
Reflections on
And
Interactions with
Jochen Katz's Series of Articles Entitled

“My Questions to Muslims”

(Or: “Why I am not a Muslim”)

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Table of Contents

Intro.....	1
1). Islam and Historical Reality.....	3
A). Crucifixion	5
B). Surah 61:14	8
a) The Identity of the Two Groups According to the Christian Tradition: Orthodox, Trinitarian Christians versus Heretics.....	9
b) The Identity of the Two Groups According to the Islamic Tradition: Muslims versus the “People of the Book”	11
c) Analysis: The Correct Identity of the Two Groups	12
C). Conclusions re: Islam and Historical Reality.....	14
D). DISCURSUS—Biblical Faith is “historical faith”	16
2). Islam and Universality.....	21
A). Language.....	23
B). Culture.....	24
C). DISCURSUS—The Christian Faith is Truly Universal.....	27
3). Islam and Tests of Authenticity	29
A). Evading Tests of Authentication for the Messenger—the prophet Muhammad...29	
B). Evading Tests of Authentication for the Message—the Qur'an.....	34
Conclusion:	40
A Critique of Katz's Affirmation re: the Internal Coherence of Islam.....	40
A Reflection on Modern Muslim Reformist Views of the Qur'an	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	47

Intro

In this paper I will interact with a series of articles by Jochen Katz entitled “My Questions to Muslims.”¹ Katz is the founder and director of www.Answering-Islam.org, the largest Christian website on Islam which provides more than 10,000 evangelistic and apologetics articles written specifically to respond to Muslim questions, challenges, and polemical attacks on Christianity and the Bible.

In this particular series of articles, “My Questions to Muslims,” Katz sets forth a devastating critique of Islam by asking a series of penetrating questions so as to expose the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in this increasingly prominent monotheistic religion. “These are honest questions,” says Katz, and they “will be very critical towards Islam” (4a). So critical and polemical—yet always fair and truthful—are Katz's questions that one can imagine Muslim readers squirming about in their seats as the agitation within them builds while they read through this devastating critique of their hollow religion. So perceptive and devastating are some of Katz's questions that he says he doesn't know if Islam even has an answer to many of them (4a).

1 Note to the Reader:

The articles being reviewed in this paper are a series of ongoing internet postings that Jochen Katz has posted in stream-of-conscious fashion without polishing or editing them; nevertheless, they are most insightful and extremely valuable to read, for, as Rev. Bassam Madany has told me, Katz is a both a Christian scholar and a widely recognized authority on Islam.

Given that these articles have not been published nor edited for grammatical errors, I have taken the liberty to correct them in my citations without explicitly indicating that I have done so. Also, the reader should note that the page numbers mentioned in citations to Katz's articles correspond to the page numbering on my personal hard-copy printout (the original is online in text format at <http://answering-islam.org/Why-not/index.html>, however, it has never been published or formatted with any set pagination).

In this paper, I will summarize and in places expand on Katz's polemic against Islam. We will begin by looking at what Katz has to say about the claims of Islam in light of the empirical evidence offered by history. Secondly, we will consider Islam's claim to be a universal religion. Thirdly, we will consider Islam's evasion of tests for the authenticity of its prophet Muhammad and its message in the Qur'an. At various points I will point out how the Bible either answers some of these questions Katz raises about Islam and the Qur'an, or, alternatively, how the Bible and the Christian faith never give rise to some of the problems that Islam poses, for Katz himself does the same in these articles. In conclusion, I will offer some critique on what Katz has to say about the internal coherence of Islam as a religious system or worldview.

1). Islam and Historical Reality

In the first set of articles in this series, which Katz entitles “Historical Reality,” the author sets forth an external critique of Islam by comparing the claims of this religion with the empirical evidence offered by history. Katz outlines his approach, saying, “One way to test the truth of any religious claim is to see if it holds true for the 'earthly reality' as we experience life” (3b). In a rather bold statement, in which he restates his approach in a far more candid way, Katz says he is essentially running a “reality check” on Islam (3b). This can be done, he explains, by asking, “What does this religion teach about the things we can test by knowledge from [gained by] research in the scientific disciplines, verification through historical and archeological research, or just logical thinking and testing the whole system for logical consistency?” (3b) If, after a process of critical evaluation, one's faith contradicts the empirically verified facts, then, says Katz, maybe there is something wrong that faith (4a).

The reader must clearly understand the author's intentions here in this first series of articles lest Katz be misunderstood (and perhaps subsequently criticized) by the reader for not taking a presuppositional approach. Katz's intention here is *not* to prove the truth of the Christian faith by means of an evidentialist apologetic. Rather, his purpose is to show that the claims of Islam do not agree with the hard facts of history, science and experience. He sets out to measure the claims of Islam against the empirical evidence that is available and concludes that, due to the many discrepancies between the two, he has many questions about Islam and finds it dubious as a religious system (3b).

Since Katz is writing for a Muslim readership, and since Muslims are not permitted to question their religion (especially the authoritative texts such as the Hadiths and the Qur'an), it is

not surprising that Katz begins by offering a justification for his critical questioning of Islam (1-2). He begins this justification of his forthcoming critique of Islam by affirming the statement, “All truth is God's truth” (3). This, he points out, is a statement that Muslims would readily agree with. Katz then states the inherent implication: if all truth is God's truth, “then the truth will never have to fear any facts and evidences” (3). This means that if Muslims believe their religion to be true, they should not hesitate to allow their religion to be tested and tried against the facts of history. Rather, they should welcome critical inquiry into their religion so as to further validate its authenticity and further vindicate its truth against any alleged errors.

Katz provides further justification for his critical approach in which he questions Islam by pointing out that the Qur'an repeatedly challenges unbelievers (especially Jews and Christians) to do just that. The Qur'an invites others—particularly the “people of the book”—to bring evidence of and argumentation for alternative truth claims. Surah 28:75 says, “*Bring your proof if you are truthful.*” Likewise, Surah 27:64 says, “(Can there be another) god besides Allah? Say, ‘*Bring forth your argument, if you are telling the Truth!*’” Since Muslims invite Jews and Christians to provide logical argumentation and empirical proof for their alternative religious claims, it is only fair, says Katz, that Muslims allow us to also, at the same time, ask critical, deeply probing questions about Islam.

After having justified the legitimacy of his critical approach from the Qur'an itself, Katz then moves on in this first set of articles to examine Islam's claims about the crucifixion and Islam's claims about Surah 61:14 in light of historical reality in order to definitively falsify them.²

2 Other areas of glaring historical errors in Islam that Katz notes include the following:

i. the Qur'an's grossly skewed conception of the *Trinity*

A). Crucifixion

The first claim of Islam that Katz examines in light of the abundant historical evidence to the contrary is the Qur'anic denial of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In one—and only one verse—the Qur'an flat-out denies the crucifixion of Jesus altogether by claiming that it merely appeared that Jesus was crucified. Surah 4:157-158 says:

“That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of Allah';- but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for a surety they killed him not:- No, Allah raised him up unto Himself.”

Katz sets forth numerous reasons why this is a very bold³ and highly unsustainable claim to make.

First, Jesus' death by crucifixion stands at the very center of Christian theology and at the heart of the entirety of the Bible's teaching. Without the atoning death of Jesus, there is no salvation. Katz rightly says, “All of Christianity crumbles and is nonsense if the resurrection

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- ii. the Qur'an's error in narrating that the *Jews referred to Jesus as the “Messiah”* (No Jew would ever ascribe to Jesus the status of “Messiah.” They claimed he could not be the promised Messiah, and this fact is incontestable based on the fact that they rejected Jesus as Messiah and subsequently condemned and crucified Him on the basis of charges of blasphemy for His claim to be the Messiah.)
 - iii. Islam's claim that the *Jews and Christians have corrupted the Torah, Zaboor, and Injeel* (There is no empirical evidence for this claim. To the contrary, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls during the mid-20th century has issued forth an irrefutable reaffirmation the accuracy of the Old and New Testament Scriptures alike. cf. *Can We Trust Today's Torah?* Ami Ben-Chanan.)

