

02. The Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the Qur'an (paper pages 9-15)



Albrecht Alt: Jude mit Torah



A thorough comparison between the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an is beyond the scope of this retreat, but some basic points need to be made, for only a renewed respect among the three so-called Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) can put an end to the practice by interested parties of putting a religious face on the political, social and economic conflicts that divide our world.

1. There are many parallels in the way God is portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the Qur'an. Comparisons can be made between the tribal conditions of Ancient Israel and the tribal conditions of seventh century Arabia. Violence was endemic to both.

2. Furthermore, Judaism and Islam have a similar structure as religions. This is not surprising when we see Muhammad's familiarity with Jewish writings. Both religions have **a prophet** (Moses, Muhammad), **a sacred Scripture** (the Torah, the Qur'an), and both religions recognise our human obligation to **believe**, and to **submit** to the will of God as revealed through the prophets, the messengers sent by God.

Judaism

- Prophet - Moses

- Book - Torah

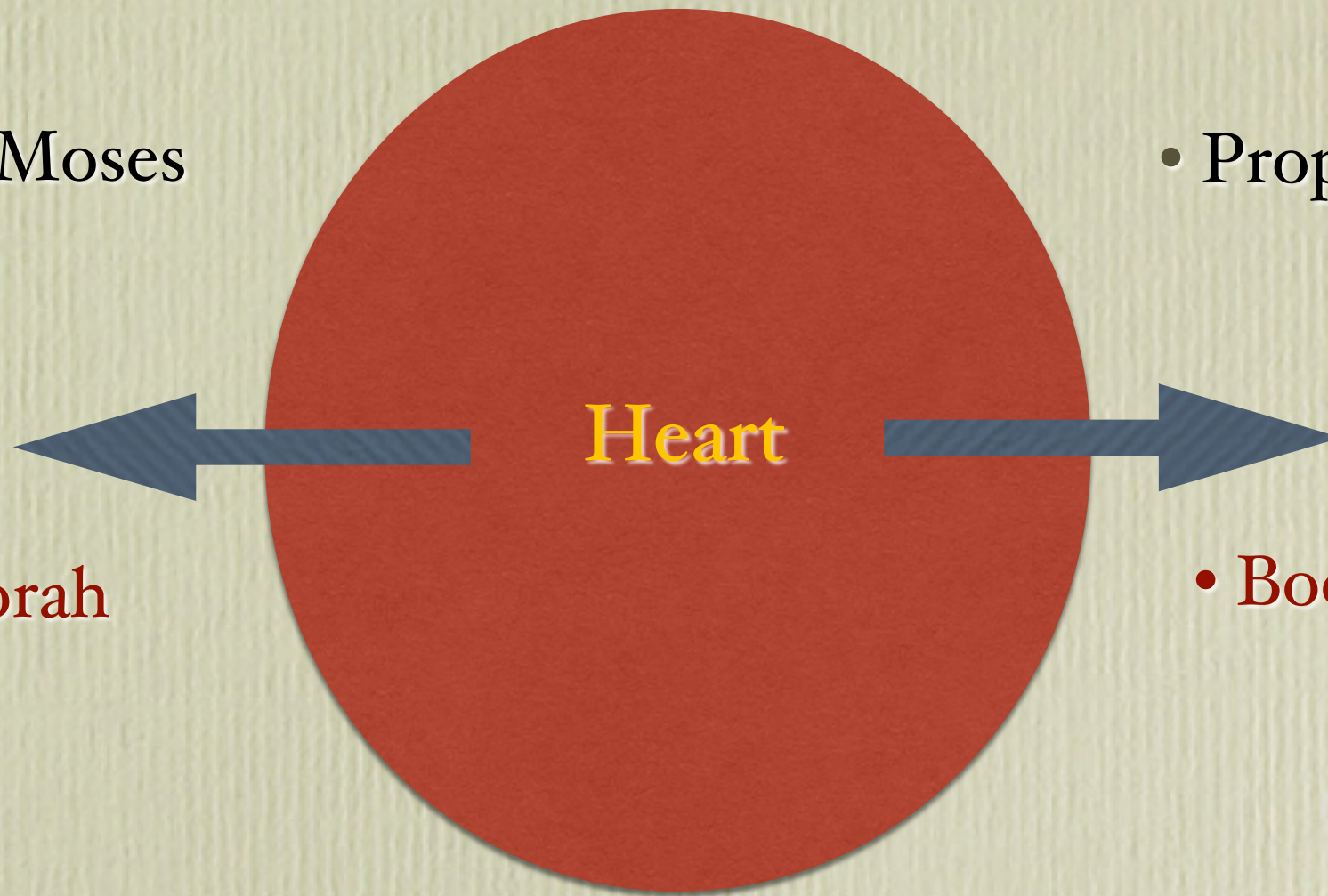
- Obedience

Islam

- Prophet - Muhammad

- Book - Qur'an

- Submission



Observation 1

Muhammad's acquaintance with the Jewish Scriptures becomes obvious when we note that there are 114 sûrahs (sections) of the Qur'an, and in 46 of them there are references to stories from the Jewish Scriptures and legends.

These are almost entirely from the narratives about Creation, the Patriarchs and Moses. It is not evident from the Qur'an that Muhammad was familiar with the writings of the Israelite prophets, or the Wisdom literature. He mentions the Psalms (Sûrahs 17:55; 34:10; 35:25), but it is not evident that he was familiar with their content.

