REGENT COLLEGE

Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula

Islam's Stepping Stone

A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH PAPER IN

CHURCH HISTORY

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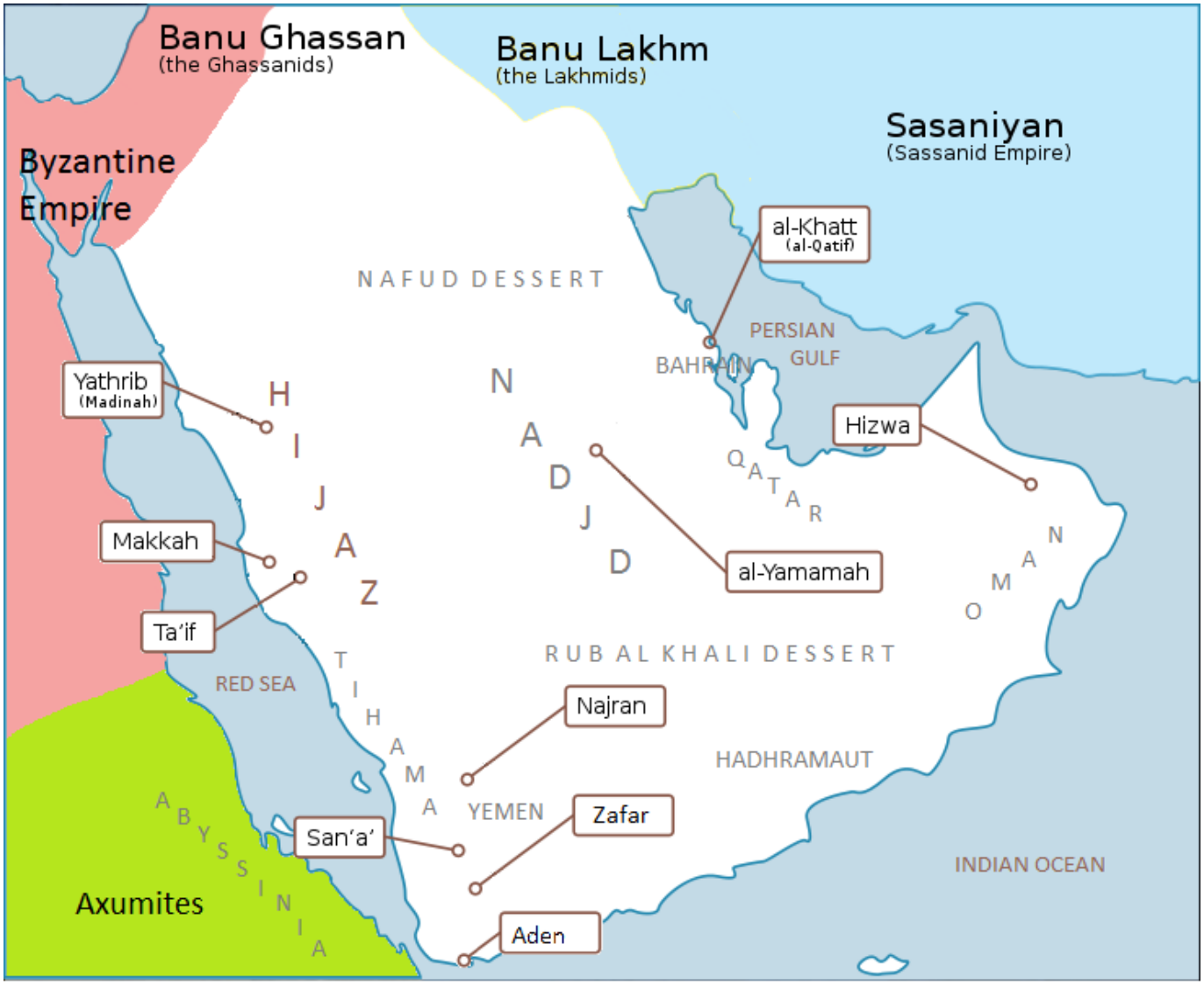
MAP OF ARABIA CA. 6TH CENTURY



The Coming and Going of Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula

For Centuries, the Arabian Peninsula has played on the imagination of many as both romantic and foreboding. Scenes of camel-riding Bedouin, transporting cargos of spices and incense are tempered with mirages of sun-scorched sandy desserts bringing unquenchable thirst and the fiery heat from which the world's last great monotheistic religion; Islam, was forged. Yet built up and scattered amongst the oases, tribes and people groups of this headland, for a few centuries at least, Christianity claimed adherents that would bring about a marked influence on the formation and shape of Islamic religious belief that would superimpose itself upon the land and its people.

Suffice it to say, the Arabs as a people have played an important role in the interaction between the peoples of the Middle East for millennia. There are numerous references to Arabs in the Old Testament[1], and the New Testament (Acts 2:11) makes reference to Arabic speaking people who were gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost. Who this nation was and where they came from is beyond the scope of this paper. Their nomadic lifestyle and sporadic entrances into the annals of ancient history have made their roots difficult to pin down. What has been generally accepted however is that the Arabian Peninsula bordered by the Red Sea on the West, the Indian Ocean on the South and East and the Persian Gulf to the North East has historically been seen as the homeland of the Arab people enveloping all their tribes, clans and confederacies.[2] **This paper will attempt to recover the early beginnings of Christianity on the peninsula while demonstrating that the form of Christianity planted there was doomed to disappear with the arrival of Islam; a consciousness that gave the Arab peoples of the region not merely a different world view or religious belief, but a new sense of common identity and nationhood.** The 18th century historian Edward Gibbon in his monumental *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* boldly claimed that it was "while the state was exhausted by the Persian war, and the church was distracted by the Nestorian and Monophysite sects, Mohammed, with the sword in

[1] 2 Chron 17:11; 21:16; 22:1; 26:7, Neh 2:19; 4:7, Is 30:20, Jer 3:2, 1 Macc 5:39; 11:17; 12:31, 2 Macc 5:8; 2:10

[2] There has been a suggestion to 10 major divisions: (1) the North Arabian Desert, encompassing southern Syria, western Iraq, eastern Jordan, and northern Saudi Arabia extending to the Nafud desert, (2) the Nafud Desert and the eastern arm—the Dahna, (3) Eastern Arabia, stretching from Kuwait to the United Arab Emirates, (4) Oman including Dhofar, (5) the Najd, covering the center of the Arabian peninsula, bounded on the north and south by the Nafud and the Rub al-Khali and on the east by Eastern Arabia respectively, (6) the Hijaz, located along the northern Red Sea and including Midian, (7) the Asir/Yemen, defining the western highlands of the peninsula, (8) the Tihama, which is the Red Sea coast along the southern portion of the peninsula, (9) the Rub al-Khali sand desert, and (10) the Hadhramaut, stretching along the Arabian Sea. From Juris Zarins, "Arabia, Prehistory of" in, Vol. 1, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 328.

one hand and the Koran in the other, erected his throne on the ruins of Christianity and of Rome."[3] Participants in history do not have the benefit of hindsight, as historians do but as scholar on Arab Christianity Kenneth Cragg has pointed out "it may illuminate a forward study to ask why those centuries ended in Islam. What is the sense of that ending as a clue to all that preceded it? What might the fact that Islam captured and fulfilled the Arab spirit indicate about the antecedent story?"[4]

The Arabian Peninsula before Christianity

The Arabian Peninsula's abundance of kingdoms, tribes and confederations oversaw a thriving trade that brought them into contact with many other civilizations in Africa, Eastern Europe and western Asia. The existence in south Arabia of frankincense, myrrh and other aromatics – all much in demand in the civilizations of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia – brought wealth and renown to its Arabian cultivators and expeditors.[5] Kingdoms like Saba had ruled in the south from times before Solomon of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 10:1-10), while nomadic Dedanites traversed the sandy plains trading with realms in the Levant (cf. Ezekiel 27:15). As centuries past, other southern dynasties and confederations rose and fell: Kinda, Awsan, Ma'in, Saba and Himyar were all to have their influence on the political landscape of the region. These kingdoms and confederations were principally defined by their allegiance to certain gods, describing themselves as their 'progeny' and binding themselves together by common sanctuaries, rituals, festivals and rulers.[6] Amongst tribes further north however, the people were more prey to the whims of the great powers and empires. Orientalist and early Islamic historian Patricia Crone has noted that polytheistic Arabia in this region was strikingly poor in mythology, ceremonial, ritual, and festivals. Religious life was reduced to periodic visits to holy places, stones, and trees, to sacrifice and consult diviners. Pilgrimages to holy sites were not conducted in the name of any one deity, and the remaining practices could effortlessly be switched from one deity to another. Renouncing one god for another thus did not require any change in either outlook or behaviour, unless the new deity carried with him a behavioural programme antithetical to tribal norms.[7] What is fairly clear is that up until the fourth century AD almost all the inhabitants of Arabia were polytheists.[8]

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[3] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.*, ed. Henry Hart Milman (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2004), Logos Electronic Edition: Vol. V, Chapter 50, part i.
[4] Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: a history in the Middle East* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 33.
[5] Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.
[6] Ibid, 37.
[7] Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007), 240.
[8] Hoyland, 139.

