

# Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 31 · Number 3 · July 2007

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical  
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for  
WORLD EVANGELICAL  
ALLIANCE  
Theological Commission

# The Bible: Classical And Contemporary Muslim Attitudes And Exegesis

Joseph M. Mutei

**KEYWORDS:** *Qur'ān, paradise, Hadith, revelation, inspiration, Word of God, falsification, abrogation, worship, Mihadhara*

## 1. Introduction

There are many references to biblical texts in the *Qur'ān*. From the beginning of Islam, Muslims were aware of both the book and the teachings of the Bible. Through their contacts with Christians and Jews or through reading the Bible themselves, Muslims have become aware of many key biblical stories. They are neither ignorant of its teaching or of its content. But they look at the Bible from a *Qur'ānic* standpoint, seeking to understand it, but approaching it from the *Qur'ānic* perspective.

It is therefore logical that a Muslim should use the scriptural understanding in the *Qur'ān* to judge the Bible. However, as we will soon realize, this

has its own drawbacks, often leading to conclusions, which do not necessarily take into account the biblical standpoint. To understand why the Bible and the *Qur'ān* cannot be judged fairly, using the other's standpoint, we will start by looking at the nature of the *Qur'ān*.

## 2. The Nature of the Qur'ān and the Bible

### The Nature of the Qur'ān

The majority of *Sunni* Muslims (who are the majority) believe that the *Qur'ān* is the eternal, uncreated word of God (the Shia'ite Muslims believe that it is created). The *Qur'ān* itself attests to this fact in the teaching that it is a copy of the original Book, *Umm-ul-Kitab*. This book is preserved in a table, *Lawh-i-Mahfuz*, in paradise. It is from the

---

*Joseph Mutei* studied at Reformed Theological College of East Africa, Eldoret, Kenya, and gained a Masters degree in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations from St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya where he is now lecturer in Islamic Studies. He is an ordained minister of the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kenya and has served at Nairobi and Limuru. This paper was originally read at the WEA Theological Commission symposium on African Theology held at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), Nairobi, Kenya, September 20-24, 2006.

eternal word of God, in its original form that it is formed; God has gradually released revelation to humanity. Yusuf 'Ali in his English translation of the *Qur'ān* calls it the 'Mother of the Book', the foundation of Revelation, the Preserved Tablet, which is also the core and the essence of Revelation.

Muslims believe that it is from the mother book in paradise that all the books sent down to the Prophets were derived. It follows therefore that the Islamic revelation is progressive and points to the coming of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Starting from the former Prophets like Adam and Abraham and moving down to the latter Prophets, Dawud, Isa and Muhammad, God has made his revelation known to all nations.

Unlike the other sectarian prophets who were sent to their respective nations, Muhammad was the seal of the prophets who was called as a messenger to all humanity (Surah 7:159; 21:107). The scripture, with which he was sent, the *Qur'ān*, is therefore not for only some people or a particular tribe, but for the entire humanity.

One of the mistakes made by those who seek to enter into some sort of Christian-Muslim dialogue is to equate Muhammad to Jesus Christ, and the *Qur'ān* to the Bible. The difficulty with this comes because for Christians the Bible reveals Christ—it discloses him as the Word of God and the eternal Son of God, and that through faith in him, and thus what is revealed about him in the Bible, they receive eternal life (John 20:31; John 1:14). On the other hand, in Islam, it is Muhammad who reveals the *Qur'ān*; the uncreated, eternal Word of God, which became a Book.

The *Qur'ān* is the key to the knowl-

edge of salvation for it is the revelation of God, giving the sign of how to walk the straight path of obedience to the divine will—Islam. For the Muslims, Muhammad's life was the *Qur'ān*. The correct contrast, however, should be between Muhammad and the Bible on the one hand, and Jesus and the *Qur'ān* on the other. It is noteworthy, that Islam calls Jesus *Kalimat'Allah*, 'a word from God' and *Ruh'Allah*, 'the Spirit of God'.

### The Nature of the Bible

While Muslims believe that the *Qur'ān* was revealed exactly in its original form as contained in the *Umm-ul-Kitāb*, thereby being received through dictation, the Christian concept of scriptural inspiration is *theanthropic*, a coterminous word of God and man, the latter being protected from error by the influence of the Holy Spirit. Although the Christians believe that Scriptures are God-breathed, (2 Tim. 3:16), these are also received as the work of human beings (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

### The *Qur'ān* and the Bible

When the *Qur'ān* refers to the Bible, it assumes that the original text was still with the *ahl-al-Kitāb*, 'the people of the book'. This followed the assumption that the *ahl-al-Kitāb* should have read their scriptures well unless the copy of the scriptures that they possessed was the corrupt one.

