

An Introduction of Christianity to Muslims

A Textual and Historical Study of the Largest
Religion of the World

AN INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO MUSLIMS

A DOCTRINAL STUDY

with

Hebrew, Greek and Arabic Textual References

Researched & Written by:

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DEDICATED

TO

“My Late Grandfather,

SYED MUHAMMAD KAMAL ALI SHAH

Whose Saintly Life Was an Absolute
Blessing for My Family.”

(1934-2006)

MAY GOD ALMIGHTY BLESS HIS SOUL. AMEN!

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2010 Electronic Copy Edition

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PREFACE

Since the world population is primarily divided in two classes; (a) those who believe in God and entertain the idea of the deity, and (b) who completely deny the possibility of the deity. We can, therefore, specify the end of the book in unequivocal terms in the light of this clear-cut distinction. Theists, as the believers of God (or even many gods) are called, are the primary addressee of the book, whereas atheists are kept at bay in the textual flow of the book owing to their entirely different discipline of understanding and grounds for denying the possibility of metaphysics. The book tends to say, from beginning till end, in a preconceived way, as we have already assumed, that the universe is God-centric—the existence of the ultimate *being* in whatever form or module. Monotheists, dualists, tritheists, polytheists, gnostics etc. are among such classes that, although dissimilar to one another, believe in metaphysics and the theistic creation of the universe; hence, we can assemble them in one collective class of the “theists”. In addition, becoming more specific about the end-goal of this book, it is our main focus to evaluate the two largest faiths of the world that, unfortunately, remain often at stake against each other. Largest part of the world population adheres to Christianity and Islam, which have always been competing in different parts of world for proselytes. In fact, the relation of Christianity and Islam is a hot issue of today's international politics and religious affairs. It seems, therefore, highly appropriate to restudy and review both of the religions in line with the present-day needs and demands.

This book is principally a comparative scholarship on the two main religions of the world, namely, Islam and Christianity. It will, however, also serve as an Islamic and Christian apologetic treatise on certain occasions. The title of the book signifies the emphasis put on the exploration of such facts that in most cases escape the eyes of both Muslims and Christians. This book is not meant exclusively for general readers of both Muslim and Christian background; instead, it presupposes to meet the coveted intellectual thirst of scholastic class pertaining to either Christianity or Islam. In a traditional Muslim sense, the level of research in this book is honestly endeavored to keep high by the intensive as well as extensive research I have had on this substantial subject during the course of its writing. Readers will discover an entirely new approach to the substance of interfaith study, especially in relation to the textual analyses of Islam and Christianity, which will, at times, appear a reconciliation or harmonization in the present work. Both of the religions, however, have numerous harmonious bits of faith on the account of, presumably, identical Semitic origin, i.e. Divinity. Judaism also stands side by side these two religions in the familiar claim of divine origin. These three Semitic religions thereby constitute a *Semitic Heritage* whose traditions concur in all three religions we know as “Semitic Religions” in the modern world. I have, in this book, however, no zealous concern for Judaism except for those instances when Christianity is explained against its Jewish background. Judaism is, nevertheless, the original guardian of the inherited Christian heritage of sacred biblical writings (*Hagiographa*) and extra-biblical Hebrew traditions. Hence, technically speaking, we cannot split the coalesced scriptural theology and history of Judaism and Christianity. Moreover, the schism of Christianity from the mother faith Judaism is undoubtedly a matter of great concern for us because Islam explicitly regards Christianity as a faction of Israelite

religious mainstream. Bible stands nowhere hostile to this assertion. This truth, nevertheless, functions to inaugurate a discordant debate whose conclusion portrays Christianity as a *cult* in lieu of a *religion* at popular level. This approach is, however, misleading. A shared religious history and heritage of scriptures and traditions do not deprive Christianity of its independent status. Despite the fact that Christianity is held as a *cult* among the Muslims, it is necessary to deal with Christianity as a separate and independent religious system with its defined doctrine. Indeed it is this independent status of Christianity with which it has evolved into the largest religion in our times.

In precision, I have comparatively analyzed both of the greatest religions of the world in the light of modern *needs*, *demands* and *values* in the present publication. We will cautiously view the fundamentals of the two faiths on purely religious grounds and will also attempt to comprehend the phenomenon of religion on different occasions as a materialistic mind of today perceives the idea of metaphysics.

The major purpose of writing this book stems from a specific happening—apparently of no magnitude. In 2003, I had a chance to read a Christian apologetic-cum-polemic booklet namely, *"What You Need to Know about Islam"*. This booklet transformed my ideology, and my hitherto silent missionary heart became zealous for religion. Truthfully speaking, I began the study of Christianity with a fair mind, but soon I realized that little of the Church rites was in agreement with the Holy Bible. A deeper contemplation on Holy Bible narrated a different story, and I discovered that there was an irreconcilable incongruity between biblical precepts and the traditional Christianity of the West. The interpretations to bridge over this gulf, in fact, always enlarged the chasm between Bible and Christianity. This reconciliation is perhaps

impossible, to speak objectively. If the very foundations of a building are flawed, the durability of the building, however high, is highly questionable. Christianity indeed requires an unbiased reversal to the original doctrine of Jesus, the Christ.

I believe that Christianity was originally divine—a culmination of the national revelation of Israel. Jesus was the “seal” and “transformer” of Jewish ‘nationalism’ into ‘universalism’. Nevertheless, a number of early opportunists deformed the mode of Israel's final revelation and made it into a new, different religion—distortion of the original. This is certainly the conclusion of my exhaustive textual and historical survey. I hope my readers will enjoy reading this book in addition to making several new discoveries. I am also very sure that the book will meet the intellectual requirements of those searching after the truth and its different facets.

After a short preface, we turn to our real course of study i.e. a textual and historical analysis of the doctrine of Christianity with a cross reference to Islamic paradigm. This comparative study has been arranged in two main sections, as below:

SECTIONS

1. SEMITIC RELIGIOUS HERITAGE
2. DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIANITY

Section One

SEMITIC RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Term “Semites” or “Semitic” may not be new for many, but its literal implication is still a point of ambiguity amongst the majority of the world population. Moreover, a huge number of the adherents of the major religions namely Islam, Christianity, and Judaism are utterly unfamiliar of this religio-historical term on the account of orthodox confines. Jews wrongly perceive of the word as another exclusive name for their race. Whatever the grounds for this ignorance and ambiguity, it is a fact that the apposite understanding of any of the three aforementioned religions is inconceivable without an extensive study of Semitic religious heritage. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share this religious heritage claiming respectively to be the rightful heir of Abraham. Although, Semites is a term that is also used for genetic distribution of races, yet we are concerned with its religious interpretation here. “Semitic heritage” may be a new entry as a compound term in religious terminology of Semitic religions; hence, even the best possible definition might be inept in many virtues. Succinctly speaking, Semitic religions possess an organic whole of traditions, precepts, facts, and myths expanded on the span of some three millennia—an unprecedented heritage that other religions can only dream and envy. This inconvincible heritage was the bedrock that set in motion a unique slogan of *Monotheism* long time ago, which successfully changed the direction of religious thinking *en toto* irrespective of geography and race. Man-made religions, thenceforth, shaped their theories and philosophical tenets in the light of monotheistic traditions of Semitic provenance. Despite the established fact of verbal and written

sources of religious heritage, we cannot deviate from the archaeological path of religious remains, which introduces yet another branch in Semitic religious heritage i.e. ancient religious architecture. Temple of Solomon, for instance, must not be overlooked owing to its central importance for all three aforementioned religions, so that we may well be able to carefully comprehend all those tenets that have been assigned to this rocky edifice over millennia. *Ka'bah* at Mecca can be taken as another sound example in this regard.

Shem, one of the three surviving sons of Prophet Noah, is the forebear of a celebrated Biblical patriarch *Abraham*. In spite of seeking a common origin in the person of Abraham, it is Shem after whose name the three religions attribute their mainstream. Our term *Semitic Religions* is an exclusive description of what is related to Abraham—the next as well as chief character in this mainstream—and his descendants from both of his sons Ishmael and Isaac. Abraham, an eighteenth century BC *Habiru* man of Ur—a city of ancient Mesopotamia—received visions from God proceeded by a commandment to move westward and a promise of being ordained by God to the designation of “Friend”. Abraham’s move to west was not just a subjective move of transient nature, but a move of history that exercised such a deep impact on mankind that could no longer be withstood anywhere. It was the first potential “Covenant” of God with mankind since the occurrence of the “*sin of disobedience*” as the Bible portrays. The sign for this new bond between God and man was *circumcision* of the foreskin of males. Hordes of *Habiru* people, already semi nomads, left their homeland and settled firstly in Asia Minor, and latterly in a land that has been spoken of in Bible as the “Promised Land”. Abraham was a noble among those *Habiru* hordes who also served as mercenaries on some instances for the king. The expanse of present day Middle East was the land that God promised to

give Abraham, saying; “I will give unto thee and thy seed.” Thus, it was the land of Abraham, his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, and the descendants of Jacob (afterwards renamed *Israel*) from his twelve sons.

The whole of the account of Abraham and his family is found in the first book of Bible, Genesis. We are, however, left with no secular records of this remarkable Mesopotamian man. Genesis is the first of the five books of Pentateuch that is said to have been written by Prophet Moses in 14th or 15th century BC. We are, therefore, uncertain of the original picture of Abraham and his belief, for a period of some 4 centuries had elapsed by the time when Pentateuch was composed. In this peculiar situation, all of the three religions are bound to rely upon the writings ascribed to Moses, which logically play the role of a “foundation” for the subsequent piling of Semitic heritage. We must be open to reality, however bitter, when facing the missing links in the record of pre-Mosaic Prophets, for we have no authentic information on their lifestyle and teachings. This discrepancy is oft dealt apologetically through the records found in Pentateuch, but this is a highly controversial approach. This very discrepancy is the motive of contention between three religions, and its extant outcome is the variant perception of early prophets and prophetic office. Variations in interpretations and mutually distinct or divergent destinations of the three religions of the same house draw a very ambiguous picture of human faith. We, therefore, need an utterly impartial approach to understand the subject of Semitic heritage, so that we can reconstruct the true faith-foundation of Abraham and his immediate descendants.

No individual faith can pronounce an assertion to be in the possession of the true creed of Abraham unless it goes through the mainstream of Semitic religious traditions. Judaism indeed wins the honor of being the first container

and guardian of Semitic heritage, for it was the Jewish race that had been, in the first, entrusted with the divine ordinance. An empirically neutral research of Semitic heritage, however, disproves the capableness of Jewish race to be the guardian of true faith owing to their inability in recognizing Jesus Christ and Muhammad. Bible itself witnesses Jewish treacheries against the very God of their being. Similarly, Jews could not manage to communicate with other world to bring them in the lot of God's commandments. They simply proved obsessed with the notion of retaining their authority of "chosen race". They made God's covenant with man into a so-called *national* revelation, which is, in the modern sense of egalitarian understanding, nothing better than a propagation of "henotheism". Traditional Christianity, moreover, is baseless if we remove Judaism from its background as the forerunning receptacle of faith. Christianity is hardly a religion of its own without Jesus' claim of Christhood based upon Davidic ideal. Despite boasting claims, Christianity has been unable to prove itself the rightful custodian of Semitic heritage since its very birth, because the person of Jesus was never correctly understood by the succeeding generations in the light of Semitic heritage. If Christianity of today claims to have been the most befitting inheritor of Semitic heritage, then why do we discover enormous contradictions in the Christians' doctrine about the *nature* of God and *person* of Jesus Christ? Today, factions of Christianity have no agreement even on the most fundamental belief in God. Moreover, Christian interpretations of Hebrew Scriptures strongly differ from those of Jews, disproving Jewish long-held beliefs. If Christianity disjoins Hebraic apprehensions of Semitic heritage and the ultimate Old Testament Messiah, it would be the best example of Christianity's self-denial culminating in a baseless ideology that appears all a sudden from no mother faith. The non-Semitic traits of Christianity, which will be hinted upon in this book, discern the assimilating capacity of

traditional Christianity that it has remarkably exhibited ever since distortion set in. In the light of history, therefore, it is safe to assert that the modern organization of Christianity has reduced to a conglomeration of heterogeneous metaphysics. However, in spite of all early and later corruption of Christian faith, there is at least one class of Christians that remains closest to the original Christianity. The above criticism of Christianity does certainly not apply to such a class of Christian believers.

Islam, being the last of the three, cannot stand solitarily without the need of having close linkage with the already stockpiled Semitic heritage. In this way, it cannot cut itself from both Judaism and Christianity. Islam is, as Glorious Qurân claims, the restoration and culmination of previously revealed divine substance. Western scholars take Islam for an imitation of both Judaism and Christianity, whereas Qurân is thought to be a twisted redaction of Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. Muslims, however, view this very imitation in a different perspective. They insist that Islam does not plagiarize anything of either Judaism or Christianity in imitation of imposter religions, but it is a restitution of the original forms of both. Pointedly, Islam is claimed to be, as *Professor Philip Hitti* also supports the theory, the “original form of Hebrew religion” and a “logical perfection” of Semitic Heritage.¹

As regards the Islamic claim, Islam as a religious system does not depart from the previous two. Moreover, it also claims to purge them of the ungodly constituents they assimilated in the span of time.² It is but a vital anthropological fact that

¹ Hitti, Philip K., *History of the Arabs*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1992, p.8]

² The nucleus of Muslim theology is the belief that Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, is a universal Prophet—in the words of a celebrated Islamic

Hebrews cannot be singled out from Arabs on any basis, for their ethnic origin is admittedly the same. Cultural life may, however, vary owing to the geographical dissimilarities. Islam reconciles itself with all of those religions that claim divine origin. According to the teachings of Glorious Qurân, all of the Prophets were raised in the very religion of *submission to God*. Qurân, for instance, reasons that Abraham was neither a Christian nor a Jew, but he was *submissive to God*. Islam at large gave an enlightening and welcoming effect to the effaced Semitic originals, which otherwise had been exposed against the hegemony of Greco-Roman thought. Islam indeed baptizes both Judaism and Christianity as the patchwork of divine plan embedded into the Muslim theology, whereas both Moses and Jesus possess a central importance in Qurânic doctrine.

authority a "world Prophet"—whose prophetic office was meant for the whole of mankind.

Section Two

DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, one of the most popular religions of ancient and modern times, is the creed of those who claim to be the followers of a 1st century Jew of the House of David, *Jesus*.³ Jesus, a carpenter, son of Mary, and the adopted son of Joseph, was the young man who, according to the New Testament of Bible, proclaimed himself the long-awaited “Messiah” of the Jewish race.

In spite of the purely Semitic nature of the doctrine, Christianity has been subject to coalescing paradoxical elements since its early days. What Jesus left after him was soon to become a corruption and degeneration of the original. Many teachers of Christianity appeared in the early Church within a decade of the crucifixion event who taught heresy in the name of Christ’s doctrine. Paul, the Apostle, is the historical figure who can be credited for evolving a creed after the name of Jesus of Nazareth—the prophesied *Christ* of Bible. He is the mighty man of apostolic era who left a great mark of his person on the Scriptures as well as history of Christianity. He, according to the Church doctrine, made a reformation of the heresy being cooked in the name of Christian religion.

Definition of Christianity, as a matter of fact, widely varies from person to person and region to region. Christianity’s

³ Muslims know Jesus as ‘Isâ ibn Maryam.

undertaking of regional notions in different geographies can be, by no means, denied on the account of converts' previous religious perspectives and practices. Such assorted practices made it really tough on Christianity to maintain its uniformity designed by Jesus in the first place and Paul in the second. The emergence of Christianity as a religion of considerable standing is not in fact an abrupt event of history; it is, instead, a tale of three evolutionary centuries after Christ. Although, Christianity had gained its Greek scriptural collection of what is now called New Testament within some eighty to ninety years of Jesus' Crucifixion, yet the official canonicity of New Testament was still a matter suspended for two centuries to come. Moreover, Christianity did not possess anything written of the New Testament Scriptures, nor did Jesus leave a command to write down his words and actions after him. It was, however, the love and zeal of his followers for Jesus Christ that they soon afterwards began to pen the "good news" of Christ's life and sacrifice, and so did they fashion a whole new genre of "Gospel writing" within religious literature towards the close of the first century. New Testament is, nevertheless, a codification of some oral traditions concerning Jesus, which are based on the testimony of the Apostles (Arabic *Hawāriyun*).⁴ Outside the mainstream Orthodox penmanship cropped up a plethora of writings attributed to Christ and Apostles. Evidence favoring this historical fact, which can be reckoned, is the appearance of a large number of pseudepigrapha, apocrypha, and other anonymous literature that has remained enigmatic for New Testament scholars throughout history. From the very beginning, this bafflement in the context of choosing apostolic writings dominated Christian world until the Council of Nicaea was held in CE 325.

