

## Who is this al Masih Isa in the Qur'an or Jesus in the Bible?

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## Abstract

*This paper exegeted Qur'an chapter 5:110 (Surah 5:110), and a few others, as well as some passages of the Bible, in order to ascertain the true and correct personality of Al Masih Isa, otherwise known as Jesus Christ in the Bible. This became necessary because of the incongruent positions that have been attributed to Al Masih Isa by both the Muslim and Christian scholars which has resulted in a long debate among them due to hermeneutical differences. The exegetical approach adopted was to consider the textual evidences of texts that relate to Isa in the Qur'an, and also considered similar texts that relate to Jesus in the Bible. The works of other scholars and their commentaries in respect of the person of Isa were also considered. This paper finally concluded that Isa is Allah in human form, and that is why only the two -Allah and Isa- were the only Creators both in the Qur'an and the Bible, without anyone else. This paper would make it possible for the Muslims as well as the people of other faiths to give Isa His rightful place in the realm of religion and spiritual discourses.*

**Keywords:** Al-Masih Isa, Jesus, Allah, Qur'an, Bible

## Introduction

Many Muslim and Christian scholars have been greatly divided over the actual spiritual identity of Al Masih Isa or Jesus Christ. Whilst both have great regard for him, the level of honour accorded him differs in relation to the position attributed to his person. Whereas the Muslim *Ummah* regard Jesus as a prophet, the Christian community "believe that Isa al-Masih is more than a prophet."<sup>1</sup> Bishop Porteus, quoted by Waryono et al, believes that, "Jesus is the son of God."<sup>2</sup> Porteus also believes that Jesus is "God and the saviour of mankind;"<sup>3</sup> but the Muslims see him "as a man" who has "several features."<sup>4</sup> This is why Leirvik, in Waryono et al, submit that, the "the question of Isa al-Masih is one problem that is sensitive in the history of apologetics and Christian-Muslim dialogue."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A. Waryono, Zaenuddin H.P. and Mohammed S. M., "The Qur'anic Jesus: Isa al-Masih in the Qur'an," *Episteme* 14, no. 2 (2019): pp 350-373.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 350.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 351.



The purpose of this paper is to find out the true identity of Al Masih Isa or Jesus (Peace be upon him (pbuh)) in the Holy Qur'an with adequate support from the Bible. This has become important because of the peculiar attributes that the Qur'an and the Bible have used to describe him, as well as the unique miracles which he performed in the Qur'an. Essentially, this paper shall employ the use of exegesis as a means to seek the right interpretations of relevant surah and Bible passages that relate to the person of Isa (Pbuh). Hence, Sura 5:110, and a few others in the Qur'an and some passages from the Bible, will be considered in this discourse.

### The Exegesis of Sura 5:110 and others

In this Sura, this paper shall seek to examine and interrogate, especially the translation of the word *takh-luqu* which is used in the verse, and which is translated as "makest"<sup>6</sup> by a renowned Islamic scholar of no mean stature, Abdullah Yusuf Ali. This interrogation will assist us to identify, in this paper, who Isa truly is in the context of what he is reported to have done in the Sura. The paper shall also find out if what he did is something any human being could just ordinarily do. Better still, could what he did in this sura be just a matter of chance, or does it have a resemblance of a *deliberate* act?

First and foremost, it is important to note that similar word as "takhluqu" occurs in some other verses (e.g., Surah 22:73; 25:3) and they are translated as "create" by Ali. Why would he prefer to use *makest* in Sura Al-Maida (Q 5:110), but use *create* for the same word in other verses indicated above? Meanwhile, let us examine the above three verses<sup>7</sup>

Then will Allah say "O Jesus the son of Mary.... Behold! I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit.... And behold! Thou makest (*takh-luqu*) out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave. And thou breathest into it, and it becometh a bird. (Q. 5:110).

O men! Here is a parable set forth! Listen to it! Those on whom, besides Allah, ye call, cannot create (*yakhluquu*) (even) a fly if they all met together for the purpose! (Q. 22:73).

Yet have they taken, besides Him, gods that can create (*yakhluquuna*) nothing but are themselves created (*yukhlaquuna*); that have no control of hurt or good to themselves; nor can they control Death nor Life nor Resurrection. (Q. 25:3).

<sup>6</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur'an*, (Kano Nigeria: Alkali Sharif Bala, 1934), 128.

<sup>7</sup>Ali, 334, 353.