3 To claim that Jesus did not die is to say strip Christianity of its most central teaching and declare it a false religion. Katz notes the weightiness of this attack against Christianity when he postulates that such a claim is akin to Christians declaring that the prophet Muhammad never lived. Such a claim would immediately discredit every Islamic teaching and declare the Islamic religion as a whole to be utterly false and nothing more than a humanly devised fable (7a).

never happened. And for sure, if there was no death, then there could be no resurrection” (6). The prophets of the Old Testament foretold the suffering and death of Jesus (cf. Psa.22; Isa.53:5-12). And references to the crucifixion pervade the entirety of the New Testament Scriptures. For example, all four Gospels report the event in excruciating detail—detail that only an eyewitness could relate. Moreover, there is unanimous consent throughout all the New Testament books that Jesus died the cursed death of crucifixion. And no historical event is more foundational and important to the authors of the New Testament than Jesus' death *by crucifixion* and His subsequent resurrection from the dead. The apostle Paul explicitly declares in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 that the historic events of Jesus' death and resurrection are central to the Christian faith when he says they are “*of first importance.*”

The second reason Katz offers to explain the absurdity of the Qur'anic denial of the crucifixion is a historical or empirical one. He explains that at the time of the crucifixion there existed three disparate groups—Romans, Jews, and Christians—all of whom were unquestioningly agreed on the fact that Jesus was indeed crucified. And the fact that these three groups unanimously upheld the historicity of the crucifixion is remarkable because the Romans, Jews, and Christians each held to very different religions and were often antagonistic toward one another, and yet the one thing they were all agreed on was that Jesus *was* crucified (18). The Romans gave official governmental approval for Jesus' execution. The Jews, having received permission from their Roman overlords, were all too eager to carry out the execution and proudly declared their success in executing this false Messiah (who they claimed spoke blasphemously and who they claimed was subverting the entire Jewish nation, cf. Luke 22:70-21–23:1-2). And the Christians made this event the very center of their message, so much so that

they would rather die than deny the historical reality of Jesus' crucifixion.⁴

Third, Katz examines the historical records of the crucifixion. His research leads him to conclude that whether from secular sources or from Christian sources (aside from those coming from Islam), all the sources are unanimous in their agreement on the historical reality of the crucifixion. Throughout history there have been many who have opposed and denied the doctrine of Jesus' resurrection, beginning with the Roman authorities (Mat.28:11-15); however, until Muhammad arrived on the scene, the crucifixion had *never* been contested (at least not on any kind of authoritative level or by anyone of significance). For six hundred years the crucifixion was accepted in an uncontested manner as a real, historical fact. Katz says, “The crucifixion is arguably the best documented fact of history in the time of antiquity. There are to my knowledge no serious scholars who doubt this.” (5-6). Even the non-Christian historical documents of the period acknowledge the reality of the crucifixion in an unquestioning manner.⁵ What is clear, Katz says, is that the only people who deny the crucifixion of Jesus are Islamic scholars and their followers, namely, Muslims.

In light of the overwhelming logical and empirical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus, Muhammad's claim that Jesus was not crucified makes Islam appear highly suspicious—yes dubious. Muhammad comes along six hundred years after the crucifixion, dismisses all the historical evidence, and—with one lone verse of the Qur'an—just declares the crucifixion to be a

4 Katz says, “Don't tell me they [the Christians] would tamper with the Scriptures, invent their own stories, and then die for what they know to be a lie. Certainly they made sure they have based their life on truth before they died for the confession of Jesus as their Lord” (43).

5 Here, Katz refers the reader to reader to Gary R. Habermas' book *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidences for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MI: College Press Publishing Co., 1996). In addition to examining the Christian historical sources for the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, this book also examines over ten non-Christian historical documents, all of which unquestioningly acknowledge the reality of the historical event of the crucifixion.

“non-event” (5b). Such a claim is outrageous and unsustainable in light of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Hussein Wario, a former Muslim who converted to Christianity, comments on dubious nature of Islam's denial of the crucifixion by saying, “Islamic scholars can play all the dirty games of hoodwinking the faithful, but the truth about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is evident.”⁶ Because the Qur'an plays such “dirty games” with the historical evidence, we have a significant reason to question the truth-claims of the Islamic religion.

B). Surah 61:14

The second way that Katz evaluates Islam in light of empirical evidence from history is by looking at the teaching of Surah 61:14 in light of church history. In Surah 61:14 the Qur'an says,

“O you who believe! Be you helpers of Allah: As said Jesus the son of Mary to the Disciples, 'Who will be my helpers to (the work of) Allah?' Said the Disciples, '*We are Allah's helpers!*' then *a portion of the children of Israel believed, and a portion disbelieved: But We gave power to those who believed, against their enemies, and they became the ones that prevailed.*”

In this ayah (i.e. verse) the Qur'an identifies the disciples of Jesus as Allah's helpers; not only that, it also claims that Jesus disciples were indeed the true believers. Furthermore, we see from this ayah that the Qur'an acknowledges that there was strife between the followers of Jesus (“*A portion of the Children of Israel believed, and a portion disbelieved*”). In other words, according to the Qur'an, there was a division among Jesus' disciples that caused them to split into two antagonistic groups. If this is true, two questions must be answered: “What is the identity of

6 Hussein Hajji Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 226.

these two groups?” and, “Which group prevailed?” In responding to these questions, we will set forth two very different sets of answers, one coming from the Christian tradition and another coming from the Islamic tradition.

a) *The Identity of the Two Groups According to the Christian Tradition:*
Orthodox, Trinitarian Christians versus Heretics

Church history certainly agrees with the Qur'an in its claim that there was strife that arose among the followers of Jesus. This strife can be seen particularly in the doctrinal battles that were waged over the deity of Christ and the two natures of the Person of Jesus Christ. Church history shows that these battles were played out in the first few centuries A.D. by two main groups. The first group is the orthodox Trinitarian Christians, and the second group is the heretics.⁷ The Orthodox group can be seen as represented by Athanasius in particular, since he was the primary opponent of Arius and the great defender of orthodox Christology. The heretics were represented in particular by Arius, the renowned initiator of a grave Christological heresy which undermined the deity and eternity of Christ.

Having answered the question about the identity of the two antagonistic groups by identifying them as the orthodox Trinitarian Christians and the heretics, we must then answer the question, “Which group prevailed?” Again, church history clearly shows that the battle between these two groups was decidedly and definitively settled in the fourth and fifth centuries with the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.). In these Ecumenical

⁷ The term “heretics” is used here in its broadest sense. There were many heretical groups that arose in the early centuries during the era of theological formation of the Christian faith, groups that span a broad range of sects which include Christological, Trinitarian, and Gnostic heresies. These groups include the Arians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Sabellians, Gnostics, Donatists, Ebionites, Marcionites, Montanists, and Pelagians, just to name a few.

Councils, the orthodox Trinitarian Christians clearly emerged as victorious. These councils condemned as heretical all those who denied the deity and eternity of Christ and condemned those who deny the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ in His one divine-human Person.

The ecumenical nature of these church councils (i.e. the universal nature of these councils in which virtually all churches across the known world were represented) tells us just how widespread this victory was. The victory was not confined to a limited geographical area made up of a few churches; rather, it was a widespread, universal victory of the world-wide church of the day. Speaking of the Council of Chalcedon in particular, Katz says, “In the end, the outcome was a clear victory for orthodox Trinitarian Christianity” (13).

Noteworthy is the fact that this victory continues into the present day. While various sects have arisen since the early centuries of the church fathers,⁸ the victory of orthodox Christianity continues on as the dominant force in the church. Evangelical churches across the globe may have differences in the areas of specific confessions and matters of church polity; nevertheless, these churches (liberalized mainline denominations aside) continue to subscribe to the apostolic creeds such as the Athanasian Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Apostles' Creed, which were developed by these early ecumenical councils. In this way, the contemporary evangelical churches witness to the ongoing victory of orthodox Christianity.

⁸ Ex. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Unitarianism, etc...

b) *The Identity of the Two Groups According to the Islamic Tradition:*
Muslims versus the “People of the Book”

We have seen how the Christian tradition identifies the two groups mentioned in Surah 61:14. Now we will consider how the Islamic tradition identifies these two groups, and we will see that Muslims come to a very different conclusion.

According to the Islamic tradition, the first group (i.e. those who believed) is the Muslims, and the second group is the “people of the book,” that is, Jews and Christians. As we would expect, Muslims claim that they are the group that has prevailed. However, in order to understand the Islamic tradition's interpretation of Surah 61:14 and their claim to be the “true believers” that have prevailed, it is necessary to understand the Islamic theory of the corruption of Christianity.

The Islamic theory of the corruption of Christianity underlies a Muslim's interpretation of Surah 61:14. This theory can be explained as follows. Muslims claim that the message of Jesus (i.e. the four New Testament Gospels) has been *corrupted* by Christians and that Christianity is thus in error on many points of doctrine and practice. Muslims also claim that the Jews have *corrupted* Allah's earliest revelations (i.e. the Torah and the Psalms or *Zaboor*), which Muslims accept as legitimate divine revelation from Allah. Katz speaks of the Islamic theory of the corruption of Christianity rather baldly when he says, “Muslims believe and proclaim that the Qur'an was given as a (new) last revelation partly because the Jews and the Christians *messed up* the earlier ones” (16).

Since the Jews and the Christians corrupted Allah's first revelations, Allah had to give another (final) revelation—the Qur'an. As Katz says, the Qur'an was “essentially given to clear up the areas of difference between the Jews and the Christians” (17). This revelation came to

Muhammad via revelations from the angel Gabriel, and these revelations were subsequently recorded and compiled into one book—the Qur'an.⁹ Muslims now claim to be the custodians of this final and supreme revelation of Allah—the Qur'an—a revelation which abrogates all earlier (and subsequently corrupted) revelations.