⁴ Qurān uses Arabic plural "*Hawāriyūn*", a word derived from Ethiopic meaning "courtiers", for the Apostles of Christ.

By CE 325, when Apostolic Church was subjugated to leave it at the disposal of the royal Church of Rome, Christian world showed consensus on the recognition of the New Testament Canon. Since it was a need of the hour, Pauline Church embraced the canonicity of traditional New Testament as official decree, for the real proponent of this canon construction was *Athanasius*. Athanasius, a scholarly zealot in his person, impressed on the first Christian Roman king *Constantine the Great* and his courtiers with his witty arguments on the deity of Jesus. Hence, Constantine approved of “Athanasian Doctrine” to declare it the state religion. Athanasian Doctrine, so to speak, was a natural follow-up of Pauline Doctrine, for it was the perfection of Pauline ideology of Jesus’ deity, which ultimately gave way to Trinitarian conception. In a sense of scriptural philosophy of Christianity, pagan manifestation of some of the Christian rites and the thesis that Christianity being an easy ‘walkway’ at the disposal of gentile Christians in the writings of Paul flared pagan minds of the ancient. That is why the Church has always recognized Paul as “Apostle”, ‘one sent by Jesus himself’, and his writings being “inspired by Holy Spirit”, hence the Word of God in every respect. Given this situation, one must not forget about Paul, Saul in his original Jewish name, that he had had no meeting with Jesus during the latter’s lifetime.

In the subsequently following history of Christianity, the *Trinitarian* mode of Christian religion engineered its dominance throughout Christendom. Unitarian presence was only nominal in the Christian world and if there were any Unitarians, they were held as ‘heretics’. Therefore, this book will solely discuss the *Trinitarian* doctrine of Christianity as the standard doctrine of the religion ascribed to Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of *Trinitarian* Christianity stands upon five basic pillars i.e. fundamental beliefs, as under:

- 1. God in Trinity**
- 2. Crucifixion and Resurrection**
- 3. Baptism in Holy Spirit**
- 4. Eucharist**
- 5. Second Coming of Christ**

Theologically speaking, there are no *prescribed* five doctrinal pillars in Christianity, *per se*, as is the case of Islam. This is, in fact, my own parameter for measuring the doctrinal range of Christian religion as well as drawing a partial resemblance between the two. Apart from these five, there remains no other dynamic belief in Christianity that can be called ‘foundation’ of religion. All of the other notions are of secondary importance, which only support to prove the key beliefs. All remaining particles of Christian pack of faith are the projected constituents of these fundamental pillars, which are most often interpreted in such ways that it seem as if they were permanent pillars in all ages instead of substitute constituents. The author would once again like to make it crystal-clear that the current dissertation concerning the five pillars of Christianity should not supposedly be taken for granted, nor should it be perceived as hard and fast rule that the Church has strictly maintained biblically derived five pillars. Bible is, however, always referred to the points of exegesis in our debate.

Jesus is God, a part of Trinity, who came to earth in a personified form (John 1:14) for the salvation of humanity. *Incarnation* is the specific term used for the transformation of Jesus’ two entirely divergent forms. This is the ultimate essence of the faith, which every Christian has to accept for being saved.

An Introduction of Christianity to Muslims

1.

GOD IN TRINITY

Christian faith indubitably stands upon the foundation of *Trinity*. The whole of the colossal building would immediately collapse if Trinity were to be removed from the Christian Creed. Trinity is also called '*Trine*', which is, however, less famous in Christendom. Trinity is, in fact, the most widely believed manifestation of God in Christianity. Despite its wide adherence, however, the conception of Trinity is *per se* vague and mysterious, which appears to have rendered Christianity as a religion of esoteric character. Moreover, it is rather interesting that every attempt to explain Trinity further perplexes it as much as the theological doctrine of Trinity is grounded into philosophical interpretations. Trinity stands in the heart of the Church doctrine, but without a clear-cut biblical support. Even reformed Christian theology is, by and large, unable to locate the demarcation of authority, activity, and objectives among the hypostases of Godhead. What we have today as a Trinitarian conception is a result of repeatedly philosophized embellishment and coating on the role and personality of every hypostasis in Trinity. To understand this faith, we need to go in depth by uncovering the historical background of *Trinity*. Such a type of research, at once, raises a question in a probing mind: "What is Trinity?"

Definition of "Trinity"

New International Dictionary of the Bible defines the subject of Trinity in these words:

*"There is only one eternal God, the Lord, who is holy Love. Through his self-revelation he has disclosed to his people that he is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet he is not three deities but one Godhead, since all three Persons share the one Deity/Godhead. The biblical teaching of the Trinity is, in a sense, a mystery; and the more we enter into union with God and deeper our understanding of him, the more we recognize how much there is yet to know. Based on biblical teaching, the traditional Christian confession is that God is One in Three and Three in One."*⁵ [Emphases mine]

From the definition of New International Dictionary of the Bible, we can readily pick up some explanatory points, which we will just manage into order for our own comfort of understanding. Thus, Trinity can be comprehended as:

- a. The Trinity is the Divine Being that contains one indivisible essence (ousia, essentia).
- b. In this one Divine Being, there are three Personages or individual subsistences (hypostases), Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- c. The whole-undivided essence of God belongs equally to the each of the three personages.
- d. The subsistence and operation of the three personages in the Divine Being is marked by a certain definite order.
- e. There are certain personal attributes by which the three personages are distinguished.
- f. The Church confesses the Trinity to be a mystery beyond the comprehension of man.

There are three persons in the *one being* of God, which is, thus, described as *Trinity*. And these three distinguished

⁵ Douglas, J. D., & Tenney, Merrill C. (editors), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Trinity", Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987

hypostases of the same being, as they are understood and believed, are; 1. Father, 2. Son, and 3. Holy Spirit. These three hypostases constitute the essential being namely “Trinity”—the object of enjoyment in the viewpoint of St. Augustine.⁶ Word *person* or *personage* is, of course, ambiguous, rather misleading, owing to the somatic comprehension of these English terms. But in Christian worldview, an organism requires three essential merits to be declared a person i.e. self-consciousness, self-determination, and moral consciousness. Christian apologists assert that it is only God that is absolute and perfect in these characteristics, whereas man is a mere characteristic imitation of God as such. God is, therefore, a person or personage in the word's most semantic sense.⁷

As we have already understood, all of the three *persons* in Trinity merge into “one *essential* being”—perfectly united in terms of *power*, *love*, and *will*. The expression ‘one being’ is a most exacted illustration of the ultimate unity of God in terms of philosophical as well as historical context, for some great historical figures of Christian religion, such as *Athanasius*, *Augustine*, and *Thomas Aquinas*, have employed the word ‘being’ to denote *triune* nature of God. Latin verb ‘esse’, meaning “to be” (*essentia*: being), has not been applied *per se* in a sense of *existence* in their writings; rather, it is to be comprehended in a metaphysical sense that is beyond the realm of *senses perception*.⁸

⁶ Augustine, Saint, *On Christian Doctrine in Four Books*, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, p. 10

⁷ Conner, Walter Thomas, *Christian Doctrine*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, Nashville, 1937, p.76

⁸ Bobik, Joseph, *Aquinas On Being and Essence: A Translation and Interpretation*, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1965, p. 1

Trinity, in the light of its definition, is ‘*tri-unity*’ by all characteristics, which induces the holy union that is essentially termed as “One God”. The conception of Trinity thus far shows a partial resemblance with Islamic belief of “Divine Attributes” (*Asmā wa-Sifāt-e-Ilāhiyyah*). Islam also believes in the different attributes and characters of God emerging from the essential ‘oneness’ of the Divine Being. However, from this point onwards, the resemblance vanishes as the conception of Trinity shows dissimilarity at much deeper level. It says that all of the Holy Members of Trinity are individuals who equally share the power of Godhead. Here, Christian faith in *God* seems to have become an *institution* of more than a single omniscient being that is operated by three persons or more correctly by three *partners*. Interestingly, this puzzle of Trinity has always been at the core of religious affairs. Christian scholars have always been deeply concerned about a tenable as well as intelligible solution of Trinitarian problem. Without a regard to the belief of early *Nicene Fathers* or to the very faith of Paul, a number of things are generally assumed. Whatever the nature of early Christians' belief, modern Christian scholarship is ever inclined to reconcile ancient faith with modern thought. In this process of reinterpretation, the most puzzling issue of Trinity is given several interpretations by varying schools of thought. Some of the most important methods of interpreting Trinity are:

- a. Modalistic Solution Method
- b. Triune Nature of God Method
- c. Tritheistic Method⁹

⁹ Conner, Walter Thomas, *Christian Doctrine*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, Nashville, 1937, p.123

Modalistic Solution demonstrates the manifestation of one God into three aspects, characters, modes, attributes, or offices, who is originally and intrinsically *unipersonal*. Thus, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit appear, according to this method, three aspects or characters of the God of *absolute* unity instead of three independent *persons*, hence unipersonalism. This unipersonal interpretation of God is, therefore, called *modalism*, which does not employ the ambiguous plural *persons* or *hypostases*. This method is more inclined to *unitarianism* than *trinitarianism*. Therefore, it is in turn criticized and dispelled by the majority of Trinitarian adherents. It is, in fact, this interpretation of Trinity that bears closest resemblance with Islamic understanding of God.

Another proposed method of the problem of Trinity is ‘triune nature’ of God. According to this method, God is one supreme and creative Being who is the undivided source of everything rest. There is, however, a trinity—a unity of three natures—in the unity of supreme God or Godhead. This Trinity is neither a trinity of three individuals nor of three characters, but this is a tri-union namely trinity of natures, which can be viewed in the work of tri-faced God. This three dimensional work is, however, inclusive rather than exclusive by means of appraisal. This method is most widely accepted in ecclesiastical atmosphere, but the ground evaluation of Trinity maintains the acceptance of *tritheistic* notions among lower theology and laity. A common believer cannot comprehend this sophisticated philosophical appraisal of triune nature, and for him Trinity is a polytheistic manifestation of three gods working together in harmony.

Third and the most easily understandable solution is *Tritheistic Method*, which maintains the rationale that God is three individuals. Although Christian scholars always insist on single Godhead or the essential unity, yet the fact remains

close to three exclusive deities working conjointly and concurrently in the institution of God. Their mutual cooperation is inferred as the unity of their collective work, which according to some is an unsafe tenet. *Tritheistic Method* is indubitably the most widely practiced paradigm of Trinity. Since actions sound louder than the words, we need to look into the Christian practice rather than the verbal expressions of priestly class or Christian philosophers.¹⁰

It seems quite necessary that we draw a line of distinction between the Jewish and Christian conceptions of God, since both of them derive fundamental beliefs respectively from the Hebrew Old Testament with some exceptions of New Testament's *Hellenization* of God. In contrast to Christians, Jews are strictly monotheistic people who believe in *one, absolute* God who is known to them as the *God of Moses* namely "Yahweh". It must not be taken for granted by the Muslims that Yahweh is the God of Moses alone; He is, instead, the God of all Prophets, such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David and others, as Bible expounds.¹¹ But the logic of Yahweh's specific affiliation with the person of Moses is embedded into the introduction of God to Israel—the first encounter of God and Moses—and the surviving record of the subsequent Hebrew religion. Received Torah is the earliest testimony of Hebraic history to a deity named Yahweh who proclaimed Himself as the God of Israel. His appearance to Moses in Sinai after long Egyptian slavery of Israelites is held as a witness of the new age of Israel, where and when *Ten Commandments* were handed over to Moses. Thereafter, Moses introduced Yahweh among the Children of Israel as their personal savior God—the very role that Christ would

¹⁰ Conner, Walter Thomas, *Christian Doctrine*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, Nashville, 1937, pp.123-127

¹¹ Heaster, Duncan, *Bible Basics*, England: The Christadelphian Advancement Trust, Surrey, 2000, p. 8

claim later—whose manifestation recurs in the five books of *Torah* as well as in other Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, it was the first formal introduction of post-Egyptian bondage Hebrews with Yahweh, their personal Lord, with a covenant sealed by a set of commandments. Yahweh, Jews believe, is the personal and very sacred name of God; hence, the sacred name of Yahweh has no parallel. Interestingly, Yahweh has been translated in King James and its successor versions as ‘Lord’ instead of employing the *personal* name of God. The name Yahweh is pronounced and written in Hebrew with *four* Hebrew consonants as *YHWH*. Hebrews had to pronounce the conjoined consonants and understand the juncture in syllables according to their common understanding, for Hebrew had no vowel system in ancient times. *YHWH* literally means ‘one *who* (self) *becomes/exists*’ (Arabic *Qā'im-bil-Dhāt*), and its root is Hebrew verb *hawah* (HWH) meaning “to become”.¹²

This name was shunned to be used among the Jews in 3rd Century CE, when Judaism spread over the non-Jewish lands and Jews conceived of this name as too sacred to be used by the “others”—the gentile converts. The name that replaced *YHWH* was another Hebrew word *Adonai*, “my Lord”. But in 10th Century CE, it was restored with the addition of vowels pronounced as ‘YeHoWaH’. *Jehovah* is the Anglicized version of Yahweh. According to Jews, Yahweh is exclusively *personal* sacred name of God that is to be used by the “chosen people” alone. We will consider this subject in later pages to critique the *personal* and *impersonal* attributes and names of God, which will satisfactorily deal with the question whether God can really have a personal name.

¹² Rotherham, J. B., *The Lord Our God is One Lord*, DE: Associated Bible Students, 2004, p. 15

Another name of God mentioned in Hebrew Old Testament is *Elohim*—a proper noun meaning *God* with capital “G”. The Hebrew “*im*” of dignity is equitable with English definite article *the* and it makes a common noun into a proper, ‘dignified’ noun. Since *Elohim* is originally a plural word, therefore, it gives way to the Trinitarian doctrine to hold it as a potential evidence for the defense of the faith in a *plural* God. The case of *Elohim* is, however, a similar one to that of the English word *sheep*, which is both singular and plural. The use of *Elohim* in Old Testament as a singular word appears to be more authentic than a plural usage, for neither Hebrew Prophets nor people had the idea of a pluralistic deity or polytheistic unity. It is, therefore, safe to assert that *Elohim* stands for “the God of gods” or simply “the God”.¹³ With the Christian doctrine, however, only the character of God changes, but God Himself remains the same. This is to say that God is identified anew, but this time on a much deeper level than the past national history of the Jews. Such a transition in the understanding of God comes off primarily due to the spiritual quest of the first century religious reformers namely “Christians” and they succeed in introducing to mankind a “loving God” by breaking the outwardly shell of the Hebraic convention.

Unlike the Jews, Christians do not have much to appreciate of the linguistic significance of Old Testament’s metaphysical terminology except for a few cases to derive their conception of God. Symbolism for Christianity seems to overtake literalism in the case in point. It is why the New Testament has a unique behavior of its own—much in contrast with the Old Testament. For instance, the case of the linguistic significance of Hebrew *ruakh*, “spirit”, is not different and it

¹³ Dirks, Jerald F., *The Cross and The Crescent*, Maryland: Amana Publications, Beltsville, 2003, p. 177

appears as if Spirit has been transformed into a new, independent entity during or after the dispensational phase between the Old and New Testaments. Christians rely upon the New Testament for finding their *tri-character* or *tri-headed* God. And they are, of course, not altogether on the wrong to do so, for it is the nucleus of their belief that God has replaced the Old Testament with the New Testament—a new Divine Covenant with mankind signed with the blood of the Son, Jesus Christ. In the thorough run of the book, therefore, we will view the concept of God not in a Jewish perspective, but in the Christian, i.e. a Trinitarian conception of God, for the subject matter of the book is the comparative study of Islam and Trinitarian Christianity.

1.1

GOD THE FATHER—FIRST PERSON IN TRINITY

"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven."
(Matthew 6:9-10)

Orthodox Christianity holds that Father is the first person in Trinity. Christianity believes in the Father to be the *unbegotten* person in the essence or Godhead of Trinity. He is the Creator of heavens and earth, although the channel of creation is identified as the "Logos" in John's Gospel. Father is the *hypostasis* that is sometimes regarded as superior to the Son among the revivalists, such as did the *Arians*. Orthodox or traditional Christianity, however, considers the "unbegotten" Father and "begotten" Son equal in the sense and substance. The same was true to the 4th century CE conflict of Arius with Athanasius, when Arius daringly challenged the orthodox doctrine of equality and uni-substance (Greek *Homoousion*). Since this debate is out of course for now, I will not consider the substance a problem.

