Mustafa Ćeric must be congratulated for unearthing all this in a dense yet lucide manner. Indeed, there are only minor shortcomings to be noted. As is typical for a doctor’s thesis, the author makes a display of as much knoweldge, whether relevant or not as possible. (Do we ever know more than during our doctoral exam?). Less typical it is that our author refers to himself mostly as “we”. This is tricky because it can be taken as modesty or, on the contrary, as pluralis majestatis.

The book needed some more editing: Footnotes should not repeat publication data available in the bibliography. On the other hand, the bibliography should list all publications that are mentioned in the footnotes or have been referred to elsewhere in the book. This concerns, for instance, the books by English, Davidson, Murtada, and Sezgin, all of which are missing in the bibliography. Also, a second edition should not describe “Gotha” as a library in Berlin, but as a city in the German federal state of Thuringia, famous for its ancient Islamic library (p. 37).

Murad Wilfried Hofmann


The book under review is by a former Catholic scholar who accepted Islam in 1986. The stature of the writer, who is a trained theologian and has taught Trinitarian Theology and Biblical Studies for over three decades, is evident from the erudition, penetrating analysis and scholarly grasp of the subject displayed by the book. The extensive information, lucid style and sound treatment of the subject by the author fully bring out the skill of an experienced teacher and an able writer.

Much has been said and is still being said on the origins of the Christian Church and its founder, the latter being generally believed to be Jesus. From the advent of the Messiah to the present day there have lived millions of Christians and non-Christians who have entertained a variety of beliefs and doctrines, and have raised numerous questions as to who Jesus Christ was, what his original teachings were, what actually happened to him during the
The scholars of three kindred religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — have one thing in common: each asks some questions and also provides answers to the questions as regards the person, life and teachings of Jesus (peace be on him). Even though Jesus was born a Jew, and the Gospel narrations present him as such in his sayings and actions, the majority of Jews from his own time till the present have not believed in him nor have they seen him as one of them. He was also not accepted by them to be the Messiah from the line of King David, the one whom they had been waiting for. The few Jews who followed him later developed into a distinct religious group. They came to have a set of beliefs and concerns quite different from that of the Jewish community.

The extant historical records, including the Gospels, indicate that Jesus and his followers entertained the same beliefs and worshipped in the same Temple as the other Jews. What really happened to these Jewish Christians is one of the many areas of inquiry to which the book under review is addressed. Did they belong to the Qumran community whose library was discovered in 1947? Were they the Essenes who shared the ideas of the Zealots who were discontented with the Roman occupation of their land? Or were they pacific loyalists who did not see any wrong in the Roman rule? The writer has discussed these questions and has also examined whether the Jews and the High Priests and the Sanhedrin were solely to blame for the ‘crucifixion’ of Jesus (p. 13). The discussion and the overwhelming evidence presented by the author sheds useful light on the socio-political milieu in which Jesus carried out his ministry, making startling revelations regarding the true nature of the people who followed him.

The Christians, on the other hand, might be quite off the mark as regards the life and teachings of Jesus and the early history of Jesus’ followers. Jesus Christ, as we know, is regarded by the Christians as the second person in the Trinity who allegedly died for the sins of mankind. In the course of disagreements and clashes that arose concerning his nature, thousands upon thousands of Christians lost their lives. Quite contrary to their perceptions, Jesus was not only a simple-hearted and good-natured human being, but also one of the greatest Messengers of the One True God.

The writer ably brings into sharp focus the various theories that have been advanced as regards the historical Jesus and his biographers as well as the New Testament canon and the historical development of the Christian tradition. She dwells on the major events of the life of Jesus: his relationship
with the Roman and Herodian authorities and the Pharisees, the events that
led to his arrest, his ‘crucifixion’, ‘death’ and his subsequent ‘resurrection’ and
the events pertaining to his disciples’ state after him, especially their leader and
his brother James. All this is portrayed in the light of the traditional Christian
sources, modern academic researches and, at places, according to the long-held
Muslim views on the subject. Since this study is qualified as ‘Muslim’, Islamic
beliefs and assertions on the above-mentioned matters feature prominently (see
chapters 18 and 19).

