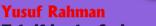
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Refleksi JURNAL KAJIAN AGAMA DAN FILSAFAT



Tahrif in the Scriptures: A Study of Ahmad Khan's Tabyin al-Kalam

Edist

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Hamdani Anwar

Seni Membaca al-Qur'an (Qira'at): Sejarah dan Perkembangan

M. Amin Nurdin

Al-Zamakhsari and the Miraculous Nature of al-Qur'an

Fariz Pari

Tafsir sebagai Hermeneutika Islam: Kajian dan Terapan

Dadi Darmadi

"Muslim Christology": The Islamization of the Gospels in the Muslim Biblical Scholarship



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EDITORIAL

Sidang Pembaca,

Refleksi yang berada di tangan sidang pembaca ini adalah nomor kedua tahun pertama. Nomor perdana jurnal ini cukup mendapat sambutan yang baik. Kami menerima berbagai saran, kritik dan sumbangan naskah. Sambutan itu tentu membuat kami semakin menyadari tantangan ke depan bagi pengembangan jurnal ini lebih lanjut. Terus terang, kami sebenarnya cukup *was-was*. Sebab perahu kecil **Refleksi** ini dengan awak yang 'cukup' sedikit jelas menanggung muatan yang luar biasa banyaknya. Karena itu, kami tetap menunggu saran, kritik, dan tentunya sumbangan tulisan para pembaca agar perahu ini tidak limbung dan karam selamanya.

Menyambut Silaturahmi dan Reuni Alumni Fakultas Ushuluddin pada medio Maret tahun ini, kami sengaja menghadirkan edisi khusus sebagai kado istimewa dan bentuk partisipasi kami untuk acara itu. Kali ini kami berusaha menggali khazanah Tafsir al-Qur'an yang menjadi inspirasi berkembangnya wacana ilmu dan peradaban kaum Muslimin. Beberapa di antaranya ditulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Bukan untuk sok atau sombong. Hanya sekedar menunjukkan apresiatifnya para Sarjana Ushuluddin betapa bidang beberapa tahun pada ini belakangan. Pada penerbitan-penerbitan yang akan datang, kami Insva-Allah juga akan diskursus lain di Fakultas tercinta ini menampilkan seperti filsafat, ilmu kalam, dan studi agama-agama.

Sekali lagi jurnal ini adalah milik kita bersama. Tanpa sidang pembaca, **Refleksi** tak akan pernah berarti apa-apa. Karena itu kami terus mengharapkan partisipasi para pembaca untuk ikut mewarnai "*intellectual exercise*" di lingkungan Fakultas Ushuluddin ini. Dan **Refleksi**, tentunya, adalah salah-satu wahana idealnya. Selamat membaca.!

Redaksi

"MUSLIM CHRISTOLOGY": THE ISLAMIZATION OF THE GOSPELS IN THE MUSLIM BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

Dadi Darmadi

THUS paper tries to discuss the biblical texts and their interpretation in the Islamic tradition. It will essentially explore the specific relations between the Qur'an, and the Bible, and how some Muslim scholars interpret the biblical texts in accordance with the Islamic doctrines. Even though the term "Islamization" of the Gospels has not been widely used in the Muslim scholarship, many Western scholars of Islam have referred to this as one of the major features of the Qur'anic discussion on Jesus and Christian tradition.¹

Since the early development of Islam in the seventh century and the medieval Islam up to the contemporary Islam, there has been a continuing tension between Islam and Christianity concerning the interpretation of some fundamental issues to both religions. Because of the significance of this ongoing discussion among Muslims and Christians, therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize the theological justification of such an "Islamization" of the Gospels in the Muslim Biblical scholarship.

