

CATHOLICISM RELATES TO ISLAM

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The above title became a source of controversy when I used it for a talk given at a recent prophecy conference. What I found curious about the commotion was that it came from Catholics (and some evangelicals) who had yet to hear my presentation. Furthermore, the title reflects the hope and prayers of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Rome has been tilling this “common ground” with Islam for decades, as evidenced by the 1994 Vatican publication, *Recognize the Spiritual Bonds Which Unite Us: 16 Years of Christian-Muslim Dialogue*. Why, therefore, would anyone be upset by my simply repeating what the Roman Catholic Church very much desires?

Actually, the real controversy stems from confusion created by the Church of Rome herself. In her zeal to be the spiritual voice of the world’s religions, she talks out of both sides of her ecumenical mouth. Regarding her relationship to Islam, not only has she made to those of the Muslim faith some theological overtures which contradict Christian orthodoxy, but even worse, there are ties between the two religions which go a lot deeper than most people realize. Let’s first consider some commonalities between the two faiths.

Starting with the number of adherents, Catholicism and Islam each exceed one billion, nearly all of whom enter their respective faiths as infants. More than 16 million babies are baptized into the Roman Catholic Church each year. It’s a family thing. My sisters and I were baptized as Catholics because our parents were Catholics, and they and their siblings were baptized into the Church because *their* parents were Catholics. That’s the primary way the faith is propagated.

Practically speaking, although baptism is not part of Islam, all children born into a Muslim family *are* Muslims. Their official “confirmation” follows as soon as they are able to confess the *shahada* (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger”). This baby-oriented process for increasing their ranks has been a motivating factor in the Vatican/Saudi-sponsored lobby against UN endeavors to introduce contraception and other methods of population control, especially in third-world countries.

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today; Catholicism is the largest religious body among those professing to be Christian. If the number of followers was a good measure for selecting a religion, then Islam and Catholicism would definitely be the way to go. However, the Bible has no such yardstick. Rather, Jesus said, “[W]ide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait *is* the gate and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mt

7:13 ,14).

Most people are aware of the veneration and even worship of Mary found among Roman Catholics, but not many know that much the same deference exists among Muslims. A chapter in the Qur’an is named after Mary (“Surah Maryam”). From the outskirts of Cairo to Bombay to

Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina, hundreds of thousands of the Islamic faith have congregated wherever processions carry her statues and where her apparitions are said to have appeared. She is esteemed above the most revered women of the Muslim faith, including Muhammad's two favorite wives, Khadija and Aisha, *and* his daughter Fatima. The *hadith* teaches that Muhammad selected Mary as his first wife upon entrance into Paradise. One of the most popular Catholic apparitions of Mary is referred to as Our Lady of Fatima.

Catholic and Islamic prayers have many similarities. For the Muslim, praying to Allah five times a day is altogether an act of obedience, and the prayers are always repetitive. As one former Muslim puts it, "It's hardly intimate communication with Allah;...it's done more to escape the punishment due to those who neglect prayer." Most prayers prayed by Catholics are also rote and repetitive, saying the rosary being the best example. Repeating 16 "Our Father's" and 153 "Hail Mary's" is far from personal communication. Furthermore, when a Catholic goes to confession the priest assigns rosaries as severe punishment, or penance, for one's sins.

Prayer beads were a part of Islamic devotion to Allah long before an apparition of the Blessed Lady taught St. Dominic to pray the rosary beads in the thirteenth century. Prayer beads, by the way, are a stock item in ancient and modern paganism. On an ironic note, Catholic Church historians credit the prayers of members of the Confraternity of the Rosary for