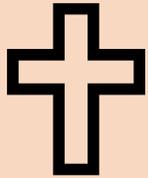# A DEFINITION OF HISTORY

History (from the Greek ἱστορία, historia meaning inquiry, knowledge acquired by investigation) of the study of the past events surrounding a person or thing.

TWO FAITHS AROSE OUT OF JUDAISM
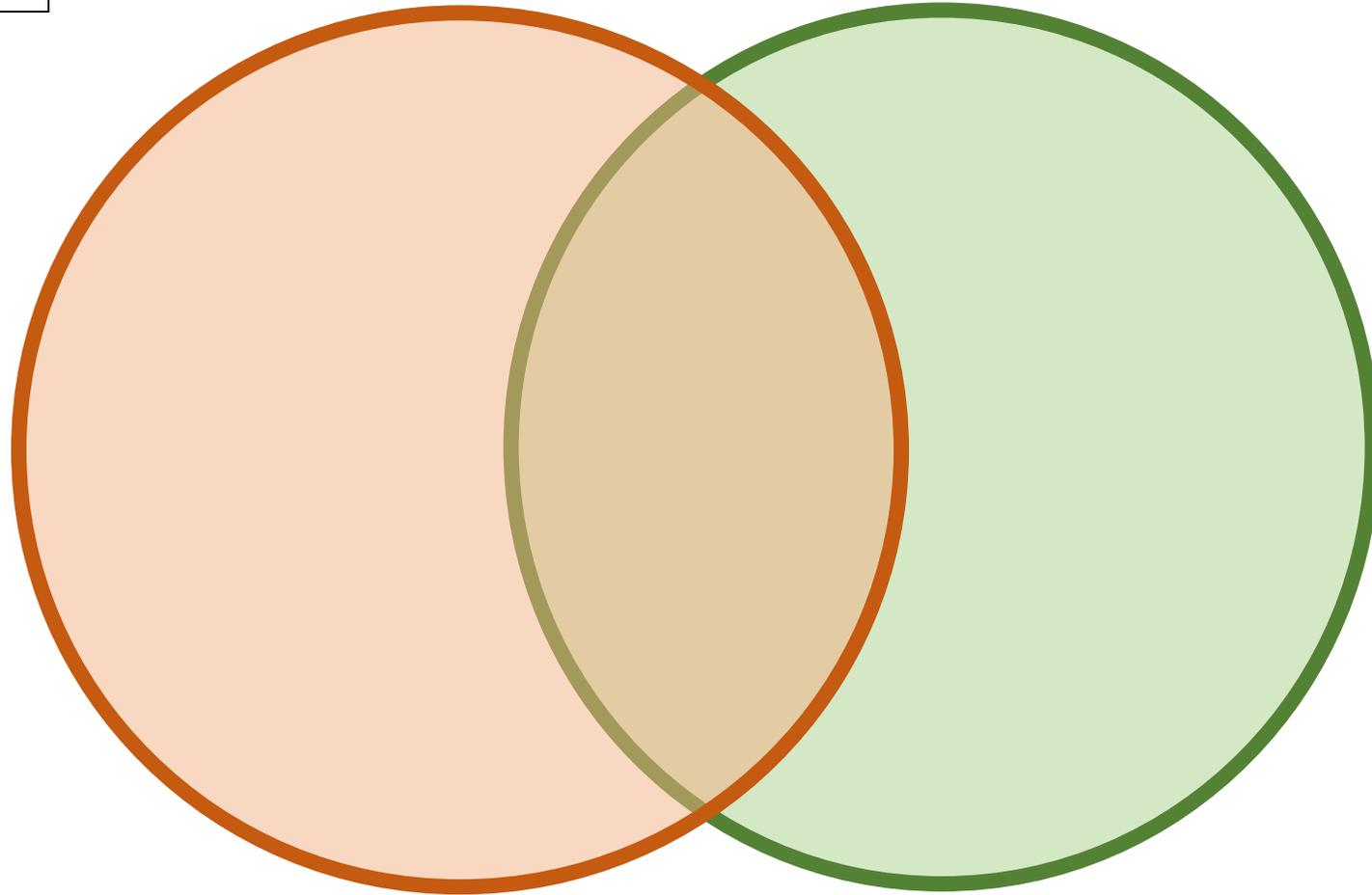
Christianity

Islam

Admitted truths represented by overlap of concentric circles

Christianity

Islam

TWO FAITHS SPRANG OUT OF JUDAISM WITH SOME COMMON THEOLGICAL TRUTHS

- Emphasized One Creator God
- Centrality of the Divine Law
- Focus on revelation of God's will by the written Word
- The preeminent place of prophets in interpreting it

DIALOGUE

- Def. of dialogue: a 'reasoned discussion' usually designed to uncover and establish similarities and dissimilarities based on evidence.

- 1.1.2. USAGE OF DIALOGUE BY CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

- Early Christians was 'reasoning for the sake of persuasion' (Acts 17:2, 18:4 etc.).