The development of Muslim Biblical scholarship and its "Islamization" motives can be clearly understood from the origin of Islam history. There is a theological claim about the relationships of the Hebrew Bible and of the New Testament to the Qur'an in the Islamic tradition.² Many scholars of religious scriptures have suggested that the three scriptures share much material. And, in fact, Islam as a religion had emerged in a Judeo-Christian environment.³

Muslim Christology

For many scholars of the Qur'anic studies, there is an ambiguous attitude of the Qur'an towards Christianity and Judaism.⁴ Certain verses in the Qur'an clearly charge Jews and Christians with deliberate corruption of their scriptures (*tahrif*). This ambiguity has not been clearly perished because there are many *mufassirs* or Muslim Qur'anic scholars have continued the persistent interpretations of the biblical texts. On the other side, however, other Qur'anic verses suggest the predictive value of these same texts, stimulating Muslims to search and examine biblical sources for the promised affirmation found in the Qur'an. These two motives have produced, and I assume they continue to produce, a diverse body of work and a diametric tension to Muslim biblical scholarship.

Yet, most of these works tend to interpret and legitimize, and to some degree, secure the Qur'anic authority.⁵ This process is precisely what I call as "the Islamization of the Gospels." Those Muslim scholars who work on this specific area have been known as the Muslim polemicists or apologists. G.C. Anawati, an Egyptian Christian scholar, has further suggested that the Muslim interpretations of the Gospels has produced a "Muslim Christology."⁶

During the early centuries of Islam, the Bible did not usually receive specific attention from Muslim scholars. Among those who did refer to it, some rejected the text on the basis that it was corrupt, and developed statements of how the original *Injil*—the Arabic and Qur'anic term of the Bible—had been lost and replaced by the canonical Gospels.⁷ However, many Muslim scholars have used the suitable verses in their arguments as illustrations and proofs of the authority of Islam and the Qur'an.

Here, I would like to show two examples of this phenomenon. The first example will be drawn from the work of a Christian convert Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari whose work, *Kitāb al-Dīn wa al-Dawlā* (A Book on Religion and Empire) must be regarded as one of the most discerning compilations of arguments, written in the early Islamic period.⁸ He employed a distinctively Muslim method of exegesis, and demonstrated how the coming of Muhammad and Islam are scattered throughout the biblical books.

The second example is from the work of the theologian al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim al-Rassi who died in 860 CE. His book called *Radd 'alā al-Nasara* (The Refutation to Christianity) which followed a more radical method in translating parts of Matthew's Gospel into Arabic, and modified words and phrases and omitted sections in order to make the original text corresponds to Islamic beliefs.⁹ This Islamization of the Gospels had been greatly developed in medieval Islam. This has significantly contributed to the Islamic Biblical scholarship. I assume this influence still continues to the present Islamic discussions over Christianity among many Muslim scholars.

The Islamization of the Gospels

In the first centuries of Islam, the polemical works written by Muslims against Christianity, as I understand them, are dominated by the twin themes of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ The Trinity is usually attacked in the form of a plurality of divine entities or as a logical contradiction. The divinity of Christ is treated in the form of the completely human son of a divine Father or the uniting of divine and human subjects in one being. These doctrines are understood and attacked as a contradiction and deviations from, and as opposed to, Islam's central doctrine about *tawhid* which means the divine unity or the unity of God (absolute monotheism).¹¹ Muslims believe that as a unity God cannot be divided and as the absolutely Other God cannot be related to creatures. These fundamental teachings of Christianity are confronted as rivals to the teaching of the Qur'an, and refuted on that basis.

Two Examples from Al-Tabari and Al-Qasim

We can find in the Qur'an certain features which, more or less directly, reflect the Gospels. According to P. Hayek in his *Le Christ de l'Islam*, except the dogma that Mary is the mother of God, which is rejected by Islamic teachings since it also denies the divinity of Jesus, "all the other dogmas defined by the Church or transmitted by its traditions of worships, find a support in the Qur'an, rather weak it is true, but certainly real: the Immaculate Conception, the Presentation of the Temple, the Annunciation, the Virgin Birth, Christmas and even the Assumption."¹² However, Islamic tradition has given its strong emphasis on the statements that Jesus—the Qur'an says Isa—Qur'anic term of Jesus—is only a prophet, and he is a human being as any other prophets sent by God.