Based on the Islamic theory of corruption, it becomes clear how it is that Muslims have come to view the Jews and Christians as the “unbelievers” and “enemies” among Jesus' followers. Christians and Jews, because of their unbelief, corrupted the earlier revelations of Allah (the Bible). And since Muslims consider themselves to be the recipients of Allah's pure and final revelation—the Qur'an—it is not surprising that they declare themselves to be the group that has prevailed.

c) Analysis: The Correct Identity of the Two Groups

Which tradition has rightly identified the two groups spoken of in the Qur'an in Surah 61:14? The Christian tradition or the Islamic tradition? To answer this question we must consider the historical time period in which Surah 61:14 was written.

A natural reading of Surah 61:14 would have us understand it as referring to something that has already happened in the past, because the past tense is used (“But We gave power to those who believed ... and they *became* the ones that *prevailed*”). This means that what is being spoken of in this ayah had to have taken place *prior to* 610 A.D. (Muhammad was not born until 570 A.D. and he did not begin to receive his first revelations from Allah until he was

⁹ cf. Riddell & Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, chapter 4. Here they explain how the revelations received by Muhammad were initially passed on orally, slowly recorded, and not compiled into a single book—the Qur'an—until the reign of Uthman ibn Affan, the third caliph, during A.D. 644-656. Uthman commissioned Zaid ibn Thabit to collect the variants and scattered texts of the Qur'an, standardize them, and then destroy all the variants upon completion of the one harmonized copy.

approximately forty years old). This dating poses a major problem for Muslims who wish to identify the group of believers spoken of in Surah 61:14 as Muslims, for at this time Islam was barely on the scene and had not even been established as a formal religion. It was not until twelve years later in 622 A.D. that the first Islamic state was established (after the *hijra* of migration to Medina), and it was not until twenty years later in 630 A.D. that Muhammad and his followers conquered Mecca.

Since Islam had not yet developed to the point of becoming a prevalent group when these Qur'anic revelations were first given circa A.D. 610, Katz says we have two options facing us in explaining what Surah 61:14 is referring to. *Either* the true believers spoken of are the orthodox Trinitarian Christians, since they are the ones who prevailed over the heretics, *or* the author of the Qur'an was not well informed about church history and the Qur'an is mistaken (13b). Muslims are thus caught on the horns of a dilemma: whether they choose to side with the first option or the second, either way they would be forsaking the teachings of Islam and declaring themselves to be non-Muslim infidels.¹⁰ Muslims cannot escape this dilemma so long as they wish to remain Muslims.

Christians, however, face no dilemma, for they can accept both options. We can affirm

¹⁰ Muslims attempt to escape this dilemma by claiming that Jesus preached in essence the same Islam as Muhammad did. Such a claim is an attempt to bridge the historical time gap and the doctrinal gap that exists between the followers of Jesus and the followers of Muhammad and their teachings. However, the claim that Jesus preached essentially the same Islam as Muhammad did is utterly false. As Katz says, "We have no record at all of any group believing anything similar to what we find in Islam" (13). We have records that there were many different heretical groups which claimed to be Christians (cf. f.n.7). Some of these groups were very small, others were larger; some of these groups deviated further from the true, orthodox, Trinitarian doctrine than others; however, says Katz, not only did no Islam-like group prevail, such a group never even existed in the first place (14). Or, if such a group did exist, "*it was so insignificant as to not leave any trace of its existence at all. Whatever the case may be, history clearly shows that there was no group with Islam-like teachings that prevailed so as to become the uppermost group*" (14).

that the group that prevailed was the Trinitarian Christians *and* we can affirm that the author of the Qur'an was certainly misguided, not having received revelation from the one, true God. We affirm, based on the testimony of church history, that there was indeed strife among Jesus' followers as spoken of in Surah 61:14. However, says Katz, these doctrinal battles were settled “nearly 250 years before the Qur'an was given to Muhammad” (13). The ecumenical councils of the early church showed in a definitive way that the orthodox Trinitarian Christians were the group that prevailed. Furthermore, we know that Islam was not yet on the scene as a recognizable, formally established religion at the time this Surah was first revealed to Muhammad.

Given that Islam's claims regarding the explanation of Surah 61:14 run completely contrary to the clear testimony of history, Islam again makes itself out to be highly dubious as a religion. Here, as in Islam's denial of the crucifixion, we see that Muslims—whether willingly or out of sheer ignorance—have a blatant disregard for the clear testimony of historical evidence.

C). Conclusions re: Islam and Historical Reality

We have seen both from the Qur'an's denial of the crucifixion and from the Islamic explanation of Surah 61:14 that Islam dismisses historical evidence either by disregarding historical evidence or by outrightly denying the clear testimony of historical evidence. This causes one to wonder if there is something deceptive about Islam that it wishes to hide. Katz certainly thinks there is. He says, “Perhaps the most substantial question I have towards Islam is its seemingly blatant disregard for historical reality” (5b). “My impression,” says Katz, “is that many Muslims seem to happily 'just' believe it when the Qur'an says that Jesus was not crucified, that He didn't die, and that He (consequently) didn't rise from the dead” (12a). The attitude of

Muslims seems to be, “*Historical evidence? Who cares!*” (12a). The Qur'an “expects to be believed without evidence that it is God who has given it” (8b). In so doing, Islam calls not only for blind faith but for blind faith in that which *contradicts* historical reality, and this makes Islam appear highly dubious—perhaps even deceptive—as a religious system. “This approach looks to me,” says Katz, “like Muslims do have something to hide” (31a).

Realizing that the Qur'an gets the empirically and historically verifiable facts wrong, how can one believe what this book has to say about matters such as faith and one's eternal state—matters which are beyond the realm of empirical scrutiny? Unless what the Qur'an says about history rings true, it cannot be trusted in what it says about anything else.

In stark contrast to Islam, Christianity values historical facts and bases itself solidly upon the historical facts. Katz says, “Historical fact *is the basis of* the Christian faith” (12a). This, then, makes Christianity far more credible—and thus believable—as a religion.

D). DISCURSUS—Biblical Faith is “historical faith”

In contrast to Islam's dismissal of and blatant disregard for historical evidence, the Christian faith is deeply concerned with historical veracity, and this makes the Christian faith far more trustworthy and believable. The Bible itself shows great concern for relating historical events in great detail. Katz explains that the authors of Scripture, as well as the early church fathers, “took great pains to make sure their faith was based on solid historical truth” and “they exposed heresy as soon as it came up” (9b). This is because “historical fact is *the basis of the Christian faith*” (12a). There are many reasons that can be adduced to prove that the Christian faith is concerned with the facts of history.

First, most Biblical doctrines are connected to actual historical events. For example, the doctrine of God and the Christian understanding of who God is has been largely defined in terms of what God has done in history. With our limited, finite minds, we cannot understand much about the essence of God by mere statements about Him; however, we can know much more about Him from His actions in history and especially through His interactions with His people. Thus the question, “Who is God?” is best answered on the basis of what God does or has done.¹¹ Throughout the Old Testament, God repeatedly self-identifies Himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” who called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldeans. This tells us that He is a God who is personal and involved with His people and committed to His promises. God also tells us

¹¹ This being said, we must not minimize the importance of the special terminology that has been painstakingly developed in our Christian theology and creeds and confessions to describe the essence of God, especially in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity (each Person of the godhead being *co-equal, co-eternal*) and in relation to Christology (the *hypostatic* union of the two natures of the Person of Jesus Christ).

something about Himself when He says, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exo.20:1-2). He shows Himself to be the gracious and loving God who rescued His people from the tyrannical rule of Pharaoh. A God who has entered into a committed relationship with His people.

Likewise, the Christian doctrine of eschatology is inextricably tied to historical events. For example, the historical events of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are absolutely crucial to the Christian faith, so crucial that if these events did not happen, then the Christian faith is useless (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:14).

Second, the Bible itself is very concerned with the veracity of its own claims. We know this because throughout the Old Testament God makes a point of foretelling (prophesying) what will happen in history so that His people have a basis upon which they can evaluate the veracity of His Word. For example, Isaiah 48:3-5 says,

³The former things I declared of old; they went out from my mouth, and I announced them; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.... ⁵*I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, ‘My idol did them, my carved image and my metal image commanded them.’*

God declared beforehand what was to happen so that when what was predicted did come to pass, His people would know that it was He, and no other foreign God or idol, which had caused such an event to take place.

From the New Testament we also see that the apostles and authors of Scripture were very concerned about providing evidence to back up their claims, for they took great pains to make sure their writings were empirically and historically verified and verifiable. We see this in how

the authors of the New Testament constantly draw attention to the fact that they were eye and ear witnesses of Jesus' earthly ministry as well as His death, resurrection, and ascension. For example, Luke says that what he has recorded in his Gospel was “handed down to [him] by those who from the first were *eyewitnesses*” (Luke 1:2). Similarly, the apostle Peter says, “We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were *eyewitnesses* of His majesty” (2Pe.1:16). Likewise, the apostle John demonstrates his deep concern for the veracity of his claims in 1 John 1:1-3. He emphasizes the historicity of the events he is about to expound in the following words:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked at* and our *hands have touched*—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life *appeared*; we have *seen* it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has *appeared* to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have *seen and heard*, so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1-3).