We can construct a distinctive character of Father in the light of New Testament text, where He is the ultimate sovereign of the universe and protector of Jesus, the incarnate Son. Father of the New Testament, in Greek conception, does not semantically represent the identical Hebrew form, which is a received problem of linguistic variation between Hebrew and Greek, as briefly referred to above. Greek word for father is “pater”, which semantically remains arbitrary to its adopted Hebrew equivalent “ab” in a number of ways. For instance, ‘pater’ implies a more physical sense than ‘ab’ does in the Hebrew language, and similarly ‘pater’ more frequently refers to the parenthood of parents rather than the father alone. ‘Ab’, on the other hand, is semantically considered in several different ways, such as the “immediate father, ancestor, leader of the tribe, leader of the house, spiritual head, and teacher”, whereas ‘pater’ confines to the immediate genealogical father in its most literal and biological sense. Unitarian Christians recognize Father of Jesus with the God of Hebrew Old Testament namely “Yahweh”—the God of absolute unity and omnipotence. And this assumption is correct to a reasonable degree in the present context, for the Greek *Theos* can be deemed as an equivalent theological conception of Hebrew *El*. Further, *theos* without Greek article *ho* simply means a ‘god, mighty ruler’ or a ‘powerful religious authority’.¹⁴ Hence, the hypostasis in the Father of New Testament should contextually as well as semantically be recognizable with Yahweh. Muslims in their understanding of Father employ a similar strand and consider no difference between the Father of Jesus and the Quranic deity, *Allah*.

¹⁴ Russell, Charles T., *"The Time Is At Hand", Studies In Scriptures*, New Jersey: Dawn Bible Students Association, Vol. 2, 1959, p. 274

We pay herein a look into the doctrine of Father being above the Son while going through different New Testament texts. Gospel of John, for instance, assigns the highest authority to the hypostasis of Father, saying;

“My Father is greater than I.”
(John 14:28)

"My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand."
(John 10:29)

“I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and *to* my God, and your God.”
(John 20:17)

Likewise, a similar sort of distinction between Father and Son, surely a matter of absolute knowledge, is recorded in the Gospel of Mark;

“But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.”
(Mark 13:32)

Therefore, we can determine the person of *Father* in the light of the above quoted verses taken from two canonical Gospels. Though majority of the Christians believe in Athanasian Doctrine and emphasize the absolute equality of all three hypostases, the position of certain verses in the Gospels seems quite arbitrary to the ‘equality hypothesis’ at this juncture. Such verses appear to have been written to propagate and establish through the canonical Gospels that Father is the real, unbegotten creator and the supreme power in the holy union of the three. Indeed, the belief in equality is an orthodox notion mainly based upon Pauline Epistles. A goodly number of indirect inferences, arising out of equivocal

verses of New Testament rather than clear texts, also support the hypothesis of equality.¹⁵ Interestingly enough, this orthodox notion has been challenged in every age of free thinking, whereas the most interesting point of turn in the current theology is modern *psycho-analysis* of Trinity and the growing scholarship opposing the equality of three persons.

Given the notion, the view of Father's superiority is a hermeneutic ordinance and an impressive number of intellectual ecclesiasts consistently submit to the notion as highlighted above. Jesus was but the instrument of creation (John 1:3) in creation science; hence, he cannot claim to be the creator or even peer of the Creator. To further analyze the hypostasis of Father, we should have a look into the prologue of John's Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things were made through Him,*

(John 1:1-3)

If carefully observed, we can explicitly discover that the *Word* (Greek *Logos*) was with God in the beginning. Although here the *Logos* is being discussed, yet the ultimate Reality, the absolute Entity of God is over and above, transcendent and superior to the *Logos* and that He has the real power to endow any designation or authority to anyone including *Logos*. John sounds explicit in his portrayal that the *primary* God in prologue is the *Father*. Further, critics also allege that the *Logos* itself is not a purely Christian conception but a Greek mytho-philosophic idea; therefore, no

¹⁵ For instance, 1John 5:7

authority can *per se* warrant the designation of Logos as assumed by John and later on with additions by the third century church. Surprising fact is that it was the Jewish philosopher *Philo of Alexandria* who for the first time, borrowing from the Grecian philosophy, introduced an independent discipline of Logos (Syro-Chaldaic *Memera*), tagging it with the eternal God, in monotheistic Judaism and classified the *essence* of one God into *hypostases*.¹⁶ In the next verse of John's prologue, we are told that the Word/Logos is itself *theos* i.e. a God—the second hypostasis of the Trinitarian character of one God. However, the *theos* in Logos is not the patriarchal, creator God but the begotten Son-God (John 1:14) and the instrument of creation as such (John 1:3).

When flipping over the pages of New Testament, we come across numerous references to God the Father framed in typical Greek terminology and conception, and it is here where the chauvinistic Oriental character of Divinity—that of the Old Testament—is transfigured and an Occidental Deity of love emerges.

Canonical Gospels and Epistles of Paul heavily employ the term "Father" for the heavenly God: verses like Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21, 22; John 10:25-28; 20:17; Romans 15:6; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 11:31 etc. hold the dissertation of exclusively unique relation of Jesus with his Father—in most instances the relationship of communion with the Father.

God Himself carried out the creation of universe from a tiny electron to gigantic nebulae; however, there was a channel, an instrumental power in the creation process, whereby, God

¹⁶ Renan, Ernest, *"The Gospels", The History of the Origins of Christianity*, Book V, London: Mathieson & Company, 1890, p. 214

accomplished His entire plan. At this stage, in the verse 3 of Johannine prologue, Jesus is identified and equated with that channel of indirect creation. Hence, everything came into being by an indirect process of creation that involved Father's *Will* and Son's *creative* character, but the original Creator is still the Father.

In fact, the central, supreme power of the universe is Father Himself and He reserves the authority of salvation in His own *Will*. But the divine plan requires a logical pattern to win the favor of divine will and the only way to do so is Jesus and his substantial sacrifice. Therefore, yet again, salvation i.e. *second creation* can be achieved through the incarnate Logos, for Jesus himself claims:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

(John 14:6)

The gift of believing in God without seeing His person and His location is the *ultimate* gift (Hebrews 11:1) of Christian Faith—an intuitive bliss. Believing is, therefore, the wholesale of good and denying or questioning would invite vice. Orthodoxy believes God has bestowed mankind with true faith and salvation by Himself because all gifts of true faith descend from heaven. God is the exclusive source of all truth, enlightenment, and love, which means God is the intelligent progenitor of mankind; thus, He being the heavenly Father of every earthly human.

"For in Him, we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, for we are also His offspring."

(Acts 17:28)

Hypostasis of Father is the uncreated Being, the infinite Source of existence, and the eternal Reality with no beginning or end—hence, the *alpha* and the *omega*. It may be said that He is the *causeless Cause* (Arabic *Samad*), the “Yahweh”. He resides in the most sacred heaven on His throne, emanating in attributes of majesty, perfection, and transcendence; His person is clothed in sharp dazzling spark, and He has His only begotten Son sitting on His right hand. Both are described in Trinitarian theology with a 'chair and lamb' placed on a raised platform—the chair being Father and Lamb Son. As deity, Father is the Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipotent, and all-loving God. In precision, He is the Father of all mankind, the *ad infinitum*.

God has spoken to mankind through the person of His Son, the *Logos* (John 1:1), eternally distinct with the Father and yet united to Him in such intimate Love that they are always One and they are always together. Jesus, the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father is also God even though He clothed Himself with human flesh and appeared before us as a man (John 1:14).

God is not separable or divisible because He is *One*, He merely appears as different persons in order to express His infinite fullness, which is incomprehensible by finite creatures. Just as a man cannot divide his body from his mind, soul and spirit; God cannot be divided. His works are perfect, His thoughts and ways are above those of all His creatures, His Majesty and power is unequalled, His infinite merciful Love is unfathomable and it is the gift by which the humans are saved.

God is omnipresent, because God is Spirit. God the Father has loved the world so much that He has given it His only

begotten Son to mankind, so that anyone who believes in Him can be saved (John 3:16).

Coming down to the things of our world, God has created man in His image, thus, humans are His sons and daughters. God created Adam and Eve in His own image, He granted them immortality and He filled them with His riches. However, sin entered the world and they lost their inheritance and their immortality. Then God placed a curse on them: *“for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* (Genesis 3:19)

We are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; therefore we have inherited not only original sin which provoked the anger of God, but we have been given a frail nature, subject to temptation, suffering, disease, pain and death.

God in His Infinite Love, seeing the misery of His creation, has condescended to redeem mankind from this curse and in the person of His Son has taken upon Himself the punishment due for human sins (Galatians 3:13). In order to save humankind, God's Son, being the only sinless soul on the earth, has offered his works, his body, his sufferings and his life as a sacrifice in atonement for mankind's sins, so that in him may mankind find Eternal Life. We will discuss God's act of bounteous love for His spiritual children, whereby He has His only Son sacrificed, under the following heading.

1.2

GOD THE SON—THE SECOND PERSON IN TRINITY

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

(John 3:16)

The second hypostasis of the essentially one God in Christian understanding is recognized as the Son. Son is the eternal Logos, coexistent with Father from all eternity. Logos being the instrument of all creations *ab initio* and the ultimate savior of mankind in his enterprise of incarnation—in both instances acting as ‘mediator’ between God and His creation. By him were all things made and designed.¹⁷ God was unknown and unknowable, but the Son emanated from the realm of unseen to the fallen mankind to make unknown into known and unknowable into knowable. The epiphany of Son in earthly man, thus, seems to be the necessitated truth that can reconcile mankind with their distant Creator.

Christians recognize and recall the incarnate Son of God as Jesus, the Christ. Jesus is the *only begotten* Son of God, as propounded in the Romanized Gospel of John. He is the fatherless son of Virgin Mary in his incarnation into flesh, although Joseph has been established as the father to fill the gap of an earthly patron. The Son is the second hypostasis of the triune Godhead, the Logos, and the prophesied Messiah who had him incarnated into *flesh* in order to save mankind from eternal damnation.

Fourth evangelist records Jesus Christ—since John claims it Jesus’ own words—saying;

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”
(John 14:6)

¹⁷ Augustine, Saint, *On Christian Doctrine, in Four Books*, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, p. 41

Apart from the claim of being light and truth, the clearest of the arguments, in the current context, is the account of Matthew, wherein, Father seems to have directly called Jesus His *Son*:

“And lo a voice from heaven, saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

(Matthew 3:17)

Very similarly, Jesus addresses his audience, primarily the Jews, claiming *communion* with Father in John 10:30. The verse shows no obscurity in its content as well as message:

“I and my Father are one.”

(John 10:30)

Thereafter, it seems evident from the forgoing Johannine and Matthean verses that Jesus is the Son of God in a unique sense—a coexisting partner in omnipotence, omniscience and eternity being one of the holy Three. Jesus, the only begotten son, had been present in divine consciousness for all eternity. He, therefore, best fits to be called the living Son of a living God. Nevertheless, begetting of the Son is the issue that oft substantiates a philosophical problem making Jesus into a recipient of the power rather than the originator. We will discuss the enigmatic nature of the begetting-issue in the pages to follow.

At next, we consider the question whether Jesus Christ is the only son of the heavenly Father, the ultimate God. Orthodox Christianity asserts that he is the only Son who was begotten by, and who subsequently proceeded from the eternal Father, thence called the *Son*. John writes in his Gospel:

“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.”

(John: 1: 18)

God has not ceased to call son on various instances to various individuals. Israel is, for instance, the son of God; David was conferred with the same honor; angels are called sons in Old Testament, and in a general sense all humans are the children of God. Hence, we are sure that God is not limiting Himself in order to specify His fatherhood. However, the issue of Jesus' Sonship is entirely different, more coherently opposite to the rest, for God has begotten him in His own similitude. He is the peerless eternal Son, co-Creator, and Savior, believes Orthodox Christianity. He bears no resemblance whatsoever with the ordinarily ordained sons, for his—and only his—sacrifice is the climactic denouement of the tragedy of human fall. His ministry is the “fullness of the time”, which regains mankind the lost treasure of God's presence and blissful life. Hence, Son is the redemption and deliverance of mankind in his person.¹⁸

A textual analysis of the New Testament can substantially explain the phenomenon in question that the essence of God is, in fact, framed up in the hypostases of *Father* and *Son*; therefore, we are disclosed by New Testament that the intrinsic character of God is not only of a *patriarchal* Father, but also of a *submissive* Son.

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."
(John 5:30)

When the belief of Sonship, according to the Pauline theology, has been understood in sharp clarity and connoted

¹⁸ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church, Volume. 1: Apostolic Christianity A.D. 1-100*, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, 1882, pp. 64-65

exoterically, we may be allowed to go after the second question, namely, "Why did God become man and what was the end of his ministry on earth?" The hypostasis of Son, as the popular notion illustrates, entered in the physical world for the salvation of the *fallen* mankind, which had been suffering with the burden of 'sin'. Mankind had been sinful in nature since the primordial event of Adam's sin. God, thus, suffered for healing mankind and, by conquering death, He announced the good news of their freedom from the sin. Jesus Christ, when disguised even in the form of flesh, was conceived by a pure, upright virgin of King David's pedigree, from the tribe of Levites, named *Mary* (Arabic *Mariam*). About Jesus' divine status and his correlation with mankind, John's testimony stands out to be the most substantial and dynamic aspect of Sonship theology:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

(John 3:16)

The Son who we are familiar with as Jesus Christ is the second entity in the union of Trinity in significance of activity, power, and love. Son, however, appears to be the most important hypostasis when we look into his ethical call of love, subsequent struggle, and objective sacrifice. His appearance in, and interaction with mankind makes him something *personal* of the human beings that they owe to God. Hence, he is the double benefactor of Adam's race i.e. God and Mediator. However, although the New Testament suggests at times the superiority of Father over the rest, we cannot raise one hypostasis above the other, whatsoever the goal achieved, for the Orthodox Christianity maintains all three being perfectly equal in all aspects and respects. Jesus' descent in human form and striping himself of the advantages

of being a far-off God made it possible for the ordinary, sinful human beings to look at God in flesh—for God in both Old and New Testaments is invisible and impassible—who would stand before their very eyes. The troublesome but unprecedented task he performed raised his status and stature among the heroes of all mankind; humanity reached its perfection with the advent of Jesus and the perfection sealed with his sacrifice. Therefore, the belief in Jesus to be the Lord and Savior of mankind, Christianity maintains, becomes indispensable for every individual to escape Hell-fire, for the keys of Heaven are in his hand. The incarnate Son is an interdisciplinary bridge between organic world and the world hereafter, between flesh and spirit, between man and God, and, so to speak, no man can survive eternal existence without his recommendation and intercession.¹⁹

Analytically speaking, the importance of God being Father and Holy Spirit is eclipsed behind the magnitude of Son's universal achievement. Father and Holy Spirit yet again need the Son to introduce their persons and act on their behalf in the world of flesh, as Father was assisted by Son in the creation of universe. The collective work of Father and Spirit appears smaller before the mission and goal of Jesus, which is, broadly speaking, salvation of mankind and submission to the will of Father. Putting it briefly, Son is from the ancient of days a pro-human agency of creation, love, salvation, and justice if strictly viewed in the human perspective of the sequential story of creation, fall, and final judgment.

