Landas 36:1 (2024) 53–72

CATHOLIC[1]-MUSLIM MARIOLOGY II[2]

Maryam's Immaculate Conception

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Abstract.[2] This article explores the theological convergence between Catholic and Muslim beliefs regarding Mary, focusing on the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. It examines how early Christian prayers and Islamic scriptures highlight Mary's purity and her role as a bridge in interfaith dialogues. The study underscores the significance of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception in the Catholic tradition and its potential to enhance Muslim-Catholic relations in Southeast Asia. By analyzing theological texts, the article reveals shared spiritual themes and the mutual reverence for Maryam (Mary) in both religions, promoting deeper interreligious understanding and respect.

Keywords. Immaculate Conception; Catholic-Muslim relations; Maryam (Mary); theological convergence; interfaith dialogue; Southeast Asia

[1] "Catholic" instead of "Christian" because the Virgin Mary (Maryam), who is the bridge to Muslim-Catholic relations, is deeply respected by Muslims but, sadly, not by mainline Protestants.

[2] The first part in this series is "A Catholic-Muslim Mariology," *LANDAS* 34:2 (2020): 143–165.

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As early as the fourth century CE, three centuries before the Qur'ān, the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception is cited in the prayer *Tota pulchra es* (You are Totally Beautiful):

Tota pulchra es, Maria.	You are totally beautiful, Mary,
Et macula originalis non est in Te.	and the stain of *original sin* is not in you.

Mary is *totally beautiful* because she is without blemish. Sin uglies the human soul; in Mary's case, the blemish here refers to original sin, from which her soul was preserved from the moment of her conception. Of the four Catholic dogmas on Mary, only through the Immaculate Conception do Muslims and Catholics share a spiritual and theological affinity with each other. Only in the Qur'ān and the Gospels are the names *Eisā al-Masīḥ* (Jesus the Christ) and *Maryam* (Mary) both found. One cannot find their story in the Torah and in other sacred scriptures.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated just before Christmas, the Solemnity of the Nativity of Jesus. On September 12, 1942, Pope Pius XII declared Mary, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, as the Patroness of the Philippines.[3] Although Filipino Catholics have a strong devotion to Mary, teaching them about the Immaculate Conception remains a challenge. Nevertheless, a better understanding of Mary's Immaculate Conception in both traditions can help enrich Muslim-Catholic relations in Southeast Asia.

Muslims and Catholics can relate to Maryam's relationship with the immanent and transcendent Allāh. In that relationship, believers can relate with and experience for themselves the Most-Loving (*ar-Rahman*) and Most-Forgiving (*ar-Rahim*) God, like the Father as portrayed by Jesus in his prayer the "Our Father." The Second Vatican Council encourages Muslim-Catholic relations by affirming that Muslims and Catholics worship the one and the same God. Muslims "also honor *Mary*, His [Jesus's] virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion."[4] The Qur'ān says, "The nearest in affection to Muslims are those who say 'We are Christians'" (Q 5:82).

[3] In the Apostolic Letter *Impositi Nobis*.

[4] Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965), no. 3.

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The Dogma

In 1708, Pope Clement XI declared the feast of the Immaculate Conception a holy day of obligation through the *papal bull Commissi Nobis Divinitus*. A century later, on December 8, 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined by Pope Pius IX in the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*. Pius IX states that Mary was preserved from original sin "by a singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ."

> Ancient indeed is that devotion of the faithful based on the belief *that her soul, in the first instant of its creation and in the first instant of the soul's infusion into the body,* was, by a special grace and privilege of God, *in view of the merits of Jesus Christ*, her Son and the Redeemer of the human race, *preserved free from all stain of original sin.*… Roman Pontiffs, our predecessors, especially Sixtus IV, Paul V, and Gregory XV, [issued Constitutions and Decrees] in favor of the doctrine asserting that the soul of the Blessed Virgin, in its creation and infusion into the body, was endowed with the grace of the Holy Spirit and preserved from original sin.[5]

The dogma relates that the soul of Mary, "in the first instant of its creation and in the first instant of the *soul's infusion into the body*, was … preserved free from all stain of original sin" *in view of the merits of Christ*. In early Arabic literature, *nafs* refers to the self or person. In Islamic theology, *nafs* is the word for *soul*. Its etymology is from the Arabic word *nafas*, which means "breathing." In Islamic theology, *nafs* is sometimes confused with *ruh* (Hebrew *ruah*) which means "breath," "wind," or "Spirit." The Maliki Madhhab holds that the fetus is ensouled at the moment of conception. Likewise, the Immaculate Conception iterates the Catholic teaching that God creates each individual soul at the moment of conception. The soul is the source of life, immortal life, as portrayed in Genesis when God at creation ensouled by breathing into the *nostrils of Adam* (Gen. 2:7b).