Initially, the *Qur'ān* assumed that in fact what the *ahl-al-Kitāb* had was actually the true word of God. This was so much so that the *Qur'ān* asked Muslims to seek clarification and guidance from them if and when they encountered dif-

difficulties in understanding certain religious realities in their newly found religion. This was therefore an endorsement of all the books as revealed to Musa (Tawrat 'Torah or the Law'), Dawud (Zabur 'Psalms'), and Isa (Injil 'the Gospel') (Surah 3:113; 5:43ff).

Nevertheless, in Surah 5:69, Christians are attacked for not following their revelation. This attack does not point to their changing of their revelation books or text. It is clear in v. 71, that the only way of escape for the *ahl-al-Kitab* would be if they followed their revelation.

So far, the *Qur'ān* agrees indeed, that the scripture the *ahl-al-Kitab* had was actually right, but it was the people who were not following it, therefore downplaying its worth. The question that comes to mind at these early stages is this: when was the Bible corrupted or falsified, if up until this time the *Qur'ān* was asking Muslims to seek help from the *ahl-al-Kitab*? In Surah 10:95, Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was likewise asked to seek clarification from the *ahl-al-Kitab*.

There are a number of examples where some *ahl-al-Kitab* were accused of concealing the truth of scriptures. These include; Surah 2:101, 140, 146, 159, 174; 3:70, 71, 187; 9:91, 92. However, a closer look at the text, Surah 6:91-92, shows that these were Jews who were accused of suppressing the truth through their misconduct.

### 3. Muslim Attitude and Exegesis of the Bible

Over the years, Muslims have used different approaches in looking at and interpreting the Bible. There are differ-

ent reasons for the ways in which Muslims see the Bible. There is always a reason behind each of the main objections raised against the Bible. For instance, the different attitudes held by Muslim Scholars have always been dependent on factors as diverse as their religio-political allegiance, the desire to prove that the Bible shows the coming of Muhammad and at the same time wishing to disavow large sections of the Bible as hopelessly corrupted.

The main accusations preferred against the Christians as far as the Bible is concerned include what Lazarus-Yafeh points as: *Tahrif* or Falsification, *Naskh* or Abrogation, Bible Exegesis and the Lack of *Tawatūr* or Lack of reliable transmission.<sup>1</sup>

As earlier stated, *Qur'ānic* arguments are used to judge the Bible in the first three, while the fourth finds its origins in the importance of *isnad*<sup>2</sup> in the study of Hadith.

#### *Tahrif* or Falsification

Amongst the accusations preferred against both the Jews and Christians, *Tahrif* is the most prominent. It means the distortion or modification of the original text.<sup>3</sup> There is *Qur'ānic* support for the different forms of *tahrif*, the first being Surah 2:146: 'but some of them conceal the truth which they them-

1 H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1992), p. 19.

2 The careful study of the chain of transmission used as a basis for judging true *Hadith*.

3 A. Bewley, *Glossary of Islamic Terms* (London: Ta-Ha, 1998), p. 23.

selves know'.<sup>4</sup> This type of *tahrif* is known as *taktumuna*, which means, 'concealing the truth'. It is assumed that Christians and Jews distort and obscure the truth, especially in regard to that which refers to Muhammad.

The second accusation is that of *tukhfuna* which means 'hiding what is in Scripture'. The passage that is used in support of this is, Surah 5:15b, 'There hath come to you our Messenger, revealing to you much that ye used to hide in the Book'. The concept is that Christians and Jews have hidden some truth and now the coming of the *Qur'ān* was meant to make bare the hidden reality in the previous revelations.

The third thought about the Bible is captured by the word, *yuharrifūna* which means, 'wilfully changing the Word of God'. The understanding is that the two, Christians and Jews, have distorted the truth of scripture knowingly and with the full knowledge of what they were doing. Surah 5:41 which says in part, 'They change the words from their times and places' is commonly taken to support this thought.

Lastly, *baddala*, which means, 'changing one word for another'. This comes from the understanding that, Jews and Christians had been involved in changing words from their rightful place and putting in words that would not properly portray the Islamic truth, as they would have it portrayed. Surah 7:162a 'But the transgressors among them changed the word that which had been given them...' According to this

text, Christians and Jews are called transgressors for the gravity of their offence.

