

## **Christian-Muslim Dialogue Perspectives of “The Muslim View of Christology” and “To Be a European Muslim”**

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### **Abstract**

Mahmoud Ayoub and Tariq Ramadan are Islamic scholars working on a Muslim-Christian dialogue study. They proposed the concepts of “The Muslim View of Christology” and “To Be a European Muslim”, respectively, and promoted the study of the Muslim-Christian dialogue into a broader field with far-reaching influence. The purpose of this study is to compare the concepts of “The Muslim View of Christology” and “To Be a European Muslim”, as well as to understand the meaning and contextualization of the dialogue between the Shi’i and the Sunni within the Muslim-Christian dialogue, in order to seek a new dimension of religious dialogue. The method of this study is a systematic analysis. This entails a close reading of the two thinkers’ writings on Christian-Muslim encounters, in order to make a comprehensive presentation of their thinking about the Christian-Muslim dialogue in its many dimensions, considering these structures through assessing their inner consistency; in particular, including the viewpoint of “The Muslim View of Christology” and “To Be a European Muslim”. “The Muslim View of Christology”, Ayoub emphasizes, Christians must take as a Muslim view and accept it as such, at least as the methodological basis for their research studies. Ramadan prioritizes Qur’anic interpretation over simply reading the text, in order to understand its meaning and to practice the tenets of Islamic philosophy. He proposed the following perspective: To be a European Muslim and to research the Study of Islamic Sources in the European Contextualisation. We find “the Muslim view of Christology” as a blessing, as a sign of God’s abundant generosity in the phenomenon of diversity. The idea that “To Be a European Muslim” is an Islamic worldview is a trend that is universal and rooted in the land. Christian-Muslim dialogue on these two topics is a very indicative key and can contribute to peace in this world. The Christology of this study will be limited to “the Muslim View of Christology” and will limit Muslims to Muslim communities born in Europe. In the context of Abraham’s religion, the purpose of the Christian-Muslim dialogue should be courageous and dare to ascend to the model of coexistence and the unity of God, not just for each others’ tolerance and acceptance. This is the ultimate concern for religious dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

**Keywords:** *Christian; Muslim; Dialogue; Christology; Coexistence.*



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### **INTRODUCTION**

With the current trend of globalization, religion has opened up a dialogue between people and demonstrated the mission of “understanding” and “peace” to each other. This is the essential idea that the contemporary world religion must awaken and promote, especially in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims (Hirvonen, H.,2013).

There are two levels of religious dialogue; Intra, which- means internal and Inter, which- means to each other. What is an interreligious dialogue? It is the process of rethinking and communicating the religious situation from the past in order to achieve peace and acceptance. Further, religious dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interactions between different religious traditions of individuals and institutional groups, namely beliefs and spiritual or humanistic beliefs. It is not a syncretism or alternative religion, because dialogue usually involves promoting understanding between different religions or beliefs to increase the acceptance of others rather than fusion to create new beliefs (Rahmat, 2017).

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The first goal of this study is to explore the history of Christology and the theological issues of Muslims very briefly, and then to try to engage in a Christian dialogue with Christology. It provides a discourse and background information according to the scholar Ayoub's Muslim view of Christology. The second goal is to explore the issue of European Muslims becoming a part of civil society, then to understand the Christian countries and societies in Europe and how to engage in dialogue with Muslims on a variety of topics such as education and justice. The discussion and background information are provided by the scholar Ramadan's universal concept of European Muslims.

In the face of the current trend of contemporary multiculturalism, in order to resolve the past differences between Christians and Muslims, many cultures and religions must courageously confront different issues while attempting a step-by-step approach to history, texts and theology. They must clarify research and create a peaceful attitude through communication and dialogue, rather than use religious violence to exacerbate the problems. It is the goal of this article to use "The Muslim View of Christology" and "To Be a European Muslim" in order to understand the meaning of the Christian religion and Muslim dialogue.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Here is a brief introduction to the literature review of "The Muslim View of Christology" and "To Be a European Muslim".

### **Literature Review on "The Muslim View of Christology"**

Ayoub uses the Qur'anic literature review to develop Islamic Christology, including the following some issues: (1) "The Miracle of Jesus". (2) "Jesus the Son of God". (3) "An Image of Jesus in Early Shi'i Muslim Literature". (4) "The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion?" (Omar Irfan, A., 2007).