[5] Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854), emphasis added.

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The Virgin Birth[6]: A Harmony of the Gospels and the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān, as an extra-Biblical source, affirms and adds to the knowledge of what has been revealed in the Gospels. Even though there may be differences, close readings of specific Qur'ānic passages can still be interpreted in the light of Judeo-Christian tradition. The Annunciation of Gabriel (*Jibril*) to Mary in Luke 1:28–30 and in Qur'ān 3:42–47 are essentially identical. If merged into a single narrative, the details are explicit and add to what we know of from Luke 1 and John 1. It begins with Luke 1 and Qur'ān 3, and segues to Qur'ān 19 where Maryam submits to Allāh's will, the Spirit consequently blows (Surahs 21 and 66) into her generative part, and the "Word" named the Messiah is conceived.

> When a woman[7] of Imran said: "My Lord, I vow to You what is in my womb, to be devoted (to Your service), so accept (it) from me; surely You, only You, are the Hearing, the Knowing." (Q 3:35)
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> So when she gave birth to it, she said: "My Lord, I have given birth to a female—and Allah knew best what she had given birth to—and the male is not like the female, and I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring into Your protection from the accursed devil." (Q 3:36)
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> The angels[8] said, "O Mary, surely *Allāh* has chosen you and you are *Immaculate*,[9] and truly chosen you above all women of the world" (Q 3:42a). The angel Gabriel greeted her: "Hail, *Kecharitomene* (full of grace)"

[6] For Muslims, "Virgin Birth" is inclusive of what would be the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity in Christianity.

[7] Hannah, the mother of Mary.

[8] Though Gabriel is not mentioned, "angels" announced the Good News to Mary. The article of the Incarnation is discussed in "Towards a Muslim-Catholic Pneumatology" (2024). Renato T. Oliveros PhD, Thomas O'Shaughnessy, SJ & Fazlur Rahman: The Incarnation in the Qur'ān, Asia Pacific Mission Studies, p. 70, 01/2022. https://archium.ateneo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1027&context=apms.

[9] Made pure.

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(Lk. 1:28)! (Allāh) has truly chosen you above all women of the world (Q 3:42b); blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, (Jesus) (Lk. 1:42)!

Maryam was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. The angel assured her: "You have nothing to fear, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus." (Lk. 1:29–31)

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel replied, "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.*" (Lk. 1:34–35)

He (*the Spirit*) said, "I am only a messenger[10] of your Lord (*Rasuulu Rabbiki*) that I *may give you* a faultless son" (Q 19:19). And Mary submits: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38).

And Mary … whose body was "*pure*" guarded well her generative organ[11] (*farjaha*), and thus We breathed *into it* of *our Spirit* (*ah-sanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi mir-ruhinaa*) (Q 66:12, Medina[12]) / into her (*fiha mir-Ruhinaa*) (Q 21:91, Mecca) … what is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 1:20b).

Chosen Above All Women

Mary is chosen by God *above all women in the world* (Q 3:42) or most blest is she among women (Lk. 1:42). Integral to God's act of *choosing* Maryam is her having been made *immaculate* early on at her conception in the womb of Hannah.

[10] The Spirit is on a mission to blow into Maryam.

[11] Ibn Kathir's interpretation of *farjaha*, meaning being chaste or pure.

[12] Actually Meccan, based on style and similarity (T. O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran* [Rome: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1953], 25).