Now let's take a look at how the difference in the interpretation of two well-known passages of the Bible and the Gospels are made in the Islamic tradition.

1. Psalms 48: 1-2;

In *the New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (1977) the passages of Psalm 48:1-2 are written as follows:

"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth,

Mount Zion, is doctrine the far north, the city of the great King."¹³

In *Kitāb al-Dīn wa al-Dawlā*, al-Tabari wrote the passages of Psalms 48:1-2 as follows—it is an English translation from its Arabic origin:

"Great is our Lord, and he is greatly *mahmud*; and in the city of our God and his mountain there is a holy one and a *muhammad*, and the joy hath come to the whole earth."¹⁴

Al-Tabari has clearly interpreted these verses in such a way to make them comprehensible in the light of Islamic doctrine: that the word "to be praised" in Arabic has its root from the word "h-m-d", and thus, in that context, the suitable word is "*mahmud*", which literally means "to be praised." Also, the word "*muhammad*" means "someone who is respected and praised." Owing to his Christian background and his familiarity with the Syriac translation of the Bible, al-Tabari points out that numerous verses in the Bible contain predictions of Muhammad—who was later known as the carrier of the message of Islam, and the founder of Islam as a religion. According to David Thomas, al-Tabari's procedure in "Islamizing" the Bible is simple: wherever there is an occurrence of the root of the word "h-m-d" or a mention of a place in or near the Hijaz—an area in Arabian gulf, where Islam first emerged and was spread—this can be shown to refer to the coming of the Prophet.¹⁵

2. Matthew 6: 9-14 (and also Luke 11: 2-4) about the Lord's Prayer

In *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (1977) the passages on the Lord's Prayer are written as follows:

"Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom comes. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors, And lead us not to temptation, But deliver us from evil."¹⁶

And, this is al-Qasim's translation of the Lord's Prayer as it was written in his *Radd 'alā al-Nasara*:

"Our Lord, who is in heaven, may your name and your wisdom be holy: may your rule and you might be: may your dominion appear in your earth vitality as it appears in your heaven, feed us with bread in your daily need: forgive us our past sins as we forgive those who have wronged us, forgive us in your mercy even though we have sinned, do not, our Lord, inflict us tribulation, and free us from foul calamities, for yours are the rule and the power, and from you are the dominion and the forgiveness, forever and never, world without end."¹⁷

It is clear that in al-Qasim's translation the spirit of the canonical version is retained. Yet here God is addressed as Lord rather than Father, I assume it relates to the Islamic denial of the idea of Trinity. And, there is no mention at all of Lord's will being done on earth. I assume that this is due to the fact that Muslim thinking would completely exclude the possibility that it was not. As we know, the proclamation of due the coming of the Kingdom is, for many Christians, very significant to Jesus' ministries. Ed. L. Miller, a prominent scholar of New Testament studies, asserts that it is one of the most essential ideas of Jesus' teachings.¹⁸ Yet, al-Qasim has deliberately omitted this notion here. The question about the authenticity of Christian scriptures was prevalent among Muslims at a very early stage. In the mid-8th Century, John of Damascus in chapter 100/101 of his work *De Haeresibus* complained that Muslim accuse Christians of interpreting the Old Testament prophets allegorically in order to make them say that God has a son, and accuse Jews of attributing to the prophets writing which they wrote themselves. Here we see one of the first appearances of the claim that the Gospel writers may have conspired together to misrepresent details from Jesus' life and teachings for their own objectives.¹⁹ Accusations of this kind exemplify the tendency among Muslims to declare the text of the Gospels as so corrupt that they cannot be granted any authority of Jesus life or teaching.