The "Miracle" is a sacred mark of Islam and is very important for the Islamic Christology situation. However, the miracles of Jesus give rise to two Qur'anic challenges. The first instructs us all, the people of the Book, to come together in a common resolve to worship God alone. The second is the infinity and openness of God's Word, which transcends human comprehension and yet demands that it be interiorized and understood anew by people of faith in every age.

Regarding "Jesus the Son of God", Ayoub investigates two relevant terms: "Ibn" and "Walad". The former is used in the Qur'an as "son", which he argues signifies "filial relationship", "understood metaphorically to mean son through a relationship of love and adoption". "Walad" refers to the more general relationship of "offspring" and this, Ayoub stresses, signifies "physical generation and sonship" (Siddiqui, A., 1997).

Did the evolution of Christ in the religious history of Jesus into the faith of Christ influence the Christology of the early Muslims? "An Image of Jesus in Early Shi'i Muslim Literature" is a very important issue worthy of serious study in "The Muslim View of Christology", as it concerns an authentic Islamic understanding of Christ that deserves careful consideration as a legitimate Christology. Ayoub does not consider Christology to mean a theological formulation analogous to the Christologies of the early church, rather, it is an understanding of the role of Christ within the divine plan of human history, of Christ the man, a servant of God, but also of Christ, the Word of God, His spirit and exalted friends. So, these ideas are clearly stated in the Qur'an and thus provide a basic framework for the image of the Christ of Muslim piety, and these ideas cover the full scope, methods, and sources of the literature as well as texts in translation.

Finally, "The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion?" according to the Qur'anic literature on the death of Jesus allowed Ayoub to make three points about Jesus, "The word of Truth" (Q. 19:34): Who died on the

cross? Did Jesus die? Why was there this outcome? Ayoub considers that Muslim commentators (mufassirūn) on the Qur’an have understood the Qur’anic verses that deal with Jesus. Islam’s religious literature teaches that human fulfillment must be achieved through human prophets; the Qur’an, therefore, insists on the humanity of God’s messengers (Q. 6-8, 9, 50, 11:31, 17:94, 95, 25:7). In other words, Jesus is only a messenger of God of “The word of Truth”. Does Ayoub find an element that influences the issue of Who Died on the Cross? He considers that the words “*wa lākin shbbiha lahum*” have generated much discussion, myth and legend throughout the long history of Islam’s tafsīr. Ayoub indicates a difficult problem regarding Jesus’s death that Qur’anic commentators have a different interpretation of; for example, “Those who differed concerning him [Jesus] are in doubt regarding it [the truth]; they have no knowledge of it [the truth] save the following of conjecture [zann]” (Q. 4:157).

### **Literature Review on “To Be a European Muslim”**

The Swiss-born Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan proposed the idea of “To Be a European Muslim” and gained worldwide attention. One can learn about becoming a European Muslim from the following literature: (1) “To be a European Muslim” must assist millions of Muslims who were born here in Europe. This is a fundamental problem of these times. Ramadan conducted in-depth research to try to answer basic questions about the social, political, cultural and legal integration of European Muslims. What this institute wants to show is that it is possible for Muslims to practise their pluralistic belief in a diverse European nation-state (Ramadan, T., 1999). (2) It analyses Muslims’ lives in France. First, it examines the historical and judicial perspectives. and then the internal motivations of Muslims in the community. Research suggests that Muslims must recognize their existence in French society, and French society also needs to examine its past colonial prejudice against Islam (Ramadan, T., 1999). (3) It attempts to prove that through using Islamic resources and civilization, Muslims have the ability to respond to the contemporary identity with their own identity. It discusses that Muslims can propose special social, political and economic arrangements through their own views in order to link the values of ethics and let their terminal consciousness and spirituality enter the modern generation (Ramadan, T., 2001).

The above is about the launch of the Muslim project rooted in Europe. (4) The current era of globalization is turbulent and ever-changing, with economic domination and the financial markets subverting every area of human activity. The world has changed, and all this turmoil is having serious consequences. The outstanding ideas of the Ulama and Muslims have become stuck, especially in the field of economics. Everyone who observes these phenomena and who researches the origins and concept of globalization understands that ethics are seriously lacking (Ramadan, T., 2004). This is the Muslim resistance.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The following is a brief introduction to the method of “The Muslim View of Christology” and “To Be a European Muslim”.