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She has been Chosen. Qurtubī's[13] exegesis (*tafsir*) explains that in Q 3:42, God repeated the election (*choosing*) of Mary—"the first being for her devotion and the second for giving birth to Jesus."[14] This was seconded by Zamakhsharī[15] who interprets Mary's election as thus:

> God chose you first when He accepted you from your mother (Hannah), nurtured you, and bestowed upon you great favors.… (Secondly,) God chose you finally in that He granted you Jesus without a father. This favor was not attained by any other woman.[16]

Like Zamakhsharī, Razi[17] interprets the second election as God granting "her Jesus without a father."[18]

Tabarsi begins with a general interpretation of Mary's chosenness as being related to the earlier vow of Hannah to dedicate the child in her womb to the service of God. Maryam's purity was there from the very moment of her conception in the womb of her mother Hannah, who prayed, "Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all." However, when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl." God knew best what she had given birth to: the male is not like the female. "I name her Mary and I commend her and her offspring to Your protection from the rejected Satan." "Her Lord graciously accepted her and made her grow in goodness"

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[13] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *A-Jami' li-Ahkam al_Qur'an*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Al-Matba'ah al-Bahiyah, 1967).

[14] M. Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 124.

[15] Abu al-Qasim Jar Allah Mahmud ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhb al-Tawil*, 4 vols. (Cairo: 1966).

[16] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhb al-Tawil* Vol. I, 361–362.

[17] Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, 32 vols. (Cairo).

[18] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 126.

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(Q 3:35–37a) by protecting her from stain and keeping her inviolable without sin.

Although Muslims do not believe in original sin, this does not deter the relevance of the Immaculate Conception for the Muslim-Catholic shared devotion to Mary (Maryam). Maryam (Mary) is respected deeply by Muslims for she is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'ān and for her status as being chosen by Allāh above all women of the world (Q 3:42). Six centuries after the Annunciation is revealed in Luke, it is revealed again to the Arabs in Qur'ān 3:42:

> And the angels said, "*Yaa-Maryamu 'innal Allāh astafaakimu wa tahharaki wastafaaki 'alaa nisaaa-'il-'aalameen.*" (O Mary, surely Allāh has chosen you and made you *immaculate* [pure], and truly chosen you above all women of the world.)

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ ٱلْمَلَٰٓئِكَةُ يَٰمَرْيَمُ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱصْطَفَىٰكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَٱصْطَفَىٰكِ

عَلَىٰ نِسَآءِ ٱلْعَٰلَمِينَ عَلَىٰ

Qur'ān 3:42–45 reveals that Mary is chosen by Allāh and conceived pure (immaculate) to be the mother of Jesus. Maryam shall give birth to *Eisa* (*Jesus* عیسی), and this is the reason why Allāh made Maryam immaculate from the time of her conception. Her being immaculate sets the stage for her calling to be the mother of *Eisa* (Maryam umm-Eisa). Maryam must be sinless (Latin prefix *im-*, not or without; *macula*, stain or sin) so that her womb may be a fitting vessel for the infant *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ) who is the "Word" that the Qur'ān names as *Kalimat-ullah*—"a *Word (kalima) from Allāh*" (Q 3:45).[19] This is consistent with the Annunciation narrative in the Gospel according to Luke (Lk. 1:26–38), and the Spirit in the Qur'ān announced that Mary shall be the Mother of *Eisa* who is the Word and the Messiah (Q 3:45, 19:19).

This Qur'ānic revelation says that Allāh makes Maryam *immaculate* and *chooses* her above all women from all generations. This encapsulates the Catholic dogma that Maryam was immaculately conceived—*tahara*, meaning pure, immaculate, chaste, unblemished, blameless, and *tāhirah*,

[19] H. Gibb & J. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 173.

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meaning "She who was made immaculate." What is radical about this Qur'ānic revelation is that it states unequivocally and with certitude that Maryam is immaculate. The Qur'ān addresses her directly as *Immaculate* while *Kecharitōmĕnē* (full of grace) still needs to be interpreted as or translated into immaculate. The angel Gabriel in Luke 1:28 greets Mary as *Kecharitōmĕnē*;[20] *the angels in the Qur'ān greet Mary as one made pure (tahharaki) or as Mutahhar(a)*, the immaculate one. The simplicity and directness by which Allāh made Maryam immaculate (*mutahhar*), without sin, advances the teaching of the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It captures the Catholic dogma that Maryam was immaculately conceived and chosen amongst all women to be the mother of *Eisa* (*Jesus* عیسی), the Word and Messiah (Q 3:45, 19:19).