At some point early in the Common Era however, monotheism became a popular and viable world-view. Vast numbers of Arabs acknowledged the One God (although they did not necessarily worship Him directly), for some centuries before Muhammad declared himself His apostle with a message specifically for the Arabs.[9] These 'monotheists' came to occupy a special place in the imagination of the future Muslim community. The term *hanif* in Islamic writing came to denote one who, before the coming of Islam followed the original and true (monotheistic) religion wherein Abraham was an exemplar.[10] While the Qur'an regards the *hanif* as neither Jew nor Christian, there is some emphasis placed on the fact that these men were independent seekers after truth albeit later influenced by the Syriac ascetic tradition for an individualist non-cultic élite.[11] It is not surprising therefore that initially it was Judaism that spread across the peninsula at an early stage in the monotheistic development of the region. It came to be strongly represented in south-west Arabia, though it seems clear that it had not gained tribal groupings and settled communities, or even formed settlement of the type that was to exist further north in the Hijaz.[12] The ninth century Muslim historian Ibn Hisham relates the conversion of the Himyarite king Abikarib As'ad (ca. 383-433) by two learned Jews from Yathrib[13] after which the Himyarites embarked on a policy of expansion, soon ruling all of South Arabia, while to the north extending their influence as far as Najran, located just south of Mecca. During this time, mention of one god, *Rahman 'the Merciful'* was initiated by the Himyarites and a century later, the Himyarite king Yusuf 'Dhu Nuwas' (ca. 520's) adopted Judaism presumably with the idea of recognizing a state religion in opposition to that held by the Byzantines and Axumites.[14] As we shall see later, it was during that time that Judaism's first violent clashes erupted with Christianity.

Christianity comes to the Peninsula

On the peninsula it is possible to identify two zones of Christianity in the period before Islam: first the south-western corner, comprising the high territories of the Yemen, dominated at the time by the tribe of Himyar and inhabited by a population composed largely of sedentary farmers, speaking a Semitic language distinct from Arabic, South-Arabian; and the rest of the peninsula inhabited mainly by nomadic herdsmen, speaking dialects of Aramaic and primitive Arabic and belonging to fluctuating tribal

[9] J.S. Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic times* (London: Longman, 1979), 6.
[10] W. Montgomery Watt, "Hanif," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 165.
[11] Trimingham, 264.
[12] Ibid, 289.
[13] Hoyland, 146.
[14] Trimingham, 289.

confederations.[15] Of these two zones, the most important in its Christian influence on the peninsula was the south-west which included the cities of Zafar and Najran. One early account of Christianity's introduction to the Arabian Peninsula comes from the 3rd/4th century ecclesiastical writer Eusebius of Caesarea. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, he briefly recounts the story of Pantaenus, a 2nd century Roman Stoic philosopher who upon conversion "was said to have displayed such ardor, and so zealous a disposition, respecting the divine word, that he was constituted a herald of the gospel of Christ to the nations of the east, and advanced even as far as India;[16] in this context, according to J.S. Trimingham a reference not to the Indian subcontinent but to South Arabia.[17] In the 4th/5th century, Philostorgius, an Anomoean[18] church historian from Cappadocia wrote that the first directed Christian mission to the peninsula was sponsored by the then Arian emperor Constantius II (337-361) and undertaken by an Arian bishop known as Theophilus 'the Indian.' Philostorgius claims that Theophilus "endeavored to persuade the ruler of [Himyar] to become a Christian…whereupon the customary fraud and malice of the Jews was compelled to shrink into deep silence as soon as Theophilus had once or twice proved by his wonderful miracles the truth of the Christian faith. The prince of the nation…built three churches in the district; one at Zafar, 'the metropolis of the nation,' one at Aden 'the Roman mart,' and one where the Persian mart stands, hard by the mouth of the Persian sea."[19] Nestorian traditions that relate the evangelization of the inhabitants of Najran in south central Arabia are recounted in the 10th century *Chronicle of Seert* written in Arabic and derived from the 8th century Nestorian historiographer from Kirkuk, Bar Sahde. In one of these accounts, a merchant from Najran named Hannan/Hayyan comes into contact with Nestorians in Hira in the Persian Empire during the reign of the emperor Yazdagird I (399-420). Two other accounts in the *Chronicle* relate how saintly heroes in the distant past destroyed the city's sacred palm tree that the people worshipped or survived persecution from the king and converted all the people.[20] Though there are three distinct accounts, all share several features in their narrative, most importantly the impression that Najran was subsequently taken over by heretics. According to the Arab Muslim historiographer Ibn Ishaq (died ca. 770) however, the first Christian influence to reach South Arabia was through a wandering brick builder named Faymiyun who introduced Christianity to Najran; a city that even in Islamic times was

[15] J.M. Fiey, "Nasara," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 971.
[16] Valesius, "Life of Eusebius Pamphilus", trans. S.E. Parker in *An Ecclesiastical History to the 20th Year of the Reign of Constantine* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1847), 205.
[17] Trimingham, 291.
[18] Anomoeanism was a 4th century Christian sect that upheld an extreme form of Arianism.
[19] Hoyland, 147.
[20] Philip Wood, *The Chronicle of Seert: Christian Historical Imagination in Late Antique Iraq* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 252.

considered holy. Working miracles and living the life of an eremitic ascetic Faymiyun's influence extends to more and more inhabitants of the desert until finally, in a show-down wherein another sacred palm tree is miraculously destroyed, the leading families of Najran are converted to Christianity. [21] Ibn Ishaq gives no date or ethnic/political affiliation for this Faymiyun and any Christian source material regarding this man has been lost to us though some have suggested a Monophysite tradition.[22] What is interesting to note in these accounts is that each historian relates how someone from their particular branch or adherence of the faith claimed precedence in the evangelism of this region. Even Ibn Ishaq's account in its very ambiguity of Faymiyun's sectarian and ethnic background allows the reader to infer a more *hanific* origin thereby legitimizing the Islamic view of Arab Christianity as a faith that was conducive to the coming of Islam and ready to accept Muhammad's prophet-hood.

The Effects of Christianity on the Peninsula

For much of central Arabia, Christianity seemed to struggle to claim more than singular adherents dotted throughout the desert oases saving in the north amongst the tribes of the Roman *foederati* such as the Ghassanids. In pre-Islamic Mecca and Medina, conversion to Christianity occurred individually, with each convert undergoing his own independent religious quest. Professor of Arabic studies Ghada Osman, when examining stories of converts to Christianity, finds two major themes: "The first is a journey to another land, where the convert-to-be first encounters Christianity. The second is an interaction with a monk – often living in a solitary cell – that leads to the traveler's conversion and adoption of an ascetic lifestyle. There are also accounts where men travel to a Christian land, convert to Christianity there, and remain in that land."[23] In general however, a significant Christian community did not have time to form in cities such as Mecca and Medina for three main reasons: Firstly, on the eve of Islam, Christianity was still such a new religion in these cities, secondly, the few Christians there were, were first generation converts without the momentum to create churches to bring their coreligionists together and thirdly, these Christians appear to have remained by nature isolated from each other even after their conversion.[24] Trimingham further explains that the lack of any background history amongst the tribes like the Qur'aish of the Hijaz and the continuation of a nomadic social organization sufficiently explain why Christianity in

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[21] Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 14-16.
[22] Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1500* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998) Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 14, 6047.
[23] Ghada Osman, "Pre-Islamic Arab converts to Christianity in Mecca and Medina: An Investigation into the Arabic Sources," *Muslim World*, 95 (January 2005): 68.
[24] Ibid, 75.

its available forms could have little to no influence upon its inhabitants.[25] Nevertheless, some forms of cultic Christianity must have impressed some of these pagan tribesman in the city of Mecca where it was reported by the 9th century Muslim historians, Al-Azraqi and Ibn Hisham that inside the Ka'aba "The Qur'aish had put pictures…including two of Jesus son of Mary and Mary."[26] Muhammad is said to have protected these icons at least for a little while from the purge of idols that took place during his triumph in Mecca.[27]

Further to the north, Christianity became more pronounced as Christians from either the Byzantine or Persian empires settled on the edge of the dessert. With regards to the north eastern edge of the peninsula, historian Samuel Moffett notes that "beginning about 339 or 340 the great Persian persecutions of Shapur II sent waves of Christian refugees out of Persia. Many of them undoubtedly found haven in Arabia and bore a Christian witness there, but with what results we do not know."[28] Nevertheless, the first documented Nestorian synod, in 410, included bishop delegates from Qatar and Bahrain.[29] On the north western corner, slightly more is known and professor of Byzantine-Arab studies Irfan Shahîd has written extensively on the situation of Arab interaction with the Byzantine Empire and the Christian faith. For those tribes "Christianity presented the Arabs with new human types unknown to them from their pagan and peninsular life -- the priest, the bishop, the martyr, the saint, and the monk."[30] By far the most potent influence of Christianity on the Arabs was that of monasticism. The new type of Christian hero after the saint and the martyr, the monk who renounced the world and came to live in what the Arabs considered their natural homeland, the desert, especially appealed to them and was the object of much veneration. Monasteries penetrated deep into the heart of Arabia; into regions to which the church could not penetrate. Thus the monastery turned out to be more influential than the church in the spiritual life of the Arabs, especially in the sphere of indirect Byzantine influence in the Peninsula. The monastery was also the meeting place of two ideals -- Christian philanthropy and Arab hospitality.[31] In fact, according to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad met and was entertained by the mysterious monk Bahira in one of these Byzantine monasteries; a legend not overlooked by both West Syrian (Jacobite) and East Syrian

[25] Trimingham, 258.
[26] Francis E. Peters, *Mecca: A Literary History of the Muslim Holy Land* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 82.
[27] Ibid, 83.
[28] Moffett, Chapter 14, 6007-6008.
[29] Ibid, 6011.
[30] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 5th Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1989), 528.
[31] Ibid, 529.