- Early Muslims holding dialogue with non-Muslims to gain an adherent. For example, one reads in surah xvi (al-Nahl)125: "Call thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and good admonition, and dispute with them in the better way".
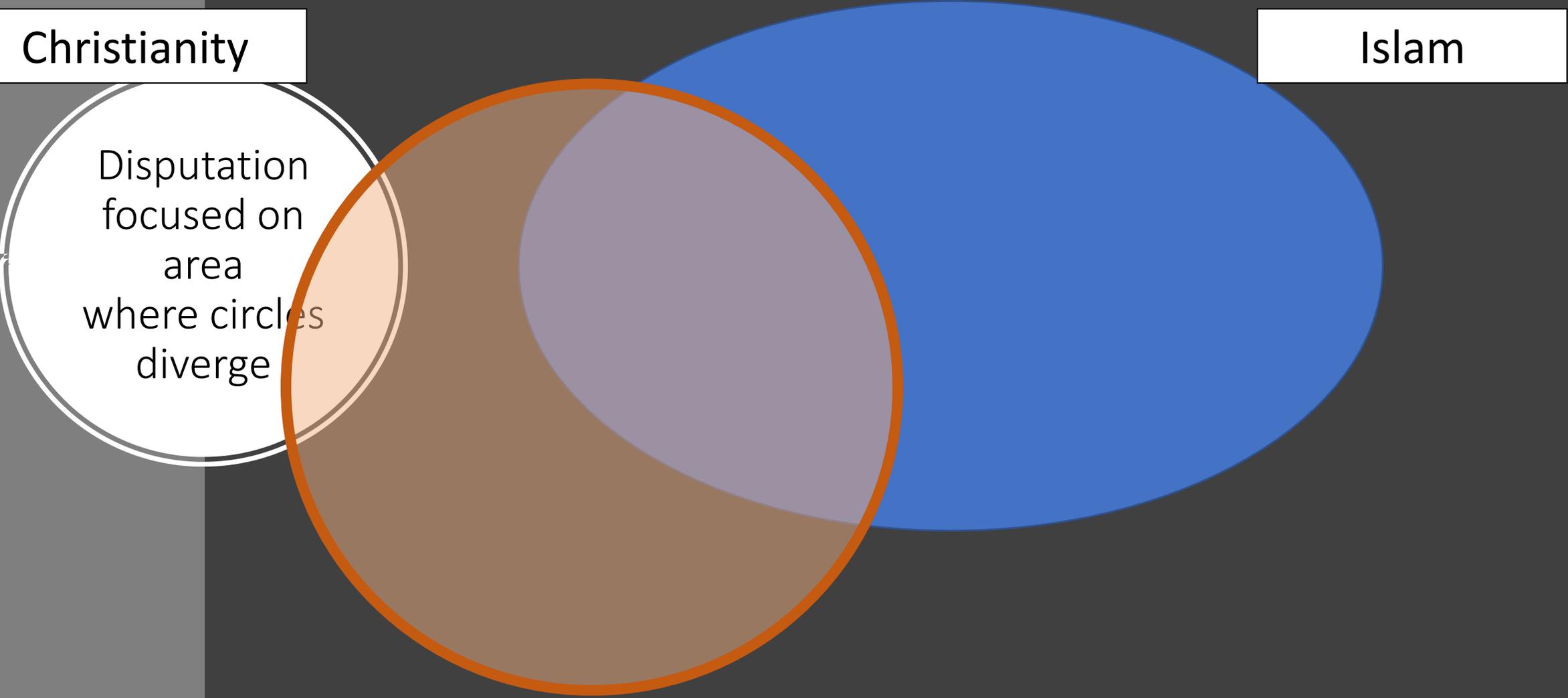
dialogue: a 'reasoned discussion' usually designed to uncover and establish similarities and dissimilarities based on textual evidence.

DISPUTATION SHUNNED BY SOME EARLY CHRISTIANS & MUSLIMS BUT EMBRACED BY LATER ONES

- Disputation: (Latin: *disputatio*) offered a formalized method of debate designed to uncover and establish differences based on reason.

- Some early Christians e.g.: Paul the Apostle described this type of religious controversy or diatribe (paradiatrib) with great contempt.

- Early Muslim: surah xl (al-Mumin) 4: "Nobody enters into arguments over the signs (or the verses) of God except those disbelieve."

EARLY CHRISTIAN DIALOGISTS IN HISTORY

John of Damascus (675-749, far right)

Mar Timothy (727-823, near Left) and

Paul of Antioch (d.1180, above).

