

NARRATIVE AND METANARRATIVE IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM¹

By Duane Alexander Miller²

1 Metanarratives

A man goes to his doctor complaining about some stomach pains. The doctor runs tests and asks some questions, and he comes to the conclusion that his patient is suffering from indigestion, and must change his diet and take some medicine. Wanting a second opinion the man visits another doctor who, after a careful evaluation, breaks the bad news to him: his patient has an untreatable form of stomach cancer.

Now even if both of these doctors have excellent staff, labs and training, only one of them will be successful in his attempt at a treatment, the one who diagnosed the patient correctly. If you begin with an incorrect diagnosis, no matter what you have going for you, you will not be able to end up with a successful treatment.

I suggest that Islam and Christianity each have coherent metanarratives, and that in investigating the similarities and differences of these metanarratives we can gain important insights into the nature of both of these great *diins*.³

¹ This paper is partially based on a series of three lectures I gave at Christ Church (San Antonio, Texas) in the winter of 2007-08, and mostly on a later, condensed version given at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary (Nazareth, Israel) in May of 2009. At the behest of my colleague and friend, J. Scott Bridger, I have decided to put down on paper some of the main material from these lectures.

² Duane A. Miller teaches at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary.

³ I generally try to avoid using the word 'religion' in referring to Islam. Islam is certainly religious, but it is as political and juridical as it is religious. The concept of 'religions' is too tied to the context of Western secularism to be of much good to us. I prefer the Arabic *diin*, a gerund of the verb *daan* which means *he judged*. The concept of tying Islam and Christianity to this concept of judgment or discernment,

So what is a metanarratives? The prefix *meta* is Greek and means 'after'. Thus Aristotle's *Metaphysics* came after his *Physics* in one convention of ordering the philosopher's volume. Similarly the metacarpal bones are in your hand, but *after* your wrist (*carpus*). So a metanarrative is a story that comes *after* every other story; it encompasses, relativizes and situates every other story that came before it, whether that be a history of the State of Israel or the biography of St Thomas Aquinas or the conversion narrative of Paul. So this is the nature of the metanarrative, and I suggest that the little example I gave above about the two different diagnoses describes very well how Christianity and Islam *qua* metanarratives differ. In the second part of this paper, I will go a little into the topic of how the normative religious narratives (Scriptures) of these two *diins* relate to their metanarratives.

Protology is not a very well known branch of theology, but if we are investigating metanarratives this is our place to start. Protology is the study of beginnings or first things and is every bit as important as its better known cousin eschatology (study of last things).

Christianity and Islam both draw on variations of the Jewish creation story, but in their own ways add their own variations. Creation *ex nihilo* is a strong tradition in both *diins* and would generally be considered orthodoxy. Where we start to find significant divergence then is not so much in the area of cosmology, but in the area of anthropology: what is the human being? What is the relation of the human being to his creator? Here is the creation narrative as related in sura *Ta Ha*:⁴

We had already beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot: and We found on his part no firm resolve. (115) When We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves to Adam" they prostrated themselves, but not Iblis: he refused. (116) Then We said: "O Adam! Verily, this is an

reward and punishment, justice and injustice, good and evil, seems realistic and fair to me.

⁴ *Ta Ha* being the 20th Sura. The translation is that of Yusuf Ali.

enemy to thee and thy wife: so let him not get you both out of the Garden so that thou art landed in misery. (117) "There is therein (enough provision) for thee not to go hungry nor to go naked" (118) "Nor to suffer from thirst nor from the sun's heat." (119) But Satan whispered evil to him: he said "O Adam! Shall I lead thee to Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?" (120) In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them: they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden: thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and allow himself to be seduced. (121) But his Lord chose him (for His Grace): He turned to him, and gave him guidance. (122) He said: "Get ye down both of you - all together from the Garden, with enmity one to another; but if, as is sure there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way nor fall into misery. (123) "But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment." (124)

Let us note a few things about Adam from this passage and others. One is that the language regarding Adam's sin is much weaker than what we find in Genesis. Secondly, the results of Adam's sin is nothing close to the devastating raft of curses levied on man, woman, the snake and the earth that Jews and Christians know. Thirdly, in this Adam narrative the focus is more on the sin of the angel Iblis. The fall is not so much the fall of mankind itself, but rather the beginning of a contest between God and Iblis. Fourthly, we find here two key terms that in many ways dominate the entire Islamic metanarrative: guidance and slavery.

The fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity is then anthropological—or more precisely, hamartiological. Adam did sin, he was indeed punished, but in no way did his guilt develop into what Christians have variously called original sin or original stain. In the Adam narrative, as in Gen 3:15 and 3:21, we already have intimations of how this narrative will play out. In the Qur'anic narrative God appears to simply forgive Adam, and then warns him to follow his guidance and not turn from his message. In the Genesis nar-

rative, however, we have hints that God will somehow conquer the serpent through Eve, and furthermore God himself sacrifices an animal to provide garments for Adam and Eve indicating that their garment of fig leaves was not sufficient for covering their nakedness. Both of these would become important images for the early Christians as they struggled towards the formulation of the orthodox tradition.

The concept of guidance is a metatheme in Islam, just as redemption is for Christianity, and they are both revealed in the respective Adam narratives. At least in terms of reading these *diins* as metanarratives this is the key difference, and everything else flows from it. It is the problem that sets the scene for everything that comes after.

In Islam man is ignorant. Like Adam, he allows himself to be deceived. In Christianity, the very icon of God has been marred to the point where there is no hope of self-repair: God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Ecc 7:29). In Islam Allah responds, as he said to Adam, by sending guidance, by sending messengers. Man does not know how to follow God; he is ignorant (*jaahil*), and so the period of Arab history before the Messenger is appropriately called ‘the ignorance’ or in Arabic *al jaahiliyya*. Sometimes God sends warners to a few extraordinary prophets (Moses, David, and Jesus). He actually sent down books. While the Qur’an never claims that the text of these books (The Torah, Psalms, and Gospels) were ever corrupted, that has become a basic teaching of Islam and is commonly accepted today. Thus something different must happen—an uncorruptable book must be sent down, and that is the Qur’an. This is indeed what we read at the beginning of the Surah *Ta Ha*: ‘We have not sent down the Qur’an to thee to be an (occasion) for thy distress, But only as an admonition to those who fear (Allah)...’ (vss 2-3). Here then is the apogee of the Islamic metanarrative and both the themes of guidance and slavery are predominant: Some men will choose guidance as it is embodied in the Qur’an, and others will not. Their eternal fate rests on this obedi-

ence, this submission (*islam*) to the benevolent guidance of his creator. They are slaves of God, not his friends or children. Thus submission to God touches every part of life from diet to dress to speaking habits to banking laws to regulations on sex, brushing your teeth, and what to say before and after you urinate. To paraphrase the great Islamic thinker Sayyid Qutb, these laws are as much part of the fabric of the universe as are the laws of gravity or planetary motion. In the eschaton Islam will rule over the whole world, ignorance will be expunged from humanity, and the resurrected righteous will live forever.

The Christian metanarrative, having started out with a much more damning diagnosis, cannot simply dismiss the source of evil in the world as ignorance. Even an exalted saint like Paul confesses with heartfelt grief his own inability to follow God's law in Rom 7:

²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

In the Biblical metanarrative we find a couple of false starts. Maybe the children will do better than the parents? But then Cain's fratricide disproves that. Maybe the correct way to redeem humanity is simply by destroying all sinners, as in the Flood? Again, it does not work. Perhaps God's action of humbling the haughty nations at Babel will bring them to repentance? Again, there is no success. It is not until we reach the election of Abraham that we have more than a hint (as in Genesis 3) at the very lengthy path to the climax of this metanarrative. Abraham is elect of God not for his own sake, but for the sake of others. 'Whom you bless I will bless, whom you curse, I

will curse,' God tells him. He goes to the land that God shows him and dies there.

God continues his mysterious work of election in calling Israel to be a people for him. But, as with Abraham, Israel is not elect for Israel's sake but for the sake of the whole world. Indeed, there is in the preaching of John the Forerunner a sense of disgust at the self-importance of some Jews at being 'sons of Abraham'. The hope of what Israel could have been and should have been (and eventually, in Christ, the new Israel actually became) is described in Isa 2:

¹ This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

² In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

³ Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."
The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.
They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

⁵ Come, O house of Jacob,

let us walk in the light of the LORD.

