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Begotten of God

Theological debates between mainstream Christianity and Islam usually arrive at stumbling blocks. One of these stumbling blocks is the understanding from the New Testament that Jesus Christ is Begotten of God. Although appreciating the plethora of distinctive Christian theologies and Christologies that have existed historically and those that still exist today, the various forms of Christian theologies on the matter are not dealt with here. Here, I will look at the Bible and the Qur'an from a textual perspective, without the theological implications of textual interpretations.

While the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of John, emphasizes that the Messiah is Begotten of God, the Qur'an candidly declares that God neither begets nor is begotten (e.g., Qur'an 112:3). If we take the understandings from a literal point of view, we find that these two scriptures are in plain contrast with one another, and accordingly create the gap of theological dogma between Christians and Muslims. I argue that even if we do take the term Begotten of God from a literal point of view, the Qur'an does not seem to be contradicting the New Testament, but it is interpreting it instead. Although Heikki Räisänen suggests that it is more important to interpret the Qur'an through the Qur'an and not through the Bible, it is evident that the Qur'an is actually invoking the use of the Bible and in direct engagement with it,¹ as it attempts to interpret it. Hence, it is important to make a textual analysis between the Qur'an and the Bible to identify the possible meanings. Unfortunately, some scholars attempt to make historical assumptions of possible Christian influences on the authorship of the Qur'an, while neglecting the literary analysis of the Qur'anic discourse in its attempt to interpret the Bible.²

This is not about the history of Muslim and Christian relations from an historical perspective. It is specifically a comparative study between Christian and Muslim scriptures. Accordingly, I will not be making any historical assumptions, and consequently, I will not be making any historical conclusions. I will be making an analysis that is mainly textual through a linguistic approach, by simply stating that the Qur'an is interpreting the Bible in the topic of Jesus as Begotten of God without rejecting the concept at all. The Qur'an simply interprets Begotten of God with the concept of "*takwin*" instead of "*tawlid*."³ As I have been arguing, the theology and Christology of the Qur'an may be different than how it was later developed in the Muslim community. Muḥammad's intentions seem to have been marred by later Muslims who sought to differentiate themselves from the Judeo-Christian roots of the Qur'an.⁴

To be

The terms Begotten of God and Son of God are two distinct terminologies. Since they can be sometimes confused with each other, it is very important to note their distinction from a linguistic point of view, besides even their possible theological implications.⁵ The Greek term in the New Testament for Son is *"huios,"* which corresponds to the Arabic *"ibn"* in the Qur'an. Even though the Qur'an many times rejects that God has begotten (*walad*), the term *"ibn Allah"* is only mentioned in a single passage in Qur'an 9:30, which has already been discussed in Chapter 5. The Greek term for begotten is rooted in *"gennaō"* or *"ginomai"* meaning to generate and corresponding to the Arabic *"walad"* or *"kawwan."* For the purpose of an accurate textual analysis, it is necessary to keep in mind the two distinct terminologies for Begotten and Son and how the Qur'an specifically engages with each one of them.

The Qur'an always rejects that God has begotten using the root of the term *"walad."* In some instances where the Qur'an denies that God has begotten, it reaffirms instead that whatever God wills, He but says to it *"be,"* and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*) (e.g., Qur'an 2:116–117, 19:35). This Qur'anic concept and distinction between *"tawlīd"* and *"takwīn,"* in which both can be understood as generation, is important. As such, the Greek terminology of *"begotten"* in the New Testament needs to be carefully analyzed.

According to the Gospel of John, the Logos, which is typically understood as Jesus Christ, is the only-begotten (*monogenous*) of God (i.e., John 1:14). The term *"monogenēs"* is used in John 1:18, *"monogenē"* is used in John 3:16, and *"monogenous"* is repeated in John 3:18. There are two related theories on the etymology of *"monogenēs."* One theory suggests the roots are from the term *"monos,"* meaning only, and the term *"genos,"* meaning derived or a kind.⁶ Hence, *"monogenēs"* could mean *"one of a kind (unique)"* and not necessarily *"only-begotten."*⁷ The Septuagint uses the term *"monogenēs"* for the Hebrew *"yahīd,"* which means only but understood as only child in Judges 11:34. However, the Septuagint also uses the term *"agapētos"* for *"yahīd"* (e.g., Genesis 22:2, 22:16, Jeremiah 6:26, Amos 8:10, Zechariah 12:10). The second theory on the etymological roots of *"monogenēs"* suggests the terms *"monos"* and *"ginomai,"*⁸ but this is still related to the first theory. The possible etymological root of *"genos"* is *"gignomai,"* which is to be born, to become, or to beget.⁹ The term *"gignomai"* is related to *"ginomai,"* which is the Ionic and Hellenistic form of the verb.¹⁰ The verb *"ginomai"* means *"to become."* Hence, the root meaning of *"monogenēs"* is either *"unique"* or *"only become."* If the meaning is *"unique,"* then it should not be considered as *"begotten,"*¹¹ and therefore, may not be an issue in the Qur'an. In Hebrews 11:17, the term *"monogenē"* is used as a reference to Abraham's son Isaac while being offered as a sacrifice. Isaac is not the *"only"* one whom Abraham begat, but he is *"unique,"* as he was conceived by a barren woman at old age. If the author of Hebrews was thinking through Genesis 22:2 in making the statement, the Septuagint does not translate Abraham's only (*yahīd*) son in Genesis 22:2, 22:12, and 22:16 as *"monogenē,"* but translates it as *"agapētos,"* meaning beloved. Perhaps the translators writing the Septuagint understood the term *"yahīd"* as the only beloved of Abraham, knowing that generally speaking Isaac is not the only son of Abraham. Nonetheless, it might still be understood as *"only"* of Abraham and Sarah, as a couple. The Synoptic Gospels use the term *"agapētos"* to describe Jesus as the

beloved son (i.e., Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Mark 1:11, 9:7, Luke 3:22). In a parable, Mark and Luke also relate Jesus talking of a beloved son using the term “*agapēton*” (i.e., Mark 12:6, Luke 20:13). If the meaning of “*monogenē*” is “only become,” then it would be related to the Arabic term “*takawwan*” instead of “*tawallad*,” which this chapter examines.