Before detailing the references to Jewish literature found in the Qur'an it is important to observe a distinction. For the most part the stories as we find them in the Hebrew Scriptures are the fruit of hundreds of years of story-telling. They are often quite subtle and brilliant. (We will be examining one in detail shortly.)

In the Qur'an the stories are not retold. Rather they are referred to in order to make a point: either as witnessing to the power and compassion of God, or as a warning to submit to the revelation God is now giving through Muhammad.

Genesis

- Creating the universe ‘in six days’ (Sûrahs 10:4; 32:4).
- Creation of the human race (see especially Sûrahs 15 and 32:7-9).
- Fall of Adam and Eve (see especially Sûrahs 2, 7 and 20)
- Conflict between the sons of Adam (Sûrah 5:27-30).
- Noah and the flood (Sûrahs 37:75-77; 71. Sûrahs 11, 23, 25 and 29).
- Abraham (Sûrahs 19:54-5; 38.49; Sûrahs 15, 19; 37:83-113).
- Lot saved by God when the cities of the Dead Sea were destroyed (Sûrahs 15:51-74; 25; 29; 37:133-138).
- Patriarchs

Exodus

- Moses confrontation with the pharaoh of Egypt (Sûrahs 20 and 26).
- Plagues of Egypt (7:103-137).
- Crossing of the Red Sea (7:138)
- Giving of the Torah (7:142-145)
- Worship of the golden calf (7:148-154)
- Seventy men given the gift of prophecy (7:155)
- Moses striking the rock (7:160)
- manna from heaven (7:160).
- Muhammad sees the refusal of the Jews to accept him as a prophet as analogous to the refusal of the Israelites to believe in Moses and the revelation God made through him (Sûrah 20).

Sections from outside the Torah

- Elijah (Sûrah 37:123-132 - 1 Kings)
- Elisha (Sûrah 38:49 - 1 Kings)
- David (Sûrah 33:10 and 38:18-27 - 2 Kings)
- The Queen of Sheba (Sûrah 27:22-44 - 2 Kings)
- Solomon (Sûrah 34:12 and 38:31-41 - 2 Kings)
- Job (Sûrahs 21 and 38:42-45)
- Jonah (Sûrah 10:99 and 37:139-148)
- Ezra (Sûrah 9 - Ezra).

Observation 2

The Hebrew Scriptures present God as making a special covenant with Abraham, and choosing to overturn cultural expectations by achieving his purpose, not through his firstborn son, Ishmael, but through his second son, Isaac.