(Nestorian) manuscripts.[32] Christian monks and monasteries may have abounded on the peninsula but the orthodoxy of these hermits as was the case with Bahira, is often the matter of much debate and speculation.

Schismatics and Persecutors: The Christian Faith is Challenged

It has been said that "the dream of world empire under the sign of the Cross rapidly evaporates…under the twin pressures of politico-military reality and the rise of heresy generated by monotheism's rigidifcation."[33] By the 4th century the lands of the desert were coming to be known as *arabia heretica* on account of the fact that men were springing up in Arabia as "propagators of false opinions."[34] Besides the Council of Nicaea in 325 that saw the separation of the 'Arian' church from mainstream Christianity, the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 saw the separation of a 'Nestorian' church that became influential in the eastern reaches of the Arab demesne, and the 'Jacobite' vis-a-vis 'Monophysite' church that became influential in the west besides the Byzantine aligned 'Chalcedonian/Melkite' church. It is highly likely that areas such as South Arabia in the 6th century may have had two competing ecclesiastical hierarchies – Chalcedonian and Monophysite.[35] It has also been suggested that a doctrinal position known as "Monophysite Philoponian Tri-theism" dominated South Arabia in the century preceding Islam's rise to dominance. Under this doctrine, Christians worshipped three distinct gods. No longer one nature and three persons, the Philoponians recognized three distinct natures in three distinct persons.[36] Author and historian Tom Holland in his best-selling *In the Shadow of the Sword* writes extensively on other sects and heretical notions that influenced and shaped the religious tone of the Near East in the centuries before the coming of Islam. He notes 4th century theologian Jerome's report on the Nazoreans; heretics who claimed descent from the original Jewish Church and who taught that the Holy Spirit was not only female but the heavenly 'mother' of Christ while other groups of so-called 'Christians' denied the Trinity and held Jesus to have been merely a man.[37] Furthermore, there is considerable evidence both from Muslim texts and from external sources

[32] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 149.
[33] Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 8.
[34] Valesius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 266.
[35] Irfan Shahîd, "Byzantium in South Arabia." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 33 (1979): 32.
[36] C. John Block, "Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam With Implications for the English Translation of 'Thalatha' in Qur'an 4.171 and 5.73," *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2011): 2.
[37] Tom Holland, *In the Shadow of the Sword: The Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World.* (London: Hachette Digital, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: 226.

that other monotheistic groups were to be found in Arabia, independent of the organized churches and hence 'heretical' in their eyes. Such groups may have been offshoots not only of Christianity, but also of Judaism, or other Judaeo-Christian groups.[38] The stage was soon set for confrontation between these rivaling factions on the peninsula but the greatest threat to the Church there was to come from the Jewish Himyarite Empire.

Early on in Christianity's introduction to the Arabian Peninsula, the Christian and Jewish faiths confronted one another in an effort to exert influence in the courts of princes and rulers. This is already evident in accounts such as the embassy of Theophilus 'The Indian' mentioned above. "That country had become one of the main centers of Judaism in the first centuries of the Christian era, especially during the reigns of its Judaizing kings, and interfaith controversies and dialogues must have taken place there after the introduction of Christianity."[39] In the early 6th century, the Jewish Himyarite king Yusuf 'Dhu Nuwas' embarked on a bloody campaign to subjugate and convert Christians in his kingdom and surrounding areas to Judaism. After crushing or wiping out Christian groups on the coast and in the capital Zafar, he began a more cautious persecution of the Christians in Najran, the fertile valley north of Himyarite territory proper, where the Monophysite form was securely implanted among the indigenous population.[40] This campaign culminated in the slaughter of thousands of Christians who refused to convert to Judaism outside the city of Najran. While this event was to have an overreaching influence on Christian martyrology as it preserved the memory of saints such as Arethas who died in Najran,[41] it was also to influence Islamic attitudes towards Christians and the martyrdom of 'Believers' as the event is alluded to in the Qur'an.[42]

News of the massacres quickly reached the courts of Byzantium to the north and a call was sent out to the Ethiopian Axumites to avenge the blood of these martyrs. Contemporary Roman historian Procopius of Caesarea wrote the following:

> Hellestheaeus, the king of the Aethiopians, [also referred to as Kaleb] who was a Christian and a most devoted adherent of this faith, discovered that a number of the Homeritae [Himyarites] on the opposite mainland were oppressing the Christians there outrageously; many of these rascals were Jews… He therefore collected a fleet of ships and an army and came against them, and he conquered them in battle and slew both the king and many of the Homeritae. He then set up in his

[38] Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, "Pre-Islamic monotheism in Arabia," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (October 1962): 271.
[39] Shahîd, "Byzantium in S. Arabia," 31.
[40] Trimingham, 289.
[41] The Feast of Saint Arethas the martyr of Najran is commemorated by both Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.
[42] Surah 85:4-8.

> stead a Christian king, a Homerite by birth, by name Esimiphaeus, and, after ordaining that he should pay a tribute to the Aethiopians every year, he returned to his home.[43]

Other contemporary accounts give intricate details to this confrontation between the Jewish kingdom and Christian Abyssinia. The *Book of the Himyarites* written in ancient Syriac and only translated by Axel Moburg early in the 20th century is a work; partly historic and partly hagiographic, detailing the massacres that took place in the southern part of the peninsula by *Masruq*, "the crucifier" (Yusuf 'Dhu Nuwas) as well as the establishment of a Christian kingdom in the region.[44] Other sources such as the *Martyrium of Arethas,* in a rather subtle manner, and the *Acts of Gregentius,* in a bombastic style, preach the triumph of Orthodox Christianity in South Arabia. This overwhelmingly 'Orthodox' attitude occurs despite the fact that the Negus of Ethiopia who re-established Christianity in the region, and probably the Gregentius who was sent to 're-convert' the area, were heretical Monophysites in the eyes of their Chalcedonian-Byzantine allies.[45]

After the defeat of 'Dhu Nuwas, the Christian Axumites proceeded to rebuild the ruined churches and to erect a magnificent cathedral in Sana'a. In ca. 570, on the pretext of avenging the desecration of his cathedral by pagan Meccans, a usurper to Kaleb's rule; Abraha, sought to invade the Hijaz with an army of thousands (including his own personal elephant) to destroy the Ka'aba in Mecca, thereby extending his control over yet another pilgrimage site. The invasion failed; an event portrayed in Surah 105; *The Elephant,* of the Qur'an. It is worth noting that scholars and historians have often wistfully imagined what 'might have been' had Abraha succeeded in his plan: "Christian hopes of converting all Arabia were blasted. Had Abraha taken Mecca, the whole peninsula would have been thrown open to Christian and Byzantine penetration; the Cross would have been raised on the Ka'aba, and Muhammad might have died a priest or monk."[46] With the defeat of Abraha, Axumite control of the region waned until finally being pushed out of the peninsula by invading Sasanian Persians. It was during this time in the latter half of the 6th century that a great push occurred among Assyrian Christians from Nestorianism toward Monophysitism that peaked at about the time the Sassanians moved into Himyar to conquer the Abyssinians. While most Christians in the Persian Empire were Nestorian, a confluence of Monophysite, and other sectarian beliefs imposed upon the churches of Arabia proved to be the "fatal schism that

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[43] Procopius, *The Works of Procopius: The Secret History and the Wars of Justinian*. (Halcyon Press Ltd.) Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter XX, Location 2821-2827.
[44] Axel Moberg, trans. *The Book of the Himyarites: Fragments of a hitherto unknown Syriac Work* (London: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1924).
[45] Vassilios Christides, "The Himyarite-Ethiopian war and the Ethiopian occupation of South Arabia in the acts of Gregentius (ca. 530 A.D.)" *Annales d'Ethiopie*, Vol 9 (1972): 117.
[46] Philip Khuri Hitti, *History of the Arabs from the earliest times to the present* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 62.

divided and weakened the Christianity of the East in the face of Islam."[47] The peninsula was now ripe to receive the revelations of a new prophet who would unite Arabs under an alternative monotheistic world-view.