Beyond the Gospel of John, the New Testament uses the term begotten in some other instances as well. In Acts 13:33, the term “*gegennēka*” (have begotten) is used, while quoting Psalm 2:7, using the same Greek term as it is in the Septuagint and translating it from the Hebrew “*yelidti*,” which is cognate to the Arabic “*yalid*” and “*walad*.” The same Greek term “*gegennēka*” is used in Hebrews 1:5 and repeated in Hebrews 5:5, which also quotes Psalm 2:7. In 1 John 4:9, it reiterates the concept from John 3:16, where God loves the world and sends his “*monogenē*” to save the world through him. In 1 John 5:1, it uses the terms “*gegennētai*” and “*gegennēmenon*” to mean “has been born,” as a reference to those who are born of God. It continues in 1 John 5:18 using the term “*gegennēmenos*” for “who has been born” and the term “*gennētheis*” for “who was born,” also as references to those born of God. The various morphologies for the term “begotten” are rooted in the term “*gennaō*” or “*genna*.”¹² The term “*genna*” is related to “*genos*” and “*gignomai*,” and there is a debate on the origin of the geminate “*nn*.”¹³ One explanation is that the “*nn*” is a restoration of the root “*gen-*” after “*genos*.”¹⁴ Although there is a controversy on the best way to translate “*monogenēs*,” I will use “only-begotten,” because it is the most popular translation. Regardless of how it is translated, I am not looking at it from a Greek scholar point of view. Instead, I argue how the Qur’an understands it. I argue that the Qur’an understands it as “*takawwan*” in Arabic instead of “*tawallad*,” or more precisely since the Greek term “*monogenēs*” is a noun, the Qur’an interprets it as “*mutakawwan*” instead of “*mutawallad*,” for the reasons I will provide.

The difference between the Greek terms “*gennaō*” and “*gignomai*” can sometimes be ambiguous. The same is with the English terms, such as “born of” and “beget,” in which the father begets, but the mother bears.¹⁵ The term “to be” in Greek can either fall under the root “*ginomai*” or “*eimi*.” The term “*ginomai*” is usually understood to mean “become,” which would correspond to the Arabic “*kn*.” The term “*eimi*” is the typical verb “to be,” which can also correspond to “*kn*.” In addition, considering the difference between the Arabic understandings of “*tawlīd*” and “*takwīn*,” it could be ambiguous on which would correspond to the Greek “*gennaō*” or “*ginomai*.” This concept is also similar to the Hebrew “*ehyeh*” and “*yalid*.” I will further explicate how the terms between the Arabic/Hebrew and the Greek terminologies are not always consistent with the use of few examples.

Semitic languages do not always explicitly use the verb “to be,” as it is usually understood from context. If the term is made explicit, then it corresponds to the Arabic “*kn*” or the Hebrew “*hyh*.” For example, to say “I am who (that) I am” in Arabic could be done in two ways. If the term “to be” is to be understood from context, then it would be translated as, “*innī ana*” or “*innanī ana*,” which the Qur’an describes how God identifies Himself to Moses in Qur’an 20:12–14. If the term “to be” is used explicitly, it may be translated as “*akun mn (alladhī) akun*.”¹⁶ In Exodus 3:14, the phraseology uses the term “to be” explicitly, in which it corresponds to the Hebrew “*ehyeh asher ehyeh*.” The

Septuagint translates it as “*egō eimi o’Ōn kai eimen*,” using the term “*eimi*” for “*ehyeh*.” However, the Hebrew term “*ehyeh*” is not always translated to a term corresponding to the Greek “*eimi*.” For example, in Genesis, when the Hebrew term “*yhy*” is understood as “let there be,” the Septuagint uses “*genēthēto*,” while when it is understood as “there was,” the Septuagint uses “*egeneto*.” Accordingly, the term “to be,” whether in Hebrew (*hyh*) or Arabic (*kn*), can sometimes correspond to either the Greek roots “*ginomai*” or “*eimi*.” However, the Arabic and Hebrew terms “*wld*” or “*yld*” would particularly be understood as corresponding to the Greek root “*gennaō*” and its various related morphologies.