Al-Qasim justifies and explains in three stages his method of exegesis. Firstly, he argues that Christians have accepted their Gospels from Jews whom they regard as untrustworthy in everything except this.²⁰ It follows that the integrity of the Gospels cannot be accepted since they do not meet the criterion of sound transmission, even by Christian standards.

Secondly, he criticizes Christian interpretations of the texts since they have used them to support doctrines which no other religious groups, not even heretics, accept.²¹ The texts themselves can thus be separated from the doctrinal tradition which has distorted their primary teachings.

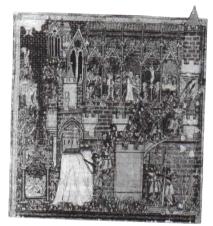
Thirdly, he proposes that in the absence of first-hand witnesses to the historical person of Christ both sides accept as guides to understanding the testimonies of five witnesses, who are God, the angels, the Christ himself, Mary, and the disciples, all of whom in the Gospels affirm to Jesus' humanity.²² These reliable authorities provide a basis upon which to understand the texts in general.

In these three consecutive stages al-Yasim suggests the possibility that the Bible was contaminated by Jewish transmitters, frees them from the exegetical control of the Church, and asserts the humanity of Christ as the criterion for understanding their true meaning. This makes it possible for him to begin to explore the Gospels without the necessity of acknowledging every word as original or accepting Christian presuppositions. Hence, in his assumption, Jesus' actions and teachings always conform with Islamic beliefs.

Almost all the Bible's story becomes Muslim stories in all parts and references. In al-Qasim's work, the Gospel of Matthew emerges in a new

form as an Islamized version, in much the same way as the Hebrew prophets emerged in Christian guise under earlier reinterpretations.

So, what is the key to the attitude of al-Qasim and the Muslims towards Christianity and the scriptures in the early Islamic period? I assume that, just like the early Christians before them, they may have felt justified in understanding previous scriptures as having been written for their particular benefit, and they consequently read them in order to discover teach-



ings which would approve with their own beliefs. Finally, they would have felt justified in believing that Islam was the pinnacle of revelation and truly God-given; Islam was the worthy inheritor of all the past wisdom and the corrective of present error which they believed found in the Bible.²³

For many Muslims, the revelation of the Qur'an effectively dismisses earlier scriptures—the Torah and the

Gospels—in a sense that these books serve no continuing liturgical function. Their function has been adopted by God's final disclosure—the Qur'an—and their continuing can be affirmed only if great understood and interpreted within the Qur'anic perspective. However, as we can see from al-Tabari and al-Qasim, the Muslim tradition has certainly not seemed to ignore entirely these previous scriptures nor to execute conclusive judgement against them. Rather, many Muslim scholars recognize the utility of these scriptures to convey the Islamic messages and even to legitimize the Qur'anic authority—of course, with their own interpretation. Even though corrupted, these scriptures testify to the need for Qur'anic authority, to the necessity for divinely proposed restoration.²⁴

Geoffrey Parrinder, a scholar of comparative religion, has suggested that in the rethinking of doctrinal expression today Islam and Christianity can learn much from each other. Both need to look back to, in the Biblical terms, "the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were dogged —Isaiah 51: 1." Until modern times, and still very widely, it has been true that most Muslims and Christians have been ignorant of each other's sacred books.²⁵

The Quranic Verses about Jesus and Christian Teachings

According to Fazlur Rahman, one of the biggest neo-modernist Muslim scholars, the Qur'an asserts that it was impossible for God to have a son, and attacked the doctrine of the Trinity—interpreted as a doctrine of three gods.²⁶ In this context the Qur'an states:

"O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus' son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So, believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not "Three" — Cease! (it is) better for you! —Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that he should have a son. His is all that in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender."²⁷

The Qur'an also asserts the denial of the crucifixion of Jesus:

"And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger—They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them, and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof: they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture: they slew him not for certain, (157) But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise (158). There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them (159)."²⁸

According to Fazlur Rahman, this denial of the crucifixion of Jesus was not aimed against the Christians but against the Jews.²⁹

The Ahmadis, one of the Islamic groups which emerged in the late nineteenth century, hold a controversial view about a post-crucifixion life of Jesus: that through divine intervention he escaped from the cross, but instead of ascending into heaven Jesus undertook a mission to the Lost Tribes of Israel in Afghanistan and Kashmir, in which latter place he died and was buried in a tomb still extant in Srinagar. Since, therefore, Jesus was mortal like God's other prophets, the messiahship of Ghulam was that of a person possessing the 'spirit and power' of Jesus, not as Jesus personally returned.³⁰

A New Paradigm Needed

As a student who wish to work on the relationships between Islam and Christianity, and between Muslims and Christian, I am of the opinion that Muslims should more look at the current development of the New Testament studies in order to gain a "confirmed" opinion about Jesus and Christianity. This concern originates from my own findings that there has been hardly any significant change of Muslim's perception of Jesus and Christians.

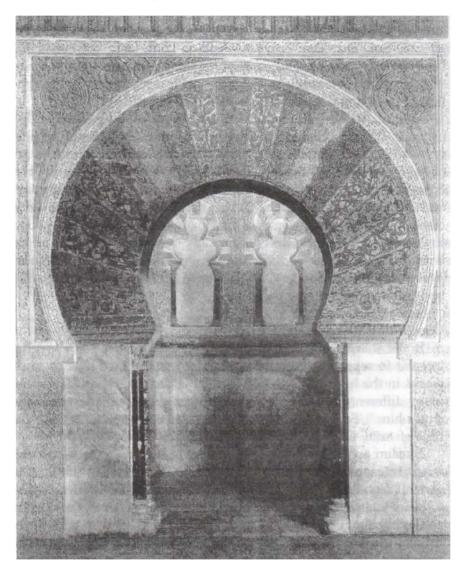
As a matter of fact, many Muslims still hold the belief that, for instance, Christians believe in three gods—which excludes Christianity from the true monotheism. While many modern Christian scholars of have reinterpreted the concept of Trinity not as "three gods," but "one God in three manifestations," it seems to me senseless to retain such beliefs. Even though the Qur'an has clearly supported this criticism, I argue that many verses of the Qur'an have explicitly responded to situations at the time the Qur'an was revealed. Without this effort, with this kind of perspective, it is seemingly inevitable, for the purpose of mutual understanding among Muslims and Christians, that both groups forge a new paradigm.

Concluding Remarks

In the area of New Testament Studies, there has been an emerging interest to represent Jesus as "historical Jesus." If we look at some works in the historical guest of Jesus, it is clear that there have been many different pictures of Jesus as many as many as the scholars who study him.³¹ Ed L. Miller describes this phenomenon as "a long parade of *many* Jesuses."³²

Muslim apologists, with different emphasis, have shown their different interpretation of Jesus in particular and Christian tradition in general. Yet, the biggest different is that while those historical Jesus's scholars interpret Jesus still within Christian perspectives, the Muslim apologists like Al-Tabari, Al-Gasim and many others who have established "Muslim Christology," have gone far beyond Christian tradition: they have refuted many basic tenets of Christian beliefs, and at the same time, established a legitimization for Islamic doctrines.

Scholars of historical Jesus such as Gerd Thiessen, Richard A. Horsley and R. David Kaylor have suggested that Jesus was the prophet of social change, and John Dominic Crossan of the Jesus Seminar has argued that Jesus was not more than "a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant."³³ It seems to me that many Muslim apologists have previously approached Jesus from the same point: they have tried to interpret, discern and suggested their "own" pictures of Jesus. Often, they have to selectively choose the resources, as happened in al-Tabari and al-Qasim, for justifying their arguments.