(ii) Incarnation of the *Only Begotten Son* of God

At next, the chief conception related to Jesus' Sonship is the belief of "incarnation" (Arabic *Zill*). *Incarnation* accounts for

¹⁹ See Maxwell, A. Graham, *Can God Be Trusted?*, Tennessee: Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, 1977, pp. 75-89

the epiphany of the Savior-God who claims to be the very Yahweh of the Hebrew Tanakh (John 8:58). By this, John maintains that the revelations to the Prophets of Israel were, in fact, *Christophanies*. This God of the Hebrew Bible ultimately becomes ordinary man of flesh to dwell amidst sinful humanity.²⁰ Divine nature of Jesus assumes human form, which is causative to redeem mankind of the contagion of the *original sin*, ransoming collective human sins by the blood-bond of incarnate God. Therefore, the notion of Jesus' supernatural *nature* transformed into terrestrial form is so called the *incarnation of the Son/Logos* in Christian theology. Word acquires the unique configuration of incarnate deity, namely, *God-cum-man* and his mission concludes on the great human sacrifice, *Crucifixion*. The crucifixion of Christ is the sacrifice of God in flesh on the behalf of sinful humanity. In this virtue, Jesus appears to be a supra-natural benefactor of mankind in their very human dress. Gospel of John overwhelmingly propagates this mystic idea:

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”
(John 1:14)

Christian theology, nevertheless, often falls prey to a very grave philosophical ambiguity concerning the incarnation of God; hence, Christians frequently use words like incarnation of the *Logos*, “Divine Word”, to avoid equivocalness, which remains a much easier and systematic notion to comprehend than the incarnation of the Son. John 1:1, furthermore,

²⁰ Pamphilus, Eusebius, Schaff, Philip (Editor), *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in the Praise of Constantine*, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890, p. 90, footnotes; See also Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church, Volume. 1: Apostolic Christianity A.D. 1-100*, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, 1882, p. 64

informs us about the divine state and status of Jesus before incarnation and demarcates Word's equation with the unbegotten God, the Father. Though, it is very controversial in many respects, it is the most prodigiously celebrated belief among *Trinitarian* Christians. The epiphany of *Logos* in the Gospel of John is, however, quite a unique ideology—peculiar to John alone—that is utterly unfound in the Synoptic Gospels.

Interestingly enough, the word *incarnation* does not appear even once in the text of the New Testament, whereas neither Jewish Old Testament nor Talmudic literature accommodates such a non-Semitic notion. Sometimes Christian apologists claim that an abundant, though figurative, data about incarnation is scattered throughout the Scriptures. The argument is, however, otherwise, for the burden of proof can be shifted to the apologists with equally strong premises from Biblical text. John 3:16 alone is sufficient basis for the doctrine of God becoming man. Indeed incarnation was a natural result early Christians eventually arrived at in the light of John 3:16. The incarnation conception as a crystallized ideology described with one word has more to do with the immediate culture of its origin and development. Now we see how a renowned biblical dictionary defines this subject:

"Incarnation is from the Latin 'becoming flesh,' that is, 'becoming human.' The doctrine of the Incarnation teaches that the eternal Son of God became human, and that he did so without in any manner or degree diminishing his divine nature. A somewhat detailed statement of the Incarnation is found in Philippians 2:5-11. Christ Jesus, 'remaining' (hyparchon) in the 'form' of God, i.e., with all the essential

attributes of God, took the 'form' of a servant and died on the cross."²¹

Here below is a critical debate on the subject. Critics allege that since Christian theology is always in need of doctrinal systematization, which is intrinsically missing in the New Testament, Christianity has assimilated various external elements that are necessarily required to regulate the *new covenant* making setup. Incarnation is also “hypothesized”, or more christianly speaking, “unmistakably derived” from the Scriptures. Logic demands the principle of incarnation being carried out through a “virgin birth”, which is equivocally spoken of in the Gospel of Matthew. Christianity is, therefore, justified in its declaration of incarnation-truth owing to the miraculous birth of Jesus. It is interesting that the Muslim Scripture, the Qurân, also confirms the virginal birth of Jesus (cf. 19:19-22). The problem of inherent contradiction on this belief, nevertheless, still haunts the unity of the two Creeds. Qurânic argument for virgin birth contradicts Christian standpoint, for Qurân declares the virgin birth of Jesus only a sign of God—a similitude of Adam's creation.²²

Pauline Epistles quite expectedly possess some extra references to the incarnation of Jesus' deity owing to the fact that Paul was himself much inclined to the Hellenistic rationale of incarnation. He, in fact, employed this notion deliberately to attract Gentiles towards Christ, which in his own assumption was a right step in the service of Christianity. Paul's connotation of Christianity, as manifest in incarnation doctrine, thus laid down the foundation of New

²¹ Douglas, J. D., & Tenney, Merrill C. (editors), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, art. “*Incarntion*”, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987

²² Ale-Imrân 3:59-60

Testament theology, which afterwards served as principal threshold for Gospel writing. Romans 8:3; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11, and Colossians 2:9 are the most widely accepted verses of Pauline Epistles that 'admittedly' advocate incarnation. Surprisingly enough, 1 John 4:2-3 denies the divinity of Jesus and preaches his 'genuine humanity', whose denial would mean to inhabit the 'spirit of antichrist' within one's person. The most celebrated verses in this context being Philippians 2:5-11 that should be given at least a cursory glance in the space of this book:

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
(Philippians 2:5-11)

In the light of Pauline injunction, if so called, we can conclude that Jesus' incarnation is not only an essential, phenomenal doctrine of Christian theology, but believing in him to be the incarnate Savior of mankind is the conditional prerequisite for acquiring salvation. In the end of this discussion, the conclusion fully supports in comprehending the potent status of Jesus that Pauline Christianity manifests. In precision, we may be justified in saying that Christianity mainly rests upon the conception of *incarnation of the only begotten* Son of God, for which the New Testament-based

theology wholly relies upon and revolves around the person of Jesus Christ.

1.3

HOLY SPIRIT—THE THIRD PERSON IN TRINITY

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water.”

(Genesis 1:1-2)

Holy Spirit (Greek *hagion pneuma*), often called *Holy Ghost* (KJV), is the third hypostasis or person in the Godhead. This eternal Spirit is the joint characteristic of Father and Son in terms of *love* and eternal *life*. God the Father expresses His love for the Son through His Spirit. Similarly, Holy Spirit is the agent of God in multifaceted acts and actions of the Father, and it is the reason why, as induces Christianity, Holy Spirit is addressed in the Old Testament as *Spirit of God*. Holy Spirit is, moreover, the agency of revelation and inspiration in the Old Testament, whereas it is primarily, in the latter phase of its role, the instrument of Jesus' conception by Mary and his aid during the ministry in the New Testament. In the second place, Holy Spirit is the agency of baptism in Christian rendering of the baptismal formula. Holy Spirit, thence, descends on a believer and works its power through the recipient of the Holy Spirit. The bodies of the Christians are, therefore, the temples of the Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit is, however, the least understood hypostasis of Godhead manifest in the Holy Bible. It is sometimes believed as having the ‘background position’ in Trinity. While interpreting the person of Holy Spirit, Christianity oft appears confused. And the confounded entity of Holy Spirit compels Christian theologians to inhabit on Jewish conception of the Spirit that is, in the most instances, no less or more than a

divine messenger. Trinitarian Christianity resolves the problem by describing Holy Spirit as the *spiritual* linkage between Father and Son at primary level, and between God and mankind at the secondary. Furthermore, since the Father is *unity*, as maintains Saint Augustine, the Son *equality*, the Holy Spirit is the *harmony* of unity and equality.²³

Unitarian Christianity, on the other hand, does not believe in Holy Spirit's hypostasis to be an independent person in the divine essence—quite akin to their rejection of the divinity of Jesus Christ. Unitarian understanding of Holy Spirit is derived from linguistic principles of the study of biblical terms and their etymology. They simply treat Holy Spirit as the *power* and *breath* of God that is bestowed upon true believers of the Messiah, or breathed in inanimate objects to make them into living soul. The additional attributes of the Holy Spirit in Unitarian theory display it being the Spirit of power, creation, life, and truth.²⁴

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and Dictionary of Bible defines *spirit* as:

“(Derived) From ru’wach (*roo'-ah*), a primitive term meaning *wind*; by resemblance *breath*, that is, a sensible (or even violent) exhalation; figuratively *life, anger, unsubstantiality*; by extension a *region* of the sky; by resemblance *spirit*, but only of a rational being (including its expression and functions): - air, anger, blast, breath, cool, courage, mind, quarter, side, spirit, tempest, vain, whirl, wind.”²⁵ [Emphases in italics mine]

²³ Augustine, Saint, *On Christian Doctrine, in Four Books*, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, p. 10

²⁴ Anonymous, *The Holy Spirit*, New Jersey: Dawn Bible Students Association, Rutherford, 2006 (reprint), p. 1-3

²⁵ Strong, James, *Exhaustive Concordance of Bible and Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1977, p.107

We should not conclude, however, at the glance of the forgoing definition when dealing with *Trinitarian Christianity*, as if Holy Spirit were only the name of an *abstract* characteristic or attribute of God, for this definition of Strong serves as a general meaning of Hebrew *rooah* (Arabic *ruh*), i.e. *pneuma* in Greek and *spirit* in English. Holy Spirit in Athanasian Creed is an independent, living third person of God. Holy Spirit has definitely an individual—but essentially and invariably one with Godhead—*existence* like the other persons of Trinity; therefore, Holy Spirit is conceived as an *eternal deity*, belonging to the same Godhead. Matthew 28:19 equates all three in an identical perspective of Lordship. Infamous 1 John 5:7 also supports this theory of the three equal in power, while 2 Corinthians 13:14 particularly describes the role of all three hypostases. Holy Spirit seems quite often, even in the New Testament, playing the role of a *messenger* (Hebrew *mal'ak* and Greek *angelos*) between the Father and Son that conveys the message and conducts their communication. This role of Holy Spirit has been emphatically testified by John in scores of his verses. Holy Spirit also manages to inspire Divine Will to the Prophets in piecemeal or totality, and the notion of Bible's status of being God's Word is indeed derived from the same textual evidence. The popular theory is that the Prophetic writings compiled in one book, the Jewish Bible, were inspired by the Holy Sprit. The Prophets were, it is believed, “moved by the Spirit of God” while penning down the revelation of God's Word. The popular Christian narration to express the process of inspiration is that “the prophets were *moved* by the Holy Spirit” as opposed to the Islamic expression namely “prophets were revealed”. Interestingly enough, the description of Holy Spirit in the Qurân corresponds to the Hebrew and Greek terms when Qurân identifies Holy Spirit as Archangel Gabriel, while the role of Gabriel in Islam minutely resembles Holy Spirit's role in both

Old and New Testaments (cf. Qurân 2:97). Christianity, nevertheless, retains the existential difference between Holy Spirit and Gabriel—often performing a role interchangeable—but the active dissimilarity or principal distinction being undefined in expressive terms. It can be asserted, however, that the very theological distinction of Holy Spirit and Gabriel as God and Archangel serves as the evidence of Christianity's unequivocal approach towards the two.

Before we proceed further by getting into the textual and linguistic support of Bible for the Holy Spirit's hypostasis, it seems coherent to envisage New International Dictionary's definition of Holy Spirit:

"(Holy Spirit is) the third person of the triune Godhead. There is a rich revelation of the Spirit of the Lord in the OT, running along the same lines as that in the NT and directly preparatory to it. Customarily we think of the Spirit of God in the OT as powerfully endowing chosen individuals for the great tasks, but actually his work ranges much more widely."²⁶

In the majority of Christian writings, Holy Spirit is given masculine pronoun *he*, which is, in fact, an obvious misunderstanding of the word in question, thus incorrect. Greek *pneuma* is neither masculine nor feminine, but is a neuter gender case that grammatically employs neuter pronoun *it*. Hebrew *ruwach* (or *ruakh*) is, however, a case entirely different from that of Indo-European languages, for Hebrew, being a Semitic language, does not contain neuter gender nouns and pronouns. Since things are divided in Hebrew either in masculine or in feminine genders, our

²⁶ Douglas, J.D., & Tenney, Merrill C., (editors), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Holy Spirit", Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987

inference therefore comes directly from the Greek translation of the word, where spirit is understood as neuter gender. It is why the present author has used neuter pronoun, *it*, throughout this book when referring to the Holy Spirit or a spirit in general.

It is observable from the Bible that Holy Spirit descends from Heaven and outpours on human beings on different occasions to insure divine benefaction in the act being done. The most accomplished example of Holy Spirit's descent on man comes of Jesus himself, although the Spirit adopted the most unconventional method of dove-incarnation. On the eve of Jesus' *Baptism*, Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and outpoured the holiness and blessings of God upon the person of Jesus Christ.

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:”

(Matthew 3:16)

Moreover, Holy Spirit has been recorded in the New Testament visiting Jesus on several occasions during his public ministry to strengthening and succoring the Messiah. Holy Spirit did not descend upon Jesus alone; it also visited his mother, Mary, before the birth of Christ (Luke 1:35), and blessed her with the gift of a miracle worker, fatherless son. Subsequent to the meeting, Mary obediently conceived the Messiah of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18)—the prophesied Messiah who is, according to Christianity, the Son of God and Savior of the fallen mankind. Holy Spirit was also prophesied by Jesus to descend upon the Apostles (Acts 1:8), which it literally fulfilled by filling the Apostles in Acts 2:4; it also filled Peter when he addressed the elders of Israel

(Acts 4:8), and moved the rest with its influence (2 Peter 1:21). Jesus, after his resurrection, would speak to his Apostles through Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). Holy Spirit was, therefore, a channel of communication between Jesus and the Apostles, and the Apostles were blessed with guidance by Holy Spirit throughout their lives (John 16:12-14; Acts 4:31).

Biblical science of hermeneutics defines Holy Spirit as a “power from on high”, which, Christian theology considers, is a promise of divine succor to Christians with the Spirit of God. John 14:16 and 16:12-14 record prophecies of a certain *Paraclete* (Greek *Parakletos*) that, again biblical scholars assert, is a mention of Holy Spirit coming to guide and assist the Apostles in inspirational writings and evangelism. Luke's words carry great weightage in this context, which he ascribes Jesus as his own words—a prophecy of the endowment of power from on high—that expound the imperative of Jesus to his Apostles. Indeed, according to Luke, Jesus forbade his Apostles to leave Jerusalem until they would receive the power of Holy Spirit, which was, by and large, inevitable for the success of this tiny evangelical mission.

“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”
(Luke 24:49)

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."
(2 Timothy 1:7)

Holy Spirit is the spirit of the creator God (Genesis 6:3), and His agent in the act of gradual creation (Genesis 1:1; Psalms 33:6). Moreover, Holy Spirit is *full* God (1 John 5:7), the

presence and the power of God (Ezekiel 1:14, 20; Isaiah 4:4), the mind of God, the essence of God, and, at the same, one of the three hypostases of triune Godhead (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). It is Holy Spirit's powerful action that permeates creation with love and life. Holy Spirit is the most perfect *spiritual* existence in itself. We also know it as the third person of the Holy Trinity.

Holy Spirit, according to another Orthodox Christian belief, is a fire of divine love that comes to wrap and refine His children to produce an ardent desire of possessing God. It bestows on Christians, through its spiritual power, a passion for God; it eliminates all earthly affection and association, since it evaluates God's personality to be the most precious and peace-filling to the carnal temples of the believers.

Once again moving back to the problem of definition and designation, Holy Spirit appears to be the most obsessed character among the members of Holy Trinity. We find little illustrious rendition of Holy Spirit in the Bible, though scores of verses name Holy Spirit, as compared to the other two persons of Godhead. Since our current subject demands only theological connotation and realization of the belief of Holy Spirit, we will not therefore allude to any philosophical problems that are particularly inseparable from the conception in question. Nevertheless, theology and metaphysics are in close proximity due to the common origin, speculation on the ultimate *being*, and the scope of the disciplines, study and systematization of the supernatural. It is why theology gets metaphysical roots and even orthodox beliefs are required to be appraised on philosophical grounds for a better understanding of the inherent truth of any conception. Christianity possesses no universal rules of comprehending and explaining the person and role of Holy Spirit. All analysts of the subject in question feed upon their

self-made assumptions and ideate their feelings and/or experiences of speculative encounters with Holy Spirit. Being a necessity, philosophical parameters will be applied on the theologically demonstrated so-called person of Holy Spirit in the pages to follow. Without tending to explain, we just pay a cursory look at a problematic passage containing repetitive ideas by simply playing upon words:

"The Holy Spirit, then, is fully God. He is not one-third God, but fully God. Yet, it is not the Spirit alone who is fully God, but he eternally exists along with the Father and the Son, each of whom also possesses fully the identically same divine nature...therefore, what distinguishes the Spirit is his particular role as the Holy Spirit in relation to the Father and to the Son."²⁷

Dwelling on the subject, one important aspect that must be cared for, while treating the subject of Holy Spirit, is the discrimination of Holy Spirit from the angels. Christian faith declares that Holy Spirit is neither an angel nor a creation of God; hence, the Spirit is the uncreated manifestation of God by itself. This vivid disparity raises the status of Holy Spirit even above the noblest of the angels.