Logos

In Qur’anic literary style, the distinction between the concepts of “*tawlid*” and “*takwīn*” must be carefully noted and analyzed, especially on the issue of Jesus as Begotten of God. While the Qur’an seems adamant to deny the concept of “*tawlid*,” it is contrasted with a strong affirmation of “*takwīn*.” However, how those concepts should be translated, let alone even understood, can be debated. Since the Arabic term “*kn*” corresponds to the Hebrew “*hyh*,” which is subsequently translated sometimes through Greek roots of “*ginomai*” or “*eimi*,” we are in an awkward position when doing a textual analysis between the Arabic Qur’an and the Greek Gospel. Which word corresponds to which becomes speculative. However, I argue that the Qur’anic discourse attempts to interpret the Greek Gospel with a particular understanding of the term by emphasizing “*takwīn*” and denying “*tawlid*.” The reason, I argue, that the Qur’an tries to make such an emphasis is due to the theological implication that the Qur’an apparently believes the Gospel is trying to portray. According to the Qur’an, Jesus Christ is not “*walad*” (begotten) of God. On the contrary, God says to Jesus “*kun fa-yakūn*” (be and he becomes). If God says to Jesus “be” (*kn*) and so he becomes (*fa-yakūn*), then Jesus is indeed become (*takawwan*) of God. As such, the Qur’an does not truly deny that Jesus is become of God, but distinguishes between begotten from “*tawlid*” and become from “*takwīn*.” Even though the Qur’an seems to firmly deny Jesus is “*tawallad*” of God, it at the same time firmly affirms that Jesus is “*takawwan*” of God, in which both terminologies are still compatible with the Greek root of “*ginomai*,” as shown earlier. However, the reason the Qur’an is making such a distinction so fervently is perhaps in its attempt to interpret the Gospel of John. I argue that the Qur’an attempts to interpret and identify the Logos with the term “to be” (*kn*), and it is for that reason that the Qur’an emphasizes “*takwīn*,” while denying “*tawlid*.” As the Qur’an is touching on the subject of Jesus Christ Begotten of God, then it is imperative to compare the language of the Gospel of John on this topic, as it is only one of the four canonical Gospels that rhetorically insists on Christ “*monogenē*” of God.¹⁷ I argue that understanding the Logos is imperative to the understanding of the “*monogenous*” in John’s prologue. I also argue that the Qur’an attempts to make such a relationship between the Logos and the “*monogenē*,” while interpreting John’s intentions. Even though Räsänen suggests that it is important to interpret the Logos from Muḥammad’s point of view and not a Christian one,¹⁸ I argue that the Qur’an is not bringing a new view of the Logos, but is actually

trying to interpret John's definition thereof. It has been argued before by Robert Zaehner that the Qur'an, unlike later Muslim Christology, does not deny the divinity of Jesus or the Johannine Logos.¹⁹

As Roger Haight states, "No biblical [*sic*] text has had more influence on the development of christology [*sic*] than the Prologue to John's gospel."²⁰ The Qur'an may appear to have a different Christology than that presented in John's prologue. Since the Qur'an may present itself with a different Christology, but at the same time not denying the Gospel[s], then we must try to understand this apparent contradiction, if indeed it is. Such a contradiction seems unlikely to pass through an intelligent and creative Muḥammad, unless he did not see it as a contradiction himself. For that reason, I argue that the Qur'an is not refuting the Gospel of John, but is attempting to interpret it instead.

There have been attempts of reconciling the Christologies by understanding certain Shī'ī concepts,²¹ such as a tradition attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib describing himself and his progeny, as the Word and Spirit of God, who are light that dwelled in their bodies.²² However, we must try to distinguish between what is considered Qur'anic and what is considered part of a post-Qur'anic tradition.

The prologue of the Gospel of John (i.e., John 1:1–18) is typically described as logically distinct from the main body of the Gospel, and by some regarded to adopt a pre-Christian hymn.²³ M. John Farrelly states: "This pre-Christian hymn is not gnostic; it is probably a fragment of an ancient myth of Wisdom adapted to 'Word' in a Judeo-Hellenistic milieu, reflecting the medium by which the transcendent God made contact with the created world."²⁴

Farrelly suggests that the Word in the Gospel of John is different than that of Philo, as it becomes incarnate in the historical figure of Jesus.²⁵ John does not use the term *Sophia* (Wisdom), but keeps it as *Logos* (Word),²⁶ giving reason why some scholars do not accept it as a source for Johannine Logos.²⁷ Farrelly refers to John 1:14, in which John identifies the Word as the Son of God, which he then uses this title as a reference to Jesus in the rest of the Gospel.²⁸ Nonetheless, John 1:14 specifically uses the term "*monogenous*," which I would like to keep distinct from the term "son" (*huiou*) that John uses in John 3:16–18. We should acknowledge that John does not explicitly identify Jesus as either the Logos or the "*monogenē*" throughout his Gospel, but does identify Jesus as the Son (*huios/huiou*) of God (e.g., John 10:36, 20:31).

Rudolf Bultmann suggested similarities between John's Gospel and Gnostic writings.²⁹ Craig Evans portrayed similarities between John's Gospel and Gnostic writings, namely the Coptic *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the Syriac *Odes of Solomon*, and *Corpus Hermeticum*.³⁰ The parallels portrayed are striking, though Evans dismisses them.³¹ Since the existence of pre-Christian Gnosticism is debatable, with some scholars debating against concrete evidence of their existence,³² then perhaps they were influenced by John's Gospel, and not the other way round.