This kind of understanding prompted Muslims to study the Bible to identify where these misrepresentations would be found. Progressively, whatever may have appeared to the Muslims as being part of the falsification has been used polemically to launch attacks on the Christians. It was from the foundation of these and similar verses that Muslim scholars examined the Bible and found examples of falsification, which they then used for polemical purposes.

Generally, there are two different types, namely first, *tahrif bi-al-ma'anâ*, which means, the corruption of meaning and secondly, *tahrif al-lafz*, meaning, 'literal falsification'.<sup>5</sup> In discussing this subject, John Chesworth states, 'The corruption of meaning allowed that Christians and Jews had deliberately interpreted passages of the Bible in their own way to their own advantage'. He gives an example from *The Book of Religion and Empire* by al-Tabarî, who takes various passages from the Bible to show that they foretell Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Chesworth points out al-Tabarî's discussion of chapter 16 of John's Gospel, where he says:

The interpretation of the saying 'He will send in my name,' is this: as the Christ was called Paraclet, and Muhammad was called by the same name, it was not strange on the

<sup>4</sup> All quotations from the *Qur'ān* are taken from the Yûsuf 'Alî translation.

<sup>5</sup> John Chesworth, 'Muslims' attitudes towards the Bible in the Classical Period' (unpublished paper, n.d.).

part of Christ to have said 'He will send in my name'.<sup>6</sup>

From this, it is clear that, Al-Tabarī's concern was to show how the meaning of the Bible had been distorted, but he did not give the impression that the Christians had corrupted the text, but that it was their interpretation that was corrupt.

With time, these accusations moved from mere distortion of interpretation to the changing of the text deliberately in order to serve their own interests. The key proponents of this thought included Ibn Hazm of Cordoba. Lazarus-Yafeh says that Ibn Hazm was 'the first Muslim author to use a systematic scholarly approach to the Bible to prove in detail this *Qur'ānic* charge [falsification], perhaps because he was one of the first Muslim authors to have a real knowledge of the Biblical text'.<sup>7</sup> Ibn Hazm in his writings, particularly *Kitāb al-Fisal fī-l-Milal wa-l-Ahwā wa-l-Nihal* (Religion and Sects), consistently shows his view that the text had been falsified. An example shows Ibn Hazm showing inconsistencies between the four Gospels and saying that at least one of the Gospel writers must be lying:

But if what Matthew says is true, then John has deliberately transmitted lies when he dealt with the same subject in his Gospel. It is one or the other. This is enough to demonstrate that the Gospels are

the work of accursed liars.<sup>8</sup>

This is an example of his approach and it shows clearly his attitude—to clearly demonstrate to fellow-Muslims the unreliability of the Bible and therefore its falseness, that the writers of the Gospels are unreliable and cannot be trusted.

We know that they [the Christians] have made mistakes in transmission and interpretation. This is because those from whom they received their books were four, John, Matthew, Luke and Mark.... But it is common knowledge that among four there is the possibility of alteration, substitution and suspicion of lying, so how can we depend on their account for what is and is not possible regarding God?<sup>9</sup>

The examples of the use of the charge of falsification show that it was understood in different ways by various Muslim Scholars, yet in all they showed a desire to demonstrate that the Bible had been 'corrupted' either by interpretation or on purpose, so that Christians and Jews may be shown to be wrong and Muslims may not be attracted by the Bible

### *Naskh* (Abrogation)

The *Qur'ān* is seen as superseding the Bible, so in effect revoking it. Muslim scholars used the principle of abrogation to show that the Bible had indeed been revoked by the *Qur'ān*. The idea of *naskh* is found in the *Qur'ān* Surah

6 al-Tabarī in Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History* 2 Vols (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, 1990), Vol II pp. 226-228.

7 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 26.

8 Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes*, p. 284.

9 'Abd al Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Mughnī* Vol. 5 ed. M.M. al-Khudayrī (Cairo, 1958), p. 143.

2:106: 'None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar'.

Muslim scholars understood it to mean 'that the later revelation... is legally the valid one'.<sup>10</sup> This led them to look at the Bible and to demonstrate that it had been abrogated. They were able to point to the Christians who, with the coming of the New Testament, had abrogated the Old Testament, yet were resisting the idea of their teachings being abrogated in turn by the *Qur'ān*.