The Legacy of Peninsula Christianity in the Forging of Islam

Tradition is rife with stories of Christian influence in the life of Islam's prophet Muhammad (570-632) and it has been noted that "the ranks of the early [Muslim] Believers did in fact include some Christians,"[48] later referred to as *Nasara* by the Muslims and referred to as such in the Qur'an.[49] Accompanying his uncle on a trading journey to Syria, the boy Muhammad was singled out by the Christian monk Bahira, who told Abu Talib that his nephew was destined to be a prophet and should be protected against the plots of the Jews.[50] Khadija, Muhammad's first wife was cousin to Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, a Christian Ebionite priest known as 'a Believer' in the *Jahiliyya* or 'age of ignorance' and said to have had a "kerygmatic role in the narrative of Muhammad's earliest revelation," predicting Muhammad's prophet-hood.[51] Muhammad's other interactions with Christians included the meeting with a delegation sent from Najran to discuss first the claims about Jesus, and the authority of Muhammad's prophet-hood. The meeting concluded with the Najrani priest making a covenant of peace with the prophet.[52] Ramla Bint Abi Sufyan was one of Muhammad's wives having been first married to Ubayd-Allah ibn Jahsh who converted to Christianity after he and his wife had submitted to Muhammad's message. The couple had emigrated to Abyssinia with other refugees to escape persecution from the pagan Meccans. Ibn Ishaq wrote that Ubayd-Allah used to say to the prophet's companions "We [Christians] see clearly, buy your eyes are only half open."[53] Maria al-Qibtiyya was an Egyptian Christian slave sent to Muhammad as a concubine by a Byzantine official and we are told that Muhammad used to sit at the booth of a Christian slave named Jabr who according again to Ibn Ishaq was said to be "the one who teaches Muhammad most of what he brings."[54] What seems evident in

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[47] Ibid, 43.
[48] Fred Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-Identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath*. 50-51 (2002-2003): 16.
[49] The designation refers to the name given to Jesus by his contemporaries who called him Jesus of Nazareth, or the Nazarene, whence his disciples were initially called "Nazarenes" by the Jews (Acts 24:5). As for the term *masihi*, derived from the name of Christ (*al-Masih*) it was only used according to one Muslim writer in the 6th/12th century, by Christians among themselves. Fiey, "Nasara," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 7, 970.
[50] J.J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge, 1965), 23.
[51] C. F. Robinson, "Waraka B. Nawfal," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 11, 143.
[52] Gordon Nickel, "We will Make Peace with you: The Christians of Najran in Muqatil's Tafsir" *Collectanea Christiana Orentalia* 3 (2006): 174.
[53] Ibn Ishaq, 99.
[54] Ibid, 180.

Muhammad's encounters with Christians, at least as has been related by his Islamic biographers, is that prophet-hood, and authority was always conferred upon him by Christians he interacted with and many of them seem to have supported him in his teaching and rise to power. Nevertheless, there is also clear evidence that later in his life, increasing hostility developed between Muhammad and Christians. It is apparent that by the time of his death, the Prophet saw very clearly that his first hopes of attracting the earlier monotheists; Jews and Christians, to his newer 'revelation' had been an illusion. But by that time also, any substantial Christian hope of converting Islam to Christian monotheism was gone.[55] Muhammad's ten years of public mission had created a far more visible community than any achieved by the early Christians in their first 280 years.

After the death of Muhammad in 632, many of the tribes in the peninsula that had sworn allegiance to Muhammad rebelled. The subsequent *Ridda* Wars or "Wars of Apostasy" launched by Abu-Bakr, the successor of Muhammad, sought to re-conquer those tribes that no longer recognized the authority and leadership of the new Caliph. In religious terms, these wars that continued throughout much of Abu Bakr's 27 month rule saw a proliferation in the number of claims to prophet-hood amongst the Arabs of the peninsula. 'Abhala al-'Ansi (called 'al-Aswad' or 'the Black One') in Yemen, Musaylima of the Christian Banu Hanifa tribe in Yamama, Dhu'l-Tadj Lakit in Oman, Tulayha of the Asad and the prophetess Sadjah of the Christian Banu Tamim both in the Nadjd region all claimed to receive divine revelations and sought to lead their tribes in their own peculiar notions of monotheism and brand of 'Christianity.'[56] One can only surmise that during Abu Bakr's bloody campaign to bring these rebels back to Islam; Christians on the peninsula that had participated in these revolts or sided with the 'false prophets' would have been shown little mercy.

The reign of 'Umar I (634– 644), the second caliph, is notable in the history of the church for his edict concerning the treatment of Christians on the peninsula. The 9th century Muslim Persian historian Al-Balhaduri recounted the covenant Muhammad had made with the Christians of Najran; said to have had a population of over forty thousand largely Monophysite Christians. It had stated: "Najran and their followers are entitled to the protection of Allah and to the security of Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of Allah, which security shall involve their persons, religion, lands and possessions, including those of them who are absent as well as those who are present, their camels, messengers and images."[57]

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[55] Moffett, Chapter 16: 7212-7214
[56] See M. Lecker in "al-Ridda," *Encyclopedia of Islam* Vol 12, 692-695.
[57] Abbas Ahmad Ibn-Jabir Al-Balhaduri. *The Origins of the Islamic State*. Trans. Philip Khuri Hitti (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1916), 100.

Al-Balhaduri then recounts the statements of a number of companions of Muhammad who had heard him say during an illness: "'There shall not remain two religions in the land of Arabia'…Consequently, when 'Umar ibn-al-Khattab became caliph, he expelled the people of Najran to an-Najraniyah and bought their properties and possessions."[58] The date affixed to this forced evacuation of the most sizable Christian population on the peninsula is 635 from whence the fate of Christianity in South Arabia was sealed. Farther south the Arab Christians were not forced to emigrate, and Sana'a and the Yemen were still served by a bishop between 837 and 850. Reference to the last known bishops of the dioceses of Bahrain and Oman date from 676, [59] however there were still Christians in Yamama and Bahrain between 893 and 899.[60] It was even reported that as late as several generations after Muhammad, Christian and Jewish communities of physicians, musicians, and merchants could be found even in Mecca.[61] As Islam continued to expand militarily and develop its theology, it became evident that there would be little choice among the Arabs as to what religious persuasion was necessary. The conquered non-Arabs might be able to continue practising their religions as long as they were considered 'People of the Book' but for the tribes of the peninsula, Islam was to be the only alternative as the Church there made its last dying gasp. The underlying reasons for this switch of allegiance are manifold however ethno-political differences, doctrinal misunderstandings, the absence of Christian scripture and socio-economic pressures are the main arguments for the realignment of monotheism in the region. It is to these themes we now turn.

The Ethno-Political factor

Jesus may have claimed that "My Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36) but in actual fact, from the time emperor Constantine legalised Christianity in the Edict of Milan (313), Christian mission gained a new dimension where religious self-propagation became conjoined with the political, military, and economic expansionism of empire. In many ways, this was a defining characteristic of late antiquity: "the conviction that knowledge of the One God both justifies the exercise of imperial power and makes it

[58] Ibid, 102. Another city in Trachonitis in the Provincia Arabia also came to be known as Najran in honour of the city in South Arabia. A great church was built there by the Najranite community which had emigrated from the South Arabian Najran after 'Umar ordered the inhabitants of Najran to vacate their city. Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and Arabia in the 6th Century* Vol. 2 Part 1, 151.
[59] R.A. Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf during the first centuries of Islam" *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 19 (2008): 71.
[60] Fiey, "Nasara," 971.
[61] Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 105.

more effective."[62] Such a conviction is bound to result in conflict with other competing kingdoms and empires that may have alternative views on "the One God." There is however a 'chicken-and egg' type question: "Do theological differences spark political, social, and economic conflicts? Or is it the converse – do existing, concrete political, social, and economic differences come to be reflected in theology or ideology?"[63] As obedience to One supreme God came to dominate the religious worship and sensitivities of the majority of peoples in the Near and Middle East (be it through Judaism, Christianity or Zoroastrianism), identity was coming to be defined, not by the kingdoms of this world, but by various conceptions of the One, the Only God: by 'monotheisms'.[64]

Monotheistic Empire Building

The Byzantine drive to extend its sphere of influence and power stands out as an example of how political objectives were mingled into a desire for religious conformity. The missionary expeditions sent out by the empire established a priesthood and the episcopate that subjected the Arabs to a new form of authority and discipline they had not been accustomed to. This induced in the Christian Arabs a new sense of loyalty which was supra-tribal, related not to tribal chauvinism but to the Christian ecclesia.[65] The spread of Christianity alarmed the rulers of Himyar, who probably discerned in the missionaries the crafty agents of Roman and Axumite imperialism. Himyar's last king, Dhu-Nuwas, resolved on desperate measures. He saw that the old paganism was moribund and that his State required a new faith to strengthen its moral basis, but unwilling to adopt the religion of his powerful neighbours, he proclaimed his adhesion to Judaism. The conflict between Christians and Jews was particularly noted by Dhu-Nuwas himself in his dialogue with a Christian captive who was later executed: "Thou holdest the same opinion as thy father. And I think from thy words that thou too art ready to burn our synagogues just as thy father burned [them]."[66] While his subsequent persecution of Christians further to the north may have somewhat extended his territory for a little while, the religious justification for the Ethiopian expedition of 525 was also in fulfillment of the long simmering ambitions of Axum."[67] This played nicely into Byzantine plans of countering their Persian rivals as the historian Procopius writes: "The emperor Justinian had the idea of allying himself with the Ethiopians and the [Christian] Himyarites, in order to

[62] Fowden, 3.
[63] Graham E. Fuller, *A World Without Islam* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2010), 63.
[64] Holland, 8.
[65] Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 5th Century*, 529.
[66] Moburg, cxxiii.
[67] G.W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 103.

work against the Persians."[68] The Muslim historian al-Tabari, states that the cathedral Abraha built in Sana'a was done with the help of Byzantine artisans, stone masons and mosaic artists, out of marble and with mosaics sent from Constantinople: Evidence of the great religious competition to which the Romans played to the best of their ability.[69] The defence (or offense) and building up of one monotheistic faith over or against another had become a pretext for extending territory and cultural influence into new regions.