THE DEBATE *on the* CHRISTIAN FAITH *between* PATRIARCH TIMOTHY I *and* CALIPH MAHDI *in* 781 A.D.
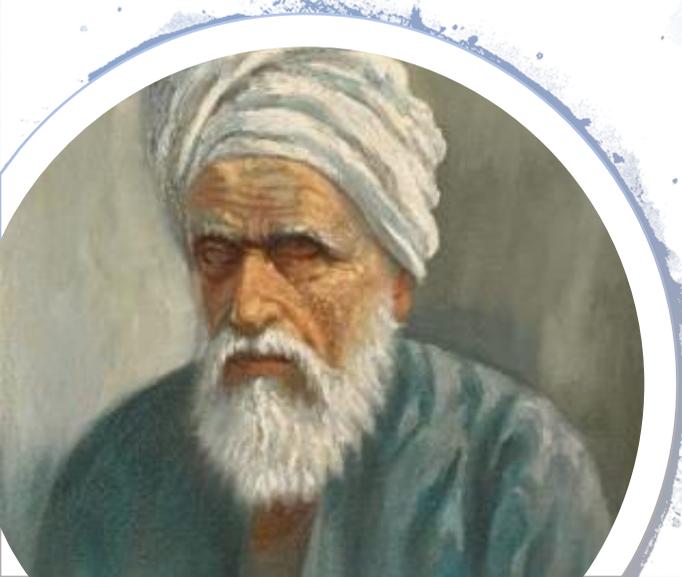
TRANSLATED BY A. MINGANA

EARLY MUSLIM DIALOGISTS & WRITERS IN HISTORY

- UPPER Lft.: 'Umar II Caliph in Damascus (717-720) conducted dialogue with John of Damascus.

  Middle Rt. : Caliph al-Mahdi˜ (775-785) conducted dialogue with Mar Timothy I, Nestorian Patriach.

  Below Lft.: Ibn Taymiyya (lived from 1263-1328) responding to Paul of Antioch's *Risala* in four volumes:

DISPUTATION EMPLOYED BY LATER CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

- Later Christians and Muslims focused their attention on the area where the intersecting circles, representing the Christian and non-Christian religions, were separate.

- Their method of dispute was based on the thinking of Aristotle and his method of logical dialectic.

- Logical dialectic involves basing ones' conclusion on reasoning through discussion of conflicting ideas.

Comparison of dialogue based on admitted truths with Disputation based on logical dialectic

- Dialogue based on admitted truths involves basing ones' conclusions on textual study;
- Disputation based on logical dialectic involves basing ones' conclusions on reasoning through discussion of conflicting ideas.
- Dialogue was engaged in to gain an adherent;
- Disputation was engaged in to prove one position superior;

# 2.0.1 IMPORTANCE OF EARLY MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUES

pivotal topics were introduced; for example a discussion of:

the Qur'an, Sunna, Muhammad,

Jesus in Islam, the Bible in Islam and God in Islam.

PIVOTAL TOPICS IN STUDYING ADMITTED TRUTHS;

SOURCES OF REVELATION IN ISLAM & CHRISTIANITY;
GOD'S: ESSENCE, NATURE, ATTRIBUTES, AND ACTS;
GOD'S LAW;
HUMANITY, SIN;
SALVATION;
PROPHETS;
MESSIAH/JESUS;
THE END TIMES;
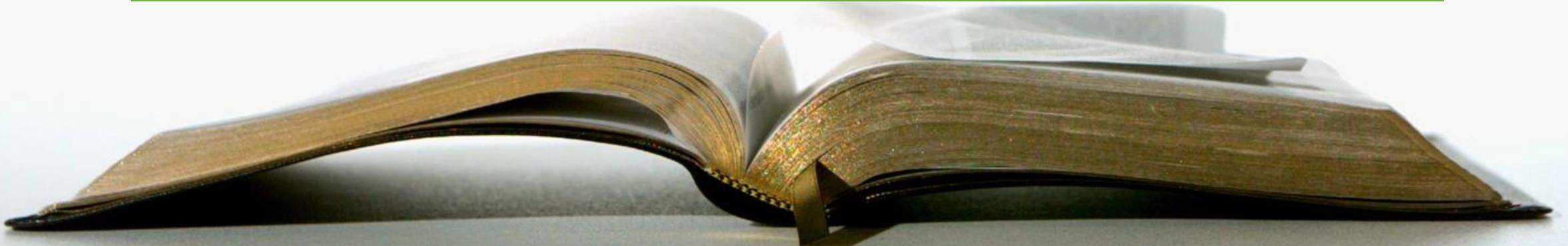
2.0.2. HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE EARLY MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUES

During the first century of Islam, Muslim scholars were too busy defining their own faith to be greatly concerned with interacting with Christian theology.

After the eleventh century the Crusades placed a great barrier between Muslim and Christian relationships.

Between the eighth and the eleventh centuries, there was significant scope for productive Muslim-Christian dialogue.

Following the introduction of dialogues by John of Damascus (675-753) with Ummayad Caliphs, dialogues reached a climax at Baghdad with Mar Timothy during the 'Abbasid Caliphates of al-Mahdi (775-785) and al-Ma'mun (813-833).

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# 3.0 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND METHODS OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS (675-753).

- John of Damascus was an eminent theologian of the Eastern Church; he derived his surname the city of his birth.

- John's grandfather was Mansur b. Sergun, governor of Damascus for the Byzantines & who surrendered the city to the Arabs in 635 AD.

- John, like his grandfather, worked in the treasury as an accountant for the Umayyads.