Ibn Hazm may have used earlier scholars' work, yet he was the first to develop it systematically. He scrutinised the contents of the Bible to look for examples of abrogation.<sup>11</sup> Lazarus-Yafeh gives an example of Ibn Hazm's use of Isaiah 54:5-6:

Where the prophet mentions that in future, foreign people will also serve God (apparently in his Holy Temple), in distinct contrast to Mosaic law, according to which only descendants of Levi can serve therein. This verse according to Ibn Hazm, not only is a good example of abrogation, but actually prophesies the coming of Islam, and the worship of God by Arab, Persian and other Muslims in the mosques of Jerusalem and elsewhere.<sup>12</sup>

The use of abrogation pointed to the almost ambivalent attitude that Muslim scholars had to the Bible—they

wanted to show that the Bible pointed the way forward to Muhammad and to Islam, and yet they wanted to question the very validity of the source itself.

### Bible Exegesis

The use of the Bible by Muslim scholars is a fascinating paradox: as we have seen above they wished to demonstrate that it was corrupt and untrustworthy, yet they also desired very strongly to use it to show that Muhammad was clearly foretold in it. The divide between biblical exegesis and showing *tahrīf* is very narrow and in many cases, they go together. For example, in commenting on a text like John 14:16 concerning the Paraclete, Christians are accused of changing *perikleitos*—far praised one, to *paraklētos*—Counsellor, helper, to hide Jesus' foretelling of the coming of Ahmad (Muhammad).

Biblical exegesis by Muslim scholars is used not only to look for proofs that Muhammad is foretold in the Bible; it is also used in a polemical manner to demonstrate how wrong Christians and Jews are to trust the texts that they have. Often the anthropomorphisms found in the Bible are attacked as being inappropriate, yet when similar ones are found in the *Qur'ān* they are explained away.

Ibn Hazm, who was a *Zahiri* and therefore a literalist, was interested in Christian interpretation of the Bible and it is here that we see something of his attitude. He dislikes analogy and attacks the Christian use of it on several occasions. Laila cites *al-Fisal* where Ibn Hazm 'criticises the divinity of Christ as established in the performing of miracles. He then uses the Chris-

10 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 35.

11 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 39f.

12 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 40.

tian tendency to analogy as a weapon of attack, arguing that the Old Testament prophets who performed miracles also merit the description of divine.<sup>13</sup>

Al-Tabari used exegesis of various passages to demonstrate that they were about Muhammad. An example from *Religion and Empire* uses the Book of Daniel to show that the number of 1,335 days used in Chapter 12:12 refers to the coming of Islam. He says: 'I have carefully examined this, and found that it refers to the Muslim faith, and more especially to this "Abbasid kingdom".'<sup>14</sup>

'Abd al-Jabbār used the Bible in his work mainly to 'offer proofs of the truth of Muhammad's prophecy'.<sup>15</sup> He sees that Christianity has perverted Jesus' teaching, by making him divine. He uses various passages from the Gospels to show how Christians have neglected Jesus' own orders. An example shows that Jesus had brothers and sisters:

In their gospels and stories it is found: When he was crucified, there came his Mother Mary with her children, Jacob, Simon and Judah, and stood in front of him. He said to her from the tree: Take your children and go away!

Do we need a more explicit statement to show that after Jesus, Mary bore these children by Joseph the

carpenter, so that they were brothers of Jesus from his mother's side? Can there be anything more absurd than this?<sup>16</sup>

'Abd al-Jabbār mainly looked for proofs of Muhammad in the Bible, for instance in the only explicit quotation in the *Qur'ān* (Sura 21:105 quoting Psalm 37:29): 'righteous slaves shall inherit the earth'. Lazarus-Yafeh says of him that he found 'not only an explicit confirmation of the true prophethood of Muhammad and the rise of Islam, but also a clear allusion to the great conquests of the first four caliphs'.<sup>17</sup>

The use of biblical exegesis never properly developed into an effective tool apart from its use to illustrate proofs for the inevitability of Islam.

### Lack of *Tawatūr* (Lack of reliable transmission)

This accusation, not found in the *Qur'ān*, is an interesting one, in that it reflects an understanding of the Bible that was probably different from that of Jews and Christians of the time and is certainly different from today. It reflects a desire for the presence of *isnad*, that is, reliable chains of transmission, as are carefully attested to for Hadith, and by implication for the *Qur'ān*. Muslim Scholars, such as al-Jabbār and Ibn Hazm 'stressed the miraculous character of the unbroken, reliable, and public transmission (*tawatūr*) of the *Qur'ān*, so different from earlier Scriptures'.<sup>18</sup>

13 A. L. Laila, 'An Introduction to the life and work of Ibn Hazm', *Islamic Quarterly* 29:75-100, 165-171, at p 92.

14 Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes*, p 222.

15 S. M. Stern, "Abd al-Djabbar b. Ahmad" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd Ed. 1967), Vol I p. 35.

16 Stern, "Abd al-Djabbar b. Ahmad", p. 52.

17 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 77.