Immaculate to be the Mother of Christ

When it comes to God's unique intervention in human history, the question one might ask is why God chose Mary and for what purpose. She was not just chosen by Allāh for something bigger than herself. Mary's being immaculate is not to *draw attention to herself*. It is for Jesus the Christ (*Eisa al-Masih*). Perhaps a more important question, then, that Muslims may ask is thus: What is it about Jesus that made God have to go through all the trouble of intervening in human history?

A Muslim-Catholic Mariology must not draw attention to Mary herself. Her purity is not for purity's sake because her immaculateness is for a purpose and that is to give birth to Jesus. The Qur'ān uses *Eisa ibn Mariam* (Jesus the son of Mary) or *Maryam umm Eisa* (Mary the mother of Jesus) to define the identity of Mary which is in relation to her son. If Catholicism emphasizes Jesus as the son of God, Islam stresses Jesus as the son of Mary. The Hail Mary prayer expresses this clearly with the line "*And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.*" In the

[20] The name *Kecharitōmĕnē (Lk. 1:28)* is a title conferred on Mary for she is "full of grace" at the moment of her conception. Maryam the *Mutahhara* (Immaculate) is similar to *Eisa al-Masih* (Jesus the Christ) where *Mutahhara* is a title like "Christ" is a title.

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greeting of Elizabeth, the name "Jesus" is added to specify who is meant by the phrase "the fruit of your womb." The first part of the Hail Mary is a concise Muslim Mariology seconded by Qur'ān 3:42–45. Muslim commentators explain the reason why Allāh chose Mary and made her immaculate. It is because she will give birth to *Eisa al Masih* (Jesus the Christ).

> When the angels said, "O Mary, Allāh announces good tidings to you of *a Word* (*Bi-kalimat-in*) from Him (*min-hu*' [Allāh]) whose name is *the Messiah* (*ismu-hul Masihu*), Jesus son of Mary (*'Eisā-ibnu-Maryama*)."[21] (Q 3:45a; see Lk. 1:31)

Maryam the *Mutahhara* (Immaculate)

Integral to God's act of *choosing* Maryam is the act of making her immaculate. *Muṣtafā* means "she who was chosen," and *Tahirah* means "she who was made immaculate." Maryam's chosenness is exemplified in her immaculateness as she was conceived by her mother, Anna (Hannah). The early Muslim commentators were consistent in their interpretation that the miracle of the "Virgin Birth" rests in Maryam being chosen to be the mother of *Eisa*—a privilege granted unto her, raising her above all women of all nations of the world. Tabarsi[22] argues that God chose her for the honor of giving birth to Christ[23] as she was chosen by Allāh to be the mother of *Eisa* (Jesus).

This was seconded by Zamakhsharī[24] who interprets Mary's election as thus: "God chose you first when He accepted you from your mother (*Hannah*), nurtured you, and bestowed upon you great favors. ... (secondly,) God chose you finally in that He granted you Jesus

[21] The Qur'ān, trans. 'Ali Quli Qara'i (New York: 2006).

[22] Abu 'Ali al-Fadl b. al-Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al Bayan fir Tafsir al-Qur'ān*, 6 vols. (Beirut: 1961).

[23] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 128.

[24] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhh al-Tawil.*

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without a father. This favor was not attained by any other woman". [25] Like Zamakhsharī, Razi[26] interprets the second election "… is that God granted her Jesus without a father."[27]

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Mary's Obedience/Submission

The Arabic word for "Muslim" (مُسْلِم) literally means "someone who submits," as the Qur'ān ascertains that the ideal Muslim is someone who submits totally to God. Integral to God's act of making her immaculate is the command "O Mary, be *obedient* to your Lord" (Q 3:43a)—*Ya Maryamu uq-nutii li-Rabbiki* (يٰمَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِيْ لِرَبِّكِ). For Muslims, Maryam's obedience is the result of her being immaculate. It emphasizes not just purity but also, more importantly, her submission to Allāh's will despite the risk of being judged as an adulteress which is punishable by stoning.

[25] al-Zamakhshari, *Al Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuhh al-Tawil* Vol. I, 361–362.

[26] al-Razi, *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*.

[27] Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 126.