This eschatological vision is different from what we find in Islam because here there is an actual meeting point with God. But Isaiah, at least in this passage, does not address the larger brokenness of man. His vision for Israel will not be accomplished, at least not in

terms of the geo-political categories with which he was familiar. The flaw and brokenness of the human being is such that no system of government or law is good enough so that the genuine shalom of God can be established. On the other hand, that is indeed what Islam claims of the shari'a: that it can establish the perfect law and perfect society here and now.

The fulfillment of all the images we have seen comes in God's Messiah: he is at once priest, king, and prophet. His teaching on the Kingdom and his unwillingness to establish a political order serve as a further indictment against the concept of Islamic shari'a. Is it too much to say that Jesus might see in a system like the shari'a a genuine idol? All the plans and designs of man are nullified in his cross. "Against the Word the unstilled world whirled."⁵ This is the climax of the narrative: it is in the multi-parted movement of conception, birth, exile, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost that we find God's full response to hamartiological problem of Genesis. The early church was aware of this dynamic. At first, every week, and then later, every year, it lived out all these events, writing the life of Jesus onto its time, and thus writing its own life *into* these movements of Messiah's Advent. This liturgical practice gave the early church, which of course had its flaws, a certain *dynamis* that made it able to witness to God's restoration of the broken icon, wrought in a way that Christians, by and large, are not able to. Could there be a connection between the sacrilization of the year and the ability to articulate the Gospel in terms other than *only* the cross, as is the way of evangelicals today? I would argue in the affirmative.

But to get back to Islam: Because Islam starts with a different problem, the solution offered by Christians is, at best naïve, and at worse blasphemous. The sort of intimacy entailed in the period between the Annunciation and the Nativity is outrageous—God's own Son being carried inside this Jewish teenager's body for nine

⁵ T.S. Eliot, 'Ash Wednesday', V.

months? When faced with persecution Muhammad fled to Yathrib. When faced with persecution Jesus did not flee, but went willingly with his captors. The Islamic year starts with Muhammad's acquisition of what would become plenipotentiary authority in Yathrib, the Christian calendar with (an approximation) of the birth of Jesus in poverty and scarcity.

Here is what I would regard as very a fundamental disjunct between Islam and Christianity: The Cross is itself the revelation of the absolute incapability of Empire and Temple to address the deepest needs of the broken icon. The cross reveals to us how the Temple and the Empire, when given free reign, actually kill God. How different is this from Islam, where the proof of God's choice of Muhammad was his ability to harness both Empire and Temple to his aims? We should not be surprised by this though: the *polis* is made up of people, and if our anthropology is different, then so will be our politic. "He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble."

This good news about God's restorative work on his broken icon through Messiah is to be spread around the world. Here is a path to peace and forgiveness like the Islamic shari'a, but it is redolent with images foreign to the Islamic vocabulary. If the metatheme of Islam's concept of the relation between man and God is that of slavery, then in Christianity it is that of filiation. Now the vocabulary of slavery is not foreign to Christianity, as we find with Paul's language of being 'slaves to righteousness' or with Mary's memorable acceptance of Gabriel's message—Behold the bondslave of the Lord (Lk 1:38 NAS).⁶ So here we do have, of sorts, a narrative bridge, a point of contact between Biblical narratives and Qur'anic narratives. But this must be qualified, because the slavery image is far from dominant in the NT. Flowing from Jesus' unconventional insistence on

⁶ The most popular Arabic translation also uses the word slave: *Ha ana ʿabdat ur-rabb*.

always referring to God as ‘my Father’ and reinforced in the prayer he taught his disciples, we find the language of filiation flourishing in both Pauline and Johannine material. Perhaps Muhammad’s lack of a father figure during his life, and the fact that all three of his sons died in their infancy, are important things to remember here. Jesus on the other hand, in addition to his growing awareness that his relationship with God was uniquely close and intimate, appeared to have largely functional family, at least from the very little we know of his childhood. So that is another case of narrative influencing metanarrative.