Another clear instance of Scripture's concern for the historical and empirical verifiability of its claims is the record we have in John 20:24-29. There we read of Thomas, best known as “Doubting Thomas,” who did not—indeed, would not—believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he was able to see with his own eyes and touch with his own hands the wounds Jesus received during His crucifixion. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 the apostle Paul shows his extensive concern for the historical veracity of the resurrection as he cites how Jesus appeared to many people after his resurrection. There the apostle Paul recounts how Jesus appeared to Cephas, the twelve disciples, a group of more than five hundred brothers, James, the apostles, and Paul himself (though the appearance to Paul was via special revelation in the form of a dream).

Another way that Scripture shows its deep concern for historical and empirical verifiability of its claims is by the criteria that the apostle Peter set for men who could be nominated as a replacement for Judas (who hung himself after betraying Jesus). Peter was not about to let just anyone be appointed as a replacement apostle. No!—only those who had been with Jesus and His disciples for the entire duration of His ministry “beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us” could be appointed as nominees for the office of apostle (cf. Acts 1:21-26). Those who were to hold the office of apostle had to have been eye-and-ear witnesses of Jesus entire ministry. What better demonstration of Scripture's concern for the veracity of its truth claims!

Finally, we see how crucial history is to the Christian faith by looking at the great resurrection chapter written by the apostle Paul. He goes so far as to say, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1Cor. 15:14). In other words, the apostle Paul is saying that if Christ did not actually die and rise from the grave, then the whole enterprise of the Christian faith is useless and a big waste of time. Then Christians are to be pitied more than all men (cf. 1Cor. 15:19).

Finally, in regards to the historical veracity of the Christian faith and the Bible's own claims, we may note that secular history and secular archeology has made many discoveries which have verified the truth claims of Scripture (8a).¹² While not every event recorded in Scripture has been or will be verified by archeological discoveries, it is nevertheless the case that

¹² Katz makes an overstatement at this point when he says that “*most* of the Biblical events can be verified from secular history and archeology” (8).

to this day there have been no discoveries which have conclusively shown that an event reported in the Bible is *contrary to* our secular archeological and historical knowledge (8). While empirical evidence does not stand as the basis upon which we believe (rather, the Word of God, i.e. the Bible, is the basis of our faith and the underlying presupposition of everything we believe), it is a clear testimony to the truths of the Bible that archeology has in many ways confirmed its testimony.

In conclusion, we have seen that Scripture is deeply concerned with the historical veracity of its claims, and we have seen that the Christian faith is inextricably intertwined with real-world history. In this way Christianity is the polar opposite of Islam. Katz says, “Historical fact is the basis of Christian faith. My impression is that Islam goes the other way around. History is defined to be what the 'sacred texts' say, no matter what the factual evidence says” (12a). Katz then concludes this section by asking rhetorically, “To which faith or religion would you entrust your future?” Obviously to the one that is backed up and supported by the undeniable empirical evidence, not the one that runs contrary to it. Because the claims of Christianity match up with the facts of empirical evidence, it is far more believable and trustworthy than Islam.¹³ The foundation of all biblical faith is what God has done in real-world history. And because God has shown Himself trustworthy in the past by making promises which He then fulfilled, we can also trust God's promises for the future, believing that what He says will yet come to pass.

¹³ This is not to say that the empirical evidence alone is enough to make someone a Christian. All the empirical evidence and miraculous wonders are futile apart from the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt.12:38-39; Luke 16:27-31).

2). Islam and Universality

We have seen that Islam betrays itself as a dubious religion on account of its denial of the crucifixion and on account of its dubious explanation of Surah 61:14; however, there are other aspects of Islam that make it questionable as a religious system. In the second section of his series of articles, Katz explores and assesses Islam's claim to be a universal religion (Note: not just “*a*” universal religion but “*the*” universal religion). Again, we will come to see that in making such a claim, Islam betrays itself as suspect. While it claims to a universal religion, it manifests many exclusivistic tendencies which indicate that it is not truly universal. But before going any further, it will be helpful for us to define our use of the term “universal” and to demonstrate how it is that Islam claims to be *the* universal religion.

We must note that the word “universal” is employed by Katz not in the sense of a soteriological universalism which teaches that all people, regardless of their religious beliefs, will ultimately be saved and go to heaven. Rather, the word “universal” is used here by Katz to refer to a religion that declares its truth claims to be universally binding upon all people in all times and in all places. Both Christianity and Islam are universal religions in this sense of the word, but neither Christianity nor Islam are soteriologically universalistic.¹⁴ However, Katz's concern here is to prove whether or not Islam is *truly* a universal religion in the sense of being flexible and universally adaptable to different languages and different cultures. In other words, to

¹⁴ Quite the opposite is true of Christianity and Islam, both of which are soteriologically *exclusivistic* religions. Christianity teaches that the only way to God and eternal life in heaven is through believing in Jesus Christ as Savior (cf. John 14:6). Islam teaches that the only way to Allah and eternal life in Paradise is by believing that Muhammad is his final prophet. (One becomes a Muslim by confessing the *shahada*, Islam's foundational creed, which says, “*There is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God.*”)

be truly universal, a religion must allow for various outward expressions in different languages and cultures (so long as those expressions do not compromise the core content of the faith). Failing this, a religion shows itself to be nothing more than a tyrant or a dictator of universal proportions. What we will come to see is that Islam is just that: not truly universal religion but a universal tyrant that imposes itself upon all peoples in all places without allowing for any form of linguistic or cultural accommodation.

Next, Katz demonstrates how it is that Islam claims to be the one and only universal religion. According to Islam, Judaism and Christianity were saving religions—but only for a time. Jews and Christians were initially considered by Muhammad and his followers to be fellow “people of the book” whose Scriptures (the Old and New Testament) were authentic revelations from God, who is one-and-the-same as the Muslims' Allah. However, Muslims soon began to claim that the Jews and Christians had corrupted their Scriptures over the course of time, thus necessitating another revelation from Allah. As we have mentioned earlier, this subsequent revelation was the Qur'an—Allah's supreme and final revelation—and it has been entrusted to Muslims. Muslims claim that their religion is a continuation and culmination of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Qur'an, they say, is the third and last in a cycle divine revelations—a revelation which abrogates all previous revelations. Thus Islam abrogates Christianity in the same way that Christianity abrogates (we would say fulfills) Judaism.¹⁵ And Qur'an makes explicit its claim that Islam is the universal religion when it says in Surah 3:19, “Indeed, the [true] religion in the sight of Allah is Islam” (Surah 3:19).

We have clarified what we mean by the term “universal” and we have demonstrated that

¹⁵ Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 213.

Islam does indeed make the exclusivistic claim that it is the universal, God-given, and final religion for all times and for all of mankind. Next we ask, “But is it?” (24b; cf. 4b). Katz rightly argues that Islam is not a universal religion in the genuine sense of the word and offers two grounds for saying so: First, Islam imposes unwarranted linguistic restrictions upon the translation of the Qur'an. Second, Islam imposes unwarranted cultural restrictions upon those who come under its rule. Another way of putting it is to say that Islam is not a genuinely universal religion because it is both linguistically exclusivistic and culturally exclusivistic.

A). Language

Language is the first area Katz deals with in assessing Islam's claim to be a universal religion. In order for Islam to sustain its claim to be a universal religion, it must allow for flexibility in how languages are used as a means of divine revelation; however, rather than being flexible in its view of language, Islam is rigid, inflexible and exclusivistic. Muslims claim that “Arabic is God's *only* holy language” and that “if you really want to understand God and His will, you need to understand Arabic” (25). It is true that the Qur'an has been translated into other languages; however, Muslims maintain that the translation is not the Qur'an but just that—a mere translation of the Qur'an. Riddell and Cotterell explain that “the Qur'an is only viewed as *the Qur'an* when it is in Arabic.”¹⁶ Evidence of this view of their holy book can be seen from the way translations of the Qur'an are titled. For example, the English translation of the Qur'an translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali's is not called “*The Qur'an*” as we would expect. Rather, it is called “*The Meaning of the Qur'an.*” Since it is just an English translation of the Arabic Qur'an, it is considered to be nothing more than merely an *explanation* of the one true, Arabic Qur'an. But

¹⁶ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 59.

the translation itself is not and must not be considered *The Qur'an*.

By restricting the language of special revelation to one language—Arabic—Islam clearly demonstrates that it is *not* a universal religion. Rather, Islam shows itself to be a religion that is restrictive and exclusivistic. A quick look at some language-related statistics will illustrate how Islam's view of language prevents it from being a truly universal religion. Out of a global population of seven billion people, there are at most approximately 250 million people who have Arabic as their mother tongue (26b). This means that Islam, through the medium of its holy language, can reach only a mere 3.57 percent of the world's population!¹⁷ This makes Islam very narrow in terms of the people groups it can reach. So much for being a universal religion!