Charles H. Dodd argued the similarities between Philo's writings with that of John in using common symbolism, such as "*logos*" and "*shepherd*."³³ He argues that Johannine literature may best be viewed through its Jewish roots. Some scholars find parallelism between John's prologue and Jewish Wisdom writings.³⁴ James Dunn considers John 1:1–14 to contain nothing unusual for a Hellenistic Jew who is familiar with Philo's mystical hermeneutics or Wisdom literature.³⁵

Philo frequently calls God's speech in the Hebrew Bible "*logos*," perhaps due to the Septuagint's rendition of God's word (*debar*) as "*logos*" (e.g., Exodus 20:1, Deuteronomy 1:1). Philo mentions the word that caused the whole world to be made as God's "*logō*," referring to Deuteronomy 34:5.³⁶ When describing the "*logos*," which made the world become (*ginomenō*), Philo suggests that God's word and action come automatically together,³⁷ which is echoed by a tradition attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.³⁸

Ed L. Miller suggests that the origins of the Johannine Logos should not go beyond Johannine literature (i.e., not influenced by either Greek "Wisdom" literature or Philo's Logos).³⁹ He suggests that the term "*logos*" is often used in the body of the Gospel, and is sometimes used to signify the message and teachings of Jesus.⁴⁰ However, Miller sometimes uses the term "word" in John's Gospel very loosely, as he also accepts the term "*rhēma*."⁴¹ However, there are truly other instances in which Jesus' "word(s)" are rooted in "*logos*" (e.g., John 4:41, 5:24, 7:40, 8:31).

At the beginning of the Gospel of John, the topic that the author addresses is that of the Logos.⁴² "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God (or God was the Logos)."⁴³ The theological implication at the beginning of the Gospel of John is that the Logos is identified as God.⁴⁴ John, starting with "in the beginning (*en archē*)," resembles Genesis.⁴⁵ It appears as if John attempts to interpret the prologue of Genesis,⁴⁶ perhaps because the Jewish midrash relates the beginning of Genesis with the Messiah.⁴⁷

The Gospel continues to state about the Logos, "All things came into being (*egeneto*) through him, and without him not one thing came into being (*egeneto*) that has become (*gegonen*)."⁴⁸ According to John, the Logos is the source of all things that came to be (*egeneto*). Also, the Logos is the life that is the light (*phōs*) of all people (i.e., John 1:4). This light (*phōs*) shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it (i.e., John 1:5). The allusions of John continue to be related to Genesis. First, there is the phrase "in the beginning," which parallels with Genesis 1:1. John uses the terminology found in the Septuagint, "*en archē*." Second, John states that the Logos is the source of all that came to be, which parallels the Genesis account of generation on how God made things to be, by saying "let there be." John also employs the terminology used in the Septuagint of the things that came to be, "*egeneto*." Third, John describes this source as the Logos, which is the Word, giving it an impression that it is a form of speech or something articulated. This also has parallels in Genesis whenever it states "and God said, let there be (*genēthēto*)."⁴⁹ Fourth, John suggests that the Logos is light, which shines in darkness. This also parallels Genesis that the first thing that God said was for light to become, and It divided the light from the darkness.

If we are to read Genesis independent of the Gospel of John, then it might be appropriate to suggest that God is the source of all things that came to be, and the Word that God uses to bring things to be is "be," which is "*yhy*" in Hebrew translated as "*genēthēto*" in the Septuagint. The apparent difference that John seems to be taking is identifying the Word as God. However, that should not be surprising. In Exodus 3:14, when Moses asks God to identify Himself, the answer is, "*ehyeh asher ehyeh*," which means "I am who I am." As such, God identifies Himself to Moses with the word, "be."⁵⁰ In Exodus 6:3, God is explicitly identified as "*Yahweh*," which might be apparently also rooted in the term "*hyh*" meaning "be."⁵¹ Therefore, the name of God, *Yahweh*, is more

appropriately understood as *The Being*, the one who is present, or the one who brings forth things that become (a God who acts).⁵² On the meaning of *Yahweh* in Exodus 6:2, the Talmud states, “The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, ‘I am He who spoke and the world came into being.’”⁵³

Some scholars also suggest that John’s prologue, especially John 1:14–18, has a relationship with Exodus 33–34.⁵⁴ It is suggested that John 1:17 compares the giving of the Law through Moses in Sinai, while grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ It is also suggested that seeing the glory (*doxan*) in John 1:14 is contrasted with Moses asking to see God’s glory (*doxan/doxa* in the Septuagint; rooted in “*k b d*” in Hebrew) in Exodus 33:18 and 33:20.⁵⁶ John 1:18 states, “No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten (*monogenēs*) God,⁵⁷ who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” This is contrasted when Moses asks to see God, and God tells him that he cannot see Its face, but only Its back (i.e., Exodus 33:20–23; Qur’an 7:143). If John 1:14 is a reference to the glory (*k b d*) in Exodus 33:18 and 33:20, then there might be an interesting reference of John 1:18 in Qur’an 90:3–4, “And the father (begetter/*wālid*) and that which was born (begotten/*walad*) (or that which was not begotten). We have created the human in *kabad*.”⁵⁸ This is the only instance where the root “*k b d*” is used in the Qur’an.