Estrangements within Christianity

In the 4th and early 5th centuries, many of the federated Arab tribes in the north of the peninsula had a doctrinal persuasion that resembled the imperial government in Constantinople. Consequently federate-imperial relations were not marred by violent and repeated friction such as vitiated these relations in the later 5th and 6th centuries. After councils subsequent to Nicaea in 325, there was constant revolt against the established religion and control from Constantinople. To this was added the unrest which the inhabitants of Arabia demonstrated under Roman political power. As noted by the philosopher and theologian James Barton "It is manifest that neither the religious nor the political power of Constantinople held firm band on the thought and life of the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Their natural political attitude was that of rebellion, and their religious attitude that of heresy."[70] That being said, it was becoming evident with the synthesis of Greek thought, culture and language into the Christian faith, that doctrine and beliefs were being joined with nationhood. "Without explicitly intending to do so, Constantinople had fused religion with ethnicity within the Orthodox tradition."[71] While conflict between the Byzantine Empire and Persia continued, the power of the Arab *foederati* increased as they came to be seen more and more as the last line of defence between the two super-powers. The Persian-allied Lakhimids remained pagan for a long time, later adopting Nestorian Christianity that was at times supported by the Persians as a counter to Byzantine Orthodoxy. The Byzantine-allied Ghassanids however were zealous Christians for whom the construction of churches and monasteries was a natural accompaniment to the extension of their power over this vast limitrophe. Thus the proliferation of churches and monasteries followed this enhancement in their political and military power.[72] After the

[68] Bowersock, 107.
[69] Jonathan P. Berkey. *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 45.
[70] James L. Barton, *The Christian Approach to Islam*. (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1918) 17.
[71] Fuller, 71.
[72] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 6th Century,* Vol. 2 Part 1, 144.

council of Chalcedon in 451 however, the Ghassanid Arab tribes took a Monophysite stance and endured a period of persecution that only ended around the mid sixth century.[73] The Byzantine *ecclesia* contributed its generous share to the fall of the Ghassanids, perhaps even more than the imperial administration. It was against loyal and zealous fellow Christians such as the Ghassanids that the Chalcedonian *ecclesia*, intolerant of confessional pluralism, threw its weight and contributed to their downfall. As observed by Shahîd: "The disastrous course of Ghassanid-Byzantine relations late in the century, which weakened the Ghassanids, contributed to the success of the great historical movement that was Islam and the Islamic conquest." [74]

Islam conquers the hearts of Arabs

While relations between Byzantium and the Christian Arabs of the desert had soured because of doctrinal differences, Islam's Prophet Muhammad awakened in the Arabs a sense of God's specific call upon them as an ethnic nation. It was not that they were somehow more pious or especially suited for the divine call since the words of the Qur'an remarked that "The Arabs of the desert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy, and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which Allah hath sent down to His Apostle" (Surah 9:97). In fact it has been noted that religious interests appear to have entered but little into their consciousness.[75] In light of this, it may therefore be better to see the Islamic conquests more as a people movement looking for better conditions than a religious 'missionary' effort. It is not, in the annals of the conquering armies that we must look for the reasons which lead to so rapid a spread of the Muslim faith, but rather in the conditions prevailing among the conquered peoples. The 19th century British Orientalist T.W. Arnold noted: "This expansion of the Arab race is more rightly envisaged as the migration of a vigorous and energetic people driven by hunger and want, to leave their inhospitable deserts and overrun the richer lands of their more fortunate neighbours."[76] Into this movement, Muhammad craftily painted a picture of the paradise that awaited the warriors of this new 'Arab religion' to be found in the lands of the empires to the north. Whatever the motives might have been for the early Arab conquerors, identity must have played a large part in convincing Arab Christians and monotheists that Islam was their 'birthright.' Arnold has noted in Muhammad's preaching that "the proud feeling…of a common nationality had much influence – a feeling which was more alive among the Arabs of that time

[73] Ibid, 144.
[74] Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 6th Century*, Vol. 1 Part 1, xxviii.
[75] T.W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 42.
[76] Ibid., 42.

than (perhaps) among any other people, and which alone determined many thousands to give the preference to their countryman and his religion before foreign teachers."[77] Accordingly it is not surprising to find that many of the Christian Bedouins were swept into the rushing tide of this great movement and that Arab tribes, who for centuries had professed the Christian religion, now abandoned it to embrace the Muslim faith."[78] There are two examples that should suffice to show how important this sense of collective identity was. The first is an account from Al-Balhaduri regarding a Christian Ghassanid chieftan; Jabalah ibn-al-Aiham, who sided with the Ansar [Muslims] saying, "Ye are our brethren and the sons of our fathers," and professed Islam.[79] The second example comes from the experiences of a European traveler to Arabia who was welcomed by an Arab tribe. "Convert, settle, and we will give you palm trees," they told the traveler; in other words, be one of ours. Allah was a source of communal identity to them, not an answer to questions about the hereafter. The idea that a believer might be personally committed to a deity, having vested the ultimate meaning of his life in it, did not occur to any of these men. Those who tried to convert the traveler were evidently thoroughly committed to Islam, but not to Islam as a saving truth of deep significance to them as individuals.[80]

With the Roman Empire's adoption of Christianity as its official religion and its subsequent drive to enforce a united and Hellenistic style 'orthodoxy' upon the peoples it ruled and influenced, there was bound to be independent-minded groups that sought a more Semitic, non-conforming and Arab-style faith. A significant weakness in the early Christian missions in Arabia was that the major areas of Christian strength on the eve of the rise of Islam were all foreign dominated. The Ghassanid kingdom in the northwest of the peninsula had for four centuries been tributary to Rome. The Lakhmid kingdom on the northeast was absorbed by Persia. And in the southwest, the Himyarites, independent for centuries, came first under the sway of Christian Ethiopia and then fell to Persia. The Christian faith retained a foreign tinge in the Arabian Peninsula. Nowhere was it able to establish an authentic Arabic base. In fact, as we shall see, it had not yet even translated the Scriptures into Arabic.[81] It has been said that "identification with a dynamic, expanding state is essential to the dissemination of a universal religion."[82] On the other hand, when that 'universal' religion takes on ethnic and political overtones, its acceptance by those who do not identify with it becomes difficult. Part of the issue with the difficulties Christianity

[77] Arnold, 41.
[78] Ibid, 42.
[79] Al-Balhaduri, *Origins of the Islamic State*, 208.
[80] Crone, 239.
[81] Moffett, Chapter 14, 6136-6140.
[82] Fowden, 75.

faced on the Arabian Peninsula has much to do with the fact that it was difficult if not impossible for its Arab adherents to identify with any of the empires of the day. In light of this, Islam did not come as a theological shock to the region but it did serve the interests of geopolitical powers of the region just as Christianity did."[83] In areas to the north of the peninsula, Christianity did survive with its own Arab 'flavour' for centuries after Islam's conquest; however for those on the peninsula, to be Arab, was to be Muslim.

The Theological Factor

Christian Confusion over Christology

Another setback to maintaining a viable Arab church on the peninsula was the controversies and misunderstandings in the doctrinal confessions circulating during the first half of the Common Era millennia. While the Carthaginian Christian writer Tertullian may have decried Greek philosophical interference in the Christian faith, by the early 3rd century there was much intermingling between the two. Kenneth Cragg posits some interesting questions: "Might Arab Christianity, both in the pre-and post-Islamic centuries, have fared more hopefully had the Greek factor in its story been less intellectually fastidious about formulas and more tuned to Arab sympathies and cast of mind? … Would Arab Christianity have been less alien and more articulate under Muslim conditions if it had been less dominated by Greek idiom and associations?"[84] These theological 'formulas' centred especially on aspects of the nature of Christ; His divinity and His humanity. Subsequent to each Church Council before the rise of Islam; Nicaea (325), Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451), and Constantinople II (553), there were always groups that did not subscribe to what the official 'Greek' church, sanctioned by the Byzantine Emperor, dictated with regards to Christ's nature. The sheer number of heresies is astonishing for what they reveal about the broad range of complex, detailed, and legalistic interpretations of the nature of Jesus; all occurring primarily before the emergence of Islam. Islam must obviously be viewed as part of this context of debate over Christology.[85] For example, there are passages in the Qur'an that seem to recall the then current theological controversy dividing the largely Syriac/Aramaic speaking Jacobite and Nestorian Christians over the propriety and veracity of the Marian title *theotokos* 'Mother of God:'

[83] Fuller, 44.
[84] Cragg, 16.
[85] Fuller, 57.