- After 'Umar II assumed power (717-720) John resigned (724) to live in Palestine at monastery of Mar Sabas writing many books until his death 753.
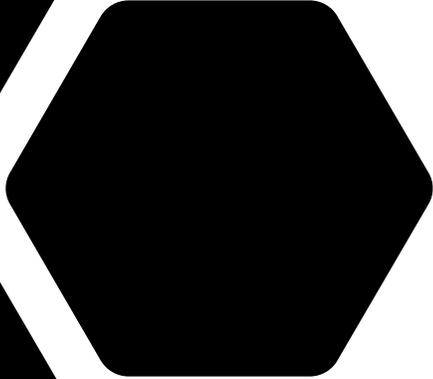
3.1 THE THEORETICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS LED TO DIALECTICAL THEOLOGY

- His theoretical works *Dialectica, De Haeresibus* and *De Fide Orthodoxa* form a trilogy and were instrumental in laying the theological foundations for dialectical theology.   Sweetman, *Theology,* Part I, Vol. I, p. 65.

- His work *Dialectica* describes dialectics as the art of disputation for the purpose of resolving differences between two opposing theological views; it is based on the thinking of Aristotle.

- *De Haeresibus* (Concerning Heresies) perceives Islam as a false sect of Christianity which had departed from the fidelity of Christianity owing to errors in history and theology. John notes that the principal historical error concerned the crucifixion.

THEORETICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS CONTINUED
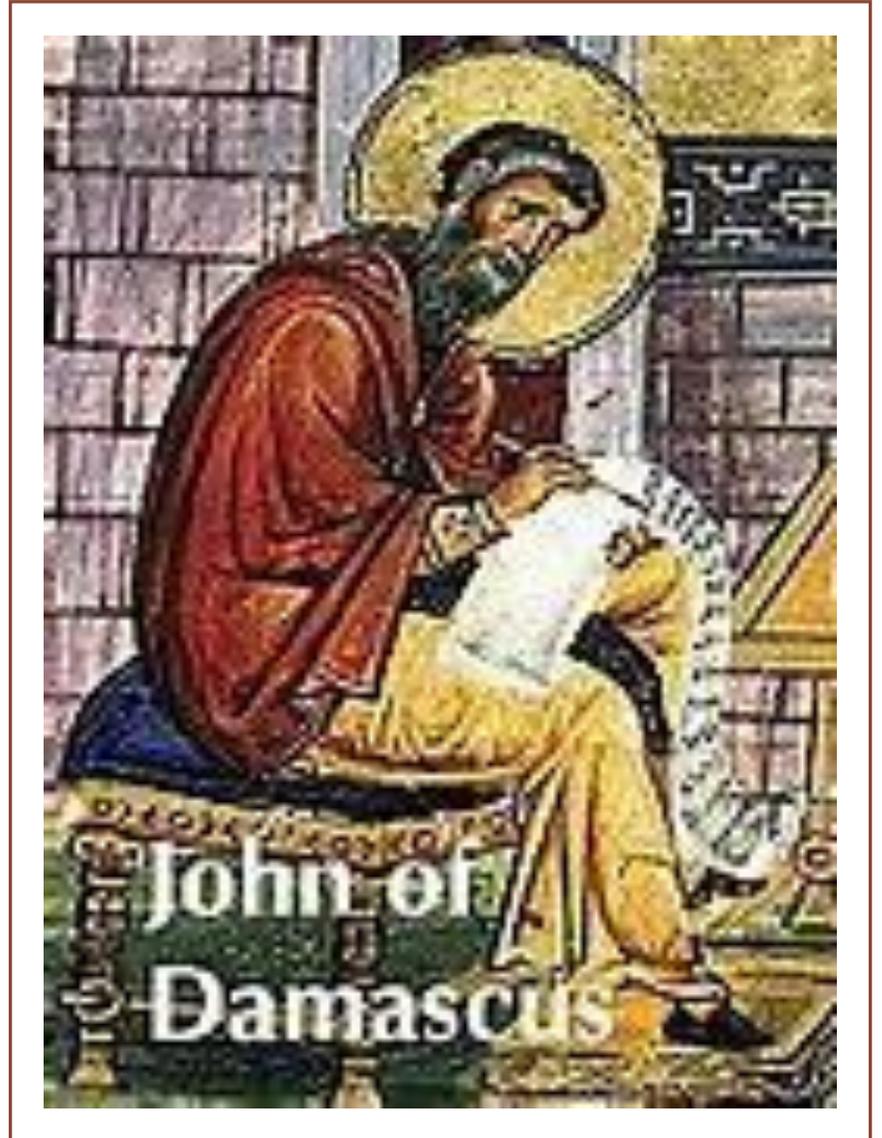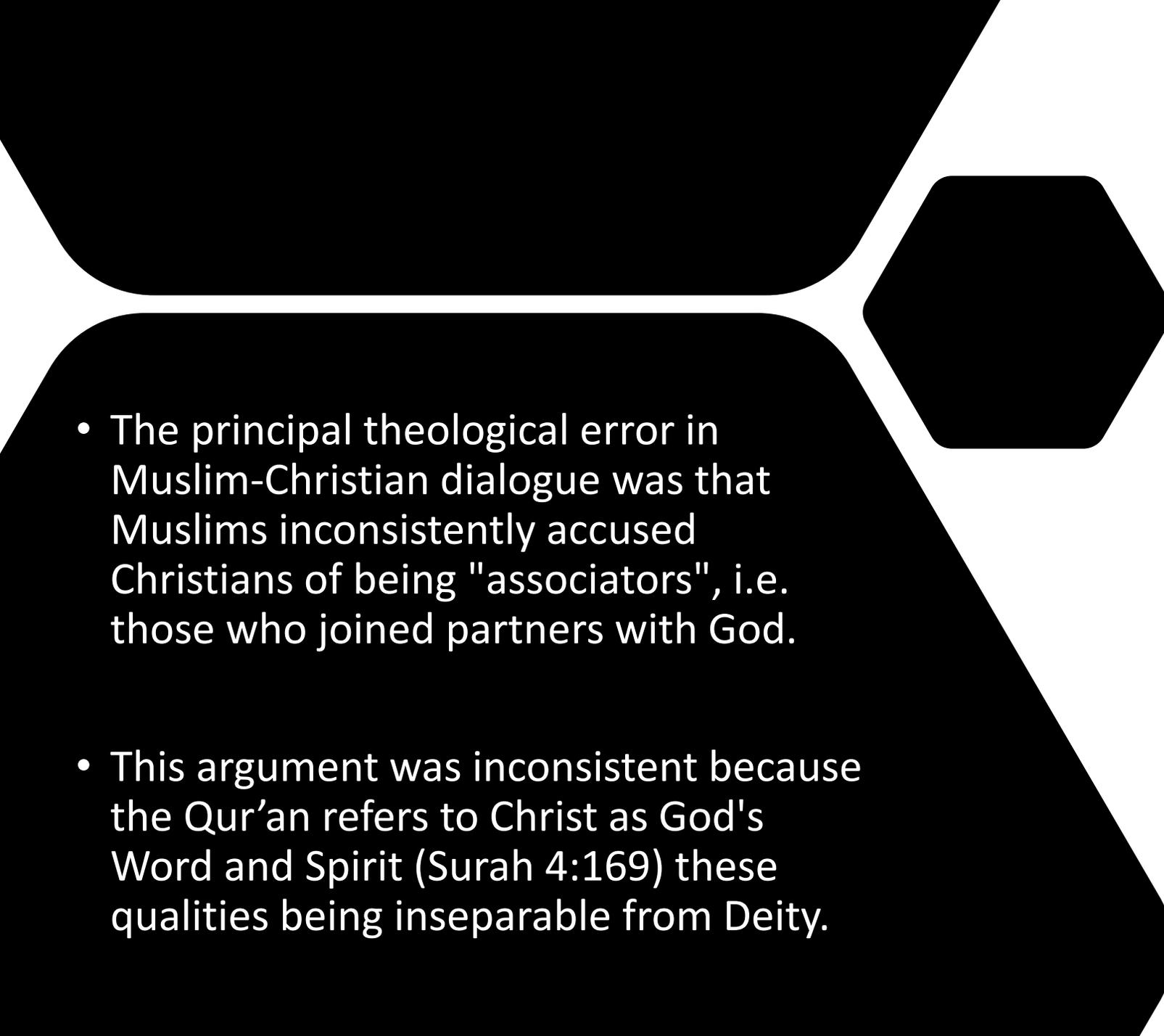
- The principal theological error in Muslim-Christian dialogue was that Muslims inconsistently accused Christians of being "associators", i.e. those who joined partners with God.