18 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 42.

Arnaldez says of Ibn Hazm that 'he attacks the Gospels, demonstrating that they show no guarantee of being a revealed text, since they have not the nature of one (the *Qur'ān* being taken as the criterion) and that they do not achieve the credibility of hadith, since they are totally lacking in *isnad* (demonstrated from the prologue to St. Luke's Gospel)'.<sup>19</sup>

If there is no reliable transmission, it must be questionable and therefore the text was probably tampered with.<sup>20</sup> Ibn Hazm goes into great detail about the Torah and the fact that the only copy was kept in the Temple as it could be viewed only three times a year, therefore the Priests had ample opportunity to alter it. Even if they did not alter it, Ezra the Scribe purposely corrupted the biblical text.<sup>21</sup>

'Abd al-Jabbār in *Mughnī* writes of the fact that the Christians received their books from the four Evangelists:

They read about it from these, because when the Messiah was no longer present—they claim that he was killed—and his companions were killed, there was no-one from his faith to pass on to them his book and injunctions... except these four.<sup>22</sup>

For the Muslim scholars the lack of reliable transmission for biblical texts was seen as further proof of their unre-

liability and the likelihood of textual corruption.

#### 4. Mihadhara: Contemporary Examples of Islamic Bible Exegesis

What were Muslim scholars attempting to do in using the Bible? To understand that would help us to understand their attitude to the Bible. They wanted to show respect for the Bible because of its place as the one preceding the *Qur'ān* and for the Prophets contained within it, Moses, David and Jesus in particular. They also had a desire to use the Bible to show that Muhammad and Islam are clearly foretold in it. Some scholars wanted to attack the Bible in order to warn Muslims. Adang cites Ibn Hazm demonstrating the 'alleged apocryphal and blasphemous nature of [the] Scriptures.... for the benefit of [his] co-religionists, many of whom he found had a deep respect for... Scripture, which they considered a genuine revealed book'.<sup>23</sup> Finally they wished to use the Bible in a polemical manner, to show Jews and Christians how corrupted it was, to show them the error of their ways and to lead them to the truth.

In many ways, they were equipped to look at the Bible only from their own standpoint, using the methods that they applied to the *Qur'ān* and Hadith. This finally shaped their attitudes to the Bible and to Christians and Jews.

19 R. Arnaldez, 'Ibn Hazm' in *Encyclopedia of Islam* (2nd Ed., 1967), Vol III p. 796.

20 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 43-45.

21 'Abd al Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Mughnī* Vol. 5 ed. M.M. al-Khudayrī, (Cairo), p. 143.

22 'Abd al Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Mughnī*, p. 143.

23 C. Adang, 'Some hitherto neglected Biblical material in the work of Ibn Hazm' *Al-Masaq*, (1992) 5, pp. 17-28 at p. 18.

### Background Information on *Mihadhara*

*Mihadhara* are a widespread method of outreach in Kenya. Most *Mihadhara* speakers are itinerant preachers moving from town to town, holding lectures. Small groups of Muslims in different towns are involved in inviting the preachers and hosting their *Mihadhara*. In a study carried out in six towns in Kenya,<sup>24</sup> it was observed that the Bible exegesis was the main approach of teaching.

In *Mihadhara*, both the Bible and the Qur'an are used side by side either to discount some Christian teachings or endorse some Islamic teachings. A number of topics featured prominently in the *Mihadhara*, most of which were applied to the Kenyan, socio-religious context. The style of using the bible exegesis is used to discuss various themes, including, the person of Jesus in the Bible, and the *Qur'an*, True religion, and True worship.

### The Person of Jesus in the Bible and the Qur'an

The divinity of Jesus is discussed under the heading, *Je, Yesu ni Mungu?* (Is Jesus God?). Speakers capitalize on the teaching that God is one, without partners or associates and that any attempt to include Jesus in the Godhead would prove futile in the end. Biblical texts that teach the unity of God are used to discount the teaching that Jesus is God. For instance, the Deca-

logue<sup>25</sup> (Exodus 20:1ff) is used to point out God's declaration that he is one and that no images should be made for worship.

The Qur'an, *Al-Maida*: 75-78, is used to point out that *Isa* is a messenger of God no different from the others who came before or after him. Biblical passages like Matthew 19:4, where Jesus declares himself to be the creator is usually opposed. The question then are how Jesus, who claimed to be God, could say 'our God' in Mark 12:19. In addition, how could God be crucified in Luke 24:36-40? According to *Al-Israa*:18, life was in the hands of God alone and no human being had power over it, including Jesus except by God's permission.

