

# Islam and Christianity

- I. Contested theological issues between Islam and Christianity
- II. Historical interactions between Christians and Muslims:
  - A. Christian views of Muslims: Christian theologians who wrote about Islam.
  - B. Muslim Views of Christians: Muslim theologians/historians who wrote about Christianity
  - C. The coexistence of Christian and Muslim communities: a historical perspective with reference to the Balkans - Bosnia and Bulgaria

# Contested Theological Issues

## 1) View of the world/monasticism:

- **Islam:** the world is not fallen; no sinners, no need of divine intervention, people and societies are capable of reforming themselves, one can live in the world and still achieve holiness, no need of monasteries; to transform the world into a *community of believers (madina)*, a divine pattern
- **Christianity (normative):** fallen world, sinners, redemption is needed (Salvation from sin through Jesus's sacrifice)
- **Bogomilism** - the material, imperfect and visible world is indispensable for man's spiritual development, not an impediment to man's way to God; enlightenment is not a prerogative of monks & clergy.

# Contested Theological Issues

## 2) View of man - relationship with God and other men, salvation:

- Islam: ethics, God-awareness and submission, refine/perfect character, moral conduct, obligation to do good and prevent evil, mutual ethical relationship between people -> a sound relationship with God:
  - “I have only been sent to perfect good character.”
  - The “greatest struggle” is the “inner struggle” (*jihad an-nafs*).
  - [God] “forgives those who forgive others” and “pardons those who pardon others” (Pr.M., qtd. in Al-Dagistani, p.4)
  - True happiness - focus on mutual relationship between knowledge and actions
  - “in order to know God, one must first know oneself, i.e., one’s soul, its vices and its virtues”
  - “faith, knowledge and action are the fundamentals of religion” (Al-Ghazzali qtd. in Al-Dagistani, p.7)
  - Unmediated relationship between man and God, no priesthood
- Salvation: personal responsibility, no monopoly of truth, duty to be shared; bringing about the salvation of others

# Contested Theological Issues

- **Christianity (normative)**: privileged position of clergy and infallible popes; Church and priests -mediators between God and men; salvation through faith and grace
- **Bogomilism** - affinity with Islam: Lord's Prayer; direct & mutual relationship with God; inner self-knowledge (gnosis); moral duty to impart wisdom to other people; doing good, service to others; Salvation/Liberation- via austerity (fasts & prayers), moral purity, integrity, social engagement

# Contested Theological Issues

## 3) Jesus Christ:

- **Islam:** prophet not God, sinless man, servant of God, sent to confirm the Torah, no universal mission, denied Crucifixion (the just God cannot allow this, affinity with Docetism).
- **Christianity :** Docetism - rejected at the Council of Nicaea, 325 AD, regarded as heretical by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church (Docetism, Wikipedia); 5-7 c. abstract philosophical debates about Jesus's nature - human or divine? Caused conversions to Islam, Gaza (?) church embraced Islam en masse
- **Bogomilism:** emphasis on Jesus's role as mentor, role model, example to follow; angel (depicted with wings in some church murals); Docetic views of Christ
- *Jesus the Jew* by Geza Vermes - Dead Sea Scrolls' implications for Christology

# Contested Theological Issues

## 4)The Virgin Mary:

- **Islam:** focus in the Annunciation and Nativity; revered as a prophet (God speaks to her), works miracles, one of the four women without sin; a role model, but not for Muslim women because of her virginity
- **Catholicism** - the Virgin Mary as the mother of God, “the vessel through which God became man,” without original sin
- **Orthodox Christianity** -Gr., *Theotokos*, "Mother of God" or "God-bearer“, “Bogorodista”; intercessional role, mediator between people and God in their prayers.

# Contested Theological Issues

- 5) **Status of Muhammad** - major issue for Christians - how does he fit into the divine pattern of Salvation without dislodging the centrality of the Crucifixion?
- Islam was part of a divine plan. Contradictions between M.'s words and deeds are explained by stating that the Qur'an comes partly from the divine and partly from M.'s mind
  - The Gospel principle: "you'll know them by their fruits" - Islam achievements in arts, architecture, sacred literature, men and women saints; the moral value of Qur'an
  - Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) - Muslims, like Christians, can hope for salvation too