By maintaining that Arabic—a language which only twenty-eight percent of the world's population can understand—is the only legitimate language for conveying and understanding Allah's will, Islam fails to stand up to its claim to be a universal religion. Rather, it is an exclusive religion that excludes all those whose mother tongue is not Arabic from truly understanding Allah's will.

B). Culture

Culture is the second area Katz deals with in assessing Islam's claim to be a universal religion. In order for Islam to sustain its claim to be a universal religion, it must allow for a variety of cultural expressions; however, Islam is culturally rigid and imposes many culturally-bound regulations upon its people.

Katz says, “Islam seems to impose a *cultural strait jacket* on all nations under its rule”

¹⁷ Katz also offers the following highly polemical comment: “If God has a real preference for Arabic, why are there at most around 250 million people with Arabic as a mother tongue and nearly 1.5 billion with Chinese as a first language? That should make one think about God's language priorities, shouldn't it?” (26b).

(34). For example, Muslims, particularly Sunni Muslims, insist that a person must do everything exactly as Muhammad did. So extreme are their demands that Muhammad's ways be followed that some Muslims impose adherence to the prophet's personal habits regarding which foot first enters the bathroom first or which foot is planted on the floor upon first getting out of bed (34). Furthermore, in most Islamic countries it is required that women wear head coverings. The burqa wars that have raged in many European countries within the last few years are proof of the fact that Islam is not a universal but an exclusivistic religion that imposes certain forms of dress upon its adherents no matter where they live. Another aspect in which Islam shows itself to be culturally exclusivistic is that it opposes democratic forms of government and imposes a dictatorship based on shariah law in any country in which Muslims gain the upper hand. In this regard, the Arab Spring of recent years stands as a clear witness to how Islam is incompatible with democracy.

Reflecting on the many ways in which Islam is culturally rigid, Katz says, "I have the impression that Islam is in many ways stuck in 'Arabism' and provinciality with its insistence on 7th century desert tribe rules, clothing, and other important items of outward behavior which are just cultural expressions rooted far back in Muhammad's time but which have nothing to do with God's word" (27). Rather than allowing for cultural diversity, Islam imposes cultural uniformity. These restrictions, Katz claims, do not mesh with Islam's claim to be a universal religion.

Noteworthy is that Muslim reformists such as Sa'eed Nasheed also say that the Islam is "utterly irrelevant" for the twenty-first century. Nasheed goes so far as to say, "[The Qur'an] does not relate to me at all.... It is not a normative document for our times.... It is no more than a

historical document.”¹⁸ As Madany says, Nasheed wants to “disconnect Islam from its sacred texts” because he sees the Qur'an not as a universally applicable document but as a document whose application and relevance are time-bound both historically and culturally to the early centuries of Islam's spread and growth. Thus it is not only non-Muslims but also reformist Muslims who see Islam in general—and the Qur'an in particular—as being far from a truly universal religion.

18 Rev. Bassam Madany, “What is the Qur'an? ما وه القرآن؟ – A Moroccan Intellectual's Critique Of the Qur'an's Ethical Teachings.” <http://answering-islam.org/authors/madany/what_is_quran.html> Accessed May 2013.

C). DISCURSUS—The Christian Faith is Truly Universal

In contrast to Islam, which we have seen is both linguistically and culturally exclusivistic, Christianity is a truly universal religion, for it allows for linguistic flexibility and cultural diversity.

First, Christianity from the earliest point onward has allowed for linguistic flexibility. In the pre-Christian era, the Jews had already translated their Holy Scriptures into other languages, including an extensive translation of the entire body of Old Testament literature into Greek circa 200 B.C., a translation project which is known as the Septuagint. Furthermore, Pentecost set the precedent for the translation of the Gospel into all languages. In Acts 2 God clearly showed that He wants all people to hear the Good News of salvation in their own native language when, for at that moment He gave the apostles the ability to speak in tongues so that everyone present there in the upper room could hear the preaching of the gospel in their own native tongue. Ever since Pentecost, Christians have followed the precedent set in that great event by translating the Bible into as many languages as possible. The translation was a top priority in the missional endeavors of the early church in the first centuries and it continues to be a priority in mission work today.¹⁹

19 The Bible League International

One of the Bible League International's stated goals is its commitment to creating an Easy-to- Read Version of the Bible in each of the world's top 100 languages, a goal that, once attained, will mean that 90% of the world's population will have God's Word in an ordinary, everyday language they can understand (<http://www.bibleleague.org/what-we-do/easy-to-read-bibles>).

Wycliffe Bible Translators

The vision of Wycliffe is to “have God's Word is accessible to all people in a language that speaks to their heart.” Since its inception, Wycliffe has made great progress in Bible translation all around the world. To date, this organization has played a part in completing more than 700 Scripture translations and their stated goal shows their resolve to continue this work: Wycliffe's mission is “to see a Bible translation program in progress in every language still needing one by 2025” (<http://www.wycliffe.org/About/WhatWeBelieve.aspx>).

A second testimony to the fact that Christianity is a truly universal religion is the fact that it is highly adaptable to other cultures. While Scripture certainly critiques all aspects of all cultures and calls for adherence to a clearly defined set of moral standards and ethical norms, Christianity does not impose a cultural strait jacket on other ethnic groups. For example, there are European and American Christians, African and Asian Christians, Jewish Christians (Messianic Jews) and Native Indian Christians. There are Eastern Christians, Western Christians, and Middle-Eastern Christians. Each of these groups of Christians wears different styles of clothing, eats different foods, speaks different languages, and has very different styles of worship. Yet these wide and varied expressions of Christianity in no way compromise the core content of the faith. By allowing for a diversity of cultural expressions, Christianity (in stark contrast to Islam) manifests itself as a truly universal religion.

3). *Islam and Tests of Authenticity*

Another aspect of Islam that makes it seem highly questionable as a religious system is that it evades all tests for authentication. In order to declare something authentic, it must first be subjected to some kind of test for authenticity. It must be evaluated in light of an objective and unambiguous set of criteria. But Islam is problematic in this regard on two counts. First, Islam evades any tests of authentication for its messenger—the prophet Muhammad. Second, Islam evades tests of authentication for its message—the Qur'an. Both the prophet Muhammad and the holy book, the Qur'an, must be believed by a blind faith which, if not acquired by one's own act of will, will be forced upon that individual by the Muslim community. We can demonstrate that Islam evades tests for the authentication of its prophet by both positive and negative evidence.

A). *Evading Tests of Authentication for the Messenger—the prophet Muhammad*

First we look at how Muslims claim that the Muhammad is the final prophet of Allah while at the same time evading—and forbidding—all attempts at critical inquiry into the meaning of the Qur'an.

Positively, we see that the Qur'an evades all tests for authentication by calling for an unquestioning acceptance of and belief in all the prophets. Muslims eagerly acknowledge that there have been many prophets prior to Muhammad. For example, they acknowledge Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, and Jesus as prophets sent from Allah, and the Qur'an repeatedly states that we must believe in all these prophets and messengers as authentic messengers from Allah. But not only that. The Qur'an also goes so far as to imply that any attempts to distinguish between true and false prophets is not permitted.

Surah 4:150-151 says, “*Those who deny Allah and His Messengers, and wish to separate between Allah and His Messengers saying: 'We believe in some but reject others' ... they are in truth unbelievers; and we have prepared for unbelievers a humiliating punishment.*”

Surah 2:285 says, “The men of faith, each one believes in Allah, His angels, His books, and His Messengers. *'We make no distinction (they say) between one and another of His Messengers.'*”

One wonders why the Qur'an does not want us to distinguish between one person who claims to be a messenger from Allah and another. One is left to wonder if Islam has something to hide.

Negatively, we see that Islam evades tests for the authentication of its messenger Muhammad by providing no tests of authentication for those who claim to be prophets. Katz says, “There is one concept ... that seems to be completely missing in the Qur'an. It is the issue of how to recognize a 'false prophet' [from a true prophet]” (32a). What Katz is getting at here is that, contrary to the Bible, the Qur'an provides absolutely no criteria, no standards whatsoever, by which to distinguish a true prophet from a false prophet. “This,” says Katz, is “a telling silence,” a silence which makes Islam appear very dubious (32a).

Since Islam provides no tests for the authenticity of its founding prophet, the prophet Muhammad, Islam demands that its adherents have blind faith, and this makes Islam appear highly suspicious. By evading any tests for authenticity, one may be led to wonder, “Why would the Qur'an not provide any criteria to distinguish between true and false prophets? Does Islam have something to hide about Muhammad?”

Katz postulates that the Qur'an “wants to make sure the reader will not even start to explore this concept” (32a). He says that one gets the impression that inquiry into the life and morality of Muhammad is avoided deliberately so that the reader of the Qur'an “doesn't get the

dangerous idea to ... even start looking at Muhammad in order to evaluate him” (32a).