> "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say).[86]

Nestorian Christians had rejected the title for much the same reason as does the Qur'an in this verse while the Jacobites to the contrary supported it as an orthodox Nicene affirmation of the full divinity of Christ as the consubstantial (*homoousios*) Son of God the Father.[87] By the 7th century, Christian communities on the Arabian Peninsula such as the one in Najran were apparently unsure of their doctrinal confession and unable to adequately explain Christ's nature to enquirers as is demonstrated by the encounter of the Najrani embassy to Muhammad. When Muhammad suggests a trial by cursing, Aqib, the Christian leader of the embassy is said to have retorted:

> "We will not produce anything through his trial of cursing…By Allah, if Muhammad is lying, cursing him won't do any good. If he is truthful, then Allah will destroy the liars by the end of the year."[88]

Further evidence of confusion and unorthodox professions of faith amongst Christians is found in the dialogue between the Muslim 'Believers' who had fled from the pagan Meccans to the Christian king of Ethiopia. The Muslims proclaimed: "Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of Allah and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet and His Word given unto Mary, the innocent virgin," to which the Christian king responded in a very 'un-Chalcedonian' or even Monophysite, declaration: "Jesus is just what you have stated him to be, and is nothing more than that."[89] Muhammad's message however seems to have been more concerned with the veracity of prophet-hood rather than the messianic nature of Christ. Where Christians absorbed themselves in Christology, Muhammad and later Muslims were markedly more concerned with prophetology."[90] There is a typology of Qur'anic prophets, a model of prophecy recognizable by the manner in which a particular prophet sets about his mission of warning a proud or sarcastic or ignorant community, the (often violent) rejection of his message, and ultimate vindication of God in the form of retribution. [91] A typology reinforced by the Qur'an

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[86] Surah 5:116
[87] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 35.
[88] Nickel, 179.
[89] Yohannes K. Mekonnen, *Ethiopia: The Land, Its People, History and Culture* (Dar Al- Salaam: New Africa Press, 2013), 230.
[90] Garth Fowden, *Before and After Mohammed: the First Millennium Refocused.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 181.
[91] Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 10.

itself, which proclaims that no distinction is, or should be made among prophets and that true belief must include the belief in all prophets (Surah 4:150-151).

Attractive Similarities in Islamic Doctrine

There are many reasons why Muhammad's message would in fact have been acceptable to the monotheistic Arabs and especially Christians at that time. The concept of Allah in its religious-monotheistic sense was not a point of controversy between Muhammad and his Arab contemporaries. They did not view Allah as a foreign concept, but as an idea with which they had long been familiar. Indeed, the name of Allah was often invoked by Arabs of that era, along with names of their local deities.[92] Muhammad espoused other beliefs that Christians held dear. Even today, both Christians and Muslims believe that God created the world in six days, and that there is a hell and a heaven, angels and devils. They believe in all the prophets of the Old and New Testaments, the virgin birth of Christ, the miracles he performed on earth, the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Day of Judgment. Muhammad and his early followers first thought of themselves as a community of 'Believers' (Arabic *mu'minun*), composed of all those who shared Muhammad's intense belief in one God and in the impending arrival of the Last Day, and who "joined together to carry out what they saw as the urgent task of establishing righteousness on earth…in preparation for the End."[93] The community of 'Believers' originally conceptualized, acted independent of confessional identities. 'Believers' could be members of any one of the several religious confessions – Christians or Jews for example – if the doctrines of their religious confession were consonant with strict monotheism and not too inimical to the 'Believers' other basic ideas. What mattered to the Believers was not a person's confessional identity, but whether he or she shared their belief in the One God, Creator of the World and Judge at the End of Time, and their conviction that the Day of Judgement was near, or at least rapidly nearing. Lesser religious notions (i.e. the idea that Jesus had long ago been the Messiah) withered into relative insignificance, at least for a time, particularly when it came to the practical work of building the community.[94]

[92] Khalil Athamina, "Abraham in Islamic perspective: reflections on the development of monotheism in pre-Islamic Arabia," *Islam* 81 (October 2004): 189.
[93] Donner, 11
[94] Ibid, 12.

Distinctive Differences separate the two Communities

For all the similarities there might have been between Christian thought and practise and that of Islam, there were enormous differences that set them apart as well. Besides conflicts in the notion of who Jesus was and other doctrinal beliefs, the message of Muhammad was also intended to contrast that of Christianity in some religious observations and practices as well. One hadith mentions that the Prophet prohibited the *wishal* (i.e. observing a fast for two or more consecutive days without breaking it at sunset). "The custom was disapproved so strongly because it reminded of Christianity…Any custom observed in the 'religions of the Book' had to be shunned."[95] Other customs were shunned in favor of new Islamic innovations: The call to prayer through the use of voice rather than wooden clappers, the prohibition of alcohol, and prayers made facing Mecca were only a few observances that were to separate Islam from Christianity. Further separation came as Muslims began to explain and defend their own doctrinal notions and ideas over and above those of Christian theology. Islamic scholars sought to show how the doctrine of the Trinity violates the norms of reason that are embedded in Islamic teachings about God, and how the belief that Christ was divine as presented by the Nestorians, Jacobites and Melkites violates both elementary reason and the witness of Christian scripture itself. The attitude these scholars had to such theology was that Christians had sunk into doctrinal incoherence and inconsistency.[96] It was only a generation or so after the founding of Muhammad's community that membership as part of the Believers came to be seen as a confessional identity in itself – "when, to use a somewhat later formulation of religious terminology, being a Believer and Muslim meant that one could not also be a Christian."[97]

Islam as the Theological 'Reformer'

Muhammad's success in revising the monotheistic message presented by Christianity has been seen as a 'reformation' of sorts amongst many Arab monotheists who had syncretised their faith with that of the old pagan religion. Keeping his religion strictly monotheistic by purging it of the clutter of Arabic gods and superstitions, but at the same time keeping it firmly embedded in Arabic tradition, proved to be

[95] G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadith* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 331.
[96] David Thomas, "Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology." *History of Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol 10. eds. David Thomas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 7.
[97] Donner, 12.

a master stroke of cultural adaptation.[98] At the same time, the central Christological concerns that characterized eastern Christendom were to prove a crucial factor in encounter with the new faith for "it was in part, by reaction against those concerns, read as misguided or perverse, that Islam had been conceived and launched."[99] Muhammad did not claim to be the preacher of a new religion, but a reformer who believed he was reviving the original pure monotheism professed by Abraham. In the eyes of the Arabs of his generation, Muhammad's monotheism was different from that of Judaism and Christianity, though the actual ideas of Abrahamic monotheism were not alien to the pre-Islamic religious vision that prevailed among the Arabs in the Peninsula.[100] Ultimately, Muhammad's message challenged the Arab's basic outlook on life in a way that Christianity (especially the 'Syro-Arab' Christianity of Mesopotamia) never did. His call to submission was sent to kings, emperors and the great powers of the day. The invitation said to have been sent to the Christian Emperor Heraclius went as follows:

> "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, Muhammad who is the servant of God and his apostle to Heraclius the Emperor of Rome…Embrace Islam and God will reward you two-fold. If you turn away from the offer of Islam, then on you be the sins of your people. O people of the Book, come towards a creed that is fit both for us and for you. It is this – to worship none but God and not to associate anything with God, and not to call others God. Therefore, O ye people of the Book, if ye refuse, beware. We are Muslims and our religion is Islam."[101]

Too Little, too Late

Not many generations after Muhammad's message had been proclaimed and Muslims had conquered large swaths of Christian territory, Christians living under Islamic rule had more or less come to terms with the situation in which they found themselves. They finally came to acknowledge the potency of Islam as a faith as well as a polity, and the need to come to terms with it socially and intellectually.[102] Amongst the Arabs however, it was only in the course of the first Abbasid century of Islam roughly 750-850, that Christians living under Muslim rule began to compose theological works in Syriac and Arabic to counter the religious challenges of Islam.[103] The Greek theological tradition was not formally summed up in Arabic until John of Damascus compiled his *Fount of Knowledge*, in conscious response to the new Islamic strictures on Christianity."[104] In fact, there are indications that Christians

[98] Moffett, Chapter 14, 7174-7176.
[99] Cragg, 15.
[100] Athamina, 187.
[101] Barton, 19.
[102] Thomas, 1.
[103] Sidney H. Griffith, *Christian Theology in Arabic*, vii.
[104] Fowden, *Before and After Mohammed*, 186.

failed to understand fully what Islam was all about.[105] Had Christianity in the Arabian Peninsula been better prepared to explain the message of the Gospel in terms that its inhabitants could relate to, without the bickering and polemicizing that much of Christendom was involved in, the faith might have taken deeper roots and the Church may have survived for much longer than it did. What might have made the faith easier to explain is Scripture in the language of the Arabs; a topic to which we now turn.

The Scriptural Factor

People of the Book

In determining the veracity of a given religious faith, one cannot discount the importance of scripture as a means of solidifying and strengthening doctrinal belief. Translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages of the peoples on the borders of the empire became a key instrument in their conversion; it brought Scripture to them in their living language and secured their cultural loyalty, especially since the translated Bible was often the first document ever to be written in their languages.[106] Shahîd has aptly noted that "Christianity is a religion that cannot exist without a church, a priest and a holy book, although the problem of the existence [in pre-Islamic Arabia] of the third is still unresolved"[107] Jews and Christians were among those whom the Qur'an calls "People of the Book"; a phrase which occurs some fifty-four times in the Qur'an. Yet for all the seeming importance placed upon 'the Book' which Christians were devoted to, it is strange that as of yet, no translations of the scriptures into Arabic pre-dating Muhammad's arrival have surfaced.