According to these Muslim scholars, the reference to Jesus as holy in Luke 35:135, should not be taken as sufficient reason for Christians to designate Jesus as God, since the Bible in the same book, Luke 2:23 referred to first-borns as holy. *Fatir* 135 certified this concept by stating that being holy did not necessarily make one God. Following on this argument, *Al-Maida*: 75, is cited as pointing to the fact that anyone who called Jesus God, blasphemed. Equally, John 20:17 is interpreted to show that Jesus himself warned people against worshipping him, rather asking them to worship God alone.

Proponents of *Mihadhara* see John 17:3 to be pointing to the fact that Jesus came so that people would know God. Consequently, Jesus was a messenger like the rest, deserving to be given revelation from God to deliver to

<sup>24</sup> These included Nairobi, Nakuru, Mom-basa, Kitui, and Mwingi.

<sup>25</sup> The Ten Commandments.

his people (Rev. 1:1). In John 13:13 Jesus was shown as a teacher and lord, not a deity.

### The True Religion

Muslims believe that there is one God. Since the *Qur'ān* is the last revelation, it sums up all God's revelation and so it and its agent of revelation Muhammad should be the ones to be followed.

For Muslims, all of humanity, starting with Adam, have always been Muslims. However, defiance to God's law led to the proliferation of religions. When God chose to send prophets for all people in all generations, he intended that they would deliver his message honestly and faithfully so that all people from all parts of the world would hold fast to the true religion of God. To enforce this, out of the many prophets sent, four<sup>26</sup> were given written messages for guidance, and to lead people to the 'way of God'.

The Muslims believe that Islam is left as the final religion given to mankind for their wellbeing and a safe-haven for ensuring their good relationship with God. All humanity should therefore believe in Islam, the 'religion of our ancestors', Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad.

According to Surah *As-Saf*: 6, Jesus' mission on earth was three-fold; first, it was to fulfil the law, second, to point to '*Ahmad*', the one who was to come as prophesied by the former prophets, and lastly to save his people the Israelites. This points to the fact that Jesus' audience was marked out for him as being

restricted to the Israelites, whereas the audience of Muhammad, seen by the Muslims to be the seal of prophethood, was universal.

For the Muslims involved in the exegesis of the Bible, Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel, (Mt. 15:24) and not to the rest of the world. Galatians 4:21 (Gen. 15), the story of Abraham and his 'two' sons, Isma'il and Isaac, is interpreted to show that Ishmael was indeed the one through whom God's covenantal blessings would be transmitted to future generations. These are Arabs, who were Muslims and so the blessings were prophesied for them and not through Isaac, as Christians have always wanted to believe.

Genesis 21:24ff. is used as proof of God's care for both Hagar and the boy, Ishmael for whom God provided water at the well known as *zam zam*. Surah *Al-Furqan*: 51 is used to show that, had God wanted, he would have sent a prophet for all the people, but he chose to send Muhammad from the line of Isma'il, to serve as a prophet to all people.

Biblical texts such as Isaiah 19:19<sup>27</sup> are interpreted to mean that the pillar of the prophet would be in Egypt. Since Egypt was an Arab-Muslim stronghold, this must have meant that Muhammad was the prophet. In Deuteronomy 33:1,<sup>28</sup> the blessing of Moses is interpreted as being bestowed upon Arabs

26 These are Musa (*Tawrat*), Dawud (*Zabur*), Isa (*Injil*) and Muhammad (*Qur'ān*).

27 In that day, shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD.

28 And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

who later became Muslims, making Muhammad the first beneficiary thereof.

In Matthew 21:43,<sup>29</sup> the thought that Jesus himself warned that at some point the Kingdom would move from the Israelites and be given to others, 'who bear their fruit', is interpreted to show that 'others' means the Muslims. In addition, Ephesians 1:13<sup>30</sup> is interpreted to mean that Muhammad, who came from Arabia, was the one from whom the message was heard, believed and sealed, and that he was the one who was meant to bring salvation to all people. Amongst the prophets, only Muhammad came from Arabia bearing the truth of God, and coming as the seal of God's final truth for this generation.<sup>31</sup>

### The True Worship

Here we see how Islamic ways and modes of worship are enforced, using both the Bible and the Qur'an. Surah *Al-Qiyamat*: 36 points out that God has not left humanity without regulation.

The guidance has however been obscured by human innovation (*bid'a*). It is apparent in *Az-Zariyat*: 56, that God created people and all other creatures to worship him.