- This argument was inconsistent because the Qur'an refers to Christ as God's Word and Spirit (Surah 4:169) these qualities being inseparable from Deity.

3.2 THE PRACTICAL WRITINGS OF JOHN OF DAMASCUS LED TO DIALOGUE

- '*Disputatio* (Disputations)' was intended as a handbook to guide Christians who were holding dialogue with Muslims.

- It is the earliest to emphasize truths admitted by both Islam and Christianity in dialogue.

- Among these, he placed particular emphasis on the Unity of God and that Christ is called God's Word and His Spirit (Surah 4:169)

A key example of J.D. use of admitted truth

- John asks Muslim if Jesus is called God's Word in the Qur'an. Upon affirmative response, he cites John 1:14 which also speaks of Jesus as God's Word.

- John then asks 'God's Word' is created or uncreated. When Muslim replies 'uncreated' John agrees, cf. John 1:1, (Jesus as the eternal Word).

- In spite of agreement on admitted truths, John content to have won argument rather than the soul.

  Sweetman, *Theology,* Pt. I, Vol. I, pp. 66, 67.

# 4.0 A SKETCH OF THE LIFE AND METHOD OF MAR TIMOTHY

- Mar Timothy I (728-823) was Patriarch of the Nestorian Church from 780 CE to 823 CE.

- Timothy spoke Greek, Syriac and Arabic, and had studied Islam. He laid out tenets of Christianity in Baghdad with Caliph al-Mahdi~ (775-785) on several occasions.

THE DEBATE on the CHRISTIAN FAITH between PATRIARCH TIMOTHY I and CALIPH MAHDI in 781 A.D.

