Gibbon, 2003]⁸. In continuation of the history of Judeo-Christianity, Hans-Joachim Schoeps took the survey of Harnack and Shlater and came to this conclusion: "Although it is not possible to determine the exact proof of relationship that exists, the indirect link of Muhammad with Judeo-Christianity is beyond any doubt. This leaves a paradox with real historical dimensions: as Judeo-Christianity in the Church was brought to extinction, it remained stored in Islam and in respect of some of its guidelines, it lasts until today." [Schoeps, 1949: 342].

The most serious difficulty of the thesis on the Jewish Christian impact on the Qur'ān, however, remained the fact that our documentation on Jewish Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century [Stroumsa, 2014: 72-96].

As Gerald Hawting is presenting the characteristics of the Qur'ānic Jesus [Hawting, 2011: 372-389] and the specific significance of his titles in the narrative contexts of the holy book (*masīh*, *kalimat Allāh*, *rūh min Allāh*, etc.), his identification with Adam and his vaguely angelic and celestial character set up a Christology that leads us in the direction of Gnostic Jewish-Christian groups. This Christology has clear parallels with Epiphanius' descriptions of Jewish-Christian doctrines and especially with the mentioned Pseudo-Clementine literature.

⁸ Gibbon, Edward, and Henry Hart Milman. *The decline and fall of the Roman Empire*. Vol. 3. New York: Modern library, 2003.

According to Islamic teaching, the Islamic view of Jesus occupies a central position between the two extremes, Christian and Jewish. Muslims in every period of Islamic history were interested in other religions – not merely to “refute” them, but to show, that the root of religion is the monotheism and that polytheism is something make-believe only. The mainstream of Jews refused to recognize Jesus as a prophet or divine. On the other hand, the modern Christian Church considers him the Son of God or complete God, which is in conflict with the Islamic view of monotheism. According to Islam, Jesus was not the founder or initiator of a new religion or even a new religious movement within Judaism in his time, but he was one of the messengers sent to the people of Israel to correct the errors in the Jewish practice of faith and to introduce a moral guidance to the lost tribes of Israel. All prophets are brothers in faith, and Muhammad and Jesus are brothers in faith. In one point, Islam considers itself as a corrector of claims by the Christians and Jews about Jesus divinity and reintroduces the core belief in One God. The apocryphal gospels, although not included in the canon of the Bible, are a historical source that still draws early-Christian view and sight of Jesus. This pretense that Jesus (for example, his early life) is a great mystery of history; but since we have a very small account of this in the Qur’an, no one has a real proof to speculate about this. In every aspect, both faiths agree that Jesus’ birth was a miracle! Both agree that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. Both agree that an angel provided His name (the name Jesus is the transliterated Hebrew name “Yeshua” and means “the Lord saves” or “God is our salvation”). In every aspect, both faiths agree that Jesus’ birth was a miracle! Both agree that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus. Both agree that an angel provided His name (the name Jesus is the transliterated Hebrew name “Yeshua” and means “the Lord saves” or “God is our salvation”). Contrary to modern-day Christianity, Ebionites and some other Jewish Christian movements insisted on the universal need to observe and preserve religious rites and Judaic law. They respected Apostle James, brother of Jesus, as head of the Jerusalem Church and rejected Paul, viewing him as an “apostate from the Law.” Confessional loyalties in the Late Antique Middle East were much more in flux than we generally believe. People could move back and forth from different church groups, not only in rural areas but also close to the centers of theological power, or inside the same family, from one generation to another. Ebionites asserted that their position also represented the Christianity of the Twelve Apostles. «Paulinism», asserting salvation by faith without following the law, was thus regarded as a heresy by Ebionites. Accordingly, Pauline gospel caused a schism from the authentic apostolic Jewish Christianity originally headed by James, brother of Jesus and Saint Peter.

Early-Christian movement was left to itself because most of the followers of Christ adapted to the influx of non-Jewish converts. They, namely, in broad circles were known as Ebionites and Nazarenes. The disappearance of these two groups began with the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. Termination of worship in the Jewish temple had a paralyzing effect on the lives of Jews and the true followers of Jesus. They slowly recovered and reconciled with essentially crippled existence, with their cherished religion devoid of meaning for existence. Among all the documents that make up the New Testament, and other extant manuscripts of post prophetic time, there is no description of the terrible events that occurred in wake of the defeat of Judea against Rome. In other words, Scripture (taken in a large sense, and not only as of the Jewish or Christian canon), is a literary, thematic, symbolic and formulaic repertoire which is the tank where so-called “heretics” and orthodox take their stuff, indifferent and even sometimes opposed ways. It is obvious that one direction was favored from many directions, and it overcame all other opinions that formed the official modern-day Christianity.

