

4.0 A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND METHOD OF MAR TIMOTHY

- Mar Timothy I (728-823) was Patriarch of the Nestorian Church from 780 CE to 823 CE.
- Timothy spoke Greek, Syriac and Arabic, and had studied Islam. He laid out tenets of Christianity in Baghdad with Caliph al-Mahdi~ (775-785) on several occasions.

THE DEBATE *on the*
CHRISTIAN FAITH *between*
PATRIARCH TIMOTHY I *and*
CALIPH MAHDI *in 781 A.D.*



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TOPICS ABOUT
CHRISTIANITY
DISCUSSED IN
TIMOTHY'S
AND CALIPH
AL-MAHDI'S
DIALOGUE

- Whether Jesus is God's Son;
- Whether Bible is trustworthy according to the Qur'an;
- How verses in the Qur'an about crucifixion resolved.
- Are Muslims and Christians addressing same subject about God;
- Why do predicates about God differ?
Ibid. Cf. Sweetman, *Theology*, Pt. I, Vol. I, pp. 74-83.

TOPICS ABOUT
ISLAM
DISCUSSED IN
TIMOTHY'S
AND CALIPH
AL-MAHDI'S
DIALOGUE

- the nature of evidence required to confirm a writing as of God and whether the Qur'an met requirements;
- the nature of evidence required to confirm a prophet of God and whether Md. met requirements.

- (a) Caliph asks if Timothy believes that God married a woman from whom He begat a son?
- (b) Timothy replies that this is blasphemy. Rather, Sonship of God is of a spiritual not a physical nature.
- (c) Timothy adds: It means that Jesus is the Word-God who in the flesh for the salvation of the world.
- (d) Timothy's exp: "As light is born of the sun and word of the soul,so also Christ who is the Word is born of God high above times and before worlds.

WHETHER & HOW IS JESUS GOD'S SON



“SON OF GOD”

JEWS SUCH AS HERBAN AND LATER AL-MAHDI SAID: “You worship and serve a man who was begotten and a human being who was crucified. You call a human being and though God has no son, you say of this Jesus who was crucified that He is God’s Son.”

Timothy: “Jesus is both “God’s Word” and “His Spirit” in Surah 4:169 (171) and God’s Word and His Spirit cannot be separated from His essence. ”

Timothy: Jesus was Son of God in a spiritual sense not a physical sense.

Al-Mahdi asked:

How could Christ use these words if He were the Son of God?

Why did he pray?

***JESUS SAID:** “I go to My Father and your Father, to My God and to your God.” **Jn.20:17**

Timothy then says that Christ worshipped and prayed in order to teach these things to His disciples.

Timothy noted: Jesus's disciples would not have yielded to His teaching if He had not put it into practice.

Muhammad's prayers for forgiveness in the Qur'an are said by Muslims be made to teach his disciples to pray.

Al-Mahdi: “Did Christ Disclaim goodness (Matt. 19:17) “Why callest me good?” affirming role of a servant according to the prophets.”

- Timothy replies with John x:11, where Christ calls Himself the Good Shepherd.
- but that Christ did not lose His Sonship (to God in a spiritual sense) by His service.

THE TOPIC OF THE TRINITY

- It is important to note that Timothy first discussed God as Unity according to Deuteronomy 6:4 where one reads: “Here O Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”
- So, when Al Mahdi accuses Timothy of Tri-Theism, Mar Timothy says that while he believes in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he still believes in one God.
- In the Qur’an God’s Word and His Spirit are not distinguishable but rather One God (Surah 4:169/171). Then Timothy uses an analogy noting that neither are the light and heat and the sun three suns but one sun. (I guess he just couldn’t resist but it ruined his argument.)

JESUS

- 1.1 Jesus described as being in the blessed lineage of Jacob (Surah 2:46)
- 1.2 Jesus' was born of a virgin (Surah 3:44-47 & Surah 19:19-22)
- 1.3 Jesus described as Masih (Messiah) (Surah 3:44,45)
- 1.4 Jesus described as Kalimat Allah (God's Word) (Surah 4:169 & Surah 3:40)
- 1.5 Jesus described as Ruh Allah (Spirit of God) (Surah 4:169)
- 1.6 Jesus described as "The Honorable One" (Just Judge at the Last Day) (Surah 3:46)
- 1.7 Jesus described as 'The Sinless One' (Surah 19:20)
- 1.8 Jesus' work affirmed of God by Miracles (Surah 5:109, 110)
- 1.9 The Controversy surrounding Jesus' crucifixion compare Surah 4:156 with Surahs 3:47-50, Surah 19:34 & Surah 5:117)
- 1.10 The 'Honourable Intercessor' at the Last Day (Surah 3:46).

. “Can God die?” was a question asked of Christians by both Muslims and Jews.

- Al-Mahdi cites Justinian Eastern Roman Emperor (527-565) who stated: “God was crucified for us”.
- Timothy: “in no book in the prophets or the Gospel do we find that God Himself died in the flesh, though we do find that the Son and Jesus Christ died in the flesh.”

CRUCIFIXION JESUS IN THE QUR'AN

- Al-Mahdi quotes the denial of the crucifixion to be found in the Qur'an (Surah 4:156)
- Timothy (like all Christians before and since) replied with Surahs 19:34, 3:48 and 5:117, the latter is of particular interest as Jesus is saying after the crucifixion event: “the day You (God) made me to die...”
- Al-Mahdi and Timothy agreed that to appeal to the Qur'an against the Qur'an is a most unsatisfactory.

CRUCIFIXION IN THE BIBLE

- Timothy quotes: Psa. xxii:16-18, Isa. 53:5; Lam. 33:4 & 30; Daniel 9:26; Zech. Xiii:7 and Jer. 11:19.
- Throughout the New Testament Jesus crucifixion is cited.
- Al-Mahdi asks if Jesus died willingly or unwillingly?
- Timothy answers: “He did not die forcibly, and he was not weaker than His murderers who murdered him because they hated Him and His sender. He died by God’s tacit permission, which preserves the freewill of man.”

Al-Mahdi asks: “do you believe that the Qur’an is from God?”

- Timothy says: “ it is not for him to say, but that the former Scriptures were confirmed by miracles. When God wished to abrogate the Mosaic law he confirmed this by miracles, and since this is so similarly He should have confirmed the abrogation of the Gospel by miracles also.”

Al-Mahdi: “Has the Bible been corrupted?”

- Al-Mahdi’s assumption is that the Gospel is a book given to Jesus. Thus Al-Mahdi asks the question: “Who gave you the Gospel and was it given before the Ascension?” The point of this is clear. If it was given before the Ascension and it can be proved that the Scriptures in the hands of the Christians were written after the Ascension then the books in the hands of the Christians cannot be the genuine Gospel.
- To this question Timothy, knowing what the implication is, replies very well. He says that the Gospel was given before the Ascension, “as the Gospel is the narrative of the Economy of the works and words of Jesus Christ and as the works of Christ were done and His concrete words delivered to us before His Ascension”, and further if the Gospel is the preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven, it certainly came down before the Ascension.