TRANSLATED BY
A. MINGANA

TOPICS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY DISCUSSED IN TIMOTHY'S AND CALIPH AL-MAHDI'S DIALOGUE
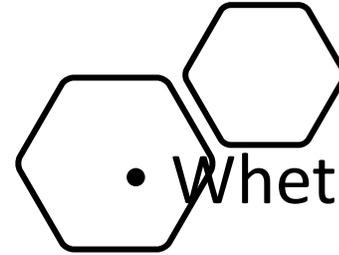
- Whether Jesus is God's Word;
- Whether Bible is trustworthy according to the Qur'an;
- How verses in the Qur'an about crucifixion resolved.
- Are Muslims and Christians addressing same subject about God;
- Why do predicates about God differ? Ibid. Cf. Sweetman, *Theology,* Pt. I, Vol. I, pp. 74-83.

TOPICS ABOUT ISLAM DISCUSSED IN TIMOTHY'S AND CALIPH AL-MAHDI'S DIALOGUE
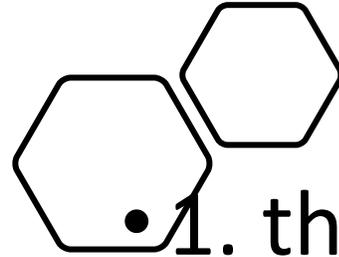
- 1. the nature of evidence required to confirm a writing as of God and whether the Qur'an met requirements;
- 2. the nature of evidence required to confirm a prophet of God and whether Md. met requirements.

5.0. THE TIMES LEADING UP TO THE CRUSADES

Century the Roman Church stood at a crossroads in its relationship with the Islamic world

Pope Gregory in the last affirmation to al-Nasir, a Muslim prince: "There is a charity which we owe to each other … because we recognize and confess one sole God, although in different ways, and we praise and worship Him every day as creator and ruler of the world.

Pope Urban had not such positive regard for Muslims and called for "Cross Wars" from the 10th century to retake the Holy Land.

The Crusades indelibly changed the nature of constructive missionary dialogue using admitted truths which had been built up between Muslims and Oriental Christians.

From the time of the Crusades most discussions between Muslims and Christians were held along the lines of logical dialectic to prove the other's arguments false.

MUSLIMS AND THE NEW POLEMIC

Ibn Hazm (994-1064) in his *Kitab al-fisal fi'l-milal wa'l-nihal,* (Book of Discernment between Confessions and Sects) contained an attack on Christianity in which any slight deviation from the Qur'an renders a corresponding Christian idea fallacious.

→

Ibn Hazm made a brilliant attempt to divorce the supernatural Christ of the Christian faith in Bible from the "historical" Jesus from extra-Biblical sources who, in his opinion, was the Jesus of Islam. This work was, perhaps, the first 'higher critical' work.

CHRISTIANS AND THE NEW POLEMIC

- Dominican missionaries following the theological presuppositions of Thomas Aquinas used the New Polemic.

- They considered the use of philosophical arguments legitimate for "defensive" purposes, that is to show the weakness of Islamic arguments against the Christian faith.   Hitti, *The History of the Arabs,* p. 289.

RESULTING USE OF THE NEW POLEMIC

- logical dialectic was a sport mirroring battlefield.
- Exp. debate in 1217 in Aleppo between Anba Girgi and three Muslim scholars; no one changed their position but shook hands before and after.

6.0 PAUL OF ANTIOCH (1180 d.) WAS A BRIGHT LIGHT AGAINST THE CRUSADES' DARK BACKDROP

- Following 9th C. only Paul of Antioch (d. 1180) a Melkite Bishop of Sidon revived the method of dialogue using admitted truths.

- Paul of Antioch's *Risala ila ba'd asdiqa'ihi al-Muslimin (Letter to Muslim Friends)* is the best example of the use of Admitted Truths.

- The Arabic letter of 20 pages claimed that Islam teaches Christianity to be a true religion according to the Qur'an itself.

PAUL OF ANTIOCH'S RISALA

1. Muhammad as sent to the Pagan Arab only, not to Christians, Suras: xii:2; xiv:4; 2:7.

2. The Qur'an praises the Christians and their faith, Suras: iii:55; lvii:27; xxii:40.

3. The Qur'an confirms the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures, Suras: iii:3; x:94; xlii:15.

4. The Qur'an praises monks and the Eucharist or Holy Communion, Suras: v:82; xxii:17; v:112-115.

5. The doctrine of the Trinity [in contrast to tri-theism] conforms to reason, the use of the Bible and even to the Qur'an, as is shown by the Bismala, and by Suras: iv:171; xix:34.

6. This doctrine, (that is the doctrine of the Trinity) when rightly understood, is compatible with monotheism.

7. Christ came as the "Word of God", the best gift He could make to man, and as a result his Law is perfect and cannot be abrogated.

