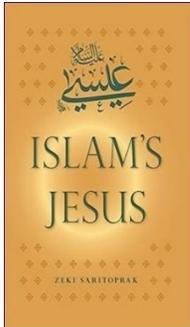




## Islam's Jesus

*Saritoprak's enlightening read on Qur'anic perceptions—with a myth*



Islam's views about Jesus are the focus of a new work by Saritoprak of John Carroll University in Cleveland. Next to Muhammad, Jesus is perhaps the most prominent messenger of God in a chain of prophets that Muslims believe reaches from Noah through the biblical patriarchs down through Moses, David, and Solomon. Jesus is mentioned in more than ninety verses of the Qur'an and appears not only as a receiver of divine revelation but can be seen, the author claims, as a precursor of Muhammad in terms of his ethical and pastoral teachings. According to Saritoprak, differences are due to the diverse contexts in which the two lived.

Further, in the Muslim tradition, veneration of Jesus—while markedly different from Christianity—"prefigures" the role of Muhammad. Saritoprak asserts that the Qur'an instructs Christians to avoid exaggerating the personality of Jesus in a way that is not consistent with his message, rejecting both the divinity of Christ and the Trinity. Likewise, Muhammad asks his companions not to deify him and to view him only as a human being, albeit one receiving the final and preeminent revelation from God in the Arabic language.

Saritoprak examines further commonalities between the two faith systems, using the figure of Jesus to find ways in which Christians and Muslims can engage in fruitful dialogue. In the Muslim tradition, for example, martyrs are not truly dead since they receive sustenance from their Lord (3:169-170). For the author, this echoes the Christian concept of an ascendant Jesus who has defeated death and is alive at the right hand of the Father.

However, Zeki Saritoprak veers off course when he maintains that Jews, Muslims, and Christians have, more often than not, lived peacefully side by side and points to the Ottomans' millet system as one of harmonious interreligious ties. This is just a romantic myth.

Real life rarely meant harmony but rather daily struggle for some barely-tolerated minorities, culminating in the genocide perpetrated by Ottoman Islamists in an axis with the Kaiser's Germans against Christians like Armenians and in the attempted genocide against Palestine's Jews in World War One. In the first case the Kaiser shared responsibility for it. Then, he tried to protect Jews also by Talat's 1918 "Ottoman Balfour Declaration" for a national home there, avoiding another full genocide. Besides, the British liberated them fast.

Despite the mentioned myth, Islam's Jesus is an easy read and does much to enlighten the reader on Qur'anic theologians' perceptions and knowledge of Jesus's teachings while offering insights into concepts shared by Christians and Muslims.

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