In a similar vein, another version<sup>8</sup> of the Qur'an checked and revised by Dr. Mahmud Y. Zayid, assisted by a committee of Muslim Scholars and approved by the Supreme Sunni and Shii Councils of the Republic of Lebanon, reads:

Then Allah will say: 'Isa, son of Mariam... I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit ... by My leave you *fashioned* from clay the likeness of a bird and breathed into it so that, by My leave, it became a living bird. (Q. 5:110).

O men, this is a parable. Listen to it. Those whom you invoke besides Allah could never *create* a single fly, though they combined to do this. (Q. 22:73).

Yet (the unbelievers) serve, besides him, other gods which can *create* nothing and were themselves *created*: (gods) which can neither help nor harm themselves, and which have no power over life death or death, or the raising of the dead. (Q. 25:3).

From the foregoing, it should be noted that all the four words above, namely: *takh-luqu*, *yakhluquu*, *yakhluquuna*, and *yukhlaquuna* translated variously as *make* *stork fashioned*, *create*, and *created*, have their root in the word "khalaqa"<sup>9</sup> which means, *to create*, and, *produce*. The prefixes, *ta*, *ya*, and *yu* which mean by, Me, and my are only prepositions<sup>10</sup> and affixes of the first person singular which do not change the meaning of the aorist, *khalaqa*, significantly. For this reason, therefore, the most appropriate translation of Q. 5:110 that is free from any form of bias which this paper will suggest should read:

Then will Allah say "O Jesus the son of Mary.... Behold! I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit.... And behold! Thou *created* out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave. And thou breathest into it, and it becometh a bird. ...

#### Allah and Al Masih Isa as "Creators"

Meanwhile, one may ask why the Islamic Scholars avoided, and still avoid, rendering *khluqas* *create* whenever it relates to Isa or Jesus. Is it to avoid calling or referring to Isa as a "creator," or better still, is it to avoid referring to him as "the Creator"? At this juncture, it is important to ask some pertinent questions. Was what Isa did and reported in Q. 5:110 a coincidence? Better still, did it happen by chance, or, was it an intentional or deliberate act? Is it something anyone could just do, or is Isa really a *creator*? Or, is he even the *Creator*? Let us find out first of all from the Qur'an!<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mahmud Y. Zayid, *The Qur'an*, (Lebanon: Dar Al-Choura, 1980)

<sup>9</sup> John Penrice, *Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-an*, (Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 1991), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 21, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Ali, *Roman Transliteration of the Holy Qur'an*, 256, 257.

We created (*khalaqna*) man from sounding *clay*, from mud  
*moulded* into *shape*;

Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create  
(*khaa-liqum*) man, from sounding *clay* from mud *moulded*  
into *shape*;

When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) *breathed into*  
him of My Spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him. (Q. 15:  
26, 28, 29). Emphasis supplied.

The above Sura reveals Allah as the Creator, and it describes how He created man. Yes, it shows how He first moulded man from clay or mud into a shape before breathing into Him of His Spirit in order to give him (man) life. Similar account can be found in the Bible!

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and  
breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became  
a living soul. (Gen 2:7, KJV).

Both the Qur'an and the Bible quoted above show the deliberate act of God in His work of creation, particularly the creation of man. A careful look at the account given in Q. 5:110 above also shows a deliberate act of creation. Here, Isa or Jesus took *clay*, *moulded* it into a *shape* of a bird, and then *breathed into* it in order to give it life. All the steps taken by God or Allah to create man were the same steps taken by Jesus to create the bird; and the end results are the same in both cases: the moulded man became a living soul, and the moulded bird became a living bird. It follows, therefore, that what Isa did was deliberate and intentional, and was not a matter of chance or coincidence. Besides, it is not anything that any man can just do. So, arguably, both Allah and Isa created in both cases. Hence, without any form of bias, both Allah and Isa are *creators* in the above instances. It is clear, therefore, that Isa is a creator! But is that all he is or he is even "the Creator"? In other words, is Isa *Allah*?

#### **Is Al Masih Isa Allah?**

Before we explore the Qur'an for an answer to this question, let us first consider what the Bible has to say about the person of Jesus. After all, the Qur'an<sup>12</sup> says:

If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee,  
then ask those who have been reading the Book from before  
thee: the truth had indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be  
in no wise of those in doubt; And before thee We sent none  
but men, to whom We granted inspiration: if ye realise this  
not, ask of those who possess the Message. (Q. 16: 43).

So, what does the Bible say about Isa?

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<sup>12</sup>Alli, 214, 264.

In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth. (Gen 1:1, KJV). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was *life*; and the life was the light of men. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. And the *Word was made flesh*, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-4, 10, 14, KJV). Emphases mine. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. (Col 1:16, KJV).