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Integral to God's act of making her pure (made pure) is the command "*O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord*" (Q 3:43a), *Ya Maryamu uq-nutii li-Rabbiki* (يٰمَرۡيَمُ اقۡنُتِىۡ لِرَبِّكِ). Mary is called *Qānitah* which means "devoutly obedient" (Q 66:12). This Arabic term implies not only constant submission to God but also absorption in prayer. This is consistent with the Islamic tradition that Maryam spent her childhood in the temple as she grew up in contemplative prayer life. It coincides perfectly with the announcement of Gabriel at the Annunciation and Maryam's obedience in declaring, "Let it be done unto me according to His word" (Lk. 1:38).

In Islam, Maryam's obedience is one with her immaculateness. She is called *Qānitah* which means "devoutly obedient" (Q 66:12). This Arabic term implies not only constant submission to God but also absorption in prayer and invocation, meanings that are consistent with the Islamic tradition that Maryam spent her childhood in the temple as she grew up in a contemplative prayer life. In this way, Mary personifies prayer and contemplation in Islam. The birth is later referred to in Qur'ān 66:12, which states that Mary remained "pure" while God allowed a life to shape itself in her womb. This coincides perfectly with Gabriel's announcement at the Annunciation and the command "Maryam, be *devoutly obedient* to your Lord" (Q 3:43a). The appropriate response of Maryam in Christianity is revealed in Luke: "Let it be done unto me according to His word" (Lk. 1:38).[28] This exemplifies her total submission to God's will.

On the Issue of No Original Sin in Islam

Muslims believe that what one does on earth depends on the quality of one's relationship with Allah. If God is a just God, God has empowered every believer to choose rightfully and with the moral ability to act on it. In James, the good works are from God's grace,

[28] *Word* in Islamic interpretation means God's command and will. *The Word* (al-Kalam) refers to the Qur'ān; for Christians, *the Word* becoming flesh refers to Jesus (Jn. 1:14).

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and for a person to deny God's grace as the source of one's good works (*zakat*) is arrogance. Perhaps Augustine is extreme—according to him, credit for all virtue and good works is due to God alone, and to say otherwise causes arrogance, which is the main cause of sin. Augustine calls humanity's inclination to sin and go against God's will concupiscence.

We can also apply the analogy of the authorship of the Scriptures. God is the author and source of revelation, and the human person is God's instrument for writing to and communicating with humankind. If we see the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, this can apply to all persons. Like Mary, our attitude must always be thus: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done unto me in accordance with God's word (command)." It is not passive surrender but rather active submission to enact the good planned by God.

In the Catholic Church, relying solely on one's sheer strength to attain salvation without the aid of God's grace is the heresy of Pelagianism, a theological position that holds that original sin did not taint the human soul and that and by divine grace have that moral will capable of choosing good and evil, there is potential to live a sinless life without special divine aid from the Church. In God's perfect love, God does not force us to follow God's will. It is when we say "yes" to God's will that God's Spirit is graced in us to strengthen and guide us. God will not leave it to us to rely solely on our strength, for God knows we will falter. For Catholics, the fullness of the Spirit is graced through the Sacraments. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, the sacrament of Baptism erases original sin and turns the life of a child or an adult into one constantly graced by God. However, the inclination toward sin persists, making the sacraments necessary for overcoming temptations to sin.[29]

Maryam's soul being made immaculate at her conception is attributed uniquely and solely to Allah Himself. Yet Islam has no

[29] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), no. 2520.

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concept of original sin. If there is no original sin, then, does this imply that all persons are conceived immaculate? Indeed, Muslim interpreters argue that Muslims like Mary are also born without sin. If every person born in the world is sinless nor has a tendency or predilection to sin, what then is Allāh's purpose in choosing Maryam and making her immaculate? To generalize this as granted to all women goes contrary to the Qur'ānic revelation that "(Allāh) has truly chosen [Maryam] above all women of the world" (3:42b). This condescends Allāh's plan of making her immaculate and chosen for a purpose which is to be the mother of *Eisa* (Jesus). Unless the unique intervention of Allāh is clearly not about Maryam but about Eisa, in what way is Eisa as a Prophet of Islam distinct from the other prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān?