These passages may shed light on Qur’an 112:1–4, “Say, He (*huwa*) is Allah the One (*aḥad*). Allah the indivisible (bound/yoke) (*ṣamad*).⁵⁹ Neither begets (*yālid*) nor begotten (*yūlad*). And nor is there one (*aḥad*) to subvert (*kufuwan*) Him.” It has already been suggested that the first passage asserting the unity of God using the term “*aḥad*” echoes the Jewish *Shema*,⁶⁰ “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God the Lord is one (*Shema Yisrael, YHWH Elohaynu YHWH aḥad*).”⁶¹ The Talmud Yerushalmi emphasizes the term “*aḥad*.”⁶² Since “*ṣamad*” may mean to join or to yoke,⁶³ then this further may suggest an intertextuality between these passages with the *Shema*, as the *Shema* is considered “the acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven.”⁶⁴ According to classical exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī, the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) is due to Jews asking Muḥammad to speak of his God,⁶⁵ which might further support its probable reference to the *Shema* in that it might have been a response to the Jews. Although the current sources of the possible connection between this Qur’anic chapter with the *Shema* emphasize the term “*aḥad*,” it may be noted that the first verse uses “*qul huwa Allah aḥad*,” in which the pronoun “*huwa*” (He) may have its own Semitic etymology meaning to be,⁶⁶ which also resonates with God’s name (*Yahweh*) in the *Shema*.⁶⁷ In addition to this, the term “*qul*” (say) may be understood that it is a speech, in which the listener is expected to hear, which may also be a reference to the *Shema* that means “hear.” The chapter is called *al-Ikhlāṣ*, which is typically understood as sincerity or devotion, but it could also mean salvation or exclusiveness.⁶⁸ Also, it may mean loins, or to withdraw, to untie, to extract, or to show oneself strong (ready for fighting).⁶⁹ Usually, a Qur’anic chapter is named using a word that exists in its content, but there are few exceptions (e.g., Qur’an 1, 21). Qur’an 112 is one of those few exceptions. If *Ikhlāṣ* means sincerity or devotion, then this might echo the second verse of the *Shema*, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might”⁷⁰ and the subsequent verses, which may be understood that a person must have full devotion to God in whatever they do. The Talmud interprets “with all your heart” to mean with both your good and bad inclinations.⁷¹ It interprets “with

all your soul" to mean even if God takes your soul.⁷² It interprets "with all your might" to mean with all your wealth.⁷³

This now brings us to Qur'an 112:3–4, which states that this inseparable God neither begets (*yālid*) nor is begotten (*yūlad*). Although it has been suggested that these passages are directly denying the Nicene Creed,⁷⁴ they may be engaging with both the Nicene Creed and the principal Trinitarian foundation that might have evolved into the pseudo-Athanasian Creed.⁷⁵ First, it seems that the Qur'an is still trying to emphasize the concept of "*takwīn*" by denying "*tawlid*," which as suggested earlier that the use of "*huwa*" might be denoting Yahweh in the *Shema* that is perhaps rooted in the term "be." Second, the pseudo-Athanasian Creed talks of three persons without dividing the essence, which could also be associated with the term "*šamad*" that may mean inseparable. Third, the term "*kufuwān*" may hold several meanings one of which is equal, and perhaps it is engaging with the pseudo-Athanasian Creed, which states that the three persons are coequal, but Jesus Christ is only equal to the Father pertaining to him being Son of God, but inferior to the Father pertaining to his manhood. If the root of this term is "*k f a*," then this is the only passage in the Qur'an that uses it, very much like "*šamad*," making both of these terms *hapax legomena*. If, however, it is rooted in "*k f y*," then there indeed are many passages that use it.

I admit that how the Qur'an attempts to engage with the Nicene Creed and perhaps the foundations of what later came to be known as the pseudo-Athanasian Creed seems like a puzzle.⁷⁶ The pseudo-Athanasian Creed, for example, suggests that the Godhead's essence is indivisible and coequal, but the persons are separate. Is the Qur'an denouncing the pseudo-Athanasian Creed, which attempts to separate the persons of the Godhead, while agreeing to that God's essence is indivisible? Edwin Walhout suggests the following on the pseudo-Athanasian Creed: (i) it presupposes a docetic mentality, (ii) it defines the Trinity docetically, and (iii) its acceptance requires fideism, and is used to distinguish Christianity from other religions, such as Islam.⁷⁷ Qur'an 4:171–172 explicitly asks Christians not to say "three." Though the elements that make up the Trinity may have started in early Christianity, but as a doctrine, it was explicitly defined by Tertullian (d. 225 CE).⁷⁸ While the Nicene Creed is not explicit about the Trinity, in which the Godhead is in three persons, the pseudo-Athanasian Creed explicitly says they are three in one God. Perhaps the Qur'an is more adamant against the foundations of the Trinity as it evolved into the pseudo-Athanasian Creed than the Nicene Creed. When elaborating on the Nicene Creed, Ambrose (d. 397 CE) states: "So, then, he himself who calls the Son of God the maker of heavenly things, has also plainly said that all things were made in the Son, that in renewal of His works He might by no means separate the Son from the Father, but unite Him to the Father."⁷⁹

The Qur'an seems to interpret the Gospel of John without denying it. According to Genesis, God is the source of all things that came to be, and the Word that God uses to bring forth everything to be is "be" (*yhy/ḡenēthēto*). According to Exodus, God is identified to be Himself the Word "be" (*Ehyeh/Yahweh*).⁸⁰ John states that the Word is the source of all things that came to be (*egeneto*) and the Word was in Itself God. In a later discourse, John quotes Jesus saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was (*ḡenesthai*), I am (*egō eimi*)."⁸¹ John, here, brings the Septuagint's translation of "I am" (*ehyeh*) in Exodus 3:14. Therefore, it seems likely that John considers the Logos as the

Word “be,” which is the source of all things that came to be, and it in itself is identified with the name of God. Ambrose states:

Therefore, let the soul which wishes to approach God raise herself from the body and cling always to that Highest Good which is divine, and lasts forever, and which was from the beginning and which was with God,⁸² that is, the Word of God. This is the Divine Being “in which we live and are and move.”⁸³ This was in the beginning, this is: “The Son of God, Jesus Christ in you,” he says, “in whom there was not Yes and No, but only Yes was in him.”⁸⁴ He Himself told Moses to say: “He who is hath sent me.”⁸⁵

Although I do not see in Ambrose’s letter that he defines the Word with the name of God (*Ehyeh/Yahweh*), there is one source that suggests this relationship.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, at least this seems to be how the Qur’an interprets the Gospel of John when it insists on “*takwīn*” instead of “*tawlid*.”