The five pillars of Islam<sup>32</sup> are then discussed as the ideal way in which God wanted to be worshipped. The five are supported with biblical as well as *Qur'anic* texts. Under prayer, such issues as posture of prayer, ablution and the like are subjects of discussion.

First 'bowing' *kusyjudu* is discussed and given Qur'anic basis in passages such as, *Maryam*:49, *Al-Hajj*:77<sup>33</sup> and *Al-i'Imran*:52<sup>34</sup> to show that Allah worship is the only acceptable way, and the decreed way was through bowing. Of equal importance in worship is the subject of worship to these Muslim scholars. Qur'anic scriptures such as *An-Nahl*: 73 and *An-Nisaa*: 116<sup>35</sup> are used to show that true worship should be of only one God, and that it was unacceptable for people to worship that one God in multiplicity.

As earlier stated, the Bible then becomes an important point of reference to show the truth of the Islamic way of worship. To begin with, Moses

29 Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

30 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

31 Jesus' parable of the narrow and the wide way from Luke 13:23-30 was used to show that those that passed through the narrow way, coming from all directions were Muslims. Christians on the other hand, will come to Christ on the judgment day, weeping, and gnashing their teeth, recounting the things they had done in Jesus' name. Jesus' response will be to cast them out of his sight saying he never knew them, a loss for Christians.

32 *Shahada* (recitation) *swalat* (Prayer), *zakah*, (almsgiving), *saum* (fasting), and *hajj* (pilgrimage).

33 O ye who believe! bow down, prostrate yourselves and adore your Lord; and do good; that ye may prosper.

34 'It is Allah who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is a way that is straight.'

35 Allah forgiveth not (the sin of) joining other gods with Him: but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this: one who joins other gods with Allah hath strayed far far away (from the right).

was instructed to inform his people that they were to worship only God, and never to make any image or likeness of God to worship (Ex. 20:1ff).

During Jesus' temptations in Matthew 4:8, Muslims scholars underscore the fact that Jesus informed Satan that only God should be worshipped, after which Satan fled. Revelation 14:6; 19:10 is usually used to mean that the angel in this context bore an Islamic message to the world about the right way of worship. In Nehemiah 8:6,<sup>36</sup> the focus of worship is identified as the 'Great God' (*Allahu Akbar*), to whom people responded *amin, amin, amin*, falling down and bowing (*kifudifudi*).

Christians are blamed for reading scriptures selectively. According to Muslims, they intentionally miss essential texts. Exodus 4:31 is one example of such selective reading, where the children of Israel responded to God by bowing their heads and worshipping him. Other texts that are used to point to key biblical characters who bowed in worship include, 1 Chronicles 29:20<sup>37</sup> where David bowed, Matthew 26:39, that Jesus bowed in his prayer in Gethsemane. Revelation 22:9 is interpreted to show that all those who were true followers of the Bible had no

choice but to bow in their worship to God.

## Conclusion

The style, method and approach used in *Mihadhara* are not new. Most of their teachings could be traced as far back as the time of Ibn Hazm, al Jahiz, and al Juwayn and more recently in the 19th century in the Indian sub-continent where Karl Pfander engaged Rahmatullah al-Hindi in arguments similar to those of *Mihadhara*. In terms of style and content, *Mihadhara* seem to borrow a lot from the self-proclaimed 'scholar of contemporary religions', Ahmed Deedat, who was himself, influenced by the style and works of al-Hindi.<sup>38</sup>

In the East African context, *Mihadhara* are a means of Muslims exerting themselves in a dominantly Christian setting. Having been for a long time passive and less active in outreach, while Christians continued to make headway in many parts, *Mihadhara* may be seen as a reactionary attempt to catch up. This has made Christianity their sole target for outreach.

The holding of *Mihadhara* in open places, playgrounds and stadiums is very similar to what Christians have done over the years. The use of powerful public address systems to reach as big an audience as possible also has a lot of similarity with what happens

---

<sup>36</sup> And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

<sup>37</sup> And David said to all the congregation, Now bless the LORD your God. And all the congregation blessed the LORD God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the LORD, and the king.

---

<sup>38</sup> D. Westerlund, 'Ahmed Deedat's Theology of Religion: Apologetics through Polemics', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 33:3 (2003), pp. 263-278.

amongst Christian groups in their 'crusades'.

The type of training used by *Mihadhara* preachers would be interesting to study, including the content of their curriculum. Important issues like qualifications, duration of training and the like would be helpful in assessing *Mihadhara*. Although not endorsed by mainstream Muslim institutions, *Mihadhara* enjoy a great deal of goodwill from a number of them. This love-hate situation could be equated to the way mainstream Muslims regard the Ahmadiyya.<sup>39</sup> Largely, Muslims do not regard them as a Muslim group. However, they seem to support them, especially when they polemically attack Christianity.