Muslim commentators note that Maryam was chosen for a divine plan. However, they did not specify what this divine plan was. The tendency of classical Muslim exegetes was to "praise" Maryam and stop there while remaining silent about the mission of Eisa that would explain Allāh's divine plan. After all, Allāh's plan was dramatically inaugurated at the virgin birth and subsequent entry of Eisa into human history. Yet there is not much in the Qur'ān that elaborates what happened to the child who became an adult and realized Allāh's divine plan. Who was this child and what would eventually be the mission of the son according to the divine plan? The Gospels answer this in revealing Jesus as the incarnate Son of God born of the Virgin Mary. **For humanity's sake, he was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day rose from the dead. However, most Muslims reject the crucifixion of Jesus, although this author's late professor, Dr. Ayoub, believed in the historicity of a Jesus from Nazareth who was crucified and died on the cross.**[30]

[30] This is elaborated in "A Muslim-Catholic Christology: The Crucifixion," Renato Taib Oliveros, 2024, unpublished.

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"And We Breathed Our Spirit into Her Womb" (Q 66:12, 21:91)

> And Mary … who guarded well her generative organ (*farjaha*), and thus We breathed into it of our Spirit (*ah-sanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi mir-Ruhinaa*). (Q 66:12-Medina) / into her (*fiha mir-Ruhinaa*). (Q 21:91-Mecca)

The *ruh* (*Ruh al-Qudus*), *Qudus* (Holy) combined with *Ruh* (Spirit) as *Ruh al-Qudus* (Holy Spirit), is found four times in the Qur'ān, three of which (2:87, 2:253, and 5:110) describe Allāh as strengthening Jesus Christ through the Spirit and once (16:102) in strengthening the faithful Muslims.[31] The Spirit as *ruah* blows into Mary's generative part (*ahsanat farjahaa fanafakhna fihi min ruhinaa* [21:91]). This Qur'ānic verse is parallel to the event when God at creation breathed into the *nostrils of Adam* (Gen. 2:7b). In the Qur'ān, the Spirit breathes into the *womb of Mary.* Her obedience to the will of God is exemplified in her *fiat*—"Let it be done unto me according to Your word" (Lk. 1:38)—and instantaneously inaugurated God's divine plan of salvation when she conceived the Word, Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17). A Preface of the Holy Mass says, "By the power of the Holy Spirit he took flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary." This is confirmed in the Qur'ān: "We (Allāh) breathed into her (Mary) from (of) Our Spirit."

On the contrary, mainstream Muslims believe that the identity of the Spirit and that of the angel Gabriel are one and the same. Muslim commentators, with the intent of avoiding downright anthropomorphism, replaced the Spirit of God with Gabriel. The Spirit, who is part of Allāh, is the one to breathe into Mary (Q 21:91, 66:12). The true teaching of the Qur'ān is that the creative inbreathing came directly from Allāh.[32] "We breathed Our Spirit (*min Ruhina*)" (Q 21:91) and, in Q 66:12, "into whose womb we breathed of Our Spirit (*min ruhi-na*)." To breathe implies that the Spirit being breathed-out

[31] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 44; Fazlur F. Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 96.

[32] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 63.

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is part of Allāh or is Allāh Himself. It is mentioned that "We sent to her 'Our Spirit' (*ruuhanaa*)," implying that the Spirit is part of God as God's self. Therefore, to be consistent with their stance that the Spirit is Gabriel, the commentators ended up assigning Gabriel the authority to give Maryam a "pure boy" (19:19).[33]

Angels, however, are created beings, and the Spirit proceeds directly from Allāh, is the breath of Allāh, and is eternal and inseparable from Allāh. In both the Gospels and the Qur'ān, it is God, not an angel, who manifests God's power directly in the conception and birth of Christ. Allāh intervenes directly in the conception of the Word as Christ. It is Allāh as Spirit blowing directly into Mary's generative organ.

