Resonating With The Word:

Exploring the Thought of Daniel Madigan S.J. in His Attempt to Share the Christian Faith with Muslims

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Islam is one of the religions that depict Jesus.[1] In al-Qur'ān, he is portrayed as a prophet of the highest rank (cf. Q 2:253, 33:7) and a "sign" (*aya*)[2] shared between Islam and Christianity (cf. Q 19:21; 21:91; 23:50; 43:61). In Muslim-Christian relations, nevertheless, dialogue about Jesus remains a contentious issue.[3] These are the areas where Muslims often challenge Christian theology: the divinity of Jesus, the Incarnation and redemption events, and the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Both

1 In al-Qur'ān, Schedl counts its references in 15 out of 114 chapters (*suras*) and in 93 out of 6339 verses (*ayas*). Jesus' name in al-Qur'ān is ʿĪsā and without doubt, al-Qur'ān honors *ʿĪsā* greatly. Yet, it must be fitted neatly into the overall theological framework of al-Qur'ān. See Claus Schedl, *Muhammad Und Jesus* (Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1978), 6 and G. C. Anawati, "Isa," in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 4, eds. E. van Donzel and B. Lewis (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 81.

2 The Arabic word for sign (*aya*) refers to God's wonders in nature and His actions in history (*ayat ullah*). The miracles of the prophets and more specifically, the wonder of the Qur'an, are reflected in the qur'anic verses (*ayat*). In the New Testament Gospels, *semeion* (Greek for 'sign') refers to the actions of Jesus, especially his miracles. Cf. Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 257.

3 J. Jomier reflects, "We (Muslims and Christians) both speak of Jesus (ʿĪsā), but we do not know him by the same sources." See Jacques Jomier, "Jesus as Seen by A Muslim," in *Information and Formation*, eds. O.C. Lim and Theresa Ee-Chooi (Kuala Lumpur: Catholic Research Centre, 1994), 1. Some accounts on the rejection of Jesus' images are: Q 112:3; 9:30; 5:18 (rejection on Son of God); Q 15:17, 72 (rejection on Divinity of Christ); Q 4:171; 5:116 (rejection on Trinity). The holy Qur'ān (al- Qur'ān) is the source of the Muslims' knowledge of Jesus.

Christians and Muslims often use the polemical approach.[4] Meanwhile, various political factors have also led to hostile actions.[5] As a result, the relationship between the two religions is dominated more by suspicion and mutual exclusion[6] than friendship and a joint effort to read together the "sign."

After centuries of having a negative perspective about Islam, the Church, in more recent times, has opened a new stage marked by a more positive attitude towards dialogue and cooperation with Muslims. This is embodied in the document *Nostra Aetate*.[7] Still, on many occasions, there are Christians who have remained reluctant to learn together with Muslims, lest they are misunderstood to compromise the principles of

4 Christians saw Islam as a completely false ideology and, therefore, adopted an aggressive policy of propagating Christian truth without taking Islamic perceptions into account. On the other hand, Muslims perceived that Christians falsified the scriptures and distorted the image of Jesus. See. J.M. Gaudeul, "Learning From Polemics - Part 1: Central Themes," *Encounter* no. 75 (May 1981) and "Learning From Polemics – Part 2: Minor Themes," *Encounter* no. 80 (December 1981).

5 Saad Ghrab, "Islam and Christianity: From Opposition to Dialogue," *Islamochristiana* 13 (1987): 99-111. Askari mentions this tendency as "monologue tendency" of the "monological religion". See the complete analysis in Hasan Askari, "The Dialogical Relationship between Christianity and Islam," *Journal of Ecumenical* Studies 9 (1972): 477-487.

6 Alwi Shihab, "Hubungan Islam dan Kristen Memasuki Abad 21," in *Melintasi Batas Agama,* eds. K. Hidayat and Ahmad Gaus A.F. (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 1998), 317.

7 The Catholic Church acknowledges that both Muslims and Christians worship the same God, although they express differently. The Catholic Church recognizes that Muslims strive to submit themselves wholeheartedly and officially acknowledges their esteem and veneration of Jesus and Mary. She calls both to come together by forgetting the past and strive sincerely for mutual understanding to promote and preserve peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values for the benefit of all humankind. Cf. Vatican II, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*), October 28, 1965, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed December 17, 2019), no. 3. Hereafter, NA.

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faith. There are even those who believe theological dialogue with Muslims to be impossible.