They also speak of the covenant made with Noah in which God expressed God's commitment to all the peoples of the earth.

Abraham was the father of Ishmael and Isaac.

The people of Israel came from the blessing given by God through Isaac.

The Arab peoples came from the blessing given by God through Ishmael.

A careful reading of the Hebrew Scriptures clearly shows that God's choice of Isaac did not involve a rejection of Ishmael. Abraham never rejected Ishmael; nor did God. On the contrary God blessed Ishmael in a special way.

This is critically important when we examine the often fraught relationship between Judaism and Islam, so it is worth underlining this point by examining the Biblical narrative as found in the Book of Genesis.

Hagar and Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael

1. Unable to conceive, Sarah gives her servant, Hagar, to Abraham, but is envious when Hagar conceives, and 'deals harshly' with her, so Hagar runs away (Genesis 16).
2. The angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar and told her to go back, but added: "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted. Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the LORD has given heed to your affliction" (Genesis 16:9-10).

There are echoes here of the Promise made earlier to Abraham: 'Look toward heaven and count the stars. So shall your descendants be' (Genesis 15:5).

We are told that the place of the encounter was called ‘Beer-lahai-roi’ (‘the well of the one who lives and sees’) because Hagar was seen by and saw the LORD and lived (Genesis 16:13-14). This place will appear later in the story (Genesis 24:62).

3. When God promised Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son, Abraham pleaded: 'O that Ishmael would live in your sight' (Genesis 17:18). God replied: 'As for Ishmael, I have heard you; I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous; he shall be the father of **twelve princes**, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant I will establish with Isaac' (Genesis 17:20-21).

The 'twelve princes' parallel the twelve sons of Jacob.

There is an echo here of God's first words to Abraham: 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed' (Genesis 12:1-3).

4. Abraham had a feast to celebrate the weaning of Isaac. Ishmael joined in the celebration and was 'laughing' with baby Isaac. Once again Sarah's bitterness shows and she demands that Abraham banish Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham, we are told, was greatly distressed, but God tells him to do as Sarah demanded. Hagar 'wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba' (Genesis 21:14).

The story goes on: 'When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child."

And as Hagar sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.



‘God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.” Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt’ (Genesis 21:15-21).

While God has chosen Isaac for a special purpose, God’s love of Ishmael is clear, as is Abraham’s.

5. After Sarah's death and burial (Genesis 23), Abraham sends his servant off to find a wife for Isaac from his own kin. We are told that 'Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi and was settled in the Negev' (Genesis 24:62). In Genesis 16 Beer-lahai-roi is associated with Hagar. Is there a hint here that Sarah's death has opened up an opportunity for reconciliation with Hagar?

This suspicion is reinforced by the fact that in the narrative Ishmael and Isaac stand together at their father's burial (Genesis 25:9). Furthermore, after Abraham's death, Isaac returns to Beer-lahai-roi and settles there (25:11).

6. Just before recording Abraham's death the Genesis story writes: 'Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah' (Genesis 25:1-4).

Abraham is presented as the father of many nations. It is interesting that an early Rabbinic suggestion is that Keturah is Hagar, called 'Keturah' because 'her acts were as fragrant as incense [ketoret]' (see Midrash Tanhuma, Hayyei Sarah, 8; Pirkei deRabbi Eliezer, 29).

It is important to note that the Hebrew text, while asserting God's choice of Isaac for a special mission, speaks with moving affection of Hagar and Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael (and so of the Arab peoples).

The Qur'an and the Christian New Testament

Reference to the Christian Scriptures is far less frequent than reference to the Hebrew Scriptures. The Qur'an refers to the story of Zechariah and John (Sûrah 19). It knows of the virgin Mary (Sûrah 19:20), and the miraculous conception of Jesus (Sûrah 3). However, only in the concluding verses of Sûrah 5 (verses 110-116) does the Qur'an refer to scenes from the public ministry of Jesus: the healing of the man who was born blind, the healing of the leper, the raising of the dead, and the multiplication of the loaves.