It is common knowledge that there are biblical texts that *Sunni* Islam finds uncomfortable to use, on authorship and content grounds. Some of these include John's Gospel, and Pauline epistles. These are, however, used without question in the *Mihadhara*. In addition, Muslims accuse Christians of falsifying, corrupting and changing their scriptures to alter their meaning; yet the Bible is extensively used in illustrating and reinforcing major Islamic teachings. In the *Mihadhara*, all major parts of the Bible<sup>40</sup> are cited, leaving one wondering what areas are falsified.

If Jesus' mission was threefold as stated earlier, in which of these did he fail and how has Muhammad accom-

plished this mission? The speakers talk of Jesus being opposed by his own people but immediately go on to talk of how the Quraishy, Muhammad's tribesmen, denied his prophethood. Do not these cancel out each other? What about the fact that many of the prophets had problems with their people which resulted in Jesus' saying: 'a prophet has no honour amongst his people'?

*Mihadhara*'s use of the Bible is interesting—the Bible, the Christian scriptures, like other sacred books, could be used to say anything due to the diversity of its subject matter and the extent of the period covered. Could the 'proof-text' technique of the *Mihadhara* speakers stand sound biblical exegetical study?

Observing *Mihadhara* in different parts of Kenya, it is evident that there is a lot of predictability. Most of *Mihadhara* material is lifted word for word from Ahmed Deedat or Ngariba and Kawemba's works.<sup>41</sup> Having attended a number of *Mihadhara* where the same subject was discussed, it was obvious that there was little originality, most of the material being repetitive, *kama kasuku* (like a parrot) as Al-Amin Mazrui used to state.<sup>42</sup>

This does not mean that *Mihadhara* speakers had not contextualized their *Mihadhara*. Christian terminologies

39 *Sunni* Muslims do not consider this as a Muslim group.

40 The law, writings, prophecy, Gospels, epistles to Revelation.

41 For instance, although, it is about twenty years since the peak of Ngariba and Kawemba's debates, their works are still faithfully transmitted.

42 J. Lacunza-Balda, 'An Investigation into some concepts and ideas found in Swahili writings' (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London, 1990).

such as, 'eternal life' (*uzima wa milele*), 'to be saved' (*kuokoka*) and eternal judgment (*hukumu ya milele*) were used to endear themselves to their audience, especially if the majority were Christians. While real concerns and issues were raised during *Mihadhara*, these could not be given the weight that serious thinkers would give to such argument.<sup>43</sup> Of course, this is important when it is understood that the kind of audience targeted in *Mihadhara* is the laity.

While *Mihadhara* speakers agree on most of their teachings, there are differences, for instance on the use of music, with some criticizing it while others even use it to illustrate their points. For example, a speaker in Uhuru Park, Nairobi sang the Christian song *ni ahadi ya Bwana haivunjiki milele* (the Lord's promises last forever) to illustrate his point. In addition, there are *sufi* groups who engage in music, like the popular coastal *taarab*, and other processional songs.

Muslim ideas such as the *Sunnah* and *hadith*<sup>44</sup> are used to judge Christians, especially when Christians are accused of not adhering to the actions and deeds of Jesus and other prophets.

Also noted was that, although big topics like worship were introduced, only the 'juicy' subtopics were given prominence, leaving out most of the other components. For instance, in worship, only prayer was dealt with, and not even the content, but only the outward expressions like bowing, and ablution.

As a whole, the Muslims seem to be in agreement with the Bible in as far as it supports the message of Islam. However, where the Bible seems to contradict this, Christians are largely accused of corrupting, changing and even altering the Bible.

One church leader who had attended a number of *Mihadhara* concluded that '*Mihadhara* thrive on deceit'. Asked why, the many promises that those attending are given were raised. For instance in the Nairobi *Mihadhara*, while people were invited to come and hear testimonials from former Bishops, Reverends, Pastors and others Christians who had reverted to Islam, eventually there was none who gave a testimony. This and many other features show to what extent some of the speakers and organizers would go to attract Christians into embracing Islam.

---

<sup>43</sup> Leaving these aside, *Mihadhara* teachers went for populist arguments, avoiding the deeper arguments that one would expect from the Muslims. Think for instance of the errors or corruption of the Bible of which Christians are accused.

<sup>44</sup> *Sunnah* and *hadith* are the deeds and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, which are authoritative teachings of Islam in the lives of Muslims.