Endnotes:

 For example, among scholars who explicitly uses this term is David Thomas in his article, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," *Islam Muslim Christian Relations* 7, no. 1, (1996): pp. 29-38. He does not clearly define this term, but, to my own understanding, the Islamization of the Gospels can be understood as the Qur'anic interpretation—or the Muslim's interpretation of the Qur'anic passages—of the Biblical texts to legitimize, and to some degree, to secure the Quranic authority. Other scholars, such as Kenneth Cragg, one of the biggest scholars in Muslim-Christian relation studies, has suggested the term the "Qur'anic Jesus." See Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (London: George Alen and Unwin: 1985).

- 2. Many scholars have asserted that one of the basic tenets in Islam is believing in the prophets sent by God long before Muhammad, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Islam, then, is considered one of three elements of "Abrahamic religion." Islam is believed to be a continuing faith of the previous religious traditions. For the relations among Judaism, Christianity and Islam, see Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company: 1994. See also, Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1979).
- 3. William Montgomery Watt. *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 1-8. Watt has suggested there were several different Christian groups encountered by Islam. Among them are the Orthodoxy, the Monophysites, and the Nestorians.
- 4. See Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad" in Mircea Eliade (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1987), vol. 10, p. 142.
- 5. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "The Quranic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7, no. 1, (1996).
- G.C. Anawati. "Isa." In Lewis (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Islam*. Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1978, p. 81.
- 7. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," pp. 29-38.
- 8. A. Khalife and W. Kutsch. *Al-Radd 'ala al-Nasara de Ali al-Tabari*, Paris: Mélanges de l'Universite Saint Joseph 36, 1959, 138-139.
- 9. B. Abrahamov, Al-Kasim b. Ibrahim on the Proof of God's Existence, (Leiden: 1990), p. 6.
- 10. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," pp. 29-38.
- 11. Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad," p. 142.
- 12. P. Hayek, Le Christ de l'Islam (Paris: 1959), p. 65.
- 13. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (ed). *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), Psalm 48:1-2.
- A. Mingana, *The Book of Religion and Empire* (Manchester, 1992); See also, D. Thomas, "Tabari's Book of Religion and Empire," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 69, (1986): pp. 1-7.
- 15. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," pp. 29-38.
- 16. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*; Matthew 6-914.
- 17. A. Mingana, The Book of Religion and Empire (Manchester, 1992).
- Ed. L. Miller, Jesus and the Future: We Will All Be Surprised. Draft. This book has not published yet, but has been thoroughly read and discussed by students at his course, "Jesus in the Gospel," (CU Boulder, Spring 1997).
- 19. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," pp. 30-31.
- 20. Mingana, The Book of Religion and Empire, pp.19-22.
- 21. Mingana. The Book of Religion and Empire, pp. 22-28.
- 22. Mingana, The Book of Religion and Empire, pp. 3218 and 322: 18.
- 23. David Thomas, "The Bible in Early Muslim Anti-Christian Polemic," p. 36.
- 24. McAuliffe, "The Qur'anic Context of Muslim Biblical Scholarship," p. 153-154.
- 25. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1965), p. 171-173.
- 26. Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad," p. 142.
- 27. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation*. New York: A Mentor Book.
- 28. Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, (QS. 4:157-159).

- 29. Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad," p. 142.
- Stanley E. Brush, "Ahmadiyyah," in Mircea Eliade (ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. (New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 154.
- 31. One of the finest books explaining the historical Jesus movement attached with intelligent critiques is probably Ben Witherington III's, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1995). Even though it is clear that the author's conclusion is more establishing the importance of the eschatological aspects of Jesus, the discussion about some other works of historical Jesus, such as Jesus as the prophet of social change, Jesus as the sage etc. are still adequately addressed.
- 32. Miller. Jesus and the Future, p. 24.
- 33. See ben Witherington III, The Jesus Quest, in particular chapter 6-7.

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