Knowing this, there is a great possibility of opening a new chapter of Judeo-Christian-Islamic understanding and promoting dialogue between the most famous religions and their mutual beliefs. The basic doctrines of modern Christianity which Islam rejected are mainly centered on the personality of Jesus. Many Muslims considered Christians as polytheists because of their doctrine of the Trinity. But in reality, there are Christians who support this Islamic, or better say Qur’anic view even at this time. These differences put in the shade the many similarities which exist between Islam and Christianity which can be a founding knowledge for interdisciplinary research and interfaith dialogue. Returning to the Early Christian period and acknowledging the facts about the doctrines can possibly lead to a better understanding of these faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) and their credence.

Bibliography:

- Armstrong, Karen. (2011), *A history of God: The 4,000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Ballantine Books.
- Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. (2000), *Messianic Judaism: A critical anthology*. A&C Black.
- Coughlan, Sean (2020), *Oldest Koran fragments found in Birmingham University*. BBC News. Retrieved 10 January.
- Crone, Patricia. (2015), *Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One)*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies 74.
- Crone, Patricia. (2015), *Jewish Christianity and the Qur’ān (Part One)*, Journal of Near Eastern Studies 74, no. 2.
- Dye, Guillaume. (2018), *Jewish Christianity, the Qur’ān, and Early Islam: some methodological caveats*. Jewish Christianity and the Origins of Islam.
- Edwards, Mark J. (2000), *Clement of Alexandria and his Doctrine of the Logos*, Vigiliae christianae.

- Edwin Keith Broadhead, (2010), *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus*, Tübingen, Eisenman, Robert H. (1998), *James the brother of Jesus: the key to unlocking the secrets of early Christianity and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Penguin.
- Elfasi, Mohammed, and Ivan Hrbek, eds. (1988) *Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century*. Vol. 3. Unesco.
- Faulkner, J. A. (1910), The First (or Monarchian) Conflict on the Divinity of Christ, *Review & Expositor* 7, no.
- Firth, Raymond. (1948) *Religious belief and personal adjustment*, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland 78, no. 1/2.
- Gallagher, Eugene V. (2006), *Introduction to New and Alternative Religions in America*, [Five Volumes], Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Gamad, Ibrāhīm. (1996), *The most beautiful names of God: Based on the holy Qur'an in vocative form*.
- Gerhard Böwering (2008), *Recent Research on the construction of the Qur'an*, The Qur'an in its historical context, Gabriel Said Reynolds ed, Oxon-New York: Routledge
- Gibbon, Edward, and Henry Hart Milman. (2003), The decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Vol. 3. New York: Modern library.
- Greenwood, Andrea, and Mark W. Harris. (2011), *An introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist traditions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Griffiths, John Gwyn, ed. (1975), *The Isis-book: (Metamorphoses, Book XI)*. Vol. 39. Brill.
- Gwatkin, Henry Melvill. (1949), *Early church history to AD 313*. Vol. 2. Macmillan
- Häkkinen, Sakari. (2005), *Ebionites*. In A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics', Brill.
- Higgins, Sabrina. (2012), *Divine Mothers: the influence of Isis on the Virgin Mary in Egyptian Lactans-iconography*. Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies 3, no. 1.
- Jackson, Montell. (1973), *Islam Revealed*. Brill.
- Kinlaw, Robert; Stasio, Frank (2020), *The Sunday School Teacher Turned Skeptic: Meet Bart Ehrma*, WUNC News. Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- Klijn, Albertus Frederik Johannes, and Gerrit Jan Reinink. (2001), *Patristic evidence for Jewish-Christian sects*. Vol. 36. Brill Archive.
- Küng, Hans, and John Stephen Bowden. (2007), *Islam: Past, present and future*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Leonard George, (1995), *The Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*. New Eusebius.
- Martin Lings (2006). *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. Inner Traditions.
- McDowell, Josh, and Jim Walker. (2013), *Understanding Islam and Christianity: Beliefs That Separate Us and How to Talk About Them*. Harvest House Publishers.
- Merriam Webster'S. (1994), *Collegiate*. Springfield, Merriam-Webster.
- Miner, M., Ghobary, B., Dowson, M., & Proctor, M. T. (2014). *Spiritual attachment in Islam and Christianity: Similarities and differences*. Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 17(1), 79-93.
- Philips, Abu Ameenah Bilal. (2002), *The True Message of Jesus Christ*. Dar al-Fatah,
- Reynolds, Alfred. (1993), *Jesus Versus Christianity*. Cambridge International Pub.,.
- Schoeps, Hans-Joachim. (1953), *Ebionite Christianity*. The Journal of Theological Studies 4, no. 2.
- Silva, Moisés. (1995), *Modern Critical Editions and Apparatuses of the Greek New Testament*. The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis 46.
- Smith, W. C. (1963). *The meaning and end of religion*. Fortress Press.
- Stroumsa, Guy G. (2014), *3 Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins*, In Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts, Brill.
- Tannehill, Robert C. (1977), *The disciples in Mark: The function of a narrative role*, The Journal of Religion 57, no. 4.
- Thurston, Robert W. (1986), *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Evangelical Quarterly.
- Timothy, Freke, and Gandy Peter. (1999), *The Jesus Mysteries*, Harmony.
- Tirmidhi Jami, Hasan (Darussalam), (1718), *English reference*: Vol. 1, Book 46, Hadith 3802
- White, James F. (1993), *A brief history of Christian worship*. Abingdon Press.
- Wilken, R.L. (2005), *The spirit of early Christian thought: Seeking the face of God*. Yale University Press.