#### **The Method of “The Muslim View of Christology”**

First, Ayoub applies the historical method to analyze the history of and theological divisions in the literature. He then analyses the meanings of words to restore the truth of the literature in order to gradually establish “The Muslim View of Christology”.

Ayoub contends that the Qur’an presents a Christology of the human Christ, empowered by God and “fortified with the holy Spirit”. He emphasises that “it is a fully Islamic Christology based not on

borrowed distortions of early Christian heresies, but on the Islamic view of man and God". He emphasizes that "Christians must take a Muslim view and accept it as such, at least as the methodological basis for their research and study". They should be accepted as authentic Islamic statements and as expressing an Islamic point of view.

Ayoub describes the various views expressed by Muslim commentators on the Qur'an on the subject of Christology. Concerning the death of Jesus, he points out two areas where all Muslims agree. First, Islam denies the divinity of Jesus "without denying his special humanity". Second, Islam denies the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as an atonement for sinful humanity. However, the main area of disagreement about Jesus which Ayoub highlights is that the Qur'an "denies neither the actual death of Christ nor his general redemptive role in human history".

The key point is that Christians insist on the crucifixion as a historical fact, but the Qur'anic commentators consider that it "belongs not to history but to theology in the broadest sense".

Ayoub suggests that Muslim commentators "indulge" in a somewhat "excessive textual analysis"; he claims that they are very vocal and express themselves in an uncompromising manner "letting God", even at the cost of "denying a man the privileges of man". On the other hand, he points out that the Christian position is equally uncompromising and serious "on letting God be a man in order for man to be divine". This gap he finds vast, even though he stresses the difference is "one of theological terminology rather than intent".

### **The Method of "To Be a European Muslim"**

Since Islam will permeate every part of the world and is rooted in this region, it must adapt and change; a wave of reform and thinking will happen. The following are Ramadan's reform methods: (1) Ramadan appeals to Muslim society and communities everywhere to be bold through reform. He challenges the conservative arguments that reform is a dangerous and external bias, and a betrayal of faith. He says that real reforms have always been rooted in Islamic textual sources and spiritual goals, and in the tradition of reason. But, the reform movement is based on re-reading textual sources, and using traditional methodologies and classifications can only achieve adaptive responses. Ramadan calls for basic reforms, and for innovative solutions to change the present and future of our society (Ramadan, T., 2008). (2) Ramadan has embarked on a journey to uncover profound truths that are connected in some way. In this world, which is filled with different beliefs and opinions, how can we find the peace that humans can share? Ramadan unveils the universal concept of love, respect, truth and tolerance, and examines the relationship between men and women. Whether you are a Christian, a Buddhist, a Jew or a Muslim, he reveals the origins of religious traditions from the concept of religious universality and guides the various religions to understand how the past separates us and to discover what we already have, which is a good consensus (Ramadan, T., 2010). (3) When inviting reflection on the concept of super-diversity, Ramadan argues about the prospects of universality, and how if there is no value and vision, it can set a limit to the comments and dialogues in use, as well as a discussion of diverse practices in everyday life. This is one of the greatest challenges to art and culture; the diversity of voices and institutional backgrounds of intellectuals (Ramadan, T., 2010).

The above states that religion must develop and accept the existence of pluralism. At the same time, it also explains the historical process and content of Muslim diversity in Western Christianity and other religions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The contemporary significance of the study of “The Muslim View of Christology”**

Ayoub believes that studying “The Muslim View of Christology” to re-examines the Christology of Islam and challenges Christians and Muslims; his aim is to harmonize the Qur’anic denial and the Christian affirmation in Christology.

Therefore, Muslims must re-examine the background, context, and meaning of every generation of Christology since the Prophet Muhammad. Christianity must also understand Islamic Christology with reason and accept the characteristics of its history and theology. Christianity and Islam have long believed that Jesus was sent by God, Christianity believes that Jesus is the Son of God, and Islam believes that the Trinity of Christianity deviates from the uniqueness of God.

There is a big gap between the background of Christianity and “The Muslim View of Christology”, and even an inability to communicate and initiate dialogue. The context that has existed for a long time is meaningful enough for dialogue between the two sides. By using a humanistic, social and psychological method, a systematic analysis of the internal and external systems of religion can be carried out and the characteristics of the various factors can be clarified. In other words, a dialogue on Christology between Christians and Muslims would be more likely to solve the unknowns of Christology and overcome the obstacles to each other’s coexistence.