And now for some notes on eschatology, which I will touch on only briefly because it is not my forte. Christianity and Islam both have diverse traditions on the eschaton but there is, in general, the vision that history is moving to a defined end where good will triumph over evil, all humanity will be resurrected and judged, and God’s sovereignty will be fully established over the world. One point of similarity here is resurrection. The common Western idea today is that people die and their souls go to be with God in heaven, and that is salvation. That sort of thinking represents a drastic and tragic departure from the very Semitic nature of the Bible (and the Qur’an for that matter) as well as the emphasis of the early church on the bodily resurrection. So fundamental was this concept that it made itself into the single most wide-spread, oft-used and pan-ethnic summary of the Christian faith ever: the Apostles’ Creed. The use of this creed is baptistic: when one wants to be baptized, this is the summary of the non-negotiables. There’s nothing in there about the Tribulation or the Rapture or whether Job is an allegorical or historical figure or what have you. It does contain, in all its brevity, a statement about the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Furthermore, souls don’t go floating around in heaven forever, rather the body is resurrected and the City of God descends *from* heaven *to* earth:

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev 21)

Islam also foresees a resurrection and a paradise for those who have been granted entry. But is there the same closeness entailed in any Islamic eschatological view? I don't know, but we do see in the famous Throne Verse (2:255) the sort of mysterious unknown that Christians think of when they quote Paul (who was quoting Isaiah): "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor 2:9) And here is the Throne Verse (Pickthall):

Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous.

Perhaps there is a connection here in the eschaton. How much work has been done on comparing the concept of everlasting life between the two *diins*? Famously, Islam has a doctrine of the return of Jesus, son of Mary, and some have suggested that in this we have fertile ground for deeper conversations. I am a little suspicious about this though - the eschatological traditions regarding Jesus (and *Al Dajal*, the antichrist) in the various *ahadiith* and Islamic jurists are all over the place. The idea of the everlasting life and possibility of

some sort of immanence of God seems more like fertile ground. Let us also remember that both the Orthodox soteriology of Theosis and the Sufi tradition of merging or becoming lost in God's being seem close enough to warrant further research and conversation.

2 Narrative

Now I want to turn a little to the topic of specific narratives: not the overarching metanarratives, but specific texts and episodes of both *diins*. The supreme text for both is their Scripture, but there are historical documents and events that forever influenced them as well: what if Arius had been acquitted of heresy; what if Revelation and Hebrews had not been included in the New Testament; what if the Mu'atazila had triumphed over the Asharites? What if...

I have already mentioned a few narratives that have influenced and helped to shape the metanarrative of the two: regarding Islam, for example, the family situation of the Prophet and his flight from Mecca; regarding Christianity we could mention how it incorporated, very quickly, numerous ethnic and linguistic groups. This, in turn, meant that while it would retain elements of its Greco-Roman-Judaic birth milieu, it would also prove to be extraordinarily malleable in terms of its ability to make itself at home in different cultures.

I would like to suggest here two narratives that, in my mind, overlap quite significantly. If someone wants to build common ground with Muslims, focusing on what is agreed on *ab initio* rather than stressing differences (and I have mentioned numerous such differences), then I would suggest talking about Mary and natural revelation.

Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Indeed she has an entire *sura* named after her. She is also one of the few people in the Qur'an whose character has any depth. The characters in the Qur'an are often marshaled out, not for the sake of telling their story but as an example of divine wrath and thus a warning for people to listen to God and his Prophet; or, as an example of

steadfastness and perseverance and faith in God, which is an occasion for encouragement to Muhammad or the Muslims. It is not common to see much in the way of character development, certainly nothing like what we have with the detailed if sometimes baffling personalities of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, David, Jesus, and Paul. Even lesser characters like Hosea and Habakkuk have their lives laid open before us in the Bible. In any case, Mary actually has a bit of depth in Qur'an, with her surprised reaction to the angel, her later despair as she gives birth (apparently alone), her rejection by her own people who doubt her purity, and the unexpected vindication from the Prophet Jesus who speaks as a baby and defends his mother. This is the account according to Sura 19 (Maryam, Yusuf-Ali translation):