Timurlenk Chekovikj, Elena Trenevskaja Chekovikj

Jesus and monotheism, the similarity and relations between Early Judeo-Christian credence and Islam

Nowadays, due to Apocrypha and the availability of other early writings, one may see many other stories of Christianity, which are so far from „canonical“. Especially, these stories are not new; already in the 2nd century C.E. (Years before the Nicaea Council), many religious groups pretended to be the real followers of Jesus. Using a variety of sources, the debate is also how political reasons influenced the development of Christianity in late antiquity. It is essential to determine if the influence of the early Christian movement implies the same belief system of Islam or if it is only possible to identify some common isolated theological ideas applying to both religions. The first proposal is that the Qur'an supports the monotheistic view of early Christians and observance of the Jewish laws. The second notion is that the historical Jesus is

considered the Prophet of God by some of the early Christian factions and this coincides with Islamic theology. The third thesis is that in most parts, Islam recognizes the thought behind Early Christian credence especially the Ebionites and the followers of James the Just. Concluding the findings, a future parallel can be found in the linkage between early Christian movements and their supporters and Islamic teachings in the present age. This should lead to mutually beneficial dialogue and understanding between Islamic Ummah and Corpus Christianum.

Timurlenk Chekovikj, Elena Trenevskaja Chekovikj

Ісус та монотеїзм, стосунки та подібність між раннім іудею-християнством та ісламом

На сьогоднішній день, завдяки Апокрифам та наявності інших ранніх творів, можна побачити багато інших історій християнства, які далеко не «канонічні». Тим більше, що ці історії не нові; вже у II столітті н.е. (за роки до Нікейського собору) багато релігійних груп прикинулися справжніми послідовниками Ісуса. Використовуючи різноманітні джерела, дискусія також полягає в тому, як політичні причини впливали на розвиток християнства в пізній античності. Важливо визначити, чи передбачає вплив ранньохристиянського руху однаково систему віросповідання ісламу чи можливо лише визначити деякі поширені ізольовані теологічні ідеї, що стосуються обох релігій. Перша пропозиція полягає в тому, що Коран підтримує монотеїстичний погляд на ранніх християн і дотримання єврейських законів. Друге поняття полягає в тому, що історичний Ісус вважається Божим Пророком деякими ранньохристиянськими угрупованнями, і це збігається з ісламською теологією. Третя теза полягає в тому, що в більшості частин іслам визнає думку про ранньохристиянську довіру, особливо про ебїонітів та послідовників Якова Праведника. Завершуючи висновки, майбутня паралель може бути знайдена у зв'язку між ранньохристиянськими рухами та їхніми прихильниками та ісламським вченням у сучасності. Це повинно призвести до взаємовигідного діалогу та взаєморозуміння між ісламською Уммою та Corpus Christianum.

Timurlenk Chekovikj, MSc in Crisis management, author of the book titled: „From Jesus to Muhammad: Similarities between Early Christianity and Islam”.

Elena Trenevskaja Chekovikj, professor of geography, co-author of the book titled: „From Jesus to Muhammad: Similarities between Early Christianity and Islam”.