The Language of Arabia

While a plethora of languages was used in pre-Islamic Arabia, scholar of ancient Semitic languages Christoph Luxenberg has posited that "Syro-Aramaic was the most important written and cultural language in the region in whose sphere the Qur'an emerged, at a time in which Arabic was not a written language yet and in which learned Arabs used Aramaic as a written language. This suggests that initiators of the Arabic written language had acquired their knowledge and training in the Syro-Aramaic cultural milieu."[108] Hebrew would have been known by the Rabbis and those in the Jewish community

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[105] Thomas, 3.
[106] Fuller, 70.
[107] Shahîd, *Byazantium and the Arabs in the 6th Century*, Vol 2 Part 1, 148.
[108] Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007), 10.

who revered the Torah in its original language. The South Arabian alphabet that was used by the Sabaen and Himyarite languages, had spread to places like Ethiopia and northern Arabia through Yemenite migration and it is highly likely that a proportion of the learned population would have been aware of Greek through the influence of trade with the Byzantine Empire. While Aramaic was the lingua franca of much of the Middle East, the "process by which other nomads speaking the language we now call Arabic infiltrated into the steppe zones that the Aramaeans dominated is entirely unknown. We may presume however, that it had been going on persistently with the eventuality that the Arabic language came to dominate all nomad life;" [109] Historian Philip Jenkins has surmised that "as the Middle East became progressively 'arabized' in language and culture, so the ground was prepared for the newly dominant religion."[110]

Christian Literature Available to Arabs

The question might be asked; was there no Arabic literature to speak of, religious or otherwise before Islam's holiest book made its entrance into the literary milieu of the Arabs? Arabs had for years appreciated poetry and much of it was well known and recited in and around Muhammad's day. In fact, during this period of the first six centuries of the Christian era, before Islam changed the whole Arab theme, a distinctive Arab consciousness was acquiring definition by means of a vast fiction of tribal relationships and custom that sought self-expression through a universal Arab medium, a stylized poetry, transcending all tribal and dialectical limitations.[111] This is aptly demonstrated through the poetry of Umayya Bin Abi Al-Salt; a Christian-Arab contemporary of Muhammad who never converted to Islam but has been described as one of Arabia's foremost pre-Islamic poets and self-proclaimed "chosen prophet of the Arabs."[112] Much of the poetry consists of praises for the tribe, the love of women and heroic deeds done in battle while a few poems undertake a religious theme. When examining this pre-Islamic 'Christian' poetry, one is struck by the sense of awe Arab Christians had in the power, majesty and unapproachable nature of the Most High God. An excerpt reads as follows:

> "…Praise to You and Grace and the Kingdom, O Lord, Nothing is higher than You and more praiseworthy…Praise be to the One whose power His creation does not know and Who is on

[109] Trimingham, 10
[110] Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 31.
[111] Trimingham, 2.
[112] Gert Borg and Ed de Moor, eds. *Representations of the Divine in Arabic Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), 10.

> His throne, alone and unique…all His creatures, male and female, are His servants in obedience…"[113]

Umayya's presentation of God's transcendence, and man's obligation to serve and fearfully respect his Lord that stands as a paradigm for the dominant themes in pre-Islamic religious poetry. Other poems primarily relating to Old Testament characters and prophets maintain the theme so that as literary analyst Gert Borg points out, poets like Umayya who started out as conventional pre-Islamic poets, came to use poetry as a medium for getting across religious messages in the way prophets like Muhammad did.[114] What is interesting to note however is that these messages placed little or no emphasis on the saving work of Jesus Christ and appear to have lacked the themes such as grace and The Incarnation, so common in Christian messages where Christianity became a strong and vibrant force.

As far as scripture is concerned, while knowledge of the contents of texts such as the Torah and Gospels was normally spread orally among Arabic speaking peoples, it is certainly possible that Arabic-speaking Christians long before the early seventh century had, for the sake of the liturgy in Arabic, already translated at least the Gospel and Psalms into Arabic[115] even though it appears that the language used for ecclesiastical services was Syriac.[116] "There are traces of Syriac Scriptures in the second century, the Coptic version dates from the next century, and before 500 AD New Testaments existed in Armenian and in Ethiopic. But it was not till the ninth century, that we find any complete New Testament in Arabic."[117] What portions of scripture were available would normally have been in possession of synagogues, churches, shrines, and monasteries, or in the hands of rabbis, priests and monks, rather than in private hands. Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians would thus have heard scriptural passages proclaimed in the course of the celebration of the liturgies in their places of study and worship, followed by songs and homilies that unfolded the meaning of the texts for the congregants.[118] In terms of the possibility that Muhammad came across a written copy of portions of scripture, an eighth century hadith tells us that his first wife Khadija's cousin, Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, "could write in Hebrew and…had written down as much of the Gospel as God saw fit"[119] Yet, despite the fact that scholars like Griffith and Shahîd maintain a high likelihood that an Arabic liturgy and some portions of an Arabic

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[113] Ibid, 13-14.
[114] Ibid, 10.
[115] Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 6th Century* Vol. 2 Part 2, 295.
[116] R.H. Kilgour, "Arabic Versions of the Bible," *The Muslim World* 6 (Oct 1916): 383.
[117] Ibid, 383.
[118] Griffith, *The Bible*, 42.
[119] Juynboll, 726.

Bible could have come into existence as early as the fourth century[120] "no conclusive documentary or clear textual evidence of a pre-Islamic, written Bible in Arabic translation has yet come to light."[121] Historian J.J. Saunders remarks that the creation of Christian Arabic literature or the translation the Bible into the language of Arabian converts would have been "an achievement which would have given solidity and permanence to their church,"[122] but this was not to be. Instead, the Arabs received a new 'divine revelation' that was quickly written down and given authority as scripture by the 'Believers' who had before professed various forms of monotheism. When the Bible was finally made available in Arabic generations after Muhammad's death,[123] Muslims would charge Christians and Jews of having distorted and/or changed parts of their scriptures from their original form; an accusation that is still used by many Muslims to this day.

The Qur'an: A 'Scripture' for Arabs

The Arabic Qur'an remains the earliest written Arabic text of any literary length or significance that we can actually put our hands on.[124] Linguistically, it is noteworthy that the Qur'an itself is self-conscious with respect to the language in which it is written, stressing that it is "an Arabic recitation" (12:2) and "an Arabic decree" (13:37), composed in the "Arabic tongue" (26:195, 46:12, 16:103), which has been made easy for Muhammad (19:97, 44:58) and is the language of his people (14:4).[125] Muslims themselves perceive the Qur'an as the actual uncreated speech of God, equivalent not so much to the Bible as to Christ himself, Muhammad being but a mediator. Nevertheless if the teaching of the Qur'an was to be understood by its first hearers, as is rightly assumed by Muslim scholarship, there must have been not only in existence, but widely enough known in Mecca, an Arabic religious vocabulary applicable to the monotheistic content of the Qur'an.[126] In only a very few instances can one make the case for there being any actual quotations from the Jewish and Christian scriptures in the Qur'an. Rather there are allusions to, comments on, and re-telling of selected episodes in biblical stories, and in many passages, what the Qur'an says is often at some variance with any extant Jewish or Christian text. This state of both harmony and disharmony in the presentations and evocations of canonical and non-canonical, Jewish and

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[120] Griffith, *The Bible*, 48 and Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the 4th Century*, 440.
[121] Griffith, *The Bible*, 42.
[122] Saunders, 13.
[123] Griffith notes that the earliest reliable evidence for the Bible in Arabic only appears in the mid ninth century. Griffith, *The Bible*, 106.
[124] Griffith, *The Bible*, 43.
[125] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context* (London: Routledge, 2006), 63.
[126] Gibb, 270.

Christian prophetic history and its leading figures has in the past led many scholars, especially non-Muslims, to conclude that Muhammad and the Qur'an were only imperfectly or badly informed about the Bible and its contents and consequently made many mistakes in recalling biblical narratives; a charge leveled against Muslims already in the early Islamic period.[127] Yet the fact that some Qur'anic references to Mary and Jesus point to clear influence from canonical tests, particularly Luke's Gospel or the quasi-canonical *Diatessaron*[128] means that these Christian groups on the Arabian peninsula must have observed a mainstream type of Christianity and could not have been only heretical Christians.[129]

The canonization process for the Qur'an was strikingly faster and more straightforward than for the Jewish or Christian Bible. During the reign of Caliph Uthman (653-656) an order went out to gather together all Qur'anic manuscripts for the canonization of one universal Qur'an with variant copies ordered destroyed. Qur'an scholars will always regret the historical order issued by Uthman, conditioned as it was by the political circumstances at the time, which has resulted in the irretrievable loss of earlier copies of the Qur'an."[130] Is it possible that at the same time, copies of the New Testament complete or in part and translated into Arabic were destroyed with the variant versions of Qur'anic scripture? At a time of upheaval and revolution, especially during the Ridda wars after Muhammad's death when self-proclaimed prophets both Jewish and Christian seemed to crop up in all corners of the peninsula, it is not surprising that suppression of rival claims and 'revelations' both written and otherwise would have been a priority for the Muslim leadership.

