

Jesus and Mary as a Misread Sign

Spahic Omer

When Allah created the universe, He planted His signs (*ayat*) throughout it, as much in the smallest as in the grandest components.

The universe is a “created book” of signs which man, as Allah’s vicegerent on earth and to whom everything in the universe had been subjected, is invited to discover, read and act upon.

In addition to the “created book” of signs, there is also a “revealed book” of signs (*ayat*). The latter is in the form of the sacred Word revealed to all holy prophets.

The last and presently the only authentic and binding Word is the Qur’an, which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) as the Seal of the prophets.

Man’s earthly mission and signs

Man is created but to fulfil his earthly vicegerency mission relying on the imports and directional competences of the signs.

He is required to read and integrate the two “books” in such a way that the “book of revelation”, owing to its supreme authoritative, guiding and authenticating powers, leads the way.

The authority of the “book of creation” is relative and conditional. It is perennially tied to the “book of revelation” and the authority of its signs.

The statuses and functions of the two “books” are to be neither compromised nor swapped under any circumstances.

They are not to be separated and kept apart from each other either. Independently they are incapacitated. On its own, neither can take man over the line.

In this world, man can know his Creator only via His revelations and via the creation as the effects of His holy Attributes.

That is to say, by means of His revealed and created signs.

What is a sign?

A sign, therefore, is a thing, quality, event, or being whose existence and purpose signify the existence and purpose of something else, also a thing, quality, event, or being.

A sign could also mean a motion or action employed to convey information or an instruction.

Signs connect and communicate. For example, natural signs are indications of types of weather, medical symptoms are signs of diseases, and bodily gestures and manifestations are signs of emotional states.

The letters, words and expressions of a language are also signs, expressing particular meanings. Numbers are signs too. And so are certain physical objects that function as conventional signs people agree on their meanings.

Signage is defined as “the design or use of signs and symbols to communicate a message.”

In philosophy, semiotics is the “study of signs and sign-using behaviour.”

Needless to say that one must be literate and knowledgeable enough to be able to read and understand any form of signs. Otherwise, signs will be misread, misunderstood and misapplied.

Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) and Maryam (Mary) as a sign for the worlds

A significant sign of Allah is Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus) and his mother Maryam (Mary).

Allah says: “And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign” (al-Mu’minun, 50).

Also: “And We made her (Mary) and her son a sign for the worlds (*al-‘alamin*: all nations, peoples, or beings)” (al-Anbiya’, 91).

It is noteworthy that the Qur’an uses the word “sign (*ayah*)” in its singular form, while it speaks about both Jesus and Mary.

That means that both of them shared a single above all historical destiny, and represented a unique set of conditions that changed the course of human history.

A person can never talk about one of them, without referring to the other, as the name “Jesus, son of Mary (‘Isa ibn Maryam)” implies.

Hence, they were a unified sign, rather than two separate ones.

In passing, the very name of Jesus dispels the biggest untruth about him. He was not the son of God, but the son of Mary.

The sign exemplified the power and lordship of Allah, validating that He is the only One and that only He is worthy of all worship. He likewise does whatever and whenever He wants.

He is not questioned, whereas everybody else will be questioned. He is not in need of anybody or anything, whereas all are in need of Him.

The relationship between Allah and all other things and beings is one of the Creator and creations, and one of the Lord and servants. No matter what, there can never be an exchange of entitlements and rights.

The sign is misread

However, most people failed to come to terms with and understand that extraordinary sign. They failed to read it, and instead of making the Jesus phenomenon a source of blessings and authentic fortune, they made it a source of especially spiritual bedlam and tragedy.

Instead of reading thus the presence and greatness of Allah, and to draw ever closer to Him, they confounded firstly themselves and then others concerning Him, and set out on a journey of perpetual alienation from His grace.

Allah repeatedly tries to bring home to them the reality of the matter, appealing to their rationality and common sense. As if He tells them, what else can you trust besides the combination of reason and revelation conveyed to you by My holy messengers?

Allah thus imparts: “Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is like that of Adam. He created Him from dust; then He said to him: ‘Be’, and he was. The truth is from your Lord, so do not be among the doubters” (Alu ‘Imran, 59-60).

The situation increased the hardness and treachery of most Jews, to whom Jesus had originally been sent, and the misguidance as well as confusion of all those individuals and groups who subsequently associated their religious sentiments with the life-story of Jesus – and his mother.

They all held myriads of conflicting beliefs as to the purpose and mission of Jesus. To them, anything but the actual truth was making more “sense” and seemed more “attractive” - as is always the case with one who labours in a sea of uncertainty and delusion.

One should only examine, for instance, the extent of people’s disagreements pertaining to the most critical aspects of Jesus’ mission, such as his miraculous birth and the events surrounding the crucifixion.