A closer look at the above Scriptures does reveal a lot about the person of Jesus. Whereas the book of Genesis simply tells us that *God created in the beginning*, the book of John tells us more. It makes us to understand that God actually created by His *Word* and that this *Word is God*. In other words, the actual "Creator" is the *Word* because according to John, there was never anything that was made without *Him*.

Furthermore, John tells us that it is this *Word* that actually carries *life* in Him (see verse 4 above, and verse 6 of John 14). That this same "Word" later became *flesh and dwelt among us*. The book of Colossians add that *all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible*, were made by this "Word" who later became flesh and dwelt among us. Who then is this "Word" since all the above Scriptures have not mentioned anyone by name? Let us consult the Qur'an!

Behold! the angels said: "O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a *Word* from Him: his name will be *Christ Jesus*, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those *nearest to Allah*. (Q. 3:45, Ali). Emphases mine.

The above Sura identifies the Word as Al-Masih Isa or Jesus the Messiah. Hence, it may suffice one to simply say, since both the Bible and the Qur'an report that it was God (Allah) who created all things in the beginning (Gen 1:1; Q 15:26, 28, 29) by His Word, and this Word is God (John 1:1-3), and the Qur'an has helped to identify this Word as Jesus Christ (Sura 3:45), then Jesus is God or Isa is Allah. But the Muslim commentators do not easily give in to this! Commenting on Sura 3:45 quoted above, Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq<sup>13</sup> observed that "Muslim commentators have endeavoured to minimize the full impact of the plain declaration of Koran that Jesus Christ was the Word of God Incarnate." To buttress this assertion, he went ahead to quote, as an example, the explanation of Fakhar al-Din Razi on the above passage thus:

<sup>13</sup>Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*, (Kaduna, Nigeria: Evangel Publishers Ltd., 1980), 67.

'The Word from Him' i.e., the essence of the word, as one would say of a brave man, 'the essence of bravery or generosity itself'. The following traditions on the Messiah, so called, because [he was] kept clear from the taint of sin, or anointed with oil like other prophets, or at his birth, touched by the wing of Gabriel when born, to avert tact of Satan. 'Exalted in the world' by the rank and wonderful miracles and vindication from the accusation of the Jews, and 'in the world to come', in virtue of his exalted place with God, intercession of his people and heavenly graces. 'The Word from Him,' the pronoun (Him) refers back to the "Word", just as the same pronoun "in his name" refers to the Messiah. Why then the pronoun is not of the same gender as "the Word"? Because the person referred to is masculine.<sup>14</sup>

I agree with Abdul-Haqq as he submits that

Razi has a great difficulty in explaining away the simple connotation of the Koranic expression used for Jesus Christ- 'the Word from Him.' In order to achieve his purpose, he goes easy with the grammar and literal sense of the expression. Thus he refers the pronoun (Him-masculine in form) to "Word" (Kalima-feminine in form). It amounts to saying that the "Word was from the Word." To put it in other words, "Jesus, as it were, is the father of Jesus."<sup>15</sup>

In addition, given the exegesis of Razi quoted above, it does seem to me that if the *Word was from the Word*, and the Qur'an says *Allah giveth... a Word from Him*, then it amounts to saying that the *Allah was from the Allah*, or *Allah giveth...a Allah from Allah*. In any case, the "Word" here simply refers to Allah! However, Abdul-Haqq observes that another great commentator, Ibn Hazam, "grants that Jesus Christ is the Word (Kalima) from God, but that this Word is a created being, not divine."<sup>16</sup> Abdul-Haqq emphasised that "the difference of opinion between Razi, who says Jesus Christ is not the Word of God, and Ibn Hazam, who says He is, illustrates the perplexity of Muslim commentators in dealing fairly with Christological passages of the Koran."<sup>17</sup> Appealing to Sura 3:39, he insists that "in the expression 'Word from Him,' the participle (from) 'min' signifies a generic relationship between the noun and the pronoun linked together by it. He, therefore, submits that "'the Word' is of the same divine essence as Him (hu)-God."<sup>18</sup>

To further support the above position, G.J.O. Moshay<sup>19</sup> quotes Al Shaikh Muhy Al Din Al Arabi who "points out that the Arabic word translated 'whose' in that verse is *ismihi*. It is a masculine personal pronoun. That is why the English

<sup>14</sup>Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*, 67.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Abdul-Haqq, 67.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 68

<sup>19</sup>G.J.O. Moshay, *Who is this Allah?* (Houston: Bishara Publishers, 2002) 107-108

translation has rightly used the personal relative pronoun 'whose'. This shows that the Word being spoken about is not just a grammatical unit, or even a power, but a person." He also observes that the celebrated Arabic scholar Al' Arasi wrote: "The Word is God in theophany ... and it is the one divine person."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Moshay submits that "if the Word is a person, and the Word is God, and the Word became flesh, it means God became flesh. This means that it is not the case that Jesus, a mere man, made himself to be God, or Christians made him so, but that God made Himself to be in Jesus."<sup>21</sup>

The Qur'an speaks further about the person of Isa:

Verily Jesus Christ Son of Mary is the apostle of God and *His Word* which He conveyed into Mary and a *Spirit from Him*.  
(Sura 4: 171, Sale). Emphasis supplied.