However, it may sound surprising that Holy Spirit has not been mentioned even once in either of Hebrew and Greek Testaments of Bible in a way as Athanasian Christianity establishes. Bible mentions different states and slots of the Spirit of God, which may be called, in more theological words, God's attributes rather than an independent agency. It is logically observed through the Bible that God remains *personal* in His *original* self; but when He adopts the form of the Spirit, He becomes impersonal and unimaginable.

²⁷ Ware, Bruce A., *Father, Son & Holy Spirit*, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2005, p. 103

An Introduction of Christianity to Muslims

2.

CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION

"Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is
risen..."

(Mark 16:6)

Faith in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and a subsequent resurrection is the second article of Christian doctrine. Primarily, it is this doctrinal article that the Christian theological edifice is standing on. Crucifixion and resurrection are essentially interrelated and indivisible; thus, they must be understood together as a joint, for the separation of one would nullify the other. The hermeneutic implications of this compounded belief are in fact twofold. Following in the logic of *cause and effect*, we may interpret these events as the crucifixion was the *cause* and resurrection being *effect* of that cause. On the other hand, crucifixion becomes utterly meaningless when resurrection is ignored, and resurrection, being the effect, can never take place when there is no crucifixion. In a nutshell, only one belief of them cannot be held without the acceptance of the other. The whole of Christendom, whether *Unitarian* or *Trinitarian*, has always believed in the compact doctrine of crucifixion and resurrection. We cannot, therefore, detach both of these integrated parts of such a doctrinal composition of Christian Creed, for the New Testament itself provides evidence for their conjunction:

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which you also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures: And the he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."

(1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Now, without getting into unnecessary details, I will give separate accounts of the two conceptions for a plain understanding of the readers—especially for the Muslim readers who are mainly ignorant of the Christian perspective on the issue in question.

2.1

CRUCIFIXION

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

(Acts 2:36)

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

(Galatians 2:20)

Reportedly some two thousand years ago, a Jewish carpenter, by the name of Jesus, was condemned by the Jewish community of Jerusalem. He was indicted as a dangerous religious and political rebel for his claim of being the “awaited Messiah” of David’s lineage that scripturally meant for Judaism the king of Jewish people (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2). He was sentenced to death inflicting one of the most painful as well as cursed punishments ever known to man—flogging and crucifixion. This form of death was scandalous in Roman provinces to both Jews and Gentiles in that as well as the preceding ages. Crucifixion was the severest of condemnations with Romans, for it was announced for the

top wicked crimes, such as blasphemy, theft, rebellion, desertion etc., hence its notoriety had become an axiom by that time. Crucifixion had become popular as the capital punishment among Egyptians, Greek, Persians, Carthaginians, and Romans by 6th century BC. The Romans borrowed this idea from their precursor Greek, who had imported it from the Phoenicians. Followers of Jesus, nevertheless, sanctified this ‘accursed’ punishment and made it into a belief of remembering his redemptive death—not just the fact that he died, but also that he died in a very shameful way to ransom the inherent sin of mankind. In their written accounts of Jesus, Christians mainly focused on the episode of death and maintained Jesus the ultimate “Paschal Lamb”. The writers of both canonical and extracanonical Gospels devoted lengthy sections to his horrible death to reflect the sacrificial nature of the event. Traditional Christianity even evolved the festival of celebrating Jesus’ death day and set aside a Friday as “Good Friday” to be observed every year as the anniversary of his death followed by the resurrection on “Easter Sunday”.

Why is the death of Jesus so important to Christians?—and why so central to the Christian faith? Jesus Christ’s death is treated as of the “first importance” in Paul’s Epistles summarizing the gospel message to the Christians as:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared...”

(1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

It is surprising that Paul characterizes his own preaching as the “*message of cross*” which is to be preached universally as the only source of salvation available to mankind. Those who

deny the crucifix Messiah are “perishable fools”, while the believers are saved by the power of God. Paul argues:

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.”

(1 Corinthians 1:18)

Furthermore, Paul preaches a message that solely emphasizes the centrality of crucifixion. His belief demonstrates the need of crucifixion as an equation as well as compensation for all Old Testament sacrificial rites. According to Paul, preaching crucified Messiah is the nucleus of Christian religion.

“But we preach Christ crucified.”

(1 Corinthians 1:23)

Crucifixion of Jesus, according to popular Christian belief, was predicted in Hebrew Scriptures and was therefore an event bound to occur (Luke 24:25-26; Acts 3:18; 17:3). It was necessary not just for the Messiah to *die*, perhaps in a way of criminals, but also to *suffer*, and to be *crucified* for the salvation of sinful mankind. It was an essential part of Jesus’ ministry and an integral part of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Jesus had predicted his own suffering and death on nailed cross. A number of the verses of New Testament, such as Mark 8:31-32; 9:31; 10:33-34; Matthew 20:19; 26:2, and John 12:32-33, mention the event to have been prophesied. Jesus was sure on his part that crucifixion would necessarily happen the way it had been predicted (Matthew 26:54). Crucifixion was Christ’s end goal as well as the mission of his first advent (John 12:27). He had to fulfill, therefore, the prophecy of Isaiah 53 as assumed in Luke 22:37.

Jesus proclaimed that his death would be a ransom of the Original Sin to save fallen humankind (Mark 10:45). On the

eve of his Last Supper, Jesus harbingered his imminent crucifixion saying that he would give his body on the behalf of ordinary people, while he would give his blood to formulate a new covenant, or more coherently, a new relationship between God and mankind, based on love and forgiveness (Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 26:28). He was, as Isaiah had already predicted, infallible by character and innocent by nature; thence his death framed the most accomplished sacrifice, for the sinless suffered and died an ignominious death to ransom the guilty. God laid humanity's sins on the shoulders of Jesus and he, receiving the gift of sins happily, got killed for man's transgression to buy him freedom. Viewing the event of crucifixion as history, Christian historians and ecclesiastical history's students broadly date the event between CE 26 to 29.²⁸

2.2

CRUCIFIXION & SALVATION

"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

(Luke 3:6)

Salvation (Greek *sōtēria*) is one of the basic orthodox Christian beliefs that every Christian is required to profess. Traditional Christianity believes that Jesus came to the earth in flesh for the salvation of mankind, and he paid the price of human sins with his own blood on cross; he took away the sins of all that were born, and delivered them from their inherent original sin. Whatever the implication of this belief, it was initially preached by Paul, and in succeeding days Pauline Church adopted it as an essential constituent of faith. Salvation is radically a part of every theistic religion.

²⁸ David, and Alexander, Pat, *Eerdmans' Concise Bible Handbook*, Minnesota: World Wide, Billy Graham Association, 1980, p. 291

Christianity, however, proposes to confer redemption upon mankind in a peculiar way.

New International Dictionary of Holy Bible comments on the conception of salvation, or in a more Christian sense, *redemption* in pithy words by giving a brief sketch in an objective manner.

"In the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as the Savior of sinners. The title reserved for God in the Old Testament is transferred to Jesus as Incarnate Son in the NT. He is the Savior or Deliverer from sin and its consequences as well as from Satan and his power. Jesus preached the arrival of the kingdom of God—the kingly, fatherly rule of God in human lives.... And since healing of the body was not separated by Jesus from healing of the person, to be healed by Jesus was to receive God's salvation."²⁹

Concept of salvation in the New Testament is a transformation of the same concept of the Old Testament. In Christian theology, salvation means a *new birth* by believing in Jesus Christ as *personal Savior* and then maturing in him, for he is the ultimate Savior and Deliverer of mankind (Luke 2:11; John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Philemon 3:20; 2 Peter 1:1, 11; 1 John 4:14). And it is the very point where it differs from the Jewish long held belief. Jews believed, as Hebrew books of Bible demonstrate, in two-fold salvation i.e. one of daily life deliverance through worships and repentance (1 Samuel 10:24; Psalms 72:4), and the other of final judgment, which is, they believe, a definite part of God's plan of human salvation (Exodus 14:13, 30-31; 15:1-2, 13; 18:8). By his belief in Jesus, his death on cross, and his blood as the price of humanity's sin, a believer ensures the beatitude of salvation. Salvation is, in fact, inseparably knit with

²⁹ Douglas, J.D., & Tenney, Merrill C., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Salvation", Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987

crucifixion; thence the meaning of *cross* is salvation for Christians.³⁰

2.3

RESURRECTION

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus..."

(Acts 4:33)

Resurrection, in a purely Christian sense, means, "*Jesus rose from the dead.*" In our everyday experience of life, the dead people always stay dead; hence, their being dead is no wonder, for the wonder is otherwise—returning to life after death. Originally, it was the doctrine of Judaism that a mass resurrection of the dead would come to take place at some unspecified time after the culmination of Messianic age commonly held as the "Last Hour". On the moment of final trumpet, all dead would rise from their graves to meet the final judgment. The notions of judgment, justice, eternal bliss, and eternal damnation were, somehow, integrated with the conception of resurrection. Judaism had come to believe—by maintaining the ethical logic of justice—in the divine act of final judgment as a natural aftermath of post death resurrection, endowing eternal life or contempt. It was not uncommon, critically speaking, in ancient religions that people held a virtual faith in post death resurrection. However, the nature of the resurrection would vary among different religions and religious schools of thought in antiquity.

³⁰ Stott, John R. W., *Basic Christianity*, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1961 (Reprinted), pp. 92-93

At next, we now consider the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Bible expresses the Jewish doctrine of mass resurrection in the book of Daniel:

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

(Daniel 12:2)

Resurrection (Greek *anastasis*) lexically means “rising up” or “to cause to stand up” (e.g. Luke 2:34—the raising up). Resurrection has twofold manifestation in Christian sense, i.e. (a) Jesus Christ's resurrection that proves him, according to the prophetic claims, the Lord and Savior of mankind, and (b) a mass resurrection taking place after the final phase of spatio-temporal scheme, probably during the theologically demonstrated lag of *Doomsday*, yoking forth the hour of final judgment (Matthew 22:31; Luke 14:14; John 5:29; Revelation 14:7; 20:5). The later type of resurrection (i.e. mass resurrection) is still an awaited event, which, for Christians alone, would have an easy and recent—although symbolical—fulfillment without undergoing death. Indeed, death is a penalty to Christians—Paul maintains it as the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23)—which they must suffer to get a new life. Pauline theology has facilitated Christians to perform a symbolical death (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12) and new birth (John 3:3, 7) in Jesus Christ without physically dying i.e. *baptism* in the name of Holy Spirit after the manner of Jesus Christ (Matthew 20:23; Mark 10:39; 16:16; Luke 12:50). Resurrection of Christ's believers is a resurrection to life in Jesus Christ (John 11:25). Hence, Pauline offshoots of Christianity are strictly adhesive to the doctrine that Christian baptism forestalls the fear of post resurrection judgment, for the resurrection would mean for Christians to be a return to eternal life and bliss of heavenly abode.

At next, we consider the phenomenal resurrection of Jesus Christ. *New International Dictionary of the Bible* comments upon the former ideology of resurrection, saying:

"There were no witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. What the disciples witnessed was the appearance of the resurrected Jesus. They saw also the empty tomb. In fact, only disciples were witnesses of the appearances of Jesus; but both disciples and others saw the empty sepulcher...It is not easy to provide a systematic and chronological account of the appearances of Jesus to his apostles and disciples in the forty days before his final departure."³¹

Resurrection of Jesus is the bedrock of Christianity, whereas the general resurrection of mankind is subsequent to the resurrection of the Savior (1 Corinthians 15:12). In spite of the enigmatic and non-systematic nature of Jesus' resurrection, of course an event reportedly unique in human history, Christianity unquestionably tends to put its trust in the postulate of Pauline theology. People would rather be silent instead of inquiring, for they preferably yearn for the existential salvation. Resurrection of Jesus is given only six accounts in New Testament—four of Gospels (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20-21) and two of extra-gospel writings (Acts 1:1; 1Corinthians 15:1-11); the rest of the references are, however, only general inspiration and ideation acts of resurrection doctrine. Reliability of resurrection claim has always remained open to doubts and questions in its historical context, for the critics assert that the visions and witnesses of a few female believers (John 20:1-2; Luke 24:10; Mark 16:9) cannot be warranted blindly to establish such a mighty but impeachable creed. It is, however, a

³¹ Douglas, J. D., & Tenney, Merrill C. (editors), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, art. "Resurrection", Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987

rational approach, whereas the faithful approach of a believer does not see any problem in the resurrection doctrine.

Here is a sequel to the above discussion. A critical debate has always overshadowed the subject of resurrection as found in the Semitic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Preexistence as well as independent existence of soul, the journey of soul and its revisiting the body to resurrect the dead were the core beliefs of Egyptian religion when Egyptian Civilization was on its climax. Egyptian religion, like any of the ancient religions, was entirely constructed upon such supernaturalism that would revolve either around a pantheon of gods or the spirits of the dead. We still have a treasure house of Egyptian theological wisdom in the form of *Egyptian Book of Dead*. The pyramids of Egypt were, in fact, the tombs of Pharaohs built in the 4th and 3rd millennia BC. These pyramidal tombs were meant to be the aloof, magnanimous palaces for the resurrected Pharaohs, and cosmic numinous stations as well, where the souls were to stay in a manner as they had been while living an earthly life. It seems absolutely irresistible in a research point of view to consider the conception of resurrection grown among the Jews in a perspective stemming off Egyptian influence. Myth of Osiris had, in particular, much to do with the ancient notion of individual resurrection. It seems no far-fetched matching of the clues that the virgin birth, ignoble death, and miraculous resurrection of Osiris would have seeded Pauline doctrine when portraying the virgin birth, ignoble death, and miraculous resurrection of Jesus Christ.³²

The race of Jacob was taken in captivity by the Egyptians a little before the mid of 2nd millennium BC. This state of

³² Asadi, Muhammad M., *Islam & Christianity: Conflict or Conciliation?*, New York: Writers Club Press, 2001, p. 59

bondage continued for about three centuries; hence, they had to live, breathe, eat, drink, and worship on the soil of Egypt for many generations. Prophet Moses brought about their liberation in 14th century BC from Egyptian slavery, but this liberation did not mean the *freedom of mind*. The Israelite genius had thus far undergone severe revulsion, which consequently made them into a people of no psychological identity. It was in fact *Yahweh*, the God of Moses, who helped them at this critical juncture of their national history. As a result of the sudden appearance of such a heavenly Savior that introduced himself to them as their *personal* God, they realized the actual state and status they were destined and signified with. They were overwhelmingly coated with Egyptian conduct of socio-religious life, especially under the influence of Egyptian mythical religion. Speaking in terms of secular history, as the thesis goes, it seems probable that the Jews borrowed some ingredients of their ideology of resurrection from their Egyptian lords, and thereafter blended them into a new format with a fresh religious color. Mass resurrection of the Day of Judgment may, however, be a predominantly Semitic conception, but individual resurrection certainly has legendary examples in the past cultures which seem to have outfitted the intrinsic belief-system of the Semites with new vistas of supernaturalism.

Apart from the Egyptians, almost all religions of antiquity had hope for, and belief in a postmortem return to life. A thorough study of the Mesopotamian, Dravidian, Greek, and Central Asian myths would disclose the pro-resurrection theological atmosphere of the days of antiquity. Several stories of gods and exceptional humans having been restored to life can be traced in the mythical epics, folktales, fables, and folk-poetry of Mesopotamia, Persia and ancient Greece. Babylonian *Enuma Elish* and Homeric *Iliad* and *Odysseus* among the epics and Persian sun-god *Mithra* and *Attis* of

Phrygia among the myths sound the best analogies insofar as to be referred to under current debate.

This discussion has, however, another somewhat healthier aspect. The same examples as quoted above, originally cited by the critics of resurrection doctrine, can also be used to construct a different kind of argument. These ancient myths and legends can be a prelude to the mature doctrine of resurrection. They may also be the rags of a tethered divine message that got corrupted into the hands of ineligible believers. In fact, this angle of putting things appears to be an equally tangible interpretation of religious history.