Why would Katz speak of the idea of inquiring into the life and character of Muhammad as a potentially “dangerous” endeavor? Precisely because Islam *does* have something to hide. Muhammad was a very wicked man.²⁰ If the average Muslim knew the horrific atrocities that Muhammad committed during his lifetime, they might very well question whether Muhammad was a true prophet of Allah and thus forsake their faith altogether. However, as Bob Dutko explains, Muslim clerics are very selective in how they present the life of Muhammad to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The portions of the prophet's life that are presented are often conveyed in a “white-washed” form such that all the atrocities he committed “are swept under the rug.”²¹ In this way Islam ensures that it maintains its adherents.

Given that Muhammad did many terrible things that clearly undermine his claim to be a true prophet of Allah, Islamic clerics know that they must ban all attempts to inquire into the prophet's life. If such investigations about the authenticity of the prophet were permitted, Muslims might well find out how terrible a man Muhammad was and be led to question their faith, if not depart from it altogether. Thus, by white-washing Muhammad's life and by forbidding any inquiry into the authenticity of his claim to be a true prophet, Islam makes itself out to be a cruel and deceptive dictator that demands blind faith in a false message.

Another inconsistency in the area of authentication is that the Qur'an provides no criteria

20 Muhammad is known to have been involved in horrendous crimes and grotesque actions such as theft, deceit, rape, torture, and genocide. Records of Muhammad's involvement in such atrocities are recorded in credible Islamic sources and by Islamic biographers, and these sources are, to this day, widely accepted in an uncontested way by all Islamic scholars as credible accounts of the prophet's life; however, Islamic scholars are careful to keep these accounts of Muhammad's horrific deeds well hidden from public view by Muslims and non-Muslims alike lest their faith fall into disrepute (cf. Bob Dutko, *Islam: Answering Top 10 Claims Given to Support Islam*, Lecture 1).

21 Bob Dutko, *Islam: Answering Top 10 Claims Given to Support Islam*, Lecture 1.

for judging the credibility of a prophet, yet Muslims still reject all those self-proclaimed prophets who come after Muhammad's time. And indeed, there have been many such self-proclaimed prophets. For example, Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon sect, claimed to be a prophet (1805-1844). But no Muslim would ever consider him to be a prophet. And—surprisingly—there have even been some from within Islam who have arisen after Muhammad as self-proclaimed prophets of Allah. These include Baha'ullah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, and Rashad Khalifa. However, these men and their messages have been quickly rejected by almost all Muslims without any hesitation at all.

Thus one thing is clear: Muslims do have one standard which they employ in considering a person's claim to prophet-hood, and that is this: anyone who comes after Muhammad and claims to be a prophet is not a prophet. However, this is not at all a legitimate test for authenticity; rather, it is a flat-out prohibition against any tests of authenticity by declaring Muhammad to be the final, the one-and-only prophet.

In contrast to Islam, the Bible is very concerned with providing tests of authenticity for the Lord's prophets, and this demonstrates the Bible's concern to distinguish between truth and error. First, the Bible sets forth clear standards by which we can determine whether a prophet is truly a messenger from God. For example, Moses says that if a prophet prophesies something and it does not come to pass, then he is not a true prophet (cf. Deu.18:21-22; Jer.28:8-9). Furthermore, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is set forth as a standard by which to judge true and false prophets. The apostle John says, “²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³ and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming

and now is in the world already” (1 John 4:2-3).

Second, the Bible issues warnings stating that there will be false prophets who will come (one of those being Muhammad). The following passages speak of false prophets and lying prophets who will arise among the Israelites: Deuteronomy 13; Jeremiah 23:9-40; 28; Ezekiel 13; 2 Timothy 4:3. Furthermore, Jesus Himself says that in the last days “many false prophets will appear and deceive many people” (Mat.24:11). And the apostle Peter says, “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies....” (2Pe.2:1). Thus the Bible is very realistic, for it expects that in a fallen world false and lying prophets *will* arise and that one must discern between those who are truly prophets sent from God and those who are false prophets.

Thirdly, the Bible issues forth an explicit instruction to Christians to discern and test the prophets to determine whether or not they are truly prophets sent from God. In 1 Corinthians 14:29 the apostle instructs the Corinthian church that when prophets speak “the others should *weigh carefully what is said.*” And the apostle John also urges his readers, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but *test the spirits* to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1Jhn.4:1).

The Bible acknowledges the reality that false prophets do exist and will continue to exist, and for that reason it urges believers to apply tests of authentication by which they might distinguish between true and false prophets. In this way the Bible shows a concern for truth. In contrast, the Qur'an shows no such concern for discerning between truth and error—rather, it prohibits such inquiries and demands blind faith in the prophet Muhammad. Thus one can only be left to wonder, “What does Islam have to hide?” (31).

B). Evading Tests of Authentication for the Message—the Qur'an

Not only does Islam call for acceptance of its prophet by blind faith, Islam also calls for acceptance of its holy book, the Qur'an, by blind faith, for Islam also prohibits any attempts to subject the message of the Qur'an to the scrutiny of tests of authenticity. It does so in numerous ways.

First, Katz explains that, according to Muslims, “you need to be able to read the revelation [of the Qur'an] *in its original language*, otherwise you are not even qualified to criticize anything in it” (30). This is very problematic because only a small percentage of the world's population, approximately twenty-eight percent, knows Arabic. This means that very few people are competent enough to test the message of the Qur'an for authenticity and truth. Further restricting those who are competent to assess the Qur'an is that fact that, of the twenty-eight percent of people in the world who do speak Arabic, only a small portion of them can understand the Arabic of the Qur'an which is very different from the contemporary Arabic of the twenty-first century. As we well know, languages are dynamic, thus they change. The Qur'an is written in “classical” Arabic which is quite different from today's spoken Arabic, and unless Muslims are trained in the Arabic of the Qur'an, a kind of training that only Imams receive, they will not be able to fully understand much of what is written in the Qur'an (29).

I know this to be true from firsthand experience. This summer I lived across the street from a Muslim man who was formerly the president of the mosque nearest to us. He spoke both Arabic and English fluently; however, could not understand the Arabic of the Qur'an! I know this because during Ramadan he decided to read the Qur'an in Arabic for the first time—however, he explained to me that he could not understand its Arabic, so he had to download an “app” for

his I-Phone which had an English-Arabic interlinear version! He could not understand the “Qur'anic” Arabic until he had the English text alongside it! Only then could he make sense of the classical Arabic of the Qur'an.

Thus we see that there is only a small minority of the world's population who can actually understand the original Arabic message of the Qur'an. This means that the vast majority of Muslims must accept the Qur'an's teachings on blind faith. In this way, we see once again that Islam protects itself against critical evaluation by making its message virtually impossible to scrutinize by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

What are we to make of the Muslims' insistence that the message of the Qur'an can only be understood by those who have reached a highly sophisticated knowledge of the classical Arabic language? First, this is problematic from a logical and philosophical point view. As Katz says, “all clear and logical thoughts can be expressed in any language” (31). This, he says, is something any competent linguist will tell us, for all languages have the capacity to express any clear thought in a way that is comprehensible in any other language (31). If this is true, and it is, then the message of the Qur'an can be properly understood in another language, provided it is a good translation. This, in turn, means that the message of the Qur'an can be judged on the basis of the translation. However, Muslims deny that this is so. They will always evade any questions about or criticisms of the meaning of the Qur'an by saying that its message can only be truly and rightly understood as explained in the classical Arabic which they all too often—and conveniently—do not know! “This,” says Katz, “is one the biggest 'cop-outs' of Muslim reasoning in dialog with other faiths” (31).²²

²² I experienced the frequent use of this “cop-out” first-hand this summer while doing street-evangelism to Muslims. Any time I asked a Muslim a question about the meaning of a controversial verse in the

The Muslims' insistence that critical thought on the Qur'an is only possible by those who have understood its message in classical Arabic is problematic in another way, for this claim exposes hypocrisy on their part. Muslims permit themselves to criticize and utterly dismiss the Bible's message as false and corrupt on the basis of a translation (it is the rare Muslim that knows biblical Hebrew or Greek). However, they will not allow us to assess the meaning of the Qur'an and critique its message on the basis of a translation. In this way, Muslims hold a double standard and show themselves to be hypocritical.

What this all comes down to is that there are no tests of authentication for the Qur'an. The only authentication for the message of the Qur'an that Muslims offer is the circular argument that the Qur'an is a "literary miracle" and that if you cannot understand it, or if its message seems problematic, then you simply have not attained sufficiently sophisticated knowledge of the holy language of classical Arabic. This, says Katz, means that "gullibility is demanded to a considerable extent" (29) and it betrays an approach that "makes it look to me like Muslims have something to hide" (31b).

In contrast, Christians will allow the message of the Bible to be critiqued, analyzed, and questioned in any good translation (meaning most translations). While we would maintain that an understanding of the original language of the Bible is useful and necessary for scholarly theological work, and while we would argue that translations can only be considered trustworthy and reliable if they are based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts, Christians certainly do permit a critical inquiry into the Bible's teaching based on a translation. Christians know that

Qur'an, he or she would inevitably evade my question by saying it can only be properly understood in Arabic, and—conveniently for them—none of them knew the classical Arabic of the Qur'an! They had an "out!"