The Qur'an claims that Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad.

'When Jesus, son of Mary, said: O children of Israel! Truly I am the Messenger of God to you, confirming that which came before me in the Torah, and bearing glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name is 'Ahmad ('more praiseworthy').' (Sûrah 61:6).

Jesus did see himself as a messenger from God, and as fulfilling the Torah: 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil' (Matthew 5:17).

He also spoke of the coming of 'the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name' (John 14:26). However, he did not speak of the Spirit as 'Ahmad, a name which enables some Muslims to identify the Spirit promised by Jesus with Muhammad.

The Qur'an claims to bring to perfection the religion of Abraham, which God revealed to Moses and to Jesus.

'God sent His Messenger with Guidance and the Religion of Truth to make it prevail over all religion' (Sûrah 61:9; see 9:33; 48:28).

Muslims honour Jesus as a prophet chosen by God to follow Moses and to prepare for Muhammad. However, the Qur'an judged Christians to be '*disbelievers*' (kafirun) because they failed to recognise Muhammad as the 'Seal of the prophets' (Sûrah 33:40).

The Qur'an's teaching on Jesus' death contradicts the New Testament

Sûrah 4:157-158 (from Medina) reads: *'The Jews say: "We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the messenger of God" though they did not slay him, nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so unto them ... but God raised him up unto Himself* (see also 3:55 and 5:72-75). That Jesus was not truly crucified is a strange idea that contradicts the Gospel record. It derives from Docetist sources.

This is not the only statement in the Qur'an that is based on legends found in apocryphal gospels. The legend of Jesus making birds from clay (see Sûrahs 3:49 and 5:110) is found in the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*.

The Qur'an misunderstands the Christian idea of the Triune God (we will look at this more closely in Presentation 3). It thinks that Christians teach that there are three gods: God, Mary and Jesus.

‘When God said, “O Jesus son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind, ‘Take me and my mother as gods apart from God?’” (Sûrah 5:116, from Medina)

It is one thing to find reasons why Muhammad misunderstood Christian teaching. It is another to accept the statements of the Qur'an to be direct revelations from God. Again and again the Qur'an speaks against Christians calling Jesus ‘the Son of God’ (for example Sûrah 9:30). Perhaps Muhammad's misunderstanding of Christian belief in regard to Jesus was partly due to lack of clarity in Christian teaching. Once again, a problem arises if people attribute the misunderstanding to God by accepting the words of the Qur'an not as Muhammad's response to his experience, but as the very words of God.