# Contested Theological Issues

## 6) Understanding of God:

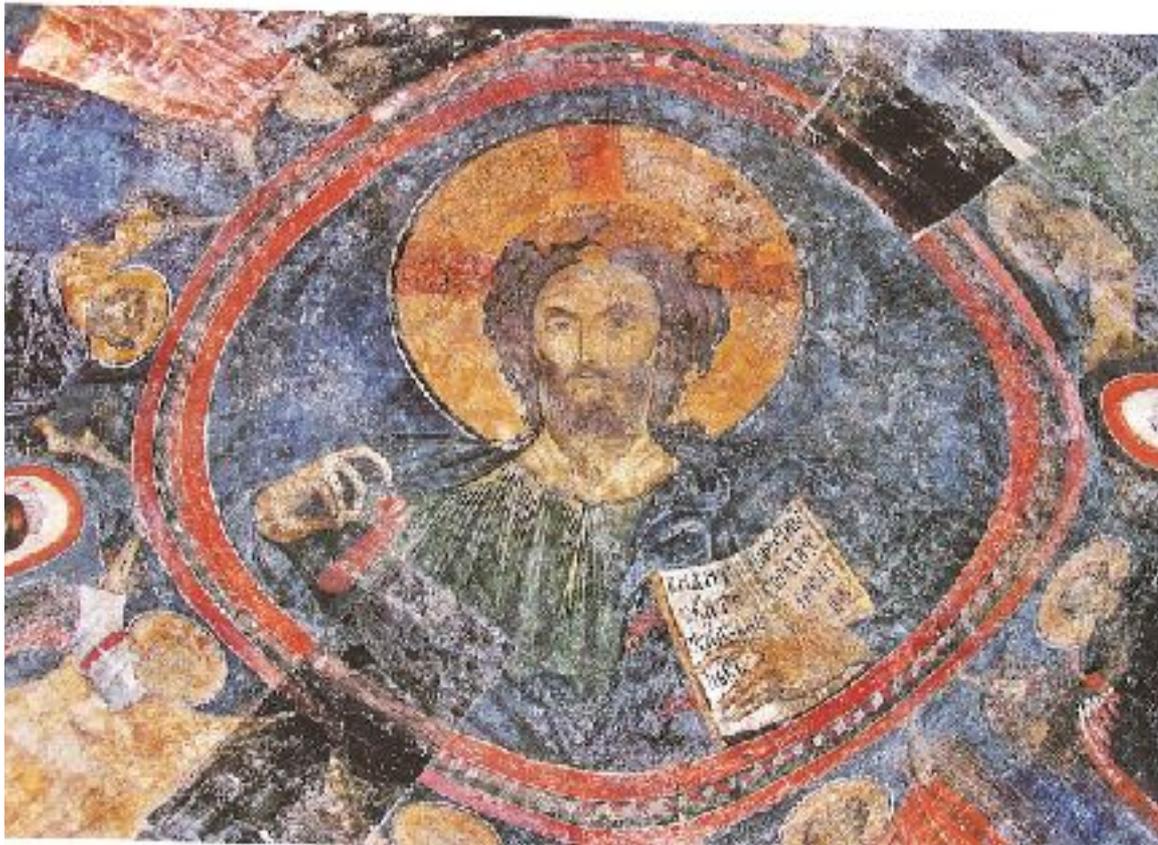
- Islam & Judaism: monotheistic conception
- **Christianity: Trinitarian model of God**, but essentially a monotheistic conception too; a way to view God's unity. Different views of Trinity among Christians, a cause for division.
- Muslims never understood it, God must be simple, no need of multiplicity; **symbol of division & the violent other** (e.g. Kazan, 1552)
  - **Bogomilism** - God the Father has three faces, the middle one is of human shape, from which man was created
- Trinity as poetic metaphor -> new dialog between Muslims and Christians

# Contested Theological Issues

- **Concept of gender - the Male God:**
  - In Islam God/Allah does not have a gender; no neuter in Arabic. God is the utterly transcendent other,
    - yet he is the “compassionate” God, “Ar-*Rahman*” (“womb” in Arabic, implies motherly love and personal love), a loving God, created the world out of love and compassion
  - In Christianity: God the Father-the Son-the Holy Spirit - theological basis for inequality

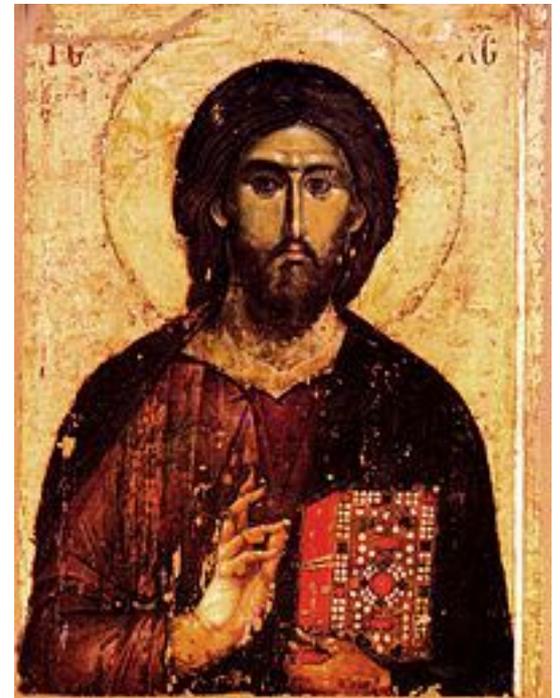
# Contested Theological Issues

- 7) Muslims rejected Paul, who corrupted the “real” Christianity:
- Defender of the doctrine of justification by faith
  - Apostle to the Gentiles, backed by Byzantine emperors -> Christianity as a universal religion vs. meant for the Jews only
  - Greek style of religion: deified, divinized Jesus vs. the Jewish Jesus. In iconography - *Christ Pantocrator* (Gr. “the omnipotent lord of the universe”, “almighty ruler”)