God's truth can be adequately conveyed in any language, and Christians know that they have nothing to hide, for we have the truth.

But there is another problem with the Islamic view of language as a means of revelation, and that has to do with how Allah has not only chosen another “divine” or “holy” language but how, in so doing, he has declared all other previously used languages as inappropriate as tools for divine revelation. Muslims believe that the Torah, Psalms, and Gospels are were earlier revelations given by Allah himself.²³ This means that Allah viewed the Hebrew language as good enough to convey his perfect Word and will for about 1500 years and that Aramaic and Greek were also appropriate languages for divine revelation. Then when Allah revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad, he chose to use another language, Arabic.²⁴

This in itself is not problematic; however, what is problematic is that Muslims have declared that Arabic is now the *only* legitimate language for divine revelation and that Allah's message can *only* be truly understood and evaluated by reading it in the original Arabic. It is utterly inconsistent for Allah to suddenly declare that all the languages he previously used for conveying his divine will are now inappropriate. Even worse is for Allah to declare that the

23 In addition to the Qur'an, Muslims accept the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David (Zaboor) from the Old Testament (they claim that the other OT books were lost before Muhammad's time). Muslims also accept what they refer to as the *Injeel of Jesus* from the New Testament (they believe there is only one Gospel of Jesus, thus they are puzzled to find that Christians recognize four distinct Gospels). Muslims claim that all these writings (the Torah, Psalms, Injeel, and Qur'an) come from a single heavenly prototype in the form of a “Preserved Tablet” (Riddell & Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 64). As for the current state of these sacred texts, we must keep in mind that Muslims claim the Old and New Testament Scriptures have been corrupted by the Jews and Christians, respectively, leaving the Qur'an as the only legitimate extant revelation.

24 Allah revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel in a series of dreams and visions beginning circa A.D. 610. These revelations were passed on orally for a few decades and only slowly written down in Arabic during the reign of the third rightly guided caliph, Caliph Uthman (reigned 644-656 A.D.).

Arabic language is the superior language. Allah had given divine revelation in the Hebrew language for 1500 years. Why on earth would he suddenly render that language inappropriate and switch to Arabic as the only permitted language when there had been only twenty-three years of divine revelation in Arabic?

We have seen that Muslims discourage any critical inquiry into the authenticity of the Qur'an by setting up linguistic restrictions which permit it to be evaluated *only* in its original Arabic form, a language which only few are competent enough to be qualified to offer a critical evaluation; however, there is another way in which Islam forbids critical inquiry into and evaluation of the Qur'an, and that is by issuing authoritative, government-sanctioned declarations which ban such endeavors. In his article "What Is the Qur'an?" Madany offers various examples of Islamic reformist scholars who have entered come under fire from the Islamic authorities of their country by critiquing Islam in general and the Qur'an in particular.²⁵ We will consider two.

First, Madany mentions Taha Hussein, a Muslim reformist from Egypt who wrote some critical works on pre-Islamic Arabic literature. These works were perceived as a threat to the integrity and uniqueness of the Qur'an as the very word of Allah and thus brought Hussein into open conflict with the civil authorities of Egypt. Second, Madany mentions Jalal Sadeq al-Adhm, a Muslim reformist from a prominent Damascus Sunni family, who became entangled in controversies with the Islamic authorities of Lebanon after writing a work entitled *A Critique of Religious Thought* in 1969.²⁶ In this article, Adhm attacked the sacred texts not only of Judaism

25 Rev. Bassam Madany, "What is the Qur'an? ما وه القرآن؟ - A Moroccan Intellectual's Critique Of the Qur'an's Ethical Teachings." <http://answering-islam.org/authors/madany/what_is_quran.html> Accessed May 2013.

26 According to Madany, this work marked the emergence of a new genre of writings by young Muslim reformists who are advocating a radical reappraisal of their religious and cultural heritage.

and Christianity but also of Islam. For example, he drew attention to the illogical nature of the Qur'an's account of the fall of *Iblis* (Satan). However, his critiques of the Qur'an brought him into conflict with the governmental authorities of Beirut, and they forbid Adhm to publish this work.

Examples like these could be multiplied; however, it is clear from these two examples that Islamic authorities officially prohibit any public criticism of their holy book. As Madany says of the latter example, “*This signaled a warning to all would-be Muslims intellectuals that no criticism of the Qur'an was allowed or could appear in a printed form* [emphasis mine, BZ].”²⁷

We have seen that Muslims forbid any critical inquiry into the legitimacy and authenticity of Muhammad's claim to be a prophet, and likewise, they forbid any critical inquiry into the Qur'an's claim to be the supreme and final revelation of Allah. The result is that Islam demands blind faith in its messenger and its message, and this makes Islam highly suspicious. The truth is always willing to open itself up to scrutiny. Only that which is false and which has something to hide seeks to evade critical inquiry—and such is Islam. So beware!

²⁷ Madany, “What is the Qur’an?” <<http://answering-islam.org>> Accessed May 2013.

Conclusion:

A Critique of Katz's Affirmation re: the Internal Coherence of Islam

Katz does a marvelous job of conducting an external critique on Islam by showing how the claims of the Qur'an fail to comport with the hard facts offered to us from history. He also does a thorough and insightful job of critiquing Islam for its failure to live up to its claim of being a universal religion. And Katz helpfully points out that Islam betrays itself as potentially dubious faith by evading the normal tests of authentication for its messenger Muhammad and its message, the Qur'an. However, there is one area of Katz's thought that stood out to me as being in need of critique, and that is the fact that Katz grants too much to Islam by saying that it is, to a large degree, internally coherent as a worldview.

While Katz is unwavering in his conviction that Islam is a false and unsustainable religion, he grants too much when he says, “My impression is that *Islam is a relatively self-consistent worldview, having a beauty that is fascinating.... My problems with Islam are not so much 'from the inside' where it is largely self-consistent and beautiful idea*, but when looking at Islam 'from the outside' and observing a number of clashes with reality as we know it.” (1b) Later he writes, “*There are not many 'internal' contradictions*” (5a). I wish to illustrate briefly that Katz goes too far in making the claim that Islam is a relatively self-consistent and internally coherent worldview when taken on its own terms and that Katz grants too much to Islam when he says this religion does not contain many internal contradictions. We will see that this is so by looking at a sampling of internal contradictions that arise in Islam firstly from the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* and secondly from internal contradictions within the Qur'an itself.

One of the areas of Islam from which internal contradictions arise is the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid*.²⁸ The doctrine of *tawhid* teaches the radical and absolute oneness of Allah and emphasizes the oneness of Allah so much that he is presented as a monad god who has no similarities to anything in the created world (i.e. Allah has no communicable attributes).²⁹ In other words, the doctrine of *tawhid* is evidence of Islam's unitarian conception of God in which Allah and Allah alone is the one eternally existent being.³⁰ Hartman points out that this doctrine gives rise to at least three internal contradictions within the Islamic faith.³¹ First, doctrine of *tawhid* fails to explain the human desire for love and community, for there can be no love and community within a monad god. Nevertheless, Muslims clearly wish to affirm that there is such a thing as love and community. Second, the doctrine of *tawhid* presents a god who is so utterly

28 Qur'anic Basis for the Doctrine of *Tawhid*

Surah 23:92-93 “*No son did God beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to God! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him! ... He knows what is hidden and what is open: too high is He for the partners they attribute to Him!*”

Note: In reading Surah 23:92-93, one wonders if there is an underlying influence of Greek and Hellenistic mythology informing the author's thinking, for in Greek mythology it is commonplace for the multiple gods that make up the Greek pantheon to fight and quarrel among each other. Disunity is a norm in the Greek pantheon. However, multiplicity within a godhead need not entail such disunity and in-fighting, as can be seen from the unity and harmony between the three Persons of the Triune God of the Bible.

Surah 112:1-4 “*Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.*”

29 Rev. Bassam Madany, *The Bible and Islam*, 75.

30 Both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions; however, Christianity is a Trinitarian monotheism whereas Islam is a unitarian monotheism which denies the Trinitarian teaching of Christianity in which it is taught that there are three Persons existing in perfect harmony and equality within the one divine essence.

31 K. Dayton Hartman II, *ANSWERING MUSLIM OBJECTIONS TO THE TRINITY*, http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/hartman/trinity_objections.html#fn_1 <> Accessed March 2013.

transcendent that he is rendered unable to engage in any kind of meaningful relationship with his creation. This, in turn, renders Allah inaccessible and unknowable.³² Nevertheless—and here lies the problem—Muslims clearly teach that Allah *can be known* through the Qur'an (however, Muslims can only know *about* Allah, they will never say they *know* Allah). Third, the doctrine of *tawhid* teaches that Allah alone is eternal; however, Muslims also claim that the Qur'an, which exists independently of Allah in the form of an inscribed tablet in heaven, is eternal.³³ This again presents us with an internal contradiction. Thus the doctrine of *tawhid* gives rise to at least three substantial internal contradictions, all of which Katz seems to gloss over when he says that Islam is a largely self-consistent worldview that is free of major internal contradictions.

