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Oxford Interfaith online: The unbegotten begotten Christ

How the Qur'an agrees with the Gospel of John

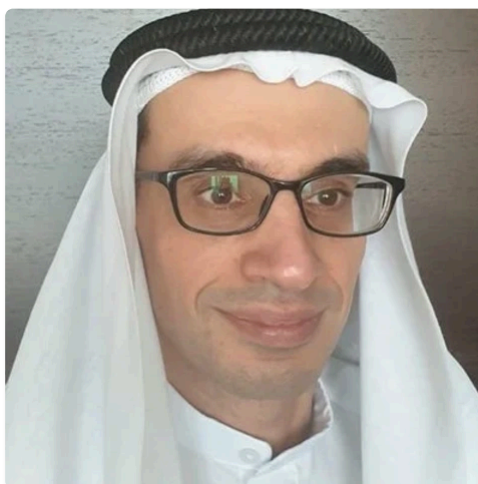
☐ Thursday 22 January 2026

- 6pm to 7pm

📍 Zoom

The Oxford Interfaith Forum host Professor Abdulla Galadari (Khalifa University, Abu Dhabi) in dialogue with Professor Daniel H Weiss (Cambridge). Part of the Forum's Sacred Literature in Interfaith Contexts series—Zoom registration is managed by the Oxford Interfaith Forum.

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About

This online lecture is hosted by the Oxford Interfaith Forum with support from the Cambridge Interfaith Programme.

Abstract

Debates between Christians and Muslims often stall over the Gospel of John's affirmation that Jesus is "begotten of God" and the Qur'an's declaration that God "neither begets nor is begotten." I propose a way through that impasse by a close textual reading of the Gospel of John and the Qur'an.

When speaking of Jesus, the Qur'an consistently rejects that he is generated (tawallad) of God yet immediately qualifies this by affirming that whatever God wills, God says, "Be, and it becomes" (kun fa-yakūn). In this sense, the Qur'an affirms that Jesus is, indeed, generated (takawwan) of God. The difference lies in the precise term used to translate the Greek concept into Arabic.

Seen in this light, the Qur'an does not contradict the Johannine text but attempts to interpret it. The Prologue of John parallels the Prologue of Genesis.

Reading Genesis independent of John, God is the source of everything that came to be, and the word used to bring everything into being is "yehi" (be), rendered in the Septuagint as "genēthēto." When John declares that "the Word was God," it could be echoing the divine self-identification in Exodus—"I will be that I will be" (ehyeh asher ehyeh)—a disclosure also rooted in the verb "to be."

This provides a striking bridge for understanding why the Qur'an distinguishes not between generation and non-generation, but between two kinds of generation: "tawlīd" and "takwīn." The latter is the word that caused everything to become, and it is in itself related to God's self-identification. The former carries no such significance.

While the Gospel of John explicitly insists on differentiating between "begotten of flesh and blood" and "begotten of God," since the Greek language makes no distinction in either type of generation, the Qur'an makes this distinction using two different Arabic terms.

About the speaker

Dr Abdulla Galadari is an Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Khalifa University (Abu Dhabi), and is currently also a Visiting Scholar at Boston College (USA). His research focuses on Qur'anic hermeneutics, particularly in the Qur'an's possible engagement with Near Eastern traditions of Late Antiquity, including biblical, rabbinic, and liturgical traditions. He adopts a multidisciplinary approach, such as integrating philology and the cognitive science of religion to explore the Qur'an's historical milieu and its dialogue with diverse audiences and religious traditions.

Dr Galadari is the author of *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible* (Bloomsbury, 2018), *Metaphors of Death and Resurrection in the Qur'an: An Intertextual Approach with Biblical and Rabbinic Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2021), and *Spiritual Meanings of the Hajj Rituals: A Philological Approach* (Fons Vitae, 2021).

About the respondent

Professor Daniel H Weiss is Polonsky–Coexist Professor of Jewish Studies and Philosophy of Religion, Deputy Director at Cambridge Interfaith Programme, and Fellow and Graduate Tutor at Darwin College, University of Cambridge.

Practicalities

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Cambridge Interfaith Programme

Faculty of Divinity
West Road (Sidgwick Site)
Cambridge
CB3 9BS

 team@interfaith.cam.ac.uk

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