It is in this context that Daniel Madigan S.J.,[8] coming from his extensive experience of engagement with Muslims and study of the Qur'ān, argues that dialogue with Muslims without including theology would be ineffective. Moreover, he believes that living in the same world and believing in the same God (who Is and continues to be present) demands doing theology together, to resonate the Word in the world.[9] Speaking from his experience, he contends that "taking seriously the Muslims' questions of our faith, rather than simply becoming defensive or rejecting it out of hand, has been extremely fruitful."[10] However, doing theology with them would require a deeper relationship as a foundation.

From the Muslim point of view, the document "A Common Word"[11] also calls for theological and interreligious exchange

8 Daniel Madigan S.J. is an Australian Jesuit priest who teaches Religious Pluralism at the Georgetown's Department of Theology since 2008. He is a Research Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown and works on projects related to Muslim-Christian relations. Previously, he was the founder and director of the Institute for Study of Religions and Cultures at the Pontifical Gregorian University from 2002-2007. At present, he is a consultor of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims. His research interests include Qur'anic Studies, Interreligious Dialogue (particularly Muslim-Christian relations), and Comparative Theology.See "Rev. Daniel Madigan," *Georgetown University,* https://jesuits.georgetown.edu/members/madigan (accessed December 17, 2019).

9 Daniel Madigan, "Mutual Theological Hospitality: Doing Theology in the Presence of the Other," in *Muslim & Christian Understanding: Theory and Application of "A Common Word,"* eds. Waleed El-Ansary and David K. Linnan (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 62.

10 Daniel Madigan, "A Lenten Journey," in *Christian Lives Given to the Study of Islam*, eds. Christian W. Troll, and C. T. R. Hewer (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 251.

11 A "Common Word" is about dialogue between Muslims and Christians in scripture and tradition. See "The ACW Letter: A Common Word Between Us and You," https://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/ (accessed November 15, 2018).

based on the shared principles of love of God and love of neighbour.[12] Thus, the challenge now is to plunge together into the deep mystery of the "sign" that Muslims and Christians share and thereby discover 'ourselves' and 'the other,' in order to "walk together toward the truth and to work together in projects of common concern."[13]

The Importance of Sharing the Christian Faith with Muslims

As adherents of monotheistic faith, Christians and Muslims believe in the one God of Abraham who continues to create and invite us to participate in His project. Thus, "One cannot say that we adore together the one God and then say that we cannot or may not talk together about that God, or about that sense of adoration that God evokes in us."[14] In other words, Christians should engage in doing theology together with Muslims, even though they may have different ways of expression. Madigan writes, "If the world is one, and God is one, then we as believers have little choice but to do our God-thinking and God-talking together."[15] Together, we can

12 Cf. John Borelli, "A New Era and a New Model for Christian-Muslim Dialogue," in *A Common Word and the Future of Christian-Muslim Relations,* ed. John Borelli (Washington: Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, 2008), 97.

13 Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions on Dialogue and Mission," https://www.shinmeizan.com/images/PDF/DialMiss.en.pdf (accessed July 20, 2020). Henceforth referred to as *DM*.

14 *Lumen Gentium,* no. 16 and *Nostra Aetate,* no. 3 in Madigan, "Mutual Theological Hospitality," 58.

15 "If God is one, and God is *al-Haqq*, then there is only one truth. There is not your truth, my truth, their truth. And it is going to take work for us to learn to seek truth together, not simply to put it in the too-hard basket, or to say, 'That's your truth; that's okay for you, but my truth is separate and different." See Daniel Madigan, "Religious Faiths in a Pluralist Society," (Lecture, Washington Theological Consortium, Washington D.C., March 30, 2017).

learn how to live (and offer freely to others) the particular way of being human that flows from a belief in the God of Abraham.

Pope Francis today continues the trajectory set by Vatican II and its determination to engage the Catholic Church with the modern world. He invites all Christians to initiate a "culture of encounter," wherein both theological and pastoral issues that deal with human concerns in this rapidly changing times are discussed.[16]

Nonetheless, to create this "culture of encounter" and plunge more effectively into the deep mystery (especially with Muslims), we need to understand the situation. There are two interesting points in the history of Christian-Muslim relations. First, since early in the seventh century, Islam has presented itself as the re-establishment of the original religion that had existed from the beginning. Judaism and Christianity are examples, as well. Precisely because of this, the faith of Muslims has a very particular claim on the theological attention of both Jews and Christians.[17] In effect, Muslims will always remain as the "proximate other" and lively challengers of our reading of the Jesus' event. They always call on us to clarify our expression of faith.[18] Second, Christians and Muslims believe that God is present and communicates with all humankind. At the same time, both share the same struggle about how to understand the history of God's engagement

16 Harold Kasimow and Alan Race, eds., *Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue—Religious Thinkers Engage with Recent Papal Initiatives* (Macmillan: Palgrave, 2018). In this book, scholars from the seven traditions have also contributed.