Taking Jewish conception of resurrection into consideration, the resurrection from death to life—from humiliation into glory, as the Christian Creed explicates—before the end of space-time was completely unexpected, as well as unpredictable, insofar as human understanding could go beyond the maximum. Similarly, the compound “crucified-Messiah” apparently shows self-contradiction and contradistinction between Messiah and crucifixion that makes such a notion work for a negative cause. However, Bible shows that Jesus had predicted both of the occurrences, crucifixion and resurrection, as the verses denote below:

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.
(Matthew 16:21)

“And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.”
(Mark 9:9)

Nevertheless, the disciples were not prepared to face such a surprising situation, nor could they believe in the marvel, since it was beyond the reach of their understanding. What they could think before the resurrection had taken place was to expect Jesus staying in grave as a lifeless body. If we carefully investigate into the matter, it reveals that they were stricken with some kind of disbelief for the time being when they received the news of resurrection, as we can read in the verse below:

“And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.”
(Mark 9:10)

It is, however, the central theme of Christian *dogmatism* that Jesus is the begotten Son of God and the archetype. He is, therefore, unique and the only one capable of performing such miraculous things among all the children of Adam. Observing the sinless person of Jesus in this perspective, it becomes crystal-clear that he did not actually deserve death—the death of cross. A sinless man, reportedly the prophesied Messiah, dying on cross—since such a death was considered *accursed*—proves even more unjustifiable and untenable in ordinary reasoning. All of the Christian canonical accounts, especially the Pauline Epistles, stand in the favor of the truth of crucifixion doctrine. If we supposedly accept the notion that the incarnate, miracle-working Son of God has died on cross, then his restoration to life should not be prefaced with amazement or disbelief. Orthodox Christianity, in furtherance, claims that resurrection event secures potent evidence, which not only builds up the confidence in Christ, but also guards against all possible objections on the reasonability and authenticity of resurrection. Hence, Christianity was perfected on the day when Jesus rose from the dead. Historically speaking, this event is reported to have

taken place on Sunday following the *Passover* Friday of crucifixion in the nineteenth year of “Caesar Tiberius”. This Sunday is now celebrated as “Easter”—the day Jesus rose from the dead. It is again amazing that we can find historical criticism even on the selection of the day to celebrate resurrection, for the historians maintain that Easter seeks its origin from pagan festival days and this notion being sanctified over the course of history.

Modern materialistic minds, which include Western born Christians in most cases, are skeptical towards such an extraordinary claim that is routed into the lost history and kept solely on ontological grounds. Skeptics are of the view that either the disciples must be mistaken or they coined the story of seeing Jesus after the third day of crucifixion. The third possibility seems to them that some of the disciples, including the female believers, were hallucinated by the visions of Jesus Christ who passed as one resurrected. Speaking in brief, we will discuss the issue in the following section in detail examining all alleged incoherence and improbability of resurrection doctrine, as expounded by the critics.

In response to the skeptical arguments, a Christian treatise puts the following counter argument:

“If there was no resurrection, how could this life (of Jesus) be the most influential life of all time?” We don't have enough faith to believe that his one solitary life from a remote, ancient village could be the most influential life of all time...*unless the Resurrection is true.*”³³

It is also no doubt that the doctrine of resurrection underwent various evolutionary processes during last two millennia, and

³³ Geisler, Norman L., Turek, Frank, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004, p. 324

we can succinctly demark the fluctuations in resurrection doctrine proceeding through the pre-Nicene, post-Nicene, Byzantine, early Papal, Medieval, and Reformation ages. Age of Reason showed a complete apathy to the doctrine, whereas modern ideation has been endeavored to found upon scientific basis. However, the subject will not be given any further details here. Suffice to say that the Bible lends no support in the modern sense of time-division to the duration generally accepted between crucifixion and resurrection, since Bible harbors a contradictory view on the issue in question. This is in fact only one view of history and the apologists have a different interpretation of the whole scheme.

2.4

Significance of the Resurrection in Christianity

Resurrection holds the key of salvation and eternal joy for the Christians. It was, in fact, the glory of the empty tomb that certified the freedom of Christians from the chastisement of Hell. In addition to the miracle of empty tomb, the gardened environ of the tomb is a symbolism of the very primordial Garden of Eden that Adam and Eve were dropped down from.³⁴ Gospels proclaim the good news of Jesus' resurrection that means the Lord of believers has returned from the dead; hence, Christians can trust in him in perfect conviction for being saved. By rising from the dead, he proved the veracity of what he claimed during his ministry that he was the "King of the kings", the very Savior of the Hebrews,³⁵ while his sufferings and helplessness were only transient and apparent, to say the least. In fact, crucifixion

³⁴ Zwemer, Samuel Marinus, *The Glory of the Empty Tomb*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 2004 (reprinted), p. 18

³⁵ Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20

was the risk taken by God to save the fallen humankind, and indeed the risk was the will of Jesus Christ to have him thrown in extreme suffering out of love for mankind. Therefore, the death and its subsequent resurrection of God is the most important event of Christian history, which Christianity claims to be substantially peerless occurrence of human history.³⁶

In Christian sense, resurrection means Jesus' coming to life after his alleged death. Secondly, the implication of resurrection for a believer refers to the belief of a believer's life in and for Jesus. One who baptizes dies in Jesus and resurrects in him. The life of a believer obtained after resurrecting in Jesus is far superior to, and better than the life without faith what Christianity terms as *death*. The same formula also applies to the person of Jesus Christ, for he was unknown to mankind before his death and subsequent resurrection, but he came to his full glory after having attained the resurrection. The act of resurrection bestowed upon Jesus the very glory that he shared with the Father before his incarnation. However, the glory, on this occasion, was not a sole property of Jesus, but it was also shared by the believers.

“And now, Father glorify Me at Your side with the glory which I had at Your side before the world existed.”
(John 17:5)

Christian dogmatic view holds the view, more or less formally, that the resurrection of Jesus is the absolute evidence, strong enough, to reveal him as the only begotten Son of God—thus God in himself according to the Trinitarian doctrine. His relation with the Father was something

³⁶ Zwemer, Samuel Marinus, *The Glory of the Empty Tomb*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 2004 (reprinted), p. 38

unconventional and superior to the ordinary sense of God's *fatherhood* for all mankind. Christ claimed that he and his Father were one without distinction,³⁷ while he ensured his status of being the 'second hypostasis' on the solid foundation of his resurrection. Saint Paul views him as the 'personal Savior', and, on this account, he powerfully reveals him in his epistles as the Son of God who miraculously rose from the dead.

"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

(Romans 1:4)

But the resurrection also means life for *mankind*, which, in other words, is a life led by as well as for Jesus Christ. As Paul again asserts in his Epistle to Romans saying, "Be saved through his life" (Romans 5:10). Paul further states that "if you confess with your mouth...and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). In his Epistle to Corinthians, Paul cuts short the length of the description and boldly demonstrates the two possible extremes as the ramification of no resurrection.

"If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."

(1 Corinthians 15:14)

Apostle Peter also demonstrates an identical belief—not deviating from the path of Paul—that establishes the importance of the doctrine in question.

"Our salvation depends not just on Jesus' death, but also his resurrection."

(1 Peter 3:21).

³⁷ John 10:30

Paul is indubitably the most fervent advocate of resurrection doctrine. It is no less than a wonder to learn how Paul influenced primitive Christianity to believe in such an incredible doctrine as resurrection. Despite all criticism from non-Christian circles for his alleged forgeries, Paul must be appreciated for his extremely missionary spirit and devotion to Christ that laid down the foundations of grand Christian theology.

While summing it up, we can safely assert that the whole system of Christianity stands on the foundation of resurrection doctrine, and if the resurrection of Christ was ever removed from the foundation, the very *raison d'être* of faith in Christ would be exposed to nullification. The edifice of Christian theology is, therefore, indebted to the empty tomb, which pointedly leads to resurrection doctrine for its existential survival.³⁸

³⁸ See Habermas, Gary R., *The Historical Jesus*, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 8-9

3.1

BAPTISM

“Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

(Romans 6:4)

Baptism is a fundamental article of Christian doctrine, which falls in the category of *ordinances*. Jesus Christ commanded the observance of two ordinances, and baptism is in fact one of the two. The second ordinance being *Lord's Supper*, which is a pictorial presentation of the actual supper of Jesus and Apostles.³⁹ Lord's Supper presents an esoteric recapitulation of Jesus' ministry, his ultimate, and the future of Christianity. Finally, the Lord's Supper is communion eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, which implies eating the body of Christ and drinking his blood to commemorate that the Christians are saved by his great sacrifice. However, despite its unsurpassable precedence in Christianity, Lord's Supper is not a subject of present study due to being external to comparative scope.

In addition to the regular ritual services, baptism is a major rite of ceremonial church. Baptism is, in truth, an ancient practice of purgation, which contains spiritual purity and faith-oriented cleanliness in its symbolical significance and structure. Baptism is not originally Christian but adopted, and adapted as well, by the New Testament theology. Water has always been sacred to man, and almost every religion holds

³⁹ Conner, Walter Thomas, *Christian Doctrine*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, Nashville, 1937, p. 271

dear spiritual purity through ablution to penetrate into the world/worlds to come. We must, however, when considering the issue of Christian rite, classify the watering ceremony in conventional and inventive segments. The former alludes to the baptism by John the Baptist, while the later points to the invention of a baptism into Holy Spirit that allegedly initiated with the outpouring of Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It may really interests us that Jesus only once sanctioned baptism under his command, while the disciples were not allowed to administer baptism in general, as misconceived and anointed by the Orthodox and Catholic sections of the Church. Therefore, we may safely assert that Jesus neither commanded nor had anything to do with the inventive i.e. the current segment of the baptism.⁴⁰

The English noun "*Baptism*" implies the '*act of dipping or immersing in water*', which figuratively stands for the ceremony of Christening, whereby, one is *purified, initiated, or given new life*. Literally, however, the noun implies no sacrament and simply means the act of dipping into water, since it was directly from Greek *bapto*, 'to immerse'. In theological perspective, baptism intends the life that is to be acquired with new birth through faith in Jesus Christ. The faith in Christ plainly means to embrace supplementary namely, "Sonship, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and gift of Salvation" as well. Therefore, we can impart it just as an act of entering into the bond with Christ, but not the bond itself.

Baptism, in a similar sense, draws a close resemblance with Islamic conception of ablution, whereas Buddhism and Hinduism also perform an identical ritual of ablution. In brief words, baptism is meant for spiritual purgation. Vine's

⁴⁰ Edersheim, Alfred, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993, p. 270

Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words expounds Christian conception of baptism in its both philological and conventional contexts. Dictionary holds:

"*Baptisma*, "baptism" consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion, and emergence (from *bapto*, "to dip"), is used (a) of John's "baptism", (b) of Christian "baptism", (c) of the overwhelming afflictions and judgments to which the Lord voluntarily submitted on the cross, (d) of the sufferings His followers would experience, not of a vicarious character, but in fellowship with the sufferings of their Master."⁴¹

Although Vine's picture of baptism is elaborative, we cannot but go through some other dictionaries in order to secure a complete understanding of the given subject. It is, however, interesting that this very widely celebrated ritual of Church is subject to conflicts of both major and minor types. Biblical encyclopedias, lexicons, and dictionaries exhibit these linguistic differences leading to doctrinal conflicts when they portray an essentially different ritualistic picture despite the fact that the Greek infinitive is invariably the same. Christian world does not necessarily disagree on the philological aspects, but what stirs the Christians is the interpretation that is most often done figuratively, whereas some denominations take the word literally.

The *Student Bible Dictionary* defines the subject in somewhat different words, and gives an emphatically dissimilar picture.

"Water baptism for new Christians calls for special attention. Baptism doesn't save a person, but is a picture of personal salvation and a sign of obedience to Christ. Going under the water is like a dead person being buried under the ground; it

⁴¹ W.E. Vine, Merrill F Unger, William White (editors), *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, "Baptism", Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996

pictures that a person has died to the old way of life. Rising up from the water is like a dead person coming up from a grave in the earth; it pictures new life that is eternal and future resurrection for the grave. This picture is not salvation any more that a picture of you is the real you, but the picture indicates what happens when a person accepts Christ as Lord and Savior."⁴²

Ritualistic significance of baptism is an accepted doctrine in the church; hence, we cannot displace baptism from its status of being a vital doctrinal pillar of Christianity. Sixty-nine verses of the Holy Book point to baptism employing noun and participles, namely 'baptism, baptizing', and 'baptized'.⁴³ However, only nine times the reference comes from Jesus' own words i.e. red-letter speech (in red letter editions) in first person. Book of Acts is very significant in the recognition of baptism as a practical church ritual, for Apostles have been recorded performing rituals in this book, and the book shows them preaching, teaching, and performing baptism on several occasions. Twenty-five verses of Acts contain reference to baptism, which is a significant number as compared to the other individual books. We should view a verse demonstrating the importance of baptism from the Book of Acts to support this assumption.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both *Lord and Christ*... Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and *be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

(Acts 2:36-38) [Emphases mine]

⁴² Karen Dockrey, Johnnie, & Phyllis Godwin (editors), *The Students Bible Dictionary*, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, Uhrichsville, 2000, p.38

⁴³ Rice, Dr. John R., *Bible Baptism*, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, p. 3

English word *baptism* has been derived from the Greek infinitive *bapto*, “to dip”, whose more actuated and more frequently used form is *baptize*. The word in question was used in original Greek writings of early Christians and New Testament books. *Professor Strong* defines the Greek root of *baptism* in his Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament as; “*Baptizo* (comes) from a derivative *bapto*; to *make whelmed* (i.e., *fully wet*); used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial *ablution*, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian *baptism*.”⁴⁴

The definition very openly explains the ceremonial significance of this symbolical ritual. Strictly speaking, baptism is an act of *identification* both from within and without with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which, actually demonstrate one's *self-identification* as a Christian. It is why Jesus enjoined his disciples to go and baptize “all nations” in Matthew 28:19. Therefore, the ordinance of baptism is of essential character for being a message of truth in a symbolic form. A renowned scholar and historian of religion *Martin S. Jaffee* explains in rather plain words what *Baptism* actually is:

"Baptism is one of the essential rites for entry into the Christian community. Historically, it has taken many forms, from immersion of the entire body in water to anointing with a few drops, and from a rite performed for infants to a ritual suitable only for adults. From a comparative and historical perspective, there is no "right" or "better" form of baptism. The form preferred in a particular Christian community depends upon the traditions that community regards as authoritative."

In the present-day Christian world, the ceremony of baptism is conducted in various ways by different *denominations* and

⁴⁴ Strong, James, *"Greek Dictionary of the New Testament"*, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1977, p.18

cults of Christian religion. In some of the sects, its symbolical method is *sprinkling* or *pouring water* on the catechumen or sinner. However, the true method of baptism is *to dip* into water as it is mentioned in New Testament in the original sense of the word in question and its derivative.

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water...”

(Matthew 3:16)

The rite of baptism promulgates some conditions as a result of theological systematization in Christianity. Baptism is, for instance, impossible without water. And if it is so done, it will be rendered as invalid—instead a sacrilege. Flowing water is the best option for baptism, and if flowing water is not available, then cold water is preferable to warm. However, incase the amount of available water is too small for dipping ceremony, the sprinkling or pouring can be used only as a secondary option.⁴⁵

Generally, it is believed that baptism has *three* steps in its execution, i.e. (a) immersing, (b) submerging, and (c) emerging. To *immerse* means to go down completely into water; to *submerge* means to be covered fully with water that no part of body should remain dry; and to *emerge* means to come out of water in a completely wet state. These three steps of *baptism* symbolically represent the *tri-unity* of Holy Trinity in whose name it is to be done. The rite also symbolizes the ‘death and resurrection’ of Jesus and the grace as gifted afterwards. *Dipping* into water implies the ‘death of the catechumen in Jesus as going into grave’; submerging stands for the ‘state of being dead as Jesus was dead in the grave for three days’, and emerging represents the

⁴⁵ Davies, J.G., *The Early Christian Church*, Michigan: Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 103

‘resurrection’ or ‘new life in Jesus’ like his own resurrection on the third day.⁴⁶ This is obviously an intelligent, tangible identification of baptism as a Christian rite without bothering about its historicity and provenance. A study through history reveals the fact that this rite of ablution survived its existence even in pre-Christian Israel. In Christian sense, however, the given method is the true symbol of Jesus' death and ascension, which entails every convert's self-identification with Jesus and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. This act of new birth is causative of the forgiveness of all previous sins, as the expression “new birth” quite explicitly appeals to our senses.⁴⁷

According to Christian theology, the tradition of baptism was formally laid down and initiated by an Israelite—but a New Testament times—Prophet, though ministering in Jordan. His name was *John the Baptist*. He used to baptize his pilgrims into River Jordan in order to prepare them for the inception of Messiah, whence he earned the fame of being widely known as the *Baptist*. Interestingly enough, this ritual had long historical roots into the very bowls of Jewish system of theology, where it could be identified with ceremonial ablution.⁴⁸ What message did John preach through this ceremonial process? Christians are of the view that, since John was the precursor of Jesus, he propagated the belief of the advent of the awaited Messiah which he said was close at hand; his teaching implied that the Messiah would embark on

⁴⁶ Rice, Dr. John R., *Bible Baptism*, Tennessee: Sword of the Lord Publishers, p. 8

⁴⁷ Arnold, J. Heinrich, *Discipleship*, PA: The Bruderhof Foundation, Farmington, 2002, p. 141

⁴⁸ Islam being 3rd religion of the Semitic line also erects the institution of ceremonial ablution. It has introduced two types of ablutions in its theology: *Ghussal*, total whelming of the body for ceremonial purification, and *Wudū*, ritual-prayer-ablution which includes washing of different body parts like face, hands till elbow and feet.

his ministry to save Israel in particular and mankind in general (Mark 1:7). The people would, therefore, need to be ready to receive him in a spiritually alive, sinless state of being, which could only be achieved through baptismal formula, the new birth. Those who believed in his message openly identified themselves with the *gospel* of John the Baptist by having been baptized by him. Another thing that is important in performing the rite of baptism is the belief in Jesus Christ as *personal* Savior, for without embracing Jesus as savior and salvation, baptism does not prove of any significance⁴⁹—even if in the name of any sacred or denominational church.