Here are verses revealed in Mecca during the early period of Muhammad's preaching that show that the Spirit has a distinct personality from angels. Four Qur'ānic verses dispel the Spirit = Gabriel claim directly. These clearly distinguish the Spirit as different in category from angels, including Gabriel: 1) 70:4 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), 2) 78:38 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), 3) 97:4 (angels and the Spirit, 1st Meccan period), and 4) 16:2 (angels with the Spirit, 3rd Meccan period). In five verses (16:2, 97:4, 7:85-Mecca, 40:5-Mecca, and 42:52-Mecca), the Spirit is mentioned as descending or bringing something down. In verses 16:2 and 97:4, the Spirit with the angels is described as ascending and descending. In these verses, "the Spirit is a definite person and plays, with the angels, an active part, 'standing,' 'descending,' and 'ascending.'"[34] The six *ruh* verses revealed in Medina make it impossible to substitute Gabriel for the Spirit like in this revelation: "We breathed into them [generative parts] some of our Spirit (66:12, 21:91)."[35] Furthermore, the notion that Gabriel is the Spirit would mean that Gabriel "impregnated"[36] Maryam, making things awkward and problematic.

[33] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 64.

[34] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 17.

[35] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 53.

[36] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān*, 66–67.

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In the Qur'ān, the Holy Spirit is described as a Person who visited Mary. If Gabriel is not the Spirit, who, then, is the Spirit? For Muslims, it is a dilemma to recognize the Spirit as the Spirit of God and not as an angel since doing so would compromise the Tawhid, the Unity and Oneness of God. In the use of the "We" form, the Qur'ān manifests that God in God's self breathed God's Spirit into Mary (21:91 and 66:12); the role of angels is to announce (3:42, 45–46) the conception of the Word by the Spirit of Holiness.[37] It is solely God who acts, without intermediaries, as it was ordained that the Holy Spirit shall grant the pure son when the Spirit said, "I am only a messenger of your Lord (*Rasuulu Rabbika*) that I may give you (Maryam) a pure son" (Q 19:19). For Catholics, God is the Holy Spirit who came down from heaven after Gabriel announced to Mary the good news: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you" (Lk. 1:35).

The Magnificat

Neither the Qur'ān nor the Hadith mentions Maryam's visit to her cousin *Ilisabat* (Elizabeth). It is in al-Tabarsi's tafsir that it is written—"The wife of Imran said, O Maryam! Truly I feel that what is in my womb is stirring before what is in thy womb" (Tafsir III, p. 157).[38] Similarly, Ibn Kathir reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that

> John's (*Yahyah*) mother (*Ilisabat*) greeted Maryam, "I feel the child in my womb bowing down in reverence to the child in your womb." This was the manner in which *Yahyah* (John the Baptist) confirmed to Jesus, while still in the womb.[39]

[37] O'Shaughnessy, *The Development of the Meaning of Spirit in the Koran*, 54.

[38] V. Courtois, *Notes on Islam* (Calcutta: Oriental Institute, St. Xavier's College, 1952), 62.

[39] Ibn Kathir II, 34, in Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters* Vol. II: *The House of Imran*, 108.

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Mary was greeted by Gabriel in the Annunciation—"*Hail Mary, full of grace*" (Lk. 1:28)—and Elizabeth in the Visitation with "*Blessed are you among women*" (Lk. 1:42).[40] Mary responds to Gabriel's greeting with her *fiat*—"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38)—and to Elizabeth's greeting with her Magnificat:

> And Mary said, "My *soul* magnifies the Lord; and my *Spirit* rejoices in God my Savior.… For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed." (Lk. 1:46–48b)

The short pericope above is a glimpse of the state of Mary's soul. When she felt the Christ child in her womb, she was so overwhelmed with great *joy* and spontaneously sang her *praises* (*nagagalak at nagpupuri*) to God. One cannot find a Qur'ānic verse equivalent to Luke's Magnificat save for her total submission to Allah's will which portrays her as the suffering servant. Yet this does not diminish Mary's joy also in Islam for it sustained her despite the rejections she experienced. Given that Maryam is close to the consciousness of many Muslims, may they, too, experience the *joy* of Maryam as Muslims.

Further to Mary's inner joy is the intimacy with God given her unique circumstance of the Holy Spirit being fully infused in her soul. The soul and Spirit are used interchangeably when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the soul of Mary. All that is in her response, "Let it be done unto me according to Your word" (Lk. 1:38), is always aligned with the will and plan of God. Mary's Magnificat exemplifies the perfect fusion of Mary's immaculate *soul* with the *Holy Spirit* that overshadowed her whole person. "Full Grace" is God in God's self, the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel's announcement that the "Holy Spirit will come upon [Mary] and the power of the Most High will overshadow [her]" (Lk. 1:35) led to that perfect union that happened instantaneously after Mary said to the Father, "Let it be done unto me according to Your word."