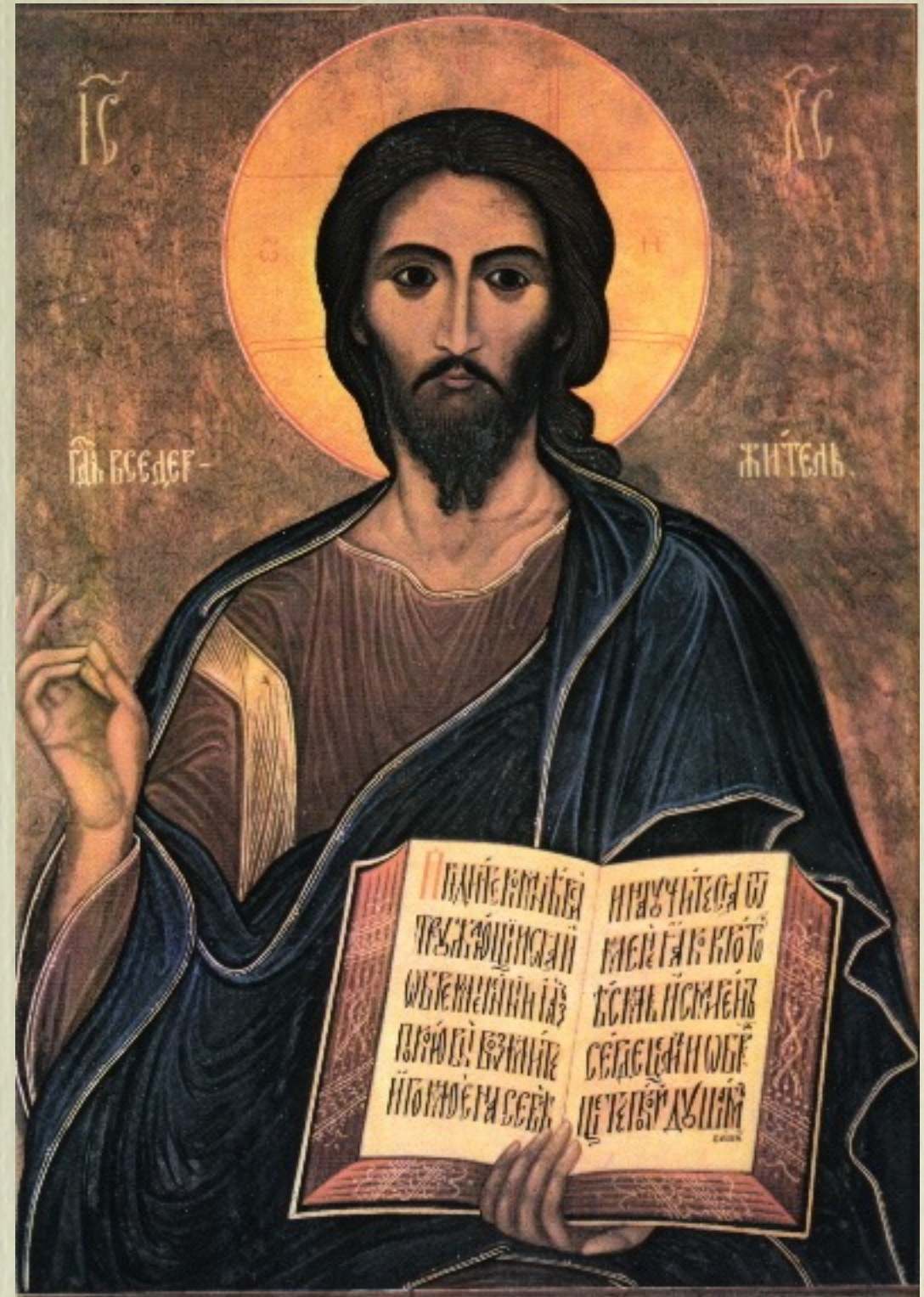
4. Islam, a 'Religion of the Book'. Christianity, a Religion of a Person.

Christianity is not a 'Religion of the Book'. It is a Religion of a Person, Jesus. We believe that Jesus is the perfect human expression of God's Word, God's Self-revelation. Jesus' words and actions, recorded in the Gospels, take us into the heart of Jesus, into his prayer-communion with God. His words and his deeds are a precious gift, for they give expression to his person, and to his intimate communion with God whom he addressed as 'Abba' ('Father'; Mark 14:36). He encouraged his disciples to address God in the same intimate way (Matthew 6:9; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15). He experienced himself as God's 'Son'. Jesus felt that God knew him and that he knew God in an especially intimate way (see Matthew 11:27). This intimacy bore fruit in an extraordinary capacity to love, and it was his love that gave authority to his teaching and healing power to his ministry.

Jesus wanted to share this intimacy, this love, with everyone.

In John's Gospel we hear Jesus say: 'The Father and I are one' (John 10:30). He wanted his disciples to experience this communion: 'May they be one, Father, as we are one' (John 17:11). 'May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).

It is Jesus himself who is the revelation. His words and the words of his disciples point to him, but they cannot contain him.