The author forms part of a certain group of former Jewish and Christian
scholars whose dissatisfaction with the religions into which they were born
combined with their study of their own scriptures prompted them to search
for the truth beyond their own religious fold which eventually led them to
accept Muhammad (peace be upon him) as God’s Messenger and Islam as His
ture religion. These scholars include ‘Al-i ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabari (d. c. 250/865)
who wrote al-Dīn wa al-Dawlah....’, Naṣr ibn Yahyā (d. 589/1194), the author
of al-Naṣḥab al-Īmāniyyah fī Fadīhah al-Millah al-Nasrāniyyah, ‘Abd Allāh al-
Tarjumān (formerly E. Turmeda) (d. 823/1421), the author of Tuhfat al-Arib fī
‘l-Radd ‘alā Abl al-Ṣālib, and ‘Abd al-Aḥad Dāwūd, the author of Muhammad
in the Bible. All of those were Christian theologians and priests who chose to
accept Islam. Likewise, there are also scholars of Jewish background who
accepted Islam. These include Samuel ibn Yaḥyā al-Maghribi (d. 570/1175),
who wrote Iḥbām al-Yahūd, Sa’īd ibn al-Ḥasan al-Iskandarānī (d. 698/1299),
the author of Masālik al-Nadhar Iḥbāt Nubūvwat Sayyid al-Bashar. These were
Jewish scholars who were eventually convinced about the truth of Islam and
decided to accept it.

These scholars have had much to say about the religions which they once
followed, and about what they had come to know through the Qur’ān about
the “People of the Book”. The work under review is the latest among these
works. It focuses on elaborating the implications of modern Biblical and
historical studies on the origins of Christianity. It is a significant addition to
the careful studies on the subject, especially since it is aimed at inviting the
scholars involved in these studies and the believing Christians to consider the
other side of the picture, viz. what the Muslims have been saying on this
major historical event for the last fourteen centuries.

Apart from these converts to Islam, many scholars, who were born as
Muslims, have also been carefully studying what the Qur’ān has said about
Jesus and his followers about the nature of his message and how it fared after
him. Some of them embarked on a careful study of the scriptures of the People
of the Book, learned other languages needed to study other religious
traditions. They also occasionally engaged the scholars of these religions in
debates. Important names like Qādi ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. c. 440/1048), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (505/1111), and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) are among the ones who are commonly mentioned in this regard. The efforts of the above two groups of scholars — the converts to Islam and those born in Islam — were complementary. Notwithstanding that, all of them subscribed to the Islamic doctrine of universality of revelation and prophethood (see the Qur’ān 16: 36, 10: 47, 13: 7). Thanks to that, Muslims have looked upon Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, John and Jesus, apart from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on them), as God’s true message-bearers to humanity. This has made Islam the most tolerant and ecumenical of the monotheistic religions.

The author of the book under review has stated that one of the tasks addressed in her work is to raise questions about some of the puzzling aspects the origins of the Christian Church. These consist of the absence of the passages that discuss these origins in contemporary sources as they have been omitted in the course of editing. Thus there is no mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament as the birth place of the coming Messiah, nor that of the Essenes and the Qumran community in the New Testament, nor that of James, the brother of Jesus, who, rather than Peter or Paul, was the first head of the Christian church in Jerusalem, yet there is virtually no indication of his role except in a hostile manner; that the Jewish-Christian practices — prayers, circumcision, ritual washing, fasting and separating clean from unclean foods were declared heretical by the Christians who won the day. (See ‘Introduction’)

In the course of investigating these facts, and the factors that led to them, the writer was able to discover many other hidden facts all of which point to the possibility that something was done deliberately to present the whole picture with a definite slant, and that too at the cost of facts. In her analysis of these intriguing matters, the author rightly mentions the Jews, Jesus and the Muslims as a group distinct from the Trinitarian Christians. For example, she writes:

But the true point of these sacrifices for Jews, Jesus and Muslims, is not the propitiation of higher powers, it is a symbol of thanksgiving by sharing meat with fellow people. No one can seriously suppose that meat or blood is acceptable to God! It was a pagan fancy to reduce the Ineffable One to the level of a malicious entity that could only be appeased or bribed by blood sacrifices (p. 69).