¹¹⁶ And they say: “God has begotten (*waladā*).”⁸⁷ Glory be to Him! Rather, unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and on the earth. All are devoutly obedient to Him,¹¹⁷ the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, “Be!” and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*).⁸⁸

³⁴ That is Jesus son of Mary—a statement of the truth, which they doubt. ³⁵ It is not for God to take a child (*walad*). Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing, He only says to it, “Be!” and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*).⁸⁹

The Qur’an in these verses does not seem to outright deny that God generates. The Qur’an is simply denying that God generates through “*tawlid*,” and instead insists that God generates through “*takwīn*.” According to the Qur’an, God makes things become through the word “*kn*,” as can be seen in various Qur’anic passages (e.g., Qur’an 6:73, 16:40, 36:82, 40:68), and not through “*yld*,” as can be seen in other various Qur’anic passages (e.g., Qur’an 6:101, 25:2). Therefore, even on the topic of Jesus, the Qur’an seems to be emphasizing how it interprets John’s understanding of the Logos, using the Word “*kn*,” which is the keyword, and not “*wld*.” This shows that the Qur’an is adopting a Johannine interpretation of Christ as the Word of God, which is not necessarily created but an agent of creation.⁹⁰ Early Muslim theological schools, such as the Ash‘arī and Mu‘tazilī, emerged debating whether or not the words of God, the Qur’an, is created or uncreated.⁹¹ “Truly the likeness of Jesus in the sight of God is that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be!’ and he is (*kun fa-yakūn*).”⁹²

Although Muslim thought has associated the term for creation with “*kn*” (be), we realize from the above verse that it is not necessarily so. As stated earlier, the term “*khlq*” may also hold the meaning to divide and not only create, but regardless, the above Qur’anic passage states that God did the “*khalq*” and then (*thumma*) said “be.” There are two types of the term “then” in Arabic, “*fa-*” and “*thumma*.” The term “*fa-*” is usually understood to mean immediately after, while the term “*thumma*” is usually understood to mean after a while.⁹³ The above verse uses the term “*thumma*,” which

means that it is stating that God “*khlq*” Adam from dust, and *then* (after a while) said to him “be,” and immediately after (*fa-*) saying “be,” he becomes. Using the term “*thumma*” does not only imply that God saying “be” is an occurrence after a while, but also implies that God saying “be” is not necessarily a direct consequence of “*khlq*” from dust. However, the term “*fa-*” implies that the “becoming” (*yakūn*) is in direct consequence of saying “be” (*kn*). The Qur'an explicitly shows that God did not say “be” to create. The Qur'an is distinguishing between creation and being.⁹⁴ They are *not* the same. God created and then (after a while) said “be,” and saying “be” is not even necessarily a consequence of God's creation. Notably, the above passage does not use the title “messiah” for Jesus. However, when the Qur'an uses the term “*kalimah*” (Word) for Jesus, it uses the title “messiah.” “When the angels said, O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings (*yubashshiruki*) of a Word (*bi-kalimah*) from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought nigh.”⁹⁵

If the Qur'an is interpreting John's Logos with the term “be,” then perhaps it may be understood from the Qur'an that God created Jesus' physical body from dust through Mary, and this Jesus without the “messiah” title is simply the physical body. However, when the Word (*kalimah*), which is “be,” dwells within this body of Jesus, he is given the title “messiah,” and this “be” is in itself perhaps uncreated, because it is the source and agent of creation.⁹⁶ Prominently, the term used to mean glad tidings of this Word is “*yubashshiruki*” that is rooted in “*b s h r*,” which is polysemous and one of its meanings is “flesh.” The Incarnation of the Word will further be explored in the next chapter. Qur'an 5:17 and 5:72 seem to suggest that God is not the Messiah the son of Mary. Qur'an 5:17 asks who will be able to subvert God, if God wills to “*yuhlika*” the Messiah son of Mary and his mother and everyone on earth. The root “*h l k*” is polysemous with meanings ranging from death, destruction, and falling.⁹⁷ In Hebrew and Aramaic, the term is associated with walking, passing, or moving from one place to another.⁹⁸ Perhaps in Arabic it came to mean passing away, as a person goes from one place to another.⁹⁹ Also, the meaning of destruction in Arabic might also have come from the meaning making them go away (wipe out).