Gaudeul, *Encounters,* p. 168.
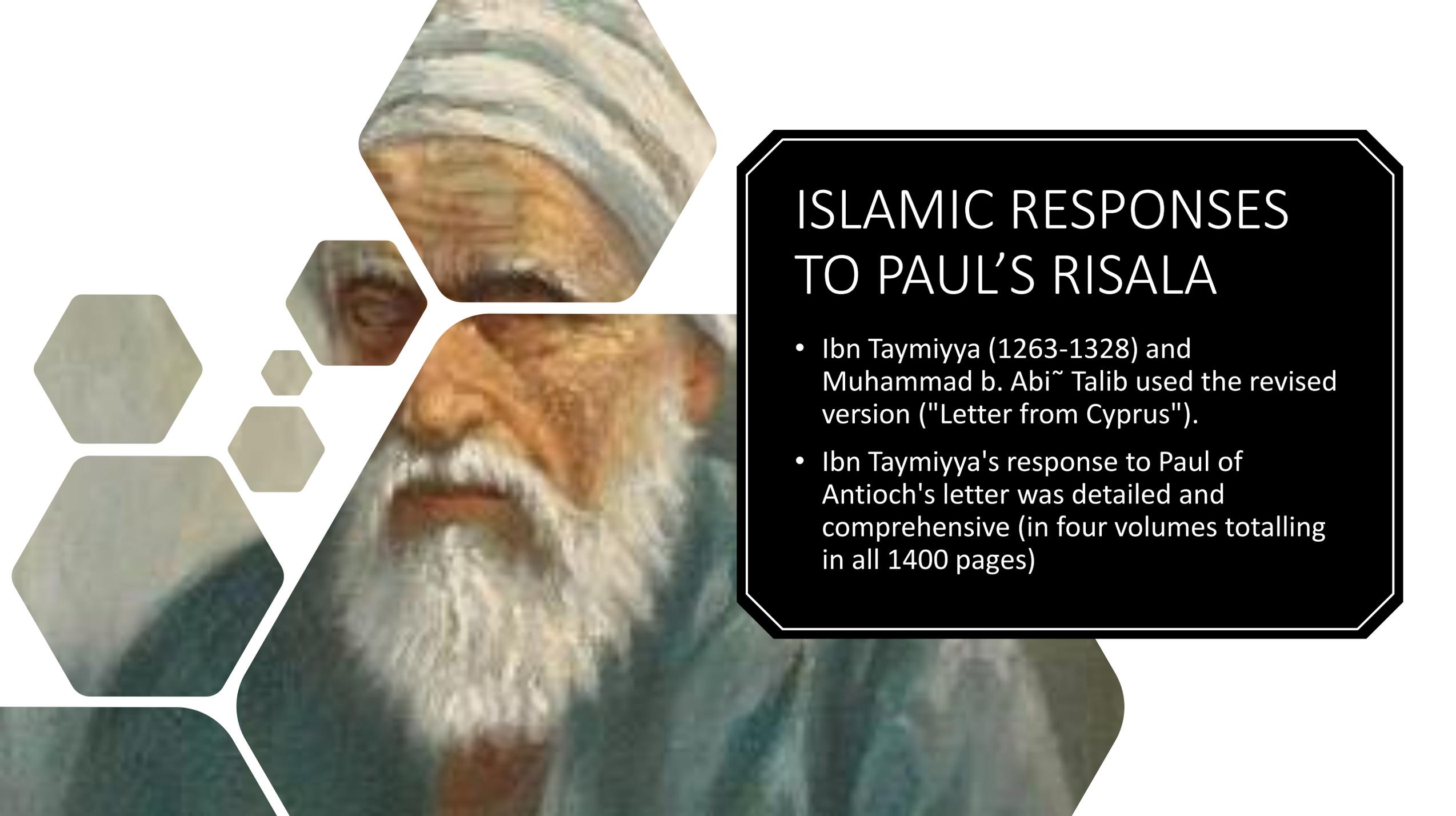
ISLAMIC RESPONSES TO PAUL'S RISALA

- Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) and Muhammad b. Abi~ Talib used the revised version ("Letter from Cyprus").

- Ibn Taymiyya's response to Paul of Antioch's letter was detailed and comprehensive (in four volumes totalling in all 1400 pages)
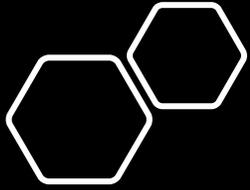
7.0 SUMMARY: ADMITTED TRUTH INTRODUCED BY JOHN OF DAMASCUS, RESTATED BY MAR TIMOTHY AND FULFILLED BY PAUL OF ANTIOCH WAS ABANDONED IN THE 12TH CENTURY.

From the 8th century Muslims and Christians often entertained one of two objectives in dialogue, the first being to prove one's position superior, the second to gain an adherent to one's position.

Two different methods were used in achieving these objectives. The method of logical dialectic tends to seek the first objective, while admitted truths opens up the possibility of the second.

In the 12th century, the Crusades drew a curtain across reasoned enquiry into the beliefs of another faith and admitted truths so that disputation was the accepted form of discourse.

8.0 LOCATION OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE SHIFTED FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO INDIA

The first cause was the migration of Muslim thinkers to India following the Mongol invasion of the Middle East during the 13th century. (See image right)

The second cause was that during Ottoman rule during the 16th-19th centuries inter-faith relations were proscribed.