Further internal contradictions in the Islamic worldview can be found in the teachings of the Qur'an itself. We will briefly mention only two: contradictions regarding the salvific status of Jews and Christians, and contradictions regarding the treatment of Jews Christians.

Regarding the salvific status of Jews and Christians, we find that early on in the Qur'an Jews and Christians are promised entrance into Paradise upon simply believing in Allah and in the Last Day (cf. Surah 5:69).³⁴ The promise of Paradise is held out to them *without* the

32 Commenting on the knowability of Allah, Rev. Madany writes, “Since Islam proclaims the doctrine of a solitary and transcendent God, it follows that no Muslim claims that he or she can know Allah.” “No Muslim can say, 'I know God.' He would rather say: 'I know about God.’” (Bassam Madany, *An Introduction to Islam*, 113, 26).

33 The Eternality of the Qur'an

Surah 85:21-22 says, “This is a Glorious Qur’an (inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved.” The Islamic scholar Yusuf Ali readily admits in his commentary that “this passage conclusively demonstrates that the Qur’an is eternal.” And Hartman comments that in Islam “the Qur’an presupposes its own eternity” (K. Dayton Hartman II, *ANSWERING MUSLIM OBJECTIONS TO THE TRINITY*, <<http://www.answering-islam.org>> Accessed March 2013).

34 Surah 5:69 says, “Lo! Those who believe, and those who are *Jews*, and *Sabaeans* [an ancient people speaking an old southern Arabian language], and *Christians*—*Whosoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right—there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.*”

stipulation of having to believe in the prophet Muhammad. However, later in the Qur'an, in Surah 98:6, the stipulation is stated that Jews and Christians must accept the prophet Muhammad in order to gain entrance into Paradise.³⁵ Wario comments on the internal contradictions evident between Surah 5:69 and 98:6, saying, “These two Qur'anic verses came from the same source—Allah—and are diametrically opposite on the fate of Jews and Christians.”³⁶

Regarding the manner in which Muslims should both view and treat Jews and Christians, we also find the Qur'an prevaricating. Early in the Qur'an there are ayahs which instruct Muslims to respect and value Jews and Christians because they are fellow people of the book (cf. Surah 29:46; 98:1).³⁷ However, later in the Qur'an, the message about how Muslims should treat Jews and Christians is far different. For example, Surah 9:5 instructs Muslims to slay the idolaters (i.e. Jews and Christians) wherever they find them and “seize them and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every strategem (of war).”

Thus the Qur'an prevaricates both in its teaching on the salvific status of Jews and Christians and its teaching on how Muslims should treat these fellow “people of the book.” Islam evidences glaring internal contradictions and inconsistencies in this regard. But Wario says that

35 Surah 98:6 says, “*Lo! Those who disbelieve, among the People of the Scripture and the idolaters, will abide in fire of hell. They are the worst of created beings.*” Wario explains that this ayah “refers to Jews & Christians who refused to accept Muhammad as prophet in Medina during Islam's final push for converts” (Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 131).

36 Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 131.

37 The Islamic scholar Dr. Badawi appeals to Surah 98:1 to show that both Jews and Christians are distinguished from *al-mushrikeen* or polytheists, and argued on the basis of this single reference that it is not correct to label the People of the Book as *Mushrik*. (cf. Sam Shamoun, “Jews and Christians Mushriks according to the Quran? Responding to One Muslim Scholar’s Denials,” <<http://www.answering-islam.org>> Accessed March 2013).

these two sets of contradictions “are a drop in the ocean ... compared with other contradictions in Islam.”³⁸ Once again, it must be said that Katz seems to overlook these glaring inconsistencies when he says that Islam is largely self-consistent and free of internal contradictions.

Despite the fact that Katz fails to see the abundance of internal contradictions in Islam, he does a marvelous job of providing us with a devastating external critique of this growing religion. All in all, these articles provide a wealth of insight that does much to prepare one for an apologetic encounter with Islam while at the same time doing much to bolster one's confidence in the Christian faith in a day when Islam is growing and spreading across the globe in a resurgence that it has not known since for over a millennium. Katz's insights on Islam are extremely valuable in a day and age when this religion is rapidly gaining new ground, especially in the Western context of Europe and North America.

38 Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 131.

The Principle of Abrogation

Muslims have an “easy-out” or “escape-all” for these alleged contradictions within the Qur'an in their *principle of abrogation*. According to Wario, the principle of abrogation teaches that “whenever there is a contradiction between two verses of the Qur'an, the newer revelation overrides the previous revelation.” What makes discussion with Muslims difficult is that they employ the rule of abrogation “to absolve Allah and the Qur'an of inconsistencies” (Wario, *Cracks in the Crescent*, 131). However, rather than explaining these internal contradictions, the principle of abrogation merely permits and legitimates contradictions and allows for the ongoing issuance of contradictory revelations.

A Reflection on Modern Muslim Reformist Views of the Qur'an

To conclude this series of critical inquiries into Islam I would like to offer a brief reflection on modern Muslim reformists' views of the Qur'an, for there is no stronger support to be drawn for our questions and concerns about Islam than that which comes from Muslims themselves.

There are many Muslim reformist scholars who are very critical about the Qur'an and its relevance in the modern world. One such reformist is Sa'eed Nasheed, a Moroccan Islamic intellectual and Muslim reformist, who wrote a critical article in September 2010 entitled "What Is the Qur'an?"³⁹ In this article, Nasheed argues that the Qur'an is, in many ways, utterly irrelevant to him and he concludes that the Qur'an is merely a time-bound historical document that is not and cannot be normative for life in the twenty-first century.⁴⁰ For example, after citing Surahs 58:3 & 5:24, 34 (which deal with how a husband should treat his wife or wives), Nasheed says of each ayah respectively, "This Ayah is irrelevant and has nothing at all to teach me personally.... This Ayah does not relate to me at all; it's utterly irrelevant!" And after citing Surahs 2:216 and 8:41 about warfare (jihad) and instructions about accumulating booty and spoils of war, he says,

I find myself alienated from its teachings.... To be honest, it's well-nigh extremely difficult to exegete these passages and see how they apply to the here-and-now! I have always maintained that I am a Muslim. However, I must reach a bold and

39 This article was published online in Arabic at www.alawan.org and has been translated by Rev. Bassam Madany in an article entitled, "What is the Qur'an? ما وه القرآن؟ - A Moroccan Intellectual's Critique Of the Qur'an's Ethical Teachings," <<http://answering-islam.org>> Accessed May 2013.

40 Nasheed speaks not merely for himself but for many other Muslims who he represents. He says, "My apprehension is shared by millions of Muslims who hesitate to express themselves openly about these topics."

honest decision regarding my relation to Islam's sacred text, which is loaded with burdensome injunctions that don't concern me at all.⁴¹

This is but a sampling of Nasheed's scathing critiques of the Qur'an. In summarizing his view of the Qur'an, he says that Islam will survive only if Muslims adjust their view of the Qur'an such that it is seen by them as

a document that played a major role in the birth of Islam, *but which is not a normative document for our times....* Rather than regarding the Qur'an as an unchanging constitution upon which the Umma must base its laws, as many claim, *actually it is no more than a historical document.... [I]ts role or function had ended with the birth of a new historical order, namely, the Islamic Umma.*⁴²

After having argued that many verses of the Qur'an contain applications that are limited to the person of Muhammad and the prophet's lifetime (especially those pertaining to the treatment of wives and one's conduct in warfare), Nasheed asks, "How may the Qur'an be a standard or belief or norm of conduct applicable for all times and in all places? ... Such texts in the Qur'an cannot be applied to anyone else [but Muhammad]."⁴³

The critiques Nasheed offers regarding the relevance of the Qur'an for modern times demonstrate that the concerns raised by Katz, Madany and others about the Qur'an in particular and Islam in general are legitimate indeed. Nasheed speaks as a Muslim. He knows Islam and its holy book better than any Westerner, and yet—he shares our concerns. The value in setting forth the views of Muslim reformist scholars is that their critiques validate our concerns as being not mere Western misperceptions but true and legitimate concerns indeed, concerns which Islam must reckon with *if* it wants to be honest with itself.

41 Madany, "What Is the Qur'an?" <<http://answering-islam.org>> Accessed May 2013.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

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* Ami Ben-Chanan is not the author's real name. The author's actual name is Alex Kerimli, a Russian Christian who I worked with this summer doing street evangelism in downtown Toronto. Alex has spoken at numerous missions conferences and has even debated Muslims at "Speakers Corner" in London, England. Given the publicity he gains from his public debates, and given the controversial nature of the things he must say, Alex does not feel comfortable identifying himself as the author of these works which he makes available for free at his public debates.