The role of St Paul which is seen by the Trinitarian Church as having been that of preventing the Mother-Church from remaining just another sect
of Judaism. The writer says: “A Jew or Muslim might more cynically, and sadly, rephrase this: ‘without the tragedy of Paul’s sudden insight into “mystery religion” theology, the Mother-Church might have reformed Judaism into a new spirituality’” (p. 81).

To summarize the important findings of the author in the light of the evidence provided by modern Biblical studies and Islamic sources, it can be said that both Muslim studies and modern scholarship on the origins of Christianity underline the need to subject the dogma of the Christian Church to a critical scrutiny.

It seems evident that the original followers of Jesus “remained faithful to the worship of the One True God, and insisted that all Christians should keep the Law, which God had revealed through the prophets. They did not regard Jesus as a divine being but as a chosen Messenger of God...” (p. 6). But due to the dominant wish to break away from the stringent demands of the Jewish law, Judaism was considered an enemy of the new faith, which was therefore abandoned.

The writer, in line with many Western Biblical scholars, concludes that the Gospels’ narrations are not accurate, and it is clear that the earlier they were written the greater was the blame for the ‘death’ of Jesus put on the Romans rather than on the Jews. Also from around 70 CE onwards we find Christianity dissociating itself from the political ambitions and rebellious posture of the Zealots. It chose, instead, to be seen as a new “Mithras-type saviours cult, “with the difference that their hero was not a myth, but had lived as a real man” (p. 37).

On the role of James, Jesus’ brother, the real leader of the followers of Jesus after his ascension, there are indications that there “must have been a kind of agreement amongst the ‘orthodox’ Church hierarchy of editors to eliminate the rôle he played, and even to allow the supposition that he was ‘against’ Jesus, or that he disbelieved in him” (p. 46). The design seems to have been to belittle and even deliberately distort his highly important role and position in the early history of Jesus’ followers. With the end of the age of the Apostles and the early followers of Jesus had come to an end that an “impious error took shape through false teachers, who, seeing that none of the Apostles were left, shamelessly preached, against the proclamation of the Truth, their false knowledge” (p. 46). James might have been able to set the record straight except that he had been largely discredited.

As for the theology of St Paul and his movement, it led, as many scholars believe, to the emergence of the present Trinitarian Christianity. The authority that St Paul gave to himself has been seen by one modern scholar of religion as a catastrophe: “Saint Paul’s considerable authority in the ancient
church is largely the result of a catastrophe that shook Judaism and paralyzed the development of the Judaeo-Christian tendency”.

Even though some Christian theologians want to close their eyes to this fact, evidence abounds that Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith in crucified Jesus “caused the severance of Christianity from Judaism and led to its beliefs being gradually recast with the mold of Hellenistic thought”.

The author points out the significance of the fact that none of the anti-Nicene Fathers were genuinely Trinitarian. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, Hippolytus, Origen, etc., would not subscribe to the Nicene creed, from what have been found on their beliefs (p. 195). She takes pains to stress the impact of Constantine’s deliberate policy to clarify the ‘true faith’, unify the bishops, and establish one form of Christianity as the official religion of his Empire, “Upon his accession, the wild beasts in the arena were treated to their first taste of the blood of pagan heroes who refused to be baptised” (p. 196). Thus, it was only gradually and as a result of the interplay of many complex factors that Trinitarianism triumphed.

The author shows full awareness of the significance of the Dead Sea scrolls and the Nag-Hammadi discoveries as significant sources for the history of Judaism and Christianity. She note that the Catholic Church was reluctant to release the documents and had also been trying to play down their significance. However, some scholars are of an entirely different view in this regard. Rev C. F. Potter, for instance, says:

There is hardly a book in the Old Testament that will not need corrections and improved readings in the light of the Qumran manuscripts, nor a New Testament book that will not suffer considerable reinterpretation of key verses on which doctrines depend.

Few scholars, according to Potter, are yet prepared to admit “how many important doctrines are due to be changed radically, and how many others should eventually be eliminated when the Scrolls are properly recognized and evaluated in relation to the New Testament”.