One cannot help but think that the absence of scripture in Arabic had to have had a profound impact on the longevity of the Christian faith amongst Arabs of the peninsula. Granted there are linguistic and cultural preferences that will promote religious ideology but in this respect, it appears Arab consciousness resisted and defeated Christianity. Muhammad however through the medium of the Qur'an challenged and actually conquered it, so that Islam, expressed through an Arabic medium, "transcended the limitation of tribalism eventually becoming a universal religion."[131] R.H. Kilgour rightly summed up what might have been for the church in Arabia had the Bible been translated into their language: "Those who believe that a vernacular Bible spells strength for the Christian Church cannot

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[127] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 25.
[128] The most prominent early Gospel harmony said to have been created in the mid-second century by Tatian; an early Christian Assyrian apologist. It came to be adopted as the standard lectionary text of the gospels in many Syriac speaking churches. See William L. Peterson "Diatessaron" in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol 2, 190.
[129] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 27.
[130] Luxenberg, 34.
[131] Trimingham, 2.

help wondering whether the whole course of the world's history might not have been altered had the rich testimony of God's Word been earlier available for the Arabic people in their own tongue."[132]

The Socio-Economic Factor

Finally, one must take into account the socio-economic pressures and behaviours that influence the rise and fall of religious groups. Christianity on the Arabian Peninsula suffered in the wake of a new religious conviction that militantly expanded its power and influence over subjugated tribes and peoples in the region. Violence, taxation, emigration, social pressure, and conversions brought about atrophy to the Arabian Church on a scale and at a speed never before seen. The 9th century Arab Christian apologist Al-Kindy makes a strong point of the hypocrisy of the Jews, Christians and Bedouins who lived at the rise of Islam, their superficial conversion, and the sordid and worldly motives by which, when the great 'Apostacy' followed immediately after the Prophet's death, they were brought back to Islam, "some by fear and the sword, some tempted by power and wealth, others drawn by the lusts and pleasures of this life."[133]

Violence, Taxation and Conversion

Churches and Christians in the peninsula were forced to make difficult decisions when Muslims consolidated more and more power over tribes and confederations. Philip Jenkins notes that state protection is critical to the survival and influence of a faith, and a church allied with the wrong nation or faction can make its own position worse as it becomes identified with the wrong side.[134] As already mentioned, during the tumultuous years after the death of Muhammad, numerous 'prophets' claiming divine revelations and a path to 'truth' sought the allegiance of people in their areas. While not much is known about these visionaries; 'Christian' or otherwise, their destruction at the hands of the vengeful Muslim armies is well attested. Al-Balhaduri recounts the consequences of rebellion, especially of some Ghassanids against whom a Muslim general "led an incursion…on their Easter day – they being Christians. He took some captive and killed others."[135] Nevertheless, there was not the wholescale forced conversions and martyrdoms at the point of sword and fire as in the days of the Jewish king 'Dhu

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[132] Kilgour, 383.
[133] Sir William Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy, Written at the Court of Al Mamun in Defence of Christianity.* (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1887), Kindle Electronic Edition: 335-338
[134] Jenkins, 211.
[135] Al-Balhaduri, 172

Nuwas only a hundred years earlier. The Qur'an had declared "there shall be no compulsion in the acceptance of the religion,"[136] and Christians who wished to remain in their faith were taken under Muslim 'protection' (*dhimma*), guaranteeing security of their goods and property and the free exercise of their religion on the condition they paid the *jizya*, tax or tribute. This is evidenced in the contract made between the Christians of Najran and Muhammad where they exclaim: "O Muhammad, we will make peace with you lest you attack us and frighten us and dissuade us from our religion." By the terms of the contract, they were forced to pay "a thousand suits of clothes in the month of Safar and a thousand suits in Rajab, plus 30 iron coats of mail.[137] In fact, in many cases there was no sustained attempt to force or even persuade subjugated tribes to accept Islam, since it was assumed that they would remain in their own communities paying taxes and tributes to support the conquerors.[138] This might have seemed acceptable for a little while but when taxation became heavier, the incentive to 'convert' to Islam became greater. In the eastern Gulf region of the peninsula we find a mid-seventh century letter from the Nestorian bishop Isho'yahb III to Simeon of Rev Ardashir, decrying the fact that the Christian community in Mazun (Oman) was dissolving through conversion, in order "to avoid giving up their worldly possessions."[139] Further conversions to Islam, especially among the educated classes came as a result of social pressure. Christians on the peninsula could occupy only marginal positions and were not fully integrated into society. Conversion was often necessary in order to retain a post or to gain promotion to a higher one. Still others chose, or like the Najranite community, were forced to emigrate from their ancient communities to lands further north. Philip Jenkins has noted that "Although religious change is commonly discussed in terms of conversion, it is often a matter of population transfer rather than of the transformation of personal convictions…and the Muslim rulers were particularly anxious to remove Christian populations from the Arabian Peninsula"[140]

Why Convert?

In examining the reason for conversion to Islam on such a mass scale, one needs to understand the social, psychological and even theological pressures that must have influenced many peninsula Arab Christians. As Patricia Crone points out: "The mass conversion of Arabia to Islam does not testify to any spiritual crisis, religious decadence…What the mass conversions show is that Muhammad's God had

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[136] Surah 2:256
[137] Nickel, 179.
[138] G.R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661-750* (London: Routledge, 1986) 4.
[139] Carter, "Christianity in the Gulf" 100.
[140] Jenkins, 31 and 212.

something very attractive to offer here and now…When Muhammad established himself, they concluded that "Allah is great." The Arabs converted to Islam because Allah was a greater power than any other spirit endowed with a name and a cult so far known in Arabia, and the problem is not the ease with which they could convert, but the inducement. What was it that Allah had to offer?"[141] Further clues to the rapid conversion of many Arab Christians can also be found in social anthropology. Scholar and social anthropologist Rodney Stark has made some insightful observations into why Christianity and a number of other influential religions succeeded to persuade people to 'make the switch' and change their religious behaviour. "Conversion is not about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about brining one's religious behaviour into alignment with that of one's friends and family members."[142] In applying this to the situation on the Arabian Peninsula, there are familiar scenarios when one considers the sense of kinship and brotherhood that many Arabs feel towards one another. For many of the Christian nomads and tribes who had previously subscribed to or identified with some form of Christianity, it was not difficult to conform to the beliefs of their victorious Muslim brothers, especially in the early days when Islam was still not clearly defined theologically but it was apparent that their victories over the Byzantines and Persians was bringing about a transformation in their fortunes. In fact, for several centuries after the original conquests, the great majority of those who accepted Islam converted quite voluntarily, for the usual range of reasons that explain such a transformation: some changed their religions for convenience or advantage, but most because they accepted the claims of the new religion to provide a definitive revelation of God's will. Many ordinary people probably accepted Islam for the same reason that their ancestors had become Christian – namely, that they followed the lead of tribal chiefs or other notables. "Conversion was all the easier because, in these early centuries, Islam bore a much closer resemblance to Christianity than it would in later eras, making the transition less radical."[143] This kind of transition has often been described as being a 're-affiliation' rather than a conversion. Conversions see shifts *across* religious traditions (ie. Roman Paganism to Christianity or Christianity to Hinduism). Re-affiliation sees a shift *within* religious traditions (i.e. Baptist to Anglican or Shi'ite to Sunni). "The process of re-affiliation is very similar to that involved in conversion though far more frequent and much less disruptive in terms of costs to individual and group."[144] Seen in this light, the transfer of 'Christians' to Islam on the peninsula in those early days can hardly be seen as a 'loss' for the Church since both the

[141] Crone, 241.
[142] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 16.
[143] Jenkins, 31.
[144] Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Ltd., 2000), 114.

Christianity and the Islam Arabs adhered to did not have the marked lines of distinction in their religious world-views that became so clear in later centuries. Furthermore, while many of the monotheistic Arabs; Christians or otherwise, might have ranked themselves as recipients of their religion's benefits, they were not always to be the participants in its values; an important distinction when determining the veracity of a community's religious convictions.

Conclusions

Christianity on the Arabian Peninsula was birthed against a backdrop of political and theological strife and disunity. The long confrontations between the Roman and Persian empires, the Jewish Himyarite and Christian Axumite kingdoms, Hellenistic and Aramaean Churches, Chalcedonian, Monophysite and Nestorian doctrines all contributed to divided loyalties and allegiances in the Arabs that Islam was able to exploit. Islam offered the Arabs a monotheism comparable to Judaism and Christianity but without their political and doctrinal ties. The failure of Christian Arabs to express a Christocentric faith through an Arab medium before the rise of Islam as well as their lack of scriptures in Arabic meant that the Gospel remained marginal to peninsula society. As we have seen, while Christianity seems to have disappeared quite quickly from the region it was not for the most part because the religion in its form was conscientiously wiped out. Rather there was a fairly swift adaptation of pseudo-religious Christian practice and belief on the peninsula to Islamicization and a more 'Arab' notion of national identity and world view. Nevertheless, there was definitely a determined effort on the part of Muslims in the peninsula to make sure Islam remained the only religion practised in that region. The further away from the Islamic heartland of Mecca and Medina, the slower the process became so that in areas outside the Peninsula that were subjugated to Muslim rule, Christians sought to preserve their identity and maintain their distinctive theological beliefs and culture. Today, Christianity amongst the indigenous Arab population of the peninsula remains a negligible figure despite the fact that guest workers in the region make up 7-10% in some countries.[145] If we are to see a re-birth of the Church in that area, the seeds planted will need to be free of political and western affiliation, strong in doctrinal unity that is Christ-centred and grounded in Arabic scripture, and allowed to grow in relative freedom from social and economic oppression. Only with a true understanding of the work of a 'supra'-tribal/ethnic Messiah and an identity in Him shall we see the desserts once again bloom as oases of joy and hope, rooted in the love of Christ.

[145] Philip Jenkins, "On the Edge of Extinction" *Christianity Today*, (November, 2014): 42.

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