Another importance of baptism is its alteration of circumcision extant in old Israel. Baptism replaces the rite of circumcision—the seal of Abraham's covenant with God. And we can substantially yield the meaning of this transformation as Jesus' new covenant has canonized its peculiar rites. Hence, the dispensational pre-New Testament baptism is acquired as a symbol of Christianity. Baptism is, by that, the Christian seal of covenant, which splits Christianity as a “nation of believers” from that of Judaism and grants Christians a unique identity of their own. This identity being *new Israel* without a geographical location, which consists of spiritually regenerated individuals. Although, the rite of baptism is by no means *salvation* in itself, it helps attain salvation and spiritual rebirth, which entail purity of soul and remission of sins. The belief such as above is more akin to Roman Catholic Church doctrine.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Jones, L. Bevan, *Christianity Explained to Muslims*, Calcutta: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1938, pp. 146-147

⁵⁰ Conner, Walter Thomas, *Christian Doctrine*, Tennessee: Broadman Press, Nashville, 1937, p. 103

Baptismal rite also symbolizes human state of resurrection as if transfigured by death, since coming out of water is figurative to resurrecting from the nothingness of grave. In fact, the ideology of baptism is manifold in its own stead. It may not be of any intrinsic worth; however, the end of baptism has made it into the fundamental rock of Christian theology. The first resurrection means to undergo an allegorical death of a sinner-*self* and to get a new spiritual birth in physical life, the new life in Christ, which preempts annulment of the previous or extant faith, be it the faith in Mosaic covenant. The second aspect of baptism foreshadows the literal resurrection of *Final Day* when mankind will be revitalized. The resurrected mass of humans will be classified in two types, i.e. (a) the believers (the baptized), and (b) the unbelievers or deniers of Christ (the non-baptized). Those who were born again in Jesus in their earthly lives would bear his image in post-resurrection transfigured state. John propagates this notion in his first epistle:

“When he appears, we shall be like him.”

(1 John 3:2)

However, those deniers of Jesus and his power of salvation would be resurrected in resemblance with the earthy one (Adam) whose primordial sin caused the befalling of divine curse on his progeny. This implies their salvation is not secured due to their dissent to receive Jesus Christ as *personal Savior*. Hence, the prolificacy of sins and failure to remit them would pave unbelievers' way to hell without being commended even for once. Paul explains the problem and difference of being earthly and divine as quoted immediately below:

“The first man is of earth, earthy, the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are

heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.”

(1 Corinthian 15:47-49)

Quoting Jesus in person, John secures a very strong testimony to the baptismal formula and its metaphysical meaning. Water and Spirit are the words that concur in the text of Johannine Gospel, as also quoted below. Though not long after apostolic era, the descent of Spirit as an immediate of baptism began to be understood as unnecessary despite the fact that Paul and Apostles held both of them inseparably united.⁵¹ Therefore, the faith of Apostles that was summarized in the New Testament would have the original, primordial meaning of any given ordinance. Water is indeed an essential constituent for purgation, whereas the *Spirit* with capital 'S' must be a reference to Holy Spirit, or more figuratively, the spirit of faith in Christ. Thus, according to baptism theology, water baptism is a means to attain the baptism of Holy Spirit.

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

(John 3:3-5)

Nicodemus, as we have seen, receives the commandment of being ‘born of water and of the Spirit’ in answer to his question. The concurrence of water and Spirit in John, therefore, establishes the intrinsic incorporation of both baptism and Holy Spirit and the inter-indispensability of

⁵¹ Harnack, Adolf, *History of Dogma*, Vol. I, Michigan: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, pp. 56-57, footnotes

physics and metaphysics. In other words, water baptism, in metaphysical spectrum, is the *seal* of Holy Spirit—the work of Holy Spirit in anointing believers and indwelling the temples of their being.

4.1

EUCCHARIST OR LORD'S SUPPER

“Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

(John 6:54)

Eucharist is one of the two sacraments of Christian faith. According to the New Testament, Jesus himself instituted the ordinance of Eucharist in addition to the ordinance of Baptism. However, the prestige of Baptism appears only partial in front of Eucharist on the basis of its liturgical status. Eucharist is the central liturgy of Christianity indeed, and it has been fulfilling the spiritual needs of the Christians for about two thousand years. Eucharist has been historically known in several different ways and the most recurrent names used are “Lord’s Supper, Last Supper, Holy Communion,” and “Breaking of the Bread.” Moreover, the service of Eucharist is called with different names in different churches. For instance, Roman Catholic Church calls Eucharist the “Mass”; Eastern Orthodox Church names it “Divine Liturgy”; and Protestants use the commonly known names, such as “Lord’s Supper, Eucharist,” and “Holy Communion”. The main Eucharistic prayer during the church service is called *Anaphora*, which is a Greek word meaning “offering”.

Vine’s Expository Dictionary defines the subject as an act “of sharing in the realization of the effects of the blood (i.e. the death) of Christ and the body of Christ.”⁵² Historically, it was the Passover meal which Jesus ate in the company of his

⁵² Vine, W.E., Unger, Merrill F., Jr, William White, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1996, p. 115

disciples in Jerusalem at John Mark's residence. Glorious Qurân, the Scripture of Islam, also accepts the occurrence of this event and names *Sûrâh 5* after it as *Al-Mâ'edah*, "the Supper Table". However, Qurân's view of looking at Eucharist is somewhat different, for it treats the event as a transformation of disciples' faith, who acquired perfect certitude in faith after having tested Jesus.⁵³ Qurân does not make a mention of Judas Iscariot and his subsequent betrayal and takes the event as of ultimate significance. Christianity, on the other hand, believes that Jesus being aware of his imminent crucifixion organized his disciples for the final time and gave them bread and cup as symbolical to his body and blood—the gift of the new covenant.⁵⁴ Jesus Christ, according to Pauline doctrine, identified himself with the Old Testament Paschal lamb.⁵⁵ He presented himself as the greatest sacrifice of the Passover of human salvation and sealed the bond of New Testament with his blood. This is what Christians commemorate when they celebrate Eucharist.

The New Testament shows that Jesus himself ordained the Eucharist sacrament and commanded his disciples to partake of it. Gospels illustrate the episode of Paschal supper, give details on how the situation developed in the upper room of Mark's house, and underline in particular the phrases that command to eat the bread and drink of the cup in the memory of the one who gave these commands.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood

⁵³ Sûrâh Mâ'edah 5:111-115

⁵⁴ Luke 22:19-20

⁵⁵ 1Corinthians 5:7

of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”

(Matthew 26:26-28)

Luke 22:17-20 and Mark 14:12-26 also lay emphasis on the commemoration of Jesus’ sacrifice by consecrating bread and wine. This consecration of bread and wine is not only a communion with the love, grace, and sacrifice of Christ, but also a thanksgiving for the gift of salvation in the blood of Jesus Christ. Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches believe in a literal participation in the crucifixion of Christ through Eucharist. They believe in the literal presence of Jesus in the ceremony, while the bread and the wine being the body and the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, for the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christians, Eucharist is a sacrament. Protestants, however, do not view Eucharist in this particular angle because Eucharist is for them a picture or emblem of Christ’s crucifixion. According to the Protestants, Eucharist is an institution,⁵⁶ and that is why the Protestant participation in Eucharist is symbolic, implying a believer’s symbolic union with Christ. Moreover, Orthodox and Catholic Christians are more regular in the celebration of Eucharist than the Protestant Christians.

Pauline theology places a huge emphasis on Eucharist doctrine. Originally, it is Paul who derives the meaning generally ascribed to the Eucharist sacrament in Christian faith. He identifies the event as the actuation of the new covenant. There is no doubt that the Paschal supper of Jesus Christ is, in the doctrine of Paul, the foreshadowing of Christ’s impending crucifixion—in a sense a ‘prototype crucifixion’. This foreshadows the actual event of the

⁵⁶ Some Protestant Churches, such as Lutheran and Anglican, also accept Eucharist as a sacrament. But the majority of Protestant churches, whereof the Baptists are on top, regards Eucharist as an institution.

crucifixion. Eleventh chapter of the first Corinthians addresses the sacrament of Eucharist and sheds light on its meaning and the way of celebrating it.

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.” (1Corinthians 11:23-26)

The phrase of central importance in the above quoted verses of the first Corinthians is “in remembrance of me”, which also occurs a second time in Luke 22:19. Though the problem of historical reliability, as shown by the textual criticism, centers the account, in particular the phrase in question, yet the Church takes it for the basis of Eucharist doctrine. There is no doubt that the early Christians celebrated Eucharist and none of the early churches disagreed on this subject. However, there was a reasonably strong diversity in the practice and the understanding of the Eucharist ceremony during the first hundred years of Christianity. *Didache* points to the Eucharist twice, but it takes a different stance from the New Testament on the implication of Eucharist. The Eucharist practice of the Corinthian Christians caused divisions in early Christianity rather than uniting the believers, for Eucharist for them was a feast.⁵⁷ Eucharist was also celebrated as a love feast throughout the then Christian world. People would come out as a church-assembly on

⁵⁷ 1Corinthians 11:18

Sunday and eat together. This on some occasions caused them the problems of immorality and sensual outburst making the holy feast into carousal.⁵⁸ Similarly, there were several other problems of identical nature in the understanding and the practice of Eucharist during that period. Nonetheless, the central idea of Eucharist, on a mass Christian level, continued to be the belief of ‘sacrifice and presence’.

Some biblical critics assert that the New Testament does not tend to describe the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist sacrament. Nevertheless, the early Church Fathers reasoned out the statements namely “this is my body” and “this cup is the new testament in my blood” are an enough evidence for the enactment of Eucharist doctrine. In fact, they believed in a miraculous transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. Later on, sometimes the idea that the celebration of the Eucharist was a new sacrifice every time instead of partaking of the sacrifice of Christ was also asserted. During the middle ages, the “Transubstantiation” perspective of Eucharist was developed under Scholastic philosophers. It had a totally materialistic view that the substance of the bread is transformed into the body of Christ by the will and power of God. Thomas Aquinas is the most significant figure among such philosophers who developed and adhered to this doctrine. Roman Catholic Church still holds this doctrine that an essential change does occur in the bread and wine. Martin Luther also taught Christ’s presence ‘in, with, and under’ the elements of the bread. His doctrine was called “Consubstantiation”. However, this Protestant doctrine was checked by the position of Swiss Protestant scholar John Calvin under the title of “Dynamic Presence”. He preached that Jesus is both symbolically and spiritually

⁵⁸ 2Peter 2:13; Jude 12

present at the Eucharist as the believers partake of it. Swiss reformer Zwingli believed that the bread and wine only remind of Jesus and Jesus can be present with the believers only by the power of Holy Spirit, whereas no physical or metaphysical change occurs at the Eucharist.⁵⁹

In brief, we can assert with great certainty that the doctrine of Eucharist is equally debatable from its origin and development as some other doctrinal issues of Christianity. However, the importance of Eucharist independently surpasses the arena of disputes. In the opinion of the present author, the only doctrinal pillar of Christianity that deserves to be called “worship” in an Islamic sense is Eucharist. In Christian sense, Eucharist is the central “Liturgy”. We can as such draw a comparison between Islam’s Friday Prayer and the liturgy of Eucharist. Nevertheless, Eucharist does not have a fixed schedule, and it can be celebrated more or less often. But the silence and focus of thoughts on the meaning during the ceremony make it really worth the Friday Prayer—or even make it surpass that.

4.2

ORIGINAL SIN AND ATONEMENT

The conception of *Original Sin* is closely, though not originally, knitted with the Old Testament theology, which authors the quasi-mythical tale of Adam’s sin and fall. Despite the Hebrew basis of the story of man’s sin and fall, Jews had never entertained any ideology, such as original or inherent sin, before or since the time of Jesus’ advent. In fact, nascent Christianity had no such complicated notions in its simple message, nor did Jesus propagate such an intricate

⁵⁹ Microsoft Encarta Reference Library, 2005, Article: “*Eucharist*”, III. Development of Doctrine

precept of man's inherent sin. The fact of such an assertion can be confirmed from the theological system of Greek Orthodox Church, which being the most primary source of early Greco-Roman Christianity does not look at Adam's fall as *damnation* of mankind.⁶⁰ A substantial survey of early Christian literature will immediately reveal that the writings of early Christian fathers lack any doctrinal issue or belief in a notion such as original sin. Ecclesiastical history of Christianity confirms that it was not until a fifth century father, Saint Augustine, that anyone had yielded the meaning of sin as inherent part of human nature, although only obscure references of a similar belief could be traced prior to him. And woman was held in Augustinian and his procurator systems as the primary instrument of passing on the contagion of original sin to next generation.⁶¹ Augustine devoted a whole book to the subject of inherent or original sin bearing the name after its nomenclature as "Original Sin".⁶²

Original sin, hermeneutically speaking, is the exact opposite of the doctrinal pillar of Baptism as a reversal force—original sin being the damnation and baptism remission. If original sin is the inherent pollution and degeneration of man, baptism is the remission of sin and regeneration of the spirit. The essence of this belief is that man is destined with the earliest couple's sin, which he cannot get rid of until he believes in Jesus Christ as "personal Savior". The magnitude of sin would gradually sharpen as the time would pass both in subjective and objective orders until the individual soul dies a spiritual death. The same was true to the generations passed

⁶⁰ Armstrong, Karen, *A History of God*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1994, pp.123-124

⁶¹ Armstrong, Karen, *A History of God*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1994, pp.123-124

⁶² Schaff, Philip, *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine with a Sketch of His Life and Work*, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886, p. 25

between Adam and Jesus, for the aggregate of sin had become so large that it could not have been remitted without a literal sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, which would entail and ensure God's Grace and Love to the world (John 3:16). Hence, regarding the belief in Jesus' healing power, the more the delay, the worse the outcome. Believing in Jesus is not a verbal process, but one has to undergo the sacramental ceremony of baptism to get a new birth in Christian life, and only then can one be able to get rid of the contagion of original sin.

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it."

(Genesis 2:16-17)

Today, Christians staunchly adhere to the belief that man is born with an inherently *sinful* nature and it is due to the "sin of disobedience" committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden on the arousal of Satan, whence they deliberately, though ambivalently, ate the forbidden fruit from the *Tree of Knowledge* that their damnation became a vital reality. Judeo-Christian scriptural traditions speak up that man was thereby fallen from a *heavenly* to an *earthly* creature. His nature, therefore, became sinfully mortal and damned.⁶³ And since Jews do not believe in the *Messiahship* of Jesus, they plainly reject the notion of *crucifix-redemption*. It is why because man is accountable in Judaism only for his own sins i.e. the sins he has committed in his earthly life. One does not have to fear from the problem of inherent corruption delivered to him from forefathers. Man is thus subject to accountability for his personal record of good and bad deeds, according to the Old Testament in Jewish interpretation. The same Hebrew tradition of sin and the story of fall were, however,

⁶³ White, E. G., *Steps to Christ*, Arizona: Inspiration Books, 1972, pp. 7-8

intermixed by Christianity to evolve a theology of greater sin namely, Original Sin. There are certain obscure verses in New Testament (e.g. 2 Corinthian 10:3; Romans 8:4; John 17:13-19 etc.) that indirectly point to the inherent corruption, but it is exclusively true to the vision of Pauline-Johannine doctrine.⁶⁴

Hebrew Bible records the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience of divine injunction that concluded on their *fall*. Genesis narrates the story as:

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”

(Genesis 3:6)

When the primordial parents of mankind committed sin of disobedience, God became tempestuous towards the couple, and thus He announced His decision of their *exile*—an essential character of Israel—from Eden in a great fury. God also predestined him to eat of the ground, as recorded in Genesis:

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.”