**Christ Pantocrator, Boyana Church, 1259**

**Christ Pantocrator, Hilandar  
Monastery, Mount Athos, 13<sup>th</sup> century**



## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims

### A. Christian views of Muslims: Christian theologians who wrote about Islam:

- **St. John of Damascus** (c.675-749) - Islam as Christian heresy; Byzantine theologians - a false religion, OT,NT, Manichean ideas
- **Peter the Venerable** (c.1092-1156), Cluny abbot - Cluniac corpus (12 books), Latin translation of Qur'an
- **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274) - false deliberate perversion of truth, M.-impostor, anti-Christ, spread by violence; self-indulgence
  - >legitimizes violence agst. Muslim minorities: Lisbon (1147); Russia (1552); Lithuania, Poland (Muslim refugees); Hungary(1687)
- **Thomas Carlyle**, mid 19 c. - end of demonization

## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims

### B. Muslim Views of Christians:

- Early Muslim encounters with educated Christian theologians -> beginning of Islam's systematic theology; less sharp polemic
- Islam - less historically inclined to persecute other religions; Q. emphasizes **unity in diversity**: “God has *“assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good”* (5:48)
- Muslim cities: Cairo, Cordoba, Damascus, Constantinople vs. England, Henry VIII
- **Al-Shahrastani** (1086-1153) - the most balanced and objective account of Christianity

## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims

- **Muslim conquest of the Balkans** - “a blessing for Christianity” (persecution of Christians, sectional infightings); e.g., Christian monasteries on **Mount Athos** - centers of political intrigue, ravaged by mercenaries
- **Ottoman Turks (1420-1912)**, peace for five centuries; preserved independence, new monasteries, art of icon painting; St. Panthaleimon Monastery
- The last Ottoman Governor’s interview for a French journalist - Muslim perception of their role as peacekeepers and benefactors



## **II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims**

**C. The coexistence of Christian and Muslim communities: a historical perspective with reference to Bosnia and Bulgaria**

**1) Ottoman Bosnia (1463 -1878) - “The religious Switzerland of Europe.” Bogomils and the Ottoman conquest.**

Ethnographic map of European Ottoman Empire (1877) - areas with black strikes are the regions where Muslims, i.e., converted Christians, reside:



## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims: Bosnia

- **Sufis/Dervish knights** first introduced Islam to the Balkan people, 14 c.; warriors and missionaries
- **Religious syncretism** - starting point in the Islamisation processes: Sufis adopted Christian customs like drinking wine, the confession, Jesus's precedence over Pr.M.; Muslims gave alms to monasteries, recognized Catholic monks' ability to exorcise evil spirits
- **Ottoman Turks** - well established in Bosnia after 1415
  - building new towns: Sarajevo (1461), Mostar (1468);
  - no strong prejudice against them;

## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims: Bosnia

- Bosnia's autonomous state within the borders of the Ottoman Empire; confidence in the Bosnian subjects
- *Kristianlar* (Bogomils) vs *gebir*, “unbelievers” (Orthodox, Catholics)
- Voluntary, large-scale process of Islamisation - in stages, 15-16 c.; various roles played by Sufis/ dervishes orders
- New Muslim urban population & infrastructure:
  - religious centers (*tekkes*)
  - crafts & commerce organizations: trade guilds (*esnafs*) with strong moral code (altruism, placing others above oneself); honesty, modesty, generosity; being Muslim not a condition of membership, unlike Christian guilds.

## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims: Bosnia

Tanners' *esnaf* supervised by the Qadiri order of dervishes -  
use of crafts as a practical symbol/aid on the spiritual  
path:

“ The Great Qur'an and the other famous books of the four schools of Islamic law state that every hide is purified when it is tanned; except for the human skin, because of its noble qualities, and the pig's, because of its uncleanness. And it should be known that as a tanner in a visible manner tans and cleans a dirty hide, **his soul too becomes clean from animal qualities and the darkness of ignorance**; he becomes enlightened and does not depart for a single hour from the manifestation of Beauty.” (Asceric-Todd, p.104)



**Mausoleums of Governor Gazi Husref-bey, on the right and his Christian friend & freed slave on the left, Sarajevo, 1541**

## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims: Bulgaria

- 2) Bulgaria under Ottoman rule (1396-1878) - long, slow process of islamisation (voluntary)
- Not as large scale as in Bosnia - in southern Bulgaria, the Phodope mountain; in the northern part - pockets with Bulgarian Muslims
  - Rules for churches



## II. Historical Interactions between Christians and Muslims

- **Pomatsi** (pl); **pomak** (sg) - helper, aid; population with a special status and privileges
- 1980s - “revival process”
- **Pomak wedding** - custom of painting the bride’s face only in the **Rhodopi mountains** - birth place of **Orpheus**, the Thracian, founder of “Orphic Mysteries”





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