Possibly, when the Qur'an uses the term “son of Mary,” it is distinguishing between the human Jesus who has the Word in him (giving him the title “messiah”), from the Word itself, which is perhaps uncreated. I have a strong inclination to assume that the Qur'an apparently is aware of the Christological differences between the Gospel of John and the rest. Take note that in the Gospel of John there is no reference of Jesus' human birth from Mary.¹⁰⁰ To further support the notion that, when the Qur'an speaks of Jesus without using the term “messiah,” it is specifically talking of Jesus' physical body, is the following verse: “when He said, ‘O Jesus, I shall take thee and raise thee unto Me, and purify thee of those who disbelieved, and place those who followed thee above those who disbelieved, until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me is your return, and I shall judge between you concerning that wherein you used to differ.’”¹⁰¹

This verse is suggesting that Jesus' physical body (not the “messiah”) will die. Just few verses later, in Qur'an 3:59, it states that Jesus' physical body (not the “messiah”) is created from dust, and the Word, “*kn*,” comes later. As stated earlier, defining “*takwīn*” and “*tawlid*” may both hold the meaning of generation, corresponding to the Greek

roots “*ginomai*” and “*gennaō*.” However, the Qur’an perhaps provides us with a clue of what it considers the difference between those two terms in a passage that precedes the one above. “She said, ‘My Lord, how shall I have a child (*walad*) while no flesh [human] (*bashar*) being has touched me?’ He said, ‘Thus does God create whatsoever He will.’ When He decrees a thing (*amran*), He only says to it, ‘Be!’ and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*)!”¹⁰²

According to this passage, Mary asks how she can beget (*walad*), when no flesh (man) had touched her. The Qur’an does not deny that Jesus is begotten through “*tawlid*,” as long as it emphasizes that the “*tawlid*” is something that had come from Mary, while “*takwīn*” is something that had come from God. Even though the above passage does not even answer whether or not Jesus is even begotten (*tawallad*) from Mary, the passages below confirm that Jesus was, in fact, somehow begotten through “*tawlid*.” However, it is not God that had begotten him through “*tawlid*,” for according to the Qur’an, God had begotten him through “*takwīn*” instead:

³³ Peace be upon me the day I was born (*wulidtu*), the day I die, and the day I am raised alive!” ³⁴ That is Jesus son of Mary—a statement of the truth, which they doubt. ³⁵ It is not for God to take a child (*walad*). Glory be to Him! When He decrees a thing (*amran*), He only says to it, “Be!” and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*).¹⁰³

The Qur’an appears to differentiate the concept of “*tawlid*” from the concept of “*takwīn*” in that “*tawlid*” is understood as physical birth, while “*takwīn*” is something more abstract. John attempts to differentiate between the concepts of physical birth and born of God when stating, “who were born (*gennaō*) not of blood, nor of the will of flesh (*sarkos*), nor of the will of man (*andros*), but of God.”¹⁰⁴ According to the Qur’an, Mary questions how she can beget (*walad*) when no flesh (man) had touched her. Hence, in the Qur’an, to beget through “*tawlid*,” it is assumed that it is physical flesh. Since “*tawlid*” and “*takwīn*” can share the same root in Greek, which is “*gennaō*” or “*ginomai*,” John apparently had to make an explicit statement differentiating between that which is born physically and that which is born through God. Actually, John even furthermore explicates the difference between begotten of flesh and begotten of God, when describing the mystery of being born again in a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus:

³ Jesus replied, “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless one is born (*gennēthē*) again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ “How can a man be born (*gennēthēnai*) when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born (*gennēthēnai*)?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless one is born (*gennēthē*) of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born (*gegennēmenon*) of the flesh (*sarkos*) is flesh (*sarkos*), and that which is born (*gegennēmenon*) of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born (*gennēthēnai*) again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born (*gegennēmenos*) of the Spirit.”¹⁰⁵

The term used by John for being born is rooted in the Greek “*gennaō*.” John differentiates between those born of flesh (*sarkos*) and those born of the Spirit. In the

Qur'an, Mary uses the term "*walad*" as an understanding of being born of flesh (*bashar*). Meanwhile, when the Qur'an rebukes that God begets through "*tawlid*," it reaffirms that whatever God commands (*amr*), He says to it, "be" (*kn*), especially in the case of Jesus (i.e., Qur'an 3:47, 19:35). The Qur'anic usage of God's command (*amr*) in these passages may be significant in trying to understand the Qur'anic differentiation between the concepts of "*tawlid*" and "*takwin*." According to the Qur'an, the Spirit is identified with God's command (*amr*), "They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is from the Command (*amr*) of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little.'"¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the concept of "*tawlid*," according to the Qur'an, is understood as born of flesh (*bashar*), while the concept of "*takwin*" may be understood as those born of God's command (*amr*) that is associated with the Spirit. While John seems to make an explicit differentiation between those born of flesh from those born of the Spirit by handling the Greek "*gennaō*," the Qur'an is simply making this differentiation by using two distinct words "*tawlid*" and "*takwin*."

Therefore, the Qur'an is not necessarily contradicting the New Testament when it outright denies that Jesus is begotten (*walad*) of God. Actually, the Qur'an is interpreting the Gospel of John using precise words by identifying the Logos with the word "be," which is in Itself God (*Ehyeh/Yahweh*), and the Qur'an precisely distinguishes between those born of flesh and those born of the Spirit. After John makes the distinction between those born of flesh and those born of the Spirit, he continues stating expressively that God sent His "*monogenē*" to save the world, but there are those who still do not believe in the name of the "*monogenous*" Son of God (i.e., John 3:16–19). The Qur'an seems to agree that Jesus is "*takawwan*" of God, as it is to be understood spiritually (*takawwan*) and not physically (*tawallad*). However, as stated earlier, the Qur'an is at the same time not denying that Jesus is also a physical person, as he was "*walad*" of flesh from Mary, and was also become (*takawwan*) of God. On a sermon about the nativity of Jesus Christ, Augustine states that there are two births; one, which is divine, and another, which is human.¹⁰⁷ On the portrayal of Mary, the mother of Jesus in the Gospel of John, Turid Seim concludes the following:

But there is no female principle involved in the divine begetting and birth-giving. The mother does not matter because matter is what she provides. The only-begotten God/Son who is in the *κόλπον* of the Father (John 1.18) bears the children of God, in whom the *σπέρμα*, that is, the *πνεῦμα* of God, abides. They are begotten as born not of bloods, not of the will of flesh or of the will of man, but of God . . .¹⁰⁸

Seim concludes that the role of the mother as childbearer is nonexistent in the Gospel of John as the author attempts to distinguish physical birth from a spiritual birth.