(Genesis 4:17)

Christianity maintains that the eventual outcome of the sin is *death*. Adam's sin was an act of *deception*, whence appeared *three lusts* biblically called *deceitful lusts* (Ephesians 4:22). Before we move onwards, we should investigate how Bible literally and contextually defines the *sin* and what the consequence of sin is. “*Sin is the transgression of the law*” (1

⁶⁴ Richardson, Cyril C., *Early Christian Fathers*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953, p. 150, footnotes

John 3:4), and “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). However, the bitter and seemingly unjust consequence of sin may explicitly be viewed through Paul’s repulsive description of the sin of mankind’s parents and the impact of their sin on the rest of humanity:

“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”
(Romans 5:12)

Luke has much to tell about the path adopted by Israelite Prophet and precursor of Jesus named John the Baptist to purge the sinners of their sins and prepare the way of the Messiah. This rite of cleansing is called “baptism”—a spiritual ablution. Here he quotes Peter in verbatim advising his audience to be christened in the name of Christ to receive the gifts of Holy Spirit:

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”
(Acts 2:38)

Since God has created man in His own image (Genesis 1:27) and breathed the breath of life into man’s nostrils (Genesis 2:7), hence, humans are His spiritual children. First two chapters of Genesis give a snapshot of Adam and Eve’s creation whom God initially granted immortality and filled with His grace. However, sin entered into their world of absolute joy in the Garden of Eden by Satan, and they lost their inheritance of immortality and chastity. Then God placed a curse on them: “you are dust and to dust shall you return.”

Since all men and women are children of Adam and Eve, mankind has inherited not only the contagion of original

sin—which caused *eternal* damnation through divine curse—but mankind on earth has also been endowed with the phenomena, such as frail nature, subjection to temptation, suffering, decease, pain and death. *James* speaks thus:

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*: But every man is tempted, *when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* “

(James 1:13-15) [Emphasis added]

Bible gives us a list of Israelite Prophets who were raised amidst different Hebrew tribes and clans to preach and admonish them to be obedient to God, their Lord. The second aspect of their substantial message was, as the New Testament claims its fulfillment, to enchant the gospel of the imminent arrival of *Davidic* Messiah. Of course, Christian New Testament is justified in claiming Jesus being the very promised Messiah of the Old Testament. The critics of Christianity, however, claim otherwise. They expound that the New Testament literature originally and basically fed upon the already regulated hypothesis of Jesus' Christhood, for the writers of the New Testament texts personally adhered to the belief of Jesus' Messianic office. It was, therefore, the belief and dominating notions of the day that founded the Scriptures and theology of the New Testament. Later on, Christian theology, though diverse from the Scriptures in most cases, exploited New Testament in the following ages as apt evidential basis for the evolving Christian doctrine to regulate a consensual, consistent canon. Thus, after the regulation of earliest Christian canon, a *culmination* was placed on the intrinsic, non-mystic gospel of the Messiah, and thenceforth, the mystic gospel of the *Kingdom of God* began

to be preached replacing the *theophanic* “voice” of the Prophets. Critically speaking, this criticism of the skeptics seems unjust on a number of places.

Before the time of the Messiah, man was sinful for his predestined, original sin. But, thereafter, the hypostasis of Son incarnated himself in the person of Jesus to dwell amidst mankind and ransom the original sin—an act of sacrifice that would secure the salvation of mankind and rescue their primordial immortality. Jesus was sinless in his person and perfect, for he was the God from the very *Being* of God whose descent to the world of flesh without an earthly father revealed his divine identity and miraculous personality. Virgin Mary, a pious Jewess, conceived him of the Holy Spirit and bore miraculously, thus honored as *virgin* despite giving birth to a baby. The notion of Jesus’ sinlessness, however, logically, falls short of the given strands from his mother’s side, for according to the theology of Original Sin, the main instrument of corruption is woman who indwells and distributes the infection of the original sin. Such problems and/or objections, as they never came to silence, would have certainly weakened Jesus’ position of being pure by birth and impeccable. And Christians would certainly have been no longer on the safe side had counter arguments and ideologies not been coined forthwith. For instance, the question of the innate tempting and damned nature of woman gave rise to the Roman Catholic conception of “*theotokos*” i.e. “mother of God”—Goddess in herself. Since God cannot be born through a sinful, corrupt source, i.e. mother, in human understanding, the mother of God, by that definition, cannot be corrupt in ordinary fashion bearing likeness after other womenfolk. She holds a very peculiar position among all women. She is naturally the nearest person to Christ in heaven. Therefore, the mother of God must be in the possession of divine attributes, which would make her too

into a *sinless* being. Mary was, after all, the virgin mother of the promised Messiah and Son-God, *Yeshua*,⁶⁵ “the eternal deliverance of God in his person”; therefore, it was impossible for her to be damned in nature. Her status was, thereby, transformed from “mother of Lord” into “mother of God”, from “humble handmaid of Lord” into “Queen of Heaven”—a certificate of purity and innocence.⁶⁶

Since all prophecies of Old Testament had been fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, now the time had come to preach the *good news* of eternal salvation adjoined with the admonition of the *Kingdom of God* being close at hand. His ministry lasted for roughly three years. Three years’ ministry was indeed very short as compared to the ancient Prophets, and Jesus had to accomplish his goal of the universal enunciation of his Messianic-cum-redemptive office and pay the price of Adam’s sin with his own blood at the end. Jesus had only a small number of converts in the duration of his ministry, and only a few were personally close to him to receive his teachings—thence called Disciples. It was these Disciples to whom he commanded after his resurrection to preach his message all over the world, whence they turned into *Apostles*. These Apostles are the exclusive source of all information we have about Jesus. Jews strictly opposed Jesus’ claims declaring him *false Prophet* and *false Messiah* and crucified him thereof. First century Hellenistic and Judean Jews, whose expectations immediately turned turtle due to the appearance of a non-political Messiah, while they got further perturbed by the uncompromising and incompatible nature of the claimant of Messiahship, enthusiastically demanded crucifixion for the claimant. He

⁶⁵ Hebrew version of the name “Jesus”

⁶⁶ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity*, Vol. III, Michigan: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, 1882, p. 241

was a ‘blasphemer’ in their view, for the epithet of “Messiah” was so sacred to them as no human could be forgiven for laying down messianic claims on his own. To them, it was vouchsafed for God to raise the Messiah with a defined political role when the time was ripe, and any claims otherwise were only a desecration of their faith, hence punishable with death. Had Jesus reconciled with their demands of a political role and formation of a Jewish polity, Jews would have probably taken him for the real Messiah of their nation. However, the objective before Jesus in his incarnation and first coming was to remit the unpardonable human sin, not to rule the world with sword. Therefore, crucifixion apparently disjointed believers from their Savior, yet Crucifixion itself was a part of the divine plan for mankind’s salvation and spiritual rebirth. Crucifix redemption was, in fact, the prerequisite for his subsequent coming, and the people who already believed in him would be raised without the burden of original sin.

Spiritually, according to Pauline Christianity, Jesus accomplished his task and achieved his final goal; physically, however, his role was postponed for a specified length in the space-time scheme according to the divine plan for humanity. Book of Revelation unfolds that the Messiah will return near *End-Times* with emblazing divine sword to establish the promised Kingdom of God in this world of flesh and blood. The proposed time for his return, the time zone of End-Times, is interpreted variably. Most interesting point in this respect is the *hope* of first century Christians who had a devout belief that Jesus would return before the passing of their very generation (Matthew 16:28). *Unitarian* Christians, like Trinitarians, adhere even today to an identical belief, but there inclination is more of a spiritual nature than of physical. Insofar as the sin-ransoming was a matter of concern, the believers of nascent Christianity were dead-sure of the

remission of their sins in wholesale. And after the emergence of Augustinian “Original Sin Theology”, the original sin was maintained as the only corruption in need of redemption—other being transitory and washable by confession.

The justification associated with Jesus’ death in common was the consequence of his resurrection (c.f. Romans 4:24-25). It is why the ‘accursed’ death of Jesus on cross *ab initio* turned out to be a *token* of the remission of sin and eternal salvation. Hence, all major factions of Christianity believe that their remission of original sin wholly depends on the entire sequence of incarnation, virgin birth, ministry, death, and resurrection—all summing up as sign of divine love for the believers.

Similarly, baptism visualizes the symbolic participation of believers in Jesus’ death and resurrection, which assures the remission. Rising from the water symbolizes *new life* (Romans 6:4) and it depicts believers’ future life as resurrected in purity, without sin.⁶⁷ This shapes the determination of Christians in the remission of original sin: “We will certainly be united with Jesus in his resurrection” (Romans 6:5), for no sinner will ever be united with the Holy Son of the Holy Father until he believes in crucifix redemption. God has “made mankind alive with Christ and raised us up with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5-6); “buried with him in baptism and risen with him” (Colossians 2:12) without the burden of sin.

By faith in Christ, all human beings are spiritually united to him. The sins of the believers are given to him and paid by

⁶⁷ More on “Baptism” will be discussed in the due course under a separate heading of Baptism.

him; his righteousness and life are given to his believers as a free gift, and his believers join him in his resurrection.

“He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.”
(Romans 8:11)

In simple English, Jesus' resurrection is a bond, a promise to mankind that all dead will live again and only the believers will enter and savor the Kingdom of God, for they will have an eternal soul, without sin—be it even the Original Sin. That will be eternal life—a life resembling the primordial life of Adam in the Garden of Eden before committing the sin of disobedience. Hence, mankind will never fear to fall again into mortality.

5.1

SECOND COMING OF JESUS THE MESSIAH

"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

(Acts 3:20-21)

One of the most important Christian doctrinal pillars is the faith in the *return* or *second coming of the Messiah*.⁶⁸ It is also called the 'second advent of Jesus', for the New Testament identifies him as the prophesied deliverer, the Davidic Christ. This belief is popularly known as "Second Coming" or "Second Advent" in Christendom. Importantly enough, Christianity is fundamentally standing on the belief of a *final* deliverance, for if Christianity gives up or withdraws itself from the belief of a second coming of Christ, nothing may, in terms of moral justification, account for Jesus' crucifixion and early Christians' sufferings. Christianity, therefore, turns thoroughly, like the mother Jewish faith, into a Messianic religion. Christian Orthodoxy holds that the second coming would be the consummation of God's *love* and *mercy* manifest in His Son's crucifixion—a gift of salvation to those who believe in him. The second

⁶⁸ Jews primarily use the term "Messiah" and Christians use "Christ" to refer to the same epithet of the deliverer. *Christos* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. Modern English more frequently employs *Christ* than the less formal *Messiah*, which is mainly spoken in the Old Testament-oriented Christian circles.

coming is believed to be the literal fruition of the gift of salvation on its own merit.⁶⁹

When we have a deeper look into the New Testament studies, we are repeatedly encountered with a substantial factor that Jesus' first coming was designed to ransom the *Sin* of mankind, and now he is expected to return to the world to obliterate the evil by *sword*—the epithet of Davidic Messianic king—to the extent of evil's annihilation *en toto*. Any of the New Testament commentaries—even of the cheapest value—can give handy references on the issue in question. It implies that his first arrival was typified on spiritual and moral grounds; whereas his second arrival would be the inauguration of Messianic age of physical and pragmatic nature. Thus, it would be a time of the transfiguration of mankind. This physical nature can be deemed in a sense that the prophecy speaks of him as doing a literal fight against the evil forces carrying the apocalyptic emblem of 'sword' in his second inception (Revelation 2:16; 19:15, 21). The motive of triggering such a series of violent events, which will be of course an aftermath to Christ's second coming, is the establishing of the promised Kingdom of God on earth. This kingdom will be populated with believers exclusively and none of Satan, fallen angels, and unbelievers will survive perishing to witness another existence.⁷⁰ Another school of thought in Christianity maintains that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, and the expression is synonymous with the eternal life of Hereafter.

⁶⁹ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, Michigan: Christian Classic Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids, 1882, p. 314

⁷⁰ Schaff, Philip, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, Wm: B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001 (reprinted), p. 300

Throughout the New Testament, the mention of Jesus' return to the world of *flesh and blood* occurs for some 318 times in different angles and contexts. Some of the accounts in Bible that bear witness to the second coming are being quoted immediately below:

“For as the lightening cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the son of man be.”

(Matthew 24:27)

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

(Matthew 24:30)

“He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.”

(Luke 19:12)

“For the Lord himself shall descend from heave with a shout with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

(Thessalonians 4:16)

The apocalyptic book of John, “Revelation”, is wholly a business of future, and the main theme running through the passages of the book is the second coming of Jesus Christ and restoration of the true Faith. Though the book is highly metaphorical, the hypothesis that can readily be constructed by analyzing its description of the ineffable is that the thematic nature of the narrative demonstrates a literal second advent of the King of the kings and his millennial reign. Since Revelation also portrays the evil forces in active action against humankind when culminating the catastrophic events of End Times, the deliverer-hero is naturally required to

protect vulnerable mankind in the story of ultimate tribulation. This picture of tribulation also includes a logical parallel of the End Times protagonist, the mighty antitype of Jesus Christ, the antagonistic person of *Antichrist*. Antichrist is the crux of the power of evil, and it is why he is termed as the leader of devilish forces. The very age of the final tribulation is regarded as Messianic Age and the Messiah—the hero of the New Testament apocalypse—is the very Jesus of Nazareth, as Christianity maintains, who was crucified by the Jews in CE 29. In fact, this ideology of *pneumatic* and *physical* Messianic roles seems highly eclectic to the assumptions of crucifix Messiah in the first advent and Davidic King in his second.

Christian belief of a *glorious* second coming of Christ is uniformly identical to that of postexilic Israel's want for a mighty deliverer. A historical survey can substantially disclose that the belief of second coming underwent several transformations on primitive stages and acquired the prototype of the current spectacular form in the speculation and writings of second century fathers. The *last* events are generally schemed in a logical manner of cause and effect and are thereby considered under seven principal headings:

- i. the Messianic tribulation giving rise to believers' persecution
- ii. the emergence of Antichrist
- iii. the Second Advent of Christ
- iv. the overthrowing of Antichrist
- v. the resurrection of the dead
- vi. the final Judgment

- vii. the world of final abode as the righteous being welcomed into the heaven and unrighteous cast into the hell⁷¹

The matter of fact is that the second coming has always been expected close at hand. The most surprising thing in the whole story is the expectation of apostolic Christians regarding Jesus' return within their own life span. It was believed that Jesus Christ would soon return, and the belief did not virtually cease to exist until Constantine's conversion and enshrinement of Christianity.⁷²

Since the Orthodox theology portrays an awesome, frightening picture of the final events, we can therefore assert that such, as stated above, would be the state of affairs in the End Times, and the stage would be completely set and ready to receive the deliverer, the Promised Messiah. Thus, it is safe to assert that the spirit of suffering and deliverance is the core element in Christian theology, which makes believers rely upon, and long for the passing off of the *ultimate* of the spatial time to meet the deliverer Lord, Jesus Christ.

In the end, a brief comparison of the Second Coming doctrine with a similar practice in Islam would be interesting for the readers. The *Shi'ah Islam*, oft termed as the Shiites, bears an inherent resemblance with Christianity as far as the doctrine of messianic deliverance is concerned. The Shiite belief of *Al-Mahdī* sets a perfect example of intrinsic identicalness with Judo-Christian doctrine of Christhood when the story of *Mahdī* is critiqued from beginning till end. Even minor

⁷¹ Davies, J.G., *The Early Christian Church*, Michigan: Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1983, p. 100

⁷² Pamphilus, Eusebius, ed. Schaff, Philip, *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890, p. 398, footnotes

details resemble in this case, say, for instance, the *Mahdī*'s first advent has since long been over and the final tribulation will necessitate his second coming. The *Sunnī Islam*, on the other hand, has a paradoxical stance on the subject of messianic deliverer, for it not only retains the role of Jesus Christ for the End Times in the lines of Christianity, but it also canonizes the messianic person and office of *Al-Mahdī* in an equal rank.

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