The historical background of Christians and Muslims is evolving, but the context of Christology is diverse. For the theologians of Christianity and Islam, this is an opportunity for more research to achieve peace and harmony.

### **The challenge and significance of establishing “to Be a European Muslim”.**

After Tariq Ramadan proposed establishing how a “to Be a European Muslim”, he faced many challenges, but it gradually gave rise to many meanings.

Ramadan’s theological intent is to establish the Muslims who have roots in Europe. He is concerned about the civilization of Islam and the challenges the world faces due to modernity, the influence of colonialism and the impact of democratic countries. He believes that appropriate theological ideas will help the Islamic civilization to enter the path and context of modernity. Therefore, he emphasizes (1) religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians, and (2) the reconstruction of rational ideas, to face these challenges.

Why do we need religious dialogue? First of all, Ramadan believes that the wisdom of contemporary Muslims is seriously lacking in dialogue and multiple arguments. The structure of the factional dialogue within Islam is in great need of diverse ideas and identities, and further changes are needed to accept and manage pluralistic goodwill.

Second, along with the words “dialogue”, “alliance”, “civilizations” and “culture”, the words “identity” and “integration” must establish the integration structure and rules of “affiliation”.

Third, “dialogue between civilizations” is presented simultaneously in the development of Western and Islamic civilization. It is more in tune with the needs of dialogue, from its creation of unique issues and dialogues with a different cosmology. It speculates on and presents the existence and value of the other.

Fourth, the requirement for dialogue between civilizations increases the content of that dialogue. These concepts and values should not only be discussed, but they should also come to fruition in reality. When comparing and observing “our own ideas” and “the other’s society”, we need to criticize and reflect on each other and analyse the gaps between generation and ideas. When a “dialogue between values and

ideals" brings them close to each other, it can be transformed into a "dialogue between policies and practices", and the other's characteristics can be passed on. This makes the dialogue meaningful.

Finally, Ramadan believes that Muslim religious scholars ('Ulama') and thinkers have not tried to reflect on the dialogue they need to complete. Ramadan cries out to the aspiring Muslims who are pursuing a new vision in the 21st century. If they are tempted away from the difficult situation, they will not understand the changes, but they will make breakthroughs in the spiritual and social existence of Muslims. Ramadan's suggestion to Muslims is "The immutable (Ath-Thabit) and the Changing (al-Mutaghayyir)" to appeal to Muslims to think rationally (Ramadan, T., 2008).

The significance and vision of establishing a European Muslim are that the European Muslim community has equal rights and obligations in the ethics of Christianity, citizenship, culture, religion, education, justice and so on. There is no longer religious conflict and violence, only peace, harmony and coexistence are accepted.

Ramadan's idea of becoming a European Muslim, in fact, not only examines the current situation of Islam, it also criticizes where Muslims are lacking. However, it is also admirable to present serious challenges to the Christian countries of Europe.

## **CONCLUSION**

The purpose of religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims is to achieve peace, harmony, and coexistence with each other and to avoid conflict and harm. The Islamic Shi'i theologian Mahmoud Ayoub has opened the door to a dialogue between the two religious communities from "The Muslim View of Christology".

From his research of the literature, his research methods and rigorous discourse, he has established a positive attitude towards the Islamic Shi'i open dialogue and obtained significant results. His theological ideas are devoted to promoting a gentle interpretation and understanding of Islamic theology, but they also seriously reflect on Islamic Christology and challenge Christianity.

In particular, the topic of Islamic Christology is a very sensitive and difficult issue. This is his contribution to the religious dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and a model for follow-up researchers. The Islamic Sunni theologian Tariq Ramadan is a Muslim who was born in Europe. From his own experience, his vision of becoming a European Muslim has inspired the hopes and expectations of many European Muslim communities.

From his research of the literature, his research methods, and systematic discussion, and through his free and open theological and philosophical thinking to build the ideal mission and practice of "Being a European Muslim", he has also revealed conservative Muslims' rigid and prevalent ideas and has presented serious challenges to Christianity in Europe, as well as receiving the appreciation and understanding of Christian theologians.

Because the concept of being a European Muslim is not only a problem in terms of geographical area, it is also a problem of Islamic religious reform. Therefore, Ramadan's proposal to be a European Muslim is still relevant, thus confirming his enormous contribution.

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