It is there that ideological disagreements get most apparent and most inconsistent.

By way of illustration, Jesus’ birth, as the most miraculous event, occurs only in Matthew and Luke. Whereas some scholars wonder if Mark and Luke are irreconcilably in conflict as regards the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

Allah says: “But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not” (al-Nisa’, 157).

To make the terrestrial end of Jesus ambiguous – except to a small party of his true followers – might have been an additional trial, as well as a punishment, for those who were supposed to follow and obey him, but refused to do so, for they did not deserve anything better.

That only a likeness of the crucifixion - followed by other accompanying events - was shown to the people, denoted the pinnacle both of the trial and punishment. The name and legacy of Jesus were set to haunt forever such people.

The perennial disagreements with reference to the fundamental issues surrounding Jesus are unmistakable evidences of Almighty Allah’s plan at work. Allah cursed such people and sealed their hearts, stirring up bitterness and aversion among them.

Who misreads signs and why?

Allah is explicit in the Qur’an that His signs are misread and denied only by disbelievers, wrongdoers, unjust ones, and all who are treacherous, arrogant, heedless and ungrateful.

Indeed, those who rejected Jesus as a sign and prophet of Allah, during his lifetime and afterwards, the Qur’an repeatedly associate with disbelief, evildoing, injustice, ungratefulness, arrogance and treachery.

For example, about the Jews, Allah says: “So for their breaking of the covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They distort words from their (proper) usages and have forgotten a portion of that of which they were reminded” (al-Ma’idah, 13)

And about Christians, Allah says: “And from those who say ‘We are Christians’ We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So We caused among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. And Allah is going to inform them about what they used to do” (al-Ma’idah, 14).

Allah warns the Children of Israel in general not to be of the first to disbelieve in His revelations and signs, and, as an indication of treason and arrogance, not to exchange His signs for a small price (al-Baqarah, 41).

This way, all of them rendered themselves deaf, dumb and blind in relation to the presence of the truth and its signs – including Jesus and his mother.

In other words, they were spiritually illiterate and intellectually debilitated. The sign(s) of Jesus meant nothing to them. They only knew that something remarkable was happening, which they subjected to their shallow understanding and stained proficiencies, coming up after that with whatever they came up with.

Their fabrications about Jesus were based on doubt, ignorance and following conjectures, all of which stand no chance against the consistency and certitude of the revealed knowledge (signs).

Both Judaism and Christianity, it may be deduced, could be termed as forms of misreading and misapplying the Jesus phenomenon and sign. They were not only national (the Jews), but also international (Christians) in character.

This is expected and on account of Jesus and his mother being a sign not merely for the Jews, but as well for all nations and peoples (*al-‘alamin*) (al-Anbiya’, 91).

Jesus as a sign lives on

The story of Jesus and him being a sign is not over yet. It lives on and will do until the end of days.

According to the Qur’anic message, he was neither killed nor crucified. He was taken up by Allah to heaven, body and soul, and is still there (al-Nisa’, 157-158).

The Prophet (pbuh) said that Jesus will descend from heaven as a major sign of the Day of Judgment (Sahih Muslim).

To all, but especially the Jews and Christians, he will be manifested as an ultimate sign of the heavenly truth.

In order to make sure that no amount of blindness, deafness, or dumbness stands between anybody and the power of him as a sign, Jesus will break the Cross, kill the swine (pig) and abolish *jizyah* (a tax on Christians and Jews).

Allah will put an end to all religious sects except Islam during his time. He will furthermore slay the Antichrist (*Dajjal*).

After staying in the world for 40 years, he will die and Muslims will perform the funerary prayer for him (Sunan Abi Dawud).

According to some accounts, he will be buried near Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in Madinah.

When all this takes place, no Jew or Christian will remain heedless. They will be able to see the truth and eventually testify to Jesus both as a prophet and a sign. However, at that time it will be too little too late.

Allah says: “And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death. And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness” (al-Nisa’, 159).

According to some commentators of the Qur’an, “before his death” rather means before the death of every member of the community of the Scripture.

Such a viewpoint should be comprehended as follows.

Allah says: “And the intoxication (stupor or agony) of death will bring the truth; that is what you were trying to avoid” (Qaf, 19).

The intoxication of death is a moment – or a series of moments - when a person is transported from this world to the Hereafter.

It is at that point that every person sees the truth and attests to it. Naturally, all evildoers wish to return to this world and mend their ways.

People are told while departing this life: “Certainly you were heedless of it, but now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp and strong” (Qaf, 22).

When a Jew or a Christian dies, as part of his ultimate realization he understands the truth about Jesus as well, duly accepting it.

The significance of Jesus as a sign finally dawns upon him, but again, it is a case of too little too late.