According to Abdul-Haqq,<sup>22</sup> the expression "Word from Him" in Sura 3: 45 earlier quoted is equal to "His Word" in Sura 4: 171 above. Hence, he submits that "it should be plain for any reasonable person to see that the Word of God must be of the same nature" even though "Muslim commentators have sought to avoid this conclusion in regard to Jesus."<sup>23</sup> But Waryono et al admit that, "the mention of Isa as the word is one issue that distinguishes Islam with Christianity in looking at Isa and revelation."<sup>24</sup> They insist that "Isa is called the word because he was created directly by God with His word *kun* and remained unchanged in terms of shape or form, he remains a man and not a child of God, nor God."<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Caner and Caner posit that the understanding of the Muslims that "Jesus is not God," is another major difference that exist between the "Jesus of Islam and the Jesus of Christianity."<sup>26</sup> They further claim that Surah 5:75 which states that, "Christ the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger, many were the Messengers that passed away before him," make the Muslims to see Jesus simply as the "son of Mary."<sup>27</sup> The Caners also submitted that the Islamic scriptures known as the Glorious Qur'an distinguished Jesus primarily with the title *Ibn Maryam* (that is, Son of Mary) twenty-three times in order to stress the humanity and mortality of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> According to the Caners, other titles associated with Jesus in the Qur'an include *Al Masih* (which means Messiah) and *Rasul* (which means the "Apostle" or "Messenger"). To the Muslims, the title *Al Masih* only designates Jesus as the "anointed one" and nothing more, just as the title *Rasul* only designates Jesus simply "as the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 108

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim*, 68

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>A. Waryono, Zaenuddin H.P. and Mohammed S. M., "The Qur'anic Jesus: Isa al-Masih in the Qur'an," 363.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ergun M. Caner and Emir F. Caner, *Unveiling Islam: An Insider's Look at Muslim Life and Beliefs* (Kaduna Nigeria: Evangel Publishers, 2002), p 219.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

mouthpiece of God, but not in anyway connected to the nature of God.”<sup>29</sup> Another position of the Muslims about Jesus which make them take Jesus as mere mortal is the fact that he was likened to Adam in existence as it pertains to his fatherhood in the Qur’an. Surah 3:59 states, “the similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: ‘Be’: And he was.” So, by this Surah, the Muslims parallel the birth of Jesus to that of Adam – “creation without need of a father.”<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, quoting Raghīb al-Isfahani, Waryono et al submit that, “Isa is called the word, because through it, God shows the way human live, just as God shows human with His other words like al-Qur’an.”<sup>31</sup> It does appear that by this submission, al-Isfahani seems to liken Isa to the al-Qur’an. Meanwhile, al-Qur’an is believed by the Muslims to be “a revelation from God (Allah).”<sup>32</sup> Following the above submission, therefore, one can posit here that, Isa is a revelation from God (Allah). If so, a being who is a revelation from Allah cannot, and should not, be equated with mere mortals because he is uncreated, just as the Sunni Muslims who constitute the majority in Islam hold the belief that “the Qur’an is uncreated.”<sup>33</sup> Again, commenting further on Sura 4:171, Nureni Aderemi Alabi<sup>34</sup> says, “this verse is a stumbling block for [many] Muslim scholars because it clearly declares that Jesus Himself is Spirit from God instead of being formed by the Spirit of God as in the two cases of Adam and Mary in the Qur’an” because “in the cases of Adam and Mary God breathed into them of His ‘Spirit’ (Sura 15: 29; 32:9; 21: 91; 66: 12).” He stated further that “the Spirit and Adam are two distinct persons” but “Jesus Himself is one with the Spirit”; that “in Adam’s instance, the breathing ‘of’ God’s Spirit signifies the means” whereas, “for Jesus, a Spirit ‘from’ God describes the nature of Jesus Himself.” He observes that “the Qur’an in Sura 4:171 uses the conjunction ‘and’ to tie ‘His Word’ with a ‘Spirit from Him.’”<sup>35</sup>

In a similar vein, Moshay,<sup>36</sup> connecting the Bible which says “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24), with the Qur’an which says, “Jesus is the Spirit of God that came into the Virgin Mary” (Sura 21:91), submits as follows:

If God is a Spirit and Jesus is the Spirit of God (and we agree that the spirit and the body are distinct yet one), then we do not need a *modus tollendoponem* or any complex logic to conclude that Jesus is one with God. We should also remember that another name of Jesus (given to Him even 700 years before He was born physically) is *Immanuel*, meaning, ‘God with us’ [Isaiah 7: 14].