8.1 IN 19TH INDIA DIALOGUE BASED ON THE USE OF ADMITTED TRUTHS REDISCOVERED

- William Goldsack, translated the Qur'an and The Gospels to Musselmani Bengali laid down the following principles:

- "Let us make it a first principle in our setting forward the Gospel to Muslims to work up from admitted truths (Truths common in Islam and Christianity). Too often our message arouses opposition and resentment at the very outset, because we begin by dilating upon the Sonship of Christ, the reasonableness of the Trinity. It was not thus that the early apostles sought to reach and teach monotheistic Jews. It was, "Jesus of Nazareth a man approved of God" (Acts 2:22); "His Servant Jesus," "The Prophet, whom the Lord would raise up amongst them" (Acts 3:22) of whom they held up before the people.
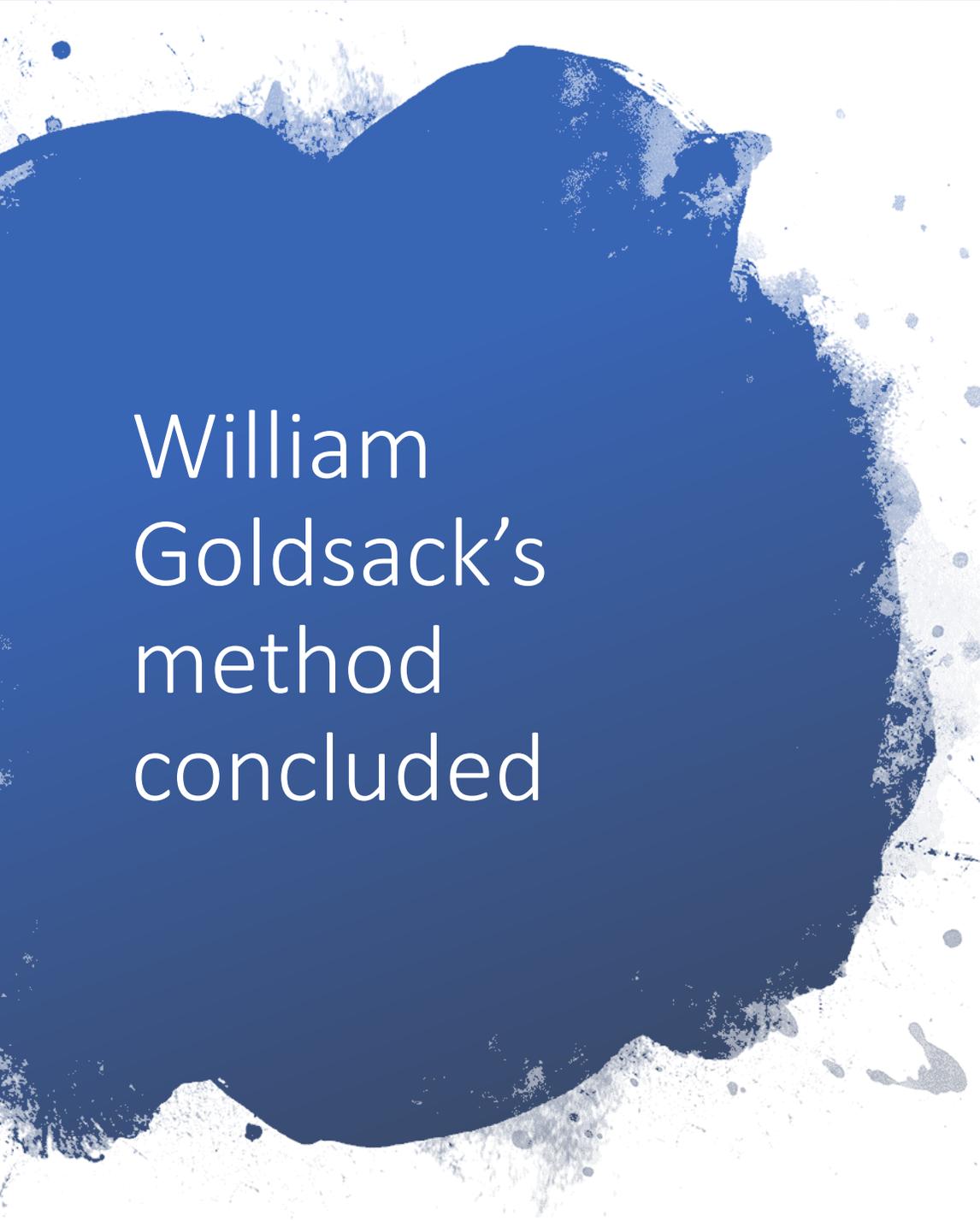
William Goldsack's method concluded

- The way not to secure a hearing is to begin by insisting upon the divinity of Christ. That subject will come up later-who would wish to avoid it? – but to begin with it is to begin at the wrong end, and to effectually bar the way to further instruction. The miraculous birth, the prophethood and messiahship of Jesus, His wonderful miracles and not less sublime teachings are all acknowledged in Islam, and are known, more or less to every Muslim. Let us begin with these, and then slowly and almost imperceptibly, our hearers will be led to see as did the centurion of old, that truly this was the Son of God. "

William Goldsack's translation of the Qur'an and Gospels have changed Muslim Bengal