As for the many centuries of wrangling on Christology and the Christian theological doctrines, the writer rightly remarks that any “ideology or faith that is based on the tenuous foundation of blind belief cannot last and sooner

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4 Ibid., 15–16.
or later its adherents will begin to wonder, and will leave it for a more solid and rational persuasion” (p. 209).

The writer also emphasizes the importance of the Atonement doctrine, which in her view, is “the most important pillar in the whole superstructure [of Trinitarian Christianity]. Knock down this pillar, and the whole edifice is razed to the ground” (p. 211). On the other hand, she raises the questions: “Does it make sense? Did Jesus teach this?” The author not only responds to this in the negative, but also argues that it is incongruent with the teachings of all the prophets of God (peace be upon them). (See chap. 24).

The book is not only well-researched but is also full of flashes of insightful findings. The arrangement of the book, also seems commendable. Notwithstanding its redoubtable merits of the work, I wish to express my reservations, on a few points:

First, there are some oversights in numbering some verses of the Qur’ān: on p. 170 of the book the verse number regarding the ‘death’ of Jesus in the Qur’ān is mentioned as 5: 20 whereas it should be 5: 117 (p. 170). Again on p. 174, the same mistake recurs: the number of the verse should be 5: 117 rather than 5: 120.

Secondly, the author falls a victim to a conceptual error. The thesis of Kamal Salibi that ‘Īsā ibn Maryam and Jesus Christ were two different persons has been uncritically accepted by the author. There seems, however, no worthwhile grounds to support that thesis. The author has quoted Salibi’s belief that the prophet ‘Īsā “taught a strict monotheistic Judaism like all the other prophets ...” (p. 141). Is it on the basis of the notion that Jesus Christ taught a trinitarian doctrine rather than strict monotheism that we should consider him to be a person different from ‘Īsā? The portrayal of ‘Īsā’s birth, life, and teachings leave no doubt that he was none other than Jesus Christ of the Christian Church, albeit he was presented by the Christian in a different light.

In trying to reconcile the positions of the Christians and Muslims, the author says the following: “However, setting aside the possibility that Jesus was a totally different person from ‘Isa, there is one way in which both faiths could concur, namely, if we consider the possibility that Jesus was indeed crucified, but instead of dying, was miraculously saved” (p. 171). The problem with this suggestion is that if we were to say that Jesus “was indeed crucified”, this would be in clear contradiction to the statement in the Qur’ān: “... they neither slayed him nor crucified him” (4: 157). The import of the verse is very clear: that Jesus the Messiah was not the one who was crucified or killed, but that Allah saved him from all that.
All in all, the book is a good contribution to the Muslim study of Christianity. The writer could have benefited from the many works of Muslim scholars both in the earlier period of Muslim civilization and the more recent ones. This at least is the impression I formed after going through the bibliography of the book.

Isa Muhammad Maishanu


The author, born in 1958 to the imām of Travnik in Central Bosnia, a political scientist as well as Islamologue, is presently teaching at the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Sarajevo University. A prolific writer, he has published among other works a two-volume translation of the Qur’ān into Bosnian along with commentary. He has also served from 1994–1996, under President Alija Izetbegovic, as Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of war-torn Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The work, which brings together some 20 essays written between 1992 and 1999 and a khutbah delivered in New York, focuses on two different themes: (i) the fate of Bosnia and (ii) Qur’ānic hermeneutics.

In dealing with his victimized country, Karić displays not only bitterness and murky humour, but also melancholy and subtle, mystical poetics. Thus he refers to Bosniaks as “Muslim Europeans” and, ironically, to Serbs as “orthodox sons of Abraham”. He describes how the Balkan Muslims recently lived the time of their holocaust, Belgrade’s agenda being “to eradicate non-Serb elements”. Given the outrageous European passivity towards the massacres enacted by Serbs such as in Serbrenica, the author cannot help assuming “that someone very powerful has given Serbia a 200-year mandate to slaughter and exile Muslim Europeans” (p. 60). How else can one explain that “the entire modern history of Bosnia was but intermissions between genocides and ethnic purges”, the only crime of Bosnian Muslims being their Islam (pp. 89, 110).