<sup>29</sup>Caner and Carner, 219.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 215.

<sup>31</sup>A. Waryono, Zaenuddin H.P. and Mohammed S. M., 363

<sup>32</sup>What is al-Qur’an? <https://quran-archive.org/commentary-of-the-quran> (Accessed 26 November 2023).

<sup>33</sup>Is al-Qur’an created? <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki> (Accessed 26 November 26, 2023).

<sup>34</sup>Nureni Aderemi Alabi, *Jesus of the Holy Qur’an*, (Lagos, Nigeria: First Concept, 2009), 16.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 17

<sup>36</sup>Moshay, *Who is this Allah?* 107



So much about what people say about Jesus, what does Jesus say about Himself? In the book of Matthew 7: 21-22, He calls Himself "Lord". He says "He is one with God" (John 14: 9-11). He calls Himself "the first and the last" (Rev 1: 17); no wonder He told the Jews that "before Abraham was born, He had been" (John 8: 58). Could Jesus really be right in making these claims? Let us go back to the Qur'an for an answer!

Is then He who creates like one who creates not? (Sura 16: 17, Ali).

The Qur'an asks a very pertinent and reasonable question which demands an answer from every sincere and unbiased hearts. The answer to this question is surely obvious! Only a moron will compare a creator with a creature! But before Allah asks this very important question, He has made it very clear to anyone who cares to understand in the earlier ayats, 3-16, that He, only, is "the Creator" of all things, including the heavens. He added in Sura 36: 81 that He, as the only Creator of the heavens and the earth, can create again the likeness of what He had created before whenever He chooses to do so; none else can perform such a feat but Him. Hear Him:

Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like thereof? – Yea, indeed! For He is *the Creator*, Supreme, of skill and knowledge (infinite). Emphasis supplied.

He confirms further in Sura 10:4, 34; 27:64; 29:19; 30:11, 27, that "it is He who *beginneth* the process of creation, and *repeateth* it." One may need to ask at this point if God had had occasion to repeat His creative work at any time. Since Allah is not a liar, He obviously must have *repeateth* the process of creation before He can make a boast of His recreative power in the above Suras. Indeed, a deep perusal of the Qur'an from the first Sura (Fatihah) to the last one (An-Nas), reveals that "the process of creation" is only repeated in Al-Maidah 5:110 where "Isa or Jesus took *clay*, *moulded* it into a *shape* of a bird, and then *breathed into* it and it 'becometh a bird.'" This is the only pattern of creation that has the exact resemblance of the one Allah, Himself, did in the beginning in the entire Qur'an.

### Conclusion

It does seem to follow from the foregoing that since Allah has made it unmistakably clear in the Qur'an that He only is the Creator, and only Him can repeat creation, and He truly repeated creation *through the person of Isa* (Jesus Christ), then it is reasonable to conclude that *Isa is Allah*. Again, since the Qur'an describes Isa (pbuh) as both the Word and the Spirit of Allah, and neither the word nor the spirit of a being can be isolated or separated from the being, it suffices to submit that Isa is same with Allah. But if anyone is still in doubt, or in disagreement about this conclusion, I wish to leave such a one with the following:

It is because certain things about God cannot be imagined that they are called 'wonderful'. God ceases to be God if His

nature and capabilities are only the things that can be logically reasoned out by the human mind.<sup>37</sup> Allah is everything and nothing. He cannot be grasped by human mind and is greater than we can comprehend. He rules and governs the world and entire universe.<sup>38</sup> And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.<sup>39</sup>

Consequent upon the above, it is proper to know and accept Al Masih Isa as not only a special or favoured Prophet, but as God. Indeed, He should be seen or understood as Allah, the Creator of all things.

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<sup>37</sup>Moshay, *Who is this Allah?* 106

<sup>38</sup>Abd Al Masih as quoted by Alabi in *Jesus of the Holy Qur'an*, xi

<sup>39</sup>1Tim 3:16, KJV