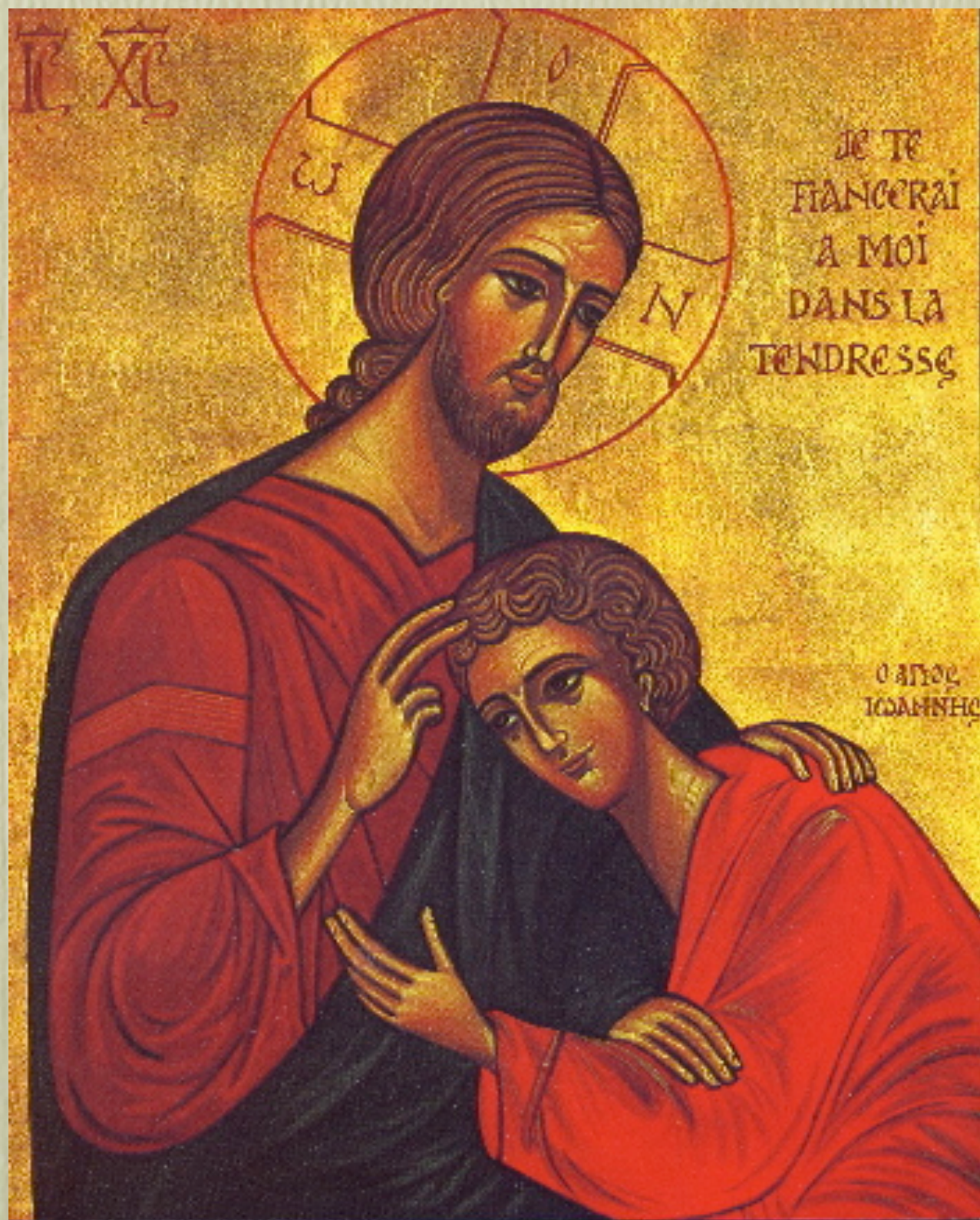


Ishmael

Isaac

Every Beloved Disciple

I'll be always Loving You



I'll be always loving you

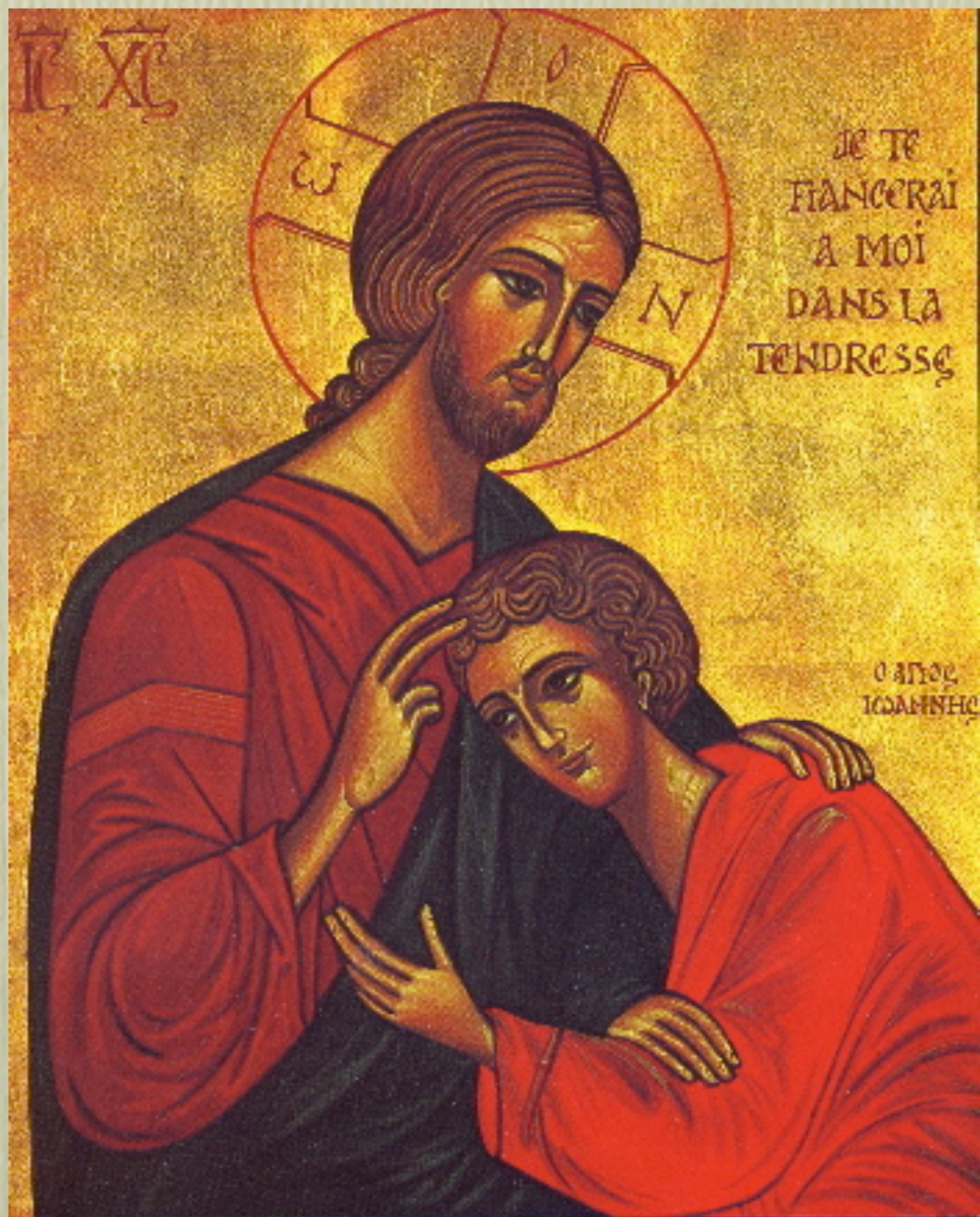
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I am here with you
by your side
sheltering your heart
in the night.
Wherever you go,
whatever you do,
I'll be always loving you.
I will be your God,
your comforter,
I will hold you close
in my heart.



Let me love the world
through your heart.

Let me heal your wounds
by my touch.

Wherever you go,
whatever you do,
I'll be always loving you.

I will be your God,
your comforter,
I will hold you close
in my arms.

Mmm

Wherever you go,
whatever you do,
I'll be always loving you.