There have been suggestions of the Johannine Logos' relationship with the *Memra* of the Targum, which also keeps it within the context of Semitic Jewish instead of Hellenistic notions.¹⁰⁹ The *Memra* is the Aramaic rendition of the Word in the Targum, sometimes denoting the Word of God. The *Memra* might have been a clue to the "*yhy*" in Genesis 1. After all, the *Memra* is rooted in "*amar*," which means "said" that Genesis 1 frequently uses to describe whenever God "said" something, and the first thing that God "*amar*" (said) is "*yhy*." Some scholars, such as Martin McNamara have dismissed

the *Memra* as a background to John's Logos. In discussing the weakness of the *Memra* theory, McNamara states: "To begin with, whereas in John Logos is not just another manner of expressing the divine Name but is a term rich in theological import, the *Memra* of the Targum seems to be a term devoid of special content; it appears to be merely another way of saying 'God' or 'the Lord.'"¹¹⁰

Given the analysis portrayed in the relationship between the Logos and "yhy," I must disagree with McNamara's analysis in that John's Logos is in fact a reference to the Name of God (*Ehyeh/Yhwh*). John appears to be cautious in using the Logos as a reference to avoid using and spelling out God's name of the Hebrew Bible. It is possible that rendering God's name (*Yhwh*) would be too great a feat for John, that he would rather refer to it indirectly in keeping with its traditional sanctity. Besides, the Aramaic *Memra* of the Targum could have been exactly that; being related to the "*amar*" of Genesis 1, which is "yhy," associated with the name of God. Daniel Boyarin states: "In the Targumim we can see, or at any rate, construct a picture of how the *Memra* has also come into being in the exegesis of Gen 1:3. Exod. 3:12–14 (the theophany of the burning bush) and its targumic expositions are key texts."¹¹¹

Boyarin continues by stating about how God reveals His name to Moses in Exodus 3:12–14: "According to the Palestinian Targum, preserved in MS Neofiti 1, the Aramaic here reads: 'I, My *Memra*, will be with you.' The other targumim maintain this interpretation but add the element of the *Memra* as supporter, thus, 'And he said: Because my *Memra* will be for your support.'"¹¹²

The *Memra* of the Targum is clearly a reference to the "*amar*" of Genesis 1, which is "yhy," and the name of God in Exodus 3:14, which is "*Ehyeh*."¹¹³ Accordingly, Boyarin does not suggest that the Logos being God is the juncture between John and Judaism, but it is specifically the Incarnation of the Logos that causes such difference.¹¹⁴ However, by suggesting John's Logos is the term "be" (*hyh*), which the Targumim calls the *Memra*, it has also been suggested that it does not necessarily mean that it is completely distinct from the notion of Wisdom in the Bible and Jewish literature.¹¹⁵ In any case, given the evidence, the Logos being a reference to "*hyh*," rooted in the very Hebrew name of God and its relationship with the *Memra* of Targum provides us with a good plausible origin and definition of John's concept.

Conclusion

Is the Qur'an right to interpret the Johannine Logos with the term "be?" There is a likelihood that the Johannine Logos is related to the word "be," which is from the term "yhy" (rooted in *h y h*) in Genesis 1 that is translated in the Septuagint as "*genēthēto*." John perhaps associates the Logos as God, because the Hebrew Bible identifies God as "*Ehyeh*," which might also have been permuted morphologically into *Yhwh*. Through the medium of this Logos, everything was created in Genesis 1, and even more specifically starting with the light, which John uses in his prologue. The first word that God utters in Genesis 1 is "yhy." If we answer the above question with "perhaps, yes," then the reason why the Qur'an is trying to associate the term "*monogenous*" with the notion of "*takwīn*" instead of "*tawlīd*" becomes evident.

The Qur'an would not contradict John's description, "And the Word became (*egeneto*) flesh (*sarx*)."¹¹⁶ When the Qur'an suggests that the likeness of Jesus is that of Adam, he created him of dust, then said to him "be" and he becomes, it confirms that Jesus is flesh made of dust, as it might also suggest that Jesus is perhaps the word "be" becoming within that flesh.

As I deliberated, this section does not look into the Christological or theological implications of its observations. I am simply comparing the New Testament's text of Jesus as Begotten of God, and the Qur'anic interpretation of the same. The texts do not seem to contradict. Actually, the Qur'an is shown to be interpretive of the Bible, and does not necessarily deny it. However, the significance of this theologically is beyond the scope of this book or even the method of intertextual polysemy. As such, the Qur'an does not seem to contradict itself, when it asks Christians to adhere to the Gospel[s], while refuting its Christology. The Qur'an seems to be interpreting, in this case, the Gospel of John, and not denying it. It seems to associate the Logos with the term "be." Ibn Taymiyyah realizes the significance of the term "be" in Genesis as God's word of generation, but does not associate Jesus with this word.¹¹⁷ It is apparent that Muḥammad's intention in the Qur'an is distinct from how Christology later developed in the Muslim community.