Relate in the Book (the story) of Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. (16) She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them: then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. (17) She said: "I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear Allah." (18) He said: "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son." (19) She said: "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" (20) He said: "So (it will be): thy Lord saith 'That is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us': it is a matter (so) decreed." (21) So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place. (22) And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: she cried (in her anguish): "Ah! Would that I had died before this! Would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" (23) But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): "Grieve not! For thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; (24) "And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree: it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. (25) 'So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man say "I have vowed a fast to (Allah) Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being.'" (26) At length she brought the (babe) to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: "O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! (27) "O sister of

Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!" (28) But she pointed to the babe. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" (29) He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; (30)" And He hath made me Blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live; (31)" (He) hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable; (32)" So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" (33) Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth, about which they (vainly) dispute. (34) It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it "Be", and it is. (35)

I have included the last section because, again, as is often the case in the Qur'an, the purpose of the inclusion of this narrative is to vindicate the Prophet Muhammad against his adversaries, in this case Christians of some sort.

This leads to a further question though—why stop with Mary and not go on to Jesus in terms of a narrative bridge between the two *di-ins*? Certainly, that is an option down the road, but in my experience Jesus is *ab initio* recognized as contested ground between Muslims and Christians; Mary is not. You mention Jesus and right away you have to choose to use either his Islamic name or his Christian name. Unfortunately, the very name, and which one you choose, can lead to all sorts of barriers being put up. Mary has one name—*Maryam*, just like the Hebrew. When speaking with Muslimaats especially I feel this is a possible starting place, and certainly here in Nazareth where we live. The other thing about Jesus is that ultimately one has to compare him with Muhammad. That can be very sensitive and hard for a relationship. That is not to say don't ever go there, but rather beware and be sensitive to the worldview of your Muslim interlocutor.

The second bridge is natural revelation. The Qur'an is replete with references to the *ayat* or signs of God. Mary and Jesus are two

ayats (unique among humanity—not even Muhammad is called an ayat). But also, nature is filled with signs that demonstrate the power and authority of God. Indeed, one’s eternal fate is tied to her reactions to these signs: "But those who reject Faith and belie Our Signs, they shall be Companions of the Fire; they shall abide therein" (2:39). Muhammad explained to Jews and Christians, who requested a miracle to verify his prophetic claims, that each verse in Qur’an was a sign; indeed, as we would say “verse 23:6”, in Arabic we say, “*aya* 23:6”. The Shi’a title ‘ayatollah’ literally means, *sign of God*. But there is a special place in nature for the signs of God:

Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (here) indeed are signs for a people that are wise. (2:164, Yusuf-Ali)

Compare this with Psalm 19:1-6:

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
- ² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
- ³ There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
- ⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,
- ⁵ which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
- ⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is hidden from its heat.

God's power to resurrect is also a sign:

Or (take) the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet, all in ruins to its roofs. He said: "Oh! How shall Allah bring it (ever) to life, after (this) its death?" But Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him up (again). He said: "How long didst thou tarry (thus)?" He said: "(perhaps) a day or part of a day." He said: "Nay, thou hast tarried thus a hundred years; but look at thy food and thy drink; they show no signs of age; and look at thy donkey: and that We may make of thee a Sign unto the people Look further at the bones, how We bring them together and clothe them with flesh! When this was shown clearly to him he said: "I know that Allah hath power over all things." (2:259 Yusuf-Ali)

This, curiously, is not that different from the point that Paul made to the Athenians regarding Jesus' resurrection, except that he connected the resurrection to the soon-to-come judgment: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30, 31).

The topic of the nature of God's signs in the Qur'an could be extended at length, but I have tried to establish that the concept of natural revelation, God revealing his glory and power to the world through what he has done and made, is a strong commonality in both metanarratives.

3 Conclusion

When we examine the metanarratives of Islam and Christianity we find that the fundamental difference, at least in terms of chronological story telling, is anthropological. The Creating God is similar if not the same, but when we arrive at the topic of man and the nature of man, we end up with two opinions: original sin or original innocence. And that choice means everything. The commitment to one of the two paths will lead to a diagnosis of ignorance and a solution

of religio-political empire; the other commitment will lead to the scandalous doctrines of the incarnation, Trinity and atonement.

Notwithstanding that, there are commonalities in the discrete narratives that resist the temptation to totally label someone as Other. I have suggested briefly that Mary and the natural revelation/the Signs of God are reasonable arenas for conversation and fellowship.