17 Daniel Madigan, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 244. See also this article he wrote, "Some Aspects of Christian Theologizing in Relation to Islam," Asian Christian Review 2 (2008): 25.

18 Madigan, "Some Aspects of Christian Theologizing," 25.

with humanity. Therefore, dialogue with Muslims is always challenging since it is not only about how we are to live, but also how we are to learn together. Both believe in the presence of God's Word in the world.

The importance of sharing our faith in Jesus with Muslims lies in the fact that it can be a way of developing our theologies together and to search for more convincing ways of expressing it. It is to help each other to see that we are in the same boat when trying to understand who God is and what he is up to.[19] Doing so is neither a form of negotiation to arrive at an agreed position nor to result in a new hybrid religion.[20] Instead, as Madigan writes, "It is a deeper exploration of what is in common but contested."[21] This is not an easy practice since Muslims have their view about those matters based on the Qur'ān.[22] Is it possible then to engage in dialogue with them even if they have a different view of Jesus?

Mutual Theological Hospitality as an Approach in Theological Dialogue with Muslims

To enter explicitly into the theological dialogue with Muslims, Madigan portrays "mutual theological hospitality"

19 Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (Evangelii Gaudium),* November 24, 2013, Vatican Archive, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed July 20, 2020), nos. 29, 142, and 251. Henceforth referred to as *EG.*

20 *DM,* nos. 37-38 and Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," May 19, 1991, Vatican Archive, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed July 20, 2020). Henceforth referred to as *DP.*

21 Madigan, "A Lenten Journey," 250.

22 Q 112:3; 9:30; 5:18 (rejection on Son of God); Q 15:17, 72 (rejection on Divinity of Christ); Q 4:171; 5:116 (rejection on Trinity).

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as a possible approach to plunge into the deep mystery. This approach is similar to what has been put forward by some Christian writers prior to Vatican II (e.g., Timothy I, Nicholas Cusa, Charles de Foucauld, L. Massignon).[23] In this approach, Madigan coins the image of a "good host" and a "good guest." [24] Thus, it serves as a "door-way" to enter into an experience of the other and sense it from within.

"Being a good host" means that we gradually start to take more notice of our guests, and we learn to speak their theological language to be able to communicate our positions more clearly.[25] It also means accommodating their questions and even letting them enter our 'theological kitchen' instead of just dishing out something already fixed in our dogma or creeds. It requires epistemological humility or knowing the limits of our human understanding and language, as well as the impossibility of ever fully expressing the truth about God. "Being a good guest" implies that we are not proprietors of

23 The complete and longer presentation can be seen in Michael L. Fitzgerald, "History of the Christian-Muslim Relationship," in *Sign of Dialogue: Christians Encounters with Muslims,* eds. Michael L. Fitzgerald and R. Caspar (Zamboanga City: Silsilah Publications, 1992), 1-41; Robert Caspar, *A Historical Introduction to Islamic Theology* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, 1998), 89-109; and Hugh Goddard, *Christians and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995).

24 "We would like our new guests to behave themselves; we want them to sit quietly in the corner, as it were, and not interrupt us by raising objections or posing questions. Yet if we are at all hospitable, we gradually start to take more notice of our guests and we learn to speak their theological language so that we might communicate our positions more clearly. Little by little our guests learn to understand how to converse in our language and they begin to take a hand in shaping the conversation themselves. When this kind of hospitality is mutual, something new emerges, and what starts out as doing theology in the presence of the other becomes doing theology together with the other." Madigan, "Mutual Theological Hospitality," 59.