Mary, like any human being, has a soul, yet hers is distinctly graced with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It is by this gift that Mary

[40] NRSV (1991). Ancient authorities add this.

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discerned perfectly the will of the Father. There is no blurredness in her purity and fullness of grace, making her will perfectly aligned with the will of God. Yet it was not passive submission but an act of faith to cooperate actively in God's plan. This does not mean, however, that she did not suffer by her submission to the will of the Father that led to the crucifixion of her son. No wonder Muslims see her as the suffering servant.

One must take into account the courage of the young Mary who valued her chastity yet submitted to Allāh's will despite the risk of being judged as an adulteress, which is punishable by stoning. She asked Allāh's messenger Gabriel, "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? I have not been unchaste" (Q 19:21). Her total submission to God's will is exemplified in the Gospel of Luke when she said, "Let it be done unto me according to [God's] word" (Lk. 1:38). Mary complied single-heartedly as Pius IX defined in *Ineffabilis Deus,* his 1854 declaration on the Immaculate Conception.

Conclusion—The Holy Rosary: A Catholic *Tasbīḥ*[41]

Tradition says that the Holy Rosary was given to St. Dominic in a Marian apparition in 1214. The genius of the Rosary is the integration of meditation on the mysteries in the life of Jesus while reciting a decade of the Hail Mary for every mystery. This contributed to the Hail Mary ending up as the most recited prayer second only to the Our Father, The Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:9–13; Lk. 11:2–4). The earliest traditional form of the Hail Mary is known to have existed as early as the ninth century.[42] It did not include the intercessory "Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners …" which appeared only in the mid-16th century at the Council of Trent, attributed to the Jesuit Peter

[41] The use of beads similar to the Japamala in Hinduism and Buddhism and the Rosary in Catholicism.

[42] According to Herbert Charles Thurston, SJ (November 15, 1856–November 3, 1939), "Hail Mary", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hail_Mary.

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Canisius's 1555 Catechism adapted from the Dominican Girolamo Savonarola's 1495 *Exposition of the Hail Mary*.

Meditating on the mysteries while reciting decades of the phrase "Hail Mary, full of grace," the Catholic hears Mary as the immaculate virgin mother of Jesus. Incidentally, the Rosary acts as the Gospel to illiterates and those without access to the Bible. Similar for Muslims are the daily remembering (*dhkr*) and glorifying of the names of Allāh or stories from the Qur'ān. This spiritual exercise of meditation in Islam can be traced back to the Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) who meditated on the life of Moses, *Eisa* (Jesus), Maryam, and other Biblical characters also named in the Qur'ān. For Catholics, praying the Rosary is a way to remember the life story of Jesus. Like any mother, one of Mary's greatest joys is that we remember what Jesus has done for us.

From the moment Mary responded to God—"Let it be done unto me according to your word" (Lk. 1:38), the Holy Spirit overshadowed her and she conceived Jesus the Word who is the Christ (Jn. 1:7). Mary's *fiat*, "Let It Be," is her maternal reminder to each one of us to discern God's will and, with courage, submit. In our time (*nostra aetate*), let Paul McCartney's[43] song be our serenade:

When I find myself in times of trouble,
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.

And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.

[Bob Dylan[44] adds:] Suddenly I turned around and
she was standin' there
With silver bracelets on her wrists and flowers in her hair
She walked up to me so gracefully and took my crown of thorns
Come in, she said
I'll give ya shelter from the storm.

[43] P. McCartney, "Let it Be," in The Beatles, *Let It Be* [music album] (1970).

[44] B. Dylan, "Shelter from the Storm," in *Blood on the Tracks* [music album] (1975).

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This author was taught that an event in the Gospel where and when the Trinity was present was the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan. As he studied the Immaculate Conception, this author discovered with amazement that the Trinity was present during the Annunciation and even before Jesus's baptism. When the angel greeted Mary in the Annunciation, she submitted to the will of the Father with her *fiat*, the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and she conceived in her womb the Word who is Jesus the Christ (*Eisa al-Masih*). At the Annunciation, Mary became the Temple of the Trinity.

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