25 Paul VI, Encyclical on the Church *(Ecclesiam Suam)*, no. 87. Henceforth referred to as ES.

the Truth. Together with Muslims, we search for the meaning of the Word in the world. As mentioned in *DM,* no. 13, "We walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern." It calls for moral humility in recognizing our history of failure to live up to the Gospel we preach.[26]

This imagery is very suitable, especially for us who are living in Asia. The purpose of this approach is to question and to be questioned. Madigan also asserts,

> To carry further the metaphor of hospitality, much of our experience as Christians has been that Muslims have barged into our theological 'home' uninvited, complained about the decoration, reorganized the furniture, and even claimed ownership! The Jews might want to say the same of Christians. However, there are some Muslims who are making great efforts to enter seriously into this relationship of mutual theological hospitality. Therefore, this is not the time to abandon the effort on our part, and so settle for being theological strangers to one another.[27]

In other words, hospitality is at its best when both host and guest are sensitive enough to one another and can share the same space with delight. Referring to *ES*, no. 87 and *RM*, nos. 28-29, Madigan emphasizes that listening by heart before speaking, and taking their questions and challenges as part of our theologizing, are essential in the exercise of

26 Daniel Madigan, "Saving *Dominus Iesus*," in *Learned Ignorance: An Investigation into Humility in Interreligious Dialogue among Christians, Muslims and Jews,* eds. James Heft, Reuven Firestone and Omid Safi (New York: Oxford, 2011), 260. See also Catherine Cornille, "Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 20-33.

27 Daniel Madigan, "Muslim-Christian Dialogue in Difficult Times," in *Catholicism and Interreligious Dialogue,* ed. James Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011),72.

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dialogue.[28] How do we exercise mutual theological hospitality in discourse about doctrinal matters then?

The Word as the Hermeneutical Key in Mutual Theological Hospitality

Theological dialogue can only become productive if all partners involved understan the "language" that will be used to be able to explore together. Madigan suggests turning to the "Word of God," not as scripture or prophecy, but as a hermeneutical key in dialoguing with Muslims.[29] This serves as a collective term that can ground our mutual theological understanding, even if it cannot guarantee our agreement. [30] By saying that the Word is a hermeneutical key, Madigan writes, "Muslims and Christians, of course, believe that God addresses us in history. God communicates with us, expresses himself in ways we can understand."[31]

In Madigan's book, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture,* he observes the semantic fields as associated with the Qur'ān's self-image.[32] From his

28 Madigan explores about recognition of other religions as "seeds of the Word," or"rays of truth." See Madigan, "Saving *Dominus Iesus*," 269-72.

29 Madigan, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue," 252 and "Lenten Journey," 253.

30 The Word as a key point is not necessarily new. Some Muslim and Christian writers since the 9th century already used it as a key concept in discussions and disputations. The problem however, was they used it defensively. See David Thomas, Early Muslim Polemic against Christianity: Abu Isa al-Warraq's Against the Incarnation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37-59.

31 We experience the Word both as given "from above," and as already expressed in creation and divine history. Both Muslims and Christians perceive the Word as sent down. For instance, *nazzala* is "sent down" in Qur'ān and its counterpart, the Johannine Gospel, uses *pempo* "send" and *katabaino* "come down." See Madigan, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue," 253.

32 Detailed analysis can be found in Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ān's*

observation, Muslims grapple with the field of *Kalām* or Islamic speculative theology, when they say that the Qur'ān is the "Inliberated Speech of God."[33] This is not so far from what the Christians understand when they profess that Jesus Christ is the "Incarnate Word of God." In other words, the

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Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). The Qur'ān itself does not say that it is a book or God's book. See below for the semantics associated with the Qur'ān's self-image:

(a) As a creator, God knows the truth of all things and is in command of all things. God is said to keep a written record of all that exists and all that is done. When commanding or determining something, God is said to "write" it. Thus, *kitab* "a writing" serves as a symbol for God's knowledge and authority. People can learn from the revealing signs (ayat) in nature and history much of the truth of what God knows and commands. Yet they rarely do so.

(b) To call humanity to such attentiveness and reflection, God sends prophetic messengers who bring their communities guidance, privileged insight into God's knowledge, and authoritative will. The symbol of this guidance again is the *k*it*ab* – God's sending down through the prophet of an authoritative word to address the current situation and the prevailing issue. This prophetic address bears the name *kitab* not because of its form, but because of its origin and its nature as a communication of God's knowledge and a clear statement of God's commands. The Qur'ān comes to Muhammad not as a completed text but rather as a living voice that intervenes and responds, that engages with the Prophet and those around him.

(c) The Qur'ān refers to itself as *kitab* long before it is written down. It is *kitab* not because it is a book or in written form, but because it is divine. Writing is the quintessentially divine activity – it symbolizes knowing and commanding. *Kitab* is a metaphor for the processes of divine engagement with the World. This symbolic understanding seems to be the only way of making sense of the complexities of the Qur'ānic term *kitab*, even if it calls into question long-held assumptions about the prophet's plans, the nature of canonical texts and the intended form of the Qur'ān.

33 What the Muslims has long grappled with is to understand and reflect: (1) The relationship between God's self and His speech; (2) The relationship between God's speech and the pre-existent Qur'ān; (3) The relationship between the Pre-existent Qur'ān and the actual Qur'ān as it was first revealed (the speech of God); and (4) The relationship between the speech of God and its continuation in the world.

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correct parallel in understanding "the Word" is in the nature of the Word—in Christianity (that is Christ) and in Islam (that is Qur'ān).[34]

Learning from past experiences (from the debates on prophecy and scripture), Madigan emphasizes that the correct parallel affirms both Muslims and Christians. Both are in the position to respond to questions and paradoxes that arise from shared affirmations. For instance, on the eternal and transcendent God who has spoken in the Word to our world. Here, it can be said that Christians and Muslims have the same language to understand one another. They can also draw from the correct parallel the roles of Muhammad and Mary, as bearers of the Word; Arabic, and *Flesh* as the language of the Word.

Thus, by using the Word as hermeneutical key, we can share the Christian faith in Jesus with Muslims without hesitation (sceptical or soft-pedal), especially (1) the Word's relationship to God's self (the divinity of Christ); (2) the mode in which that Word is expressed in the humanly understandable form (the incarnation); and (3) in the relationship of the divine and the human within that historically expressed Word (redemption).

Sharing the Divinity of Christ: The Word's Relationship to God's Self

Since the Qur'ān often underlines the transcendence of God, "There is nothing whatever like unto Him" (Q 42:11),

34 From the Muslim side, Seyyed H. Nasr also recognized the same things. He writes, "The word of God in Islam is the Qur'ān, in Christianity it is Christ." See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1996; 2d ed. Unwin Paperbacks, 1979), 43.

Muslims are horrified by every attempt to associate with God anything from the created order (human beings included), and to place it beside Him (*shirk*), or to assimilate it with Him (*tashbīh*). How can we share the divinity of Christ in that condition then?

To explain the divinity of Christ to Muslims, we can use the Muslim language *sifa dhâtiyya* (the essential divine attribute of *kalam*/speech of God). For instance, in *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2):117, it is written, "The originator of the heavens and the earth when He determines something, just says to it, "be" and "it is" (*kun fa-yakūn*, Q 2:117)."[35] Madigan notes in some way there are similarities between the Islamic tradition (especially Sunni Muslim tradition) and John's prologue.[36]

Firstly, the divine attribute of *kalām* is described as, *la 'aynuhu wa-la ghayruhu*, or "neither identical with God nor other than God."[37] In the prologue, "The Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). Whether in Islam or Christianity, *kalām* (Speech of God) or Logos (the Word of God) is an eternal attribute of the divine. It is not a possession;

35 Daniel Madigan, "People of the Word," in *Review and Expositor* 104 (Winter 2007): 86.

36 Madigan prefers to use Johannine Christology (or high-descending Christology) in exploring more about the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity, rather than use low-ascending Christology. He writes, "A more Johannine Christology finds many echoes in the standard high-descending theology of the Qur'ān which came to define Islamic orthodoxy." Madigan, "God's Word to the World," 157. Madigan follows a complex examination of John's Gospel's prologue from Daniel Boyarin, a Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture and Rhetoric at the University of California, Berkeley.

37 Daniel Madigan, "The Gospel of John as a Structure for Muslim-Christian Understanding," in *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context –Qur'ānic Conversations,* eds. Daniel J. Crowther, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 257. See as an example the creed of al-Nasafī and the commentary by al-Taftazānī (*Sharḥ 'alā al-'aqā'id al-nasafiyya*) in *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature*, eds. Norman Calder, et al. (London: Routledge, 2003): 156–58.

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neither is it a part of God since God is not divisible by parts.[38] It is intrinsic and unitary to God. Here, Madigan notices, "Muslims and Christians face the challenge of how to appropriately express the relationship between kalām of God and God."[39]

There is a correct parallel between Muslim reflection on the divine attributes (*sifa dhâtiyya la 'aynuhu wa-la ghayruhu*) and Christian discussions on the modes of being and hypostases in the Holy Trinity. Madigan writes, "Both groups were affirming a monotheist position and yet at the same time recognizing that the transcendent God had communicated with us."[40] By understanding this, we can also explain Jesus as "Son of God." Christians use the image of "begetting, Father-Son" to express this relationship because we want to insist that God and His Word have the same nature. The Word is not God's creation in time; rather it is God's eternal self-expression. Some Muslim theologians call it *kalām nafsı*, literally "self-speech" or "personal speech," and at various times and ways, this speech is spoken in the world as *kalām lafzı*, or "speech in words."[41]

Secondly, as many scholars had pointed out about the economy of the logos *ensarkos* before the moment in which the Word took flesh—we turn to John 1:9-13 as the activity of the pre-incarnate logos (and not of the incarnate logos).[42] It is about the relationship between the pre-incarnate Word

38 Madigan, "People of the Word," 86-87.
39 Ibid.
40 Daniel Madigan, "God's Word to the World: Jesus and the Qur'ān, Incarnation and Recitation," in *Godhead here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering*, eds. Terence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 164.
41 Madigan, "Universality, Particularity, Finality," 19.
42 C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 281.

(*logos asarkos*) and the incarnate Word *(logos ensarkos).*[43] In the Muslim context, it is parallel with their struggle in reflecting the relationship between God's speech and the pre-existence of the Qur'ān. This involves the notion of the celestial preserved tablet (*al-lauh al-mahfuz,* or "Heavenly Book," Q 85: 21-22),[44] which is believed in the Muslim tradition to contain the text of the Qur'ān and (perhaps) of the other scriptures (*umm al-kitāb*, "Mother of the Book"). There is an ancient belief that the Qur'ān was created on the Tablet prior to the creation of the world. This gives way to the view, much more widely, though not universally held, that the Qur'ān is eternally pre-existent, since, as the Word of God, it is an eternal attribute of God.[45]

Sharing the Incarnation: God's Word is Expressed in Humanly Understandable Form

To Muslim eyes, the person and role of Jesus have been exaggerated by Christians. For them, the Christian deification of Jesus is a blasphemy (cf. Q 4, 171; 5, 116; 19, 34-35). What Muslims find difficult to understand is how Christians

43 A question much under discussion in recent years, mainly because of the work of Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (New York: Orbis Books, 1997): 1-456.

44 It is written in the Qur'ān, "This is a glorious Qur'ān (inscribed) in a preserved Tablet." (Sūrat al-Buruj (85): 21-22). Abdulah Yusuf Ali comments that God's message is not ephemeral. It is eternal. The "Tablet" is not to be understood in a material sense. It is "Preserved" or guarded from corruption (Q 15:9) for God's message must endure for ever. That message is the "mother of the book." (Q 3:7). See. Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān—Arabic Text with an English Translation and Commentary* (Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1937), 1717.

45 Daniel Madigan, "Preserved Tablet," in *The Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān,* vol. 4, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 261-63. In his article, Madigan writes commentaries about the preserved tablet (e.g., *tafsir* of al-Tabari, Ibn Hanbal, Ibn al-'Arabī, and Sufi Tradition).

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consider Jesus as human and divine. On the other hand, Christians find it difficult to understand how Muslims think of Qur'ān as a book and divine Speech. Here, we face the challenge of how the Word communicates to humanity with a language that can be understood. God addresses us in history. God communicates with us, expressing himself in ways we can understand.[46]

In the Muslim faith, nothing less than God's eternal speech has entered human history in the Qur'ān (in-libra-tion).[47] Yet in what way can it still be the Word of God if it is so humanly conditioned? This bears an interesting parallel with the Christian question of the Incarnation. Several Muslim theologians have maintained that it could not be. However, the majority of Muslims believe the Qur'ān has a twofold nature: a created and an uncreated one. Albeit one of the natures was created, Ibn Hanbal refrained from applying the term "created" to any form of the Qur'ān at any stage of its existence.[48] Similarly, classical Christology has maintained that although the human nature of Jesus is no doubt created, he has nonetheless only one personal identity. Paradoxically, his personhood must be eternal despite having a human or created element.

By pointing out the particularity of the Word, Christians can now explain to Muslims how Jesus is, in any sense, divine, beginning with their own belief in how the Qur'ān in any sense is divine. Moreover, Christians claim that the Word that is most eloquently and definitively spoken is Jesus. They

46 See footnote 29.
47 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 244 and Madigan, "Mary and Muhammad," 419.
48 Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History,* vol. 3, trans. F. Rosenthal (New York, 1958), 64.

believe him to be God's eternal Word made flesh. Although many people, even those who knew him, thought that he was just a first-century Jewish carpenter-turned-rabbi. Madigan shares, "Muslims, on the other hand, believe God's Word to have been expressed definitively and most eloquently in the Qur'ān. Though to many, even those who originally heard it, it is simply a seventh-century Arabic text with strong biblical echoes, to others, it is God's very Word expressed in Arabic."[49]

Sharing the Redemption: Particularity and Finality of the Word

Here, we must be clear that our purpose is not to prove that every element of Christian theology has a major or minor parallel in Islamic tradition, but to discover our particular identity and role as believers who listen and resonate with the Word. For this, Christians should do well to underline what is particular and essential in the Christian understanding of the Incarnation.

Because the language which God uses to communicate is human-flesh/body language, it is not a series of directives that need to be stated in clear and unambiguous terms. It is the revelation of God's gracious and forgiving love. In this manner, God made himself vulnerable. There was a great possibility of him being rejected, mocked, and hurt. The Word truly and fully enters the condition of human beings.[50]

It is in this sense that the self-emptying love shown on the cross is the fullest revelation of who God is and how things are between God and humanity. It is not some late Johannine invention, but is expressed in an earlier form in the hymn in

49 Madigan, "God's Word to the World," 159.
50 Madigan, "Particularity, Universality and Finality," 20.

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Phil 2: 5-11. In the resurrection of Jesus, God is affirming the truth about his divinity and humanity. The union of the human and divine in Jesus is opened to all of us. In other words, self-sacrificing love is ultimately revealed as the way to true life. In living out the same sacrificial love as Jesus did, we, too, share in his rising to new life (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pet 1:4).

This is something truly particular (a central theme) to Christianity as there is no death of the Word (and thus no resurrection) in the Islamic tradition. Yet, we still can continue to dialogue with them in this matter and explain this particularity since there are some accounts in the Qur'ān which talk about the rejection of God's speech. The most common verbs connected with this are "to call (something) a lie,"[51] "to disbelieve in,"[52] and "to deny."[53] Thus, one might say that God's revelation in Islam also has some kind of passion, even if not death. It is rejected and accused of making false claims to a divine origin. It is dismissed as nothing more than poetry, lies, sorcery, "old-wives tales" or the product of conspiracy with foreigners. Hence, through this vulnerability of the Word, we can explain to Muslims the significance of the Cross for Christians. Madigan writes, "Coming into the world necessarily involves entering into the history of human suffering. Without that, the incarnation (the Word becomes

51 To call something a lie (*Kadhdhaba*) is used thirty nine times (often in conjunction with *kafara*): Q 2:39; 3:11; 5:10, 86; 6:21, 27, 39, 49, 150, 157; 7:36, 37, 40, 64, 72, 136, 146, 147, 176, 177, 182; 8: 54; 10:17, 73, 95; 17:59; 21:77; 22:57; 23:105; 25:36; 27:83, 84; 30:10, 16; 54:42; 57:19; 62:5; 64:10; 78:28. Interestingly, though this verb is so commonly used to describe the reaction to the ayat, it is used only once (Q 40:70) to describe people's responses to the kitab.

52 To disbelieve (*Kafara* bi) is used twenty four times: Q 2:39, 61, 73, 99, 3:4 (with *Injil, Tawrat* and *Furqan*), 19, 21, 70, 98, 101, 112, 4:56, 140, 155, 5:10, 8:52, 17:98, 18:105, 19:77, 29:23, 39:63, 45:11, 64:10, 90:19.

53 To deny (*Jahada*) is used ten times: Q 6:33, 7:51, 11:59, 29:47, 49, 31:32, 40:63, 41:15, 28, 46:26.

flesh) is incomplete; and so, the revelation of God is incomplete."[54] The more one loves, the more one suffers.

Finality Initiated and Universal Message of the Word: What Is Our Role?

Do we need to boast, since everything is already accomplished in the Cross? The Word, John's *Logos*, is described as *erxomenos* continually coming into the world. One might read the serene, "It is accomplished" (Jn 19:30) of John's Jesus on the cross in this light.[55] When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, he breathed on them and said, ''Receive the Holy Spirit'' (Jn 20:23). In the Christian context, this saying indicates that the definitive revelation may have taken place in the Word made flesh. Still, its full significance will only be cleared gradually, to those who allow God's Spirit to guide them to the full truth of that revelation. Thus, finality has already begun but is not yet finished. The consequence, as Madigan contends, is "[t]he correct attitude of a believer before what she or he considers to be God's definitive Word is not one of pride in possession of this revelation, but rather humility before it. The truth of God will possess us, and not vice versa. We are servants of that Word and that Truth, not its masters or owners."[56]

In other words, the mystery of the Cross is teaching us that we can give glory in nothing, but in the self-emptying love of God. The universal message of the Word is to be a

54 Madigan, "God's Word to the World," 166.

55 There are two senses of completion. First, it is unsurpassable, because the love revealed here knows no limit. Second, it is irrevocable. What God has spoken is spoken once and for all. All things can never again be, as though God had not spoken.

56 Madigan, "Universality, Particularity, Finality," 22 and Madigan, "The Gospel of John as Structure," 266.

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witness or to embody the Word in the world. As Madigan writes, "Christians are not salespeople for the Reign of God, but free samples of it."[57] Together with other believers, we can find ways to resonate with the Word in the world, since the Word is the universal language.

For many Muslims, to resonate with the Word is a profound experience of opening themselves to the divine will and mercy. Muhammad Arkoun describes it as, "Playing host to a power with an infinite capacity to signify things . . . playing host to the divine-revealing word."[58] Playing host to the divine-revealing word means to allow oneself to be formed by the eternal truth in daily life, to discern and to contextualize the meaning (*ma'na*) of the actual structured text (*mabna*) of the Qur'ān into real actions.

As Christians, we are to witness to the Incarnate Word by emulating his self-sacrificing love. Where else can we see such love in action but in welcoming and proclaiming the truth to God's creation? To put that in Qur'ānic terms: all self-sacrificing love is an *aya*, a sign that reveals God to us. Even though we may be poor witnesses to him, it is the particularities that make us who we are, and who we are is where dialogue begins.[59]

In light of what has been mentioned, Madigan makes a crucial point about the Church: "Christians make a commitment to allow themselves to be formed by God into a community animated by the Spirit of Christ, a community that can serve as a nucleus or seed of that new human family—not its

57 Madigan, "The Gospel of John as Structure," 267 and Madigan, "Religious Faiths in a Pluralist Society," 13.

58 Muhammad Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers,* ed. Robert D. Lee (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 42.

59 Madigan, "Universality, Particularity, Finality," 24.

gatekeeper or its landlord. Only in that sense is the Church necessary."[60] In pastoral terms, he suggests moving forward together with Muslims by way of "dialogue of repentance" and "dialogue of action to respond to the cry of the poor."[61] This dialogue that leads us deeper into the reality of our moral failures echoes the words of the Qur'ān: "Perhaps God will create friendship between you and those you consider your enemies. God is powerful, infinitely forgiving, most merciful" (Q 60:7).[62]

Conclusion

By mutually practicing theological hospitality, we can explain our Christian faith to Muslims without hesitation., We can together explore theological matters with "the Word" as the hermeneutical key and our role as listeners of the Word. To have the Word as the hermeneutical key affirms that "Christians and Muslims believe the divine Word to have been addressed to us in the concreteness of our history."

Drawing correct parallels (Jesus and Quran as the Word in the world; Mary and Muhammad as the bearers of the Word; Flesh, and Arabic as the language of the Word, Holy Spirit, and God's Power as a guide in the continued presence and activity of the Word within the world) will also help us to realize our role as listeners of the Word. We are to witness to it by living that same kind of self-sacrificing love. To put that in Qur'ānic terms: all self-sacrificing love is an *aya*, a sign that reveals God to us.

60 Madigan, "Saving *Dominus Iesus*," 274.

61 Daniel Madigan, "Christian Reflects on Common Word," in *We Have Justice in Common,* eds. Christian Troll, Helmud Reifel, and C. T. R. Hewer (Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., 2010), 186.

62 Daniel Madigan, "Our Next Word in Common: Mea Culpa?" in *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Encounters through A Common Word,* eds. Yazid Said & Lejla Demiri (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 15.

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Even though we may be poor witnesses to God, it is the particularities that make us who we are, and who we are is where dialogue begins.[63] Thus, together with others, we can resonate with the Word, especially to confess our shared failures and to respond to the cry of the poor.

63 Madigan, "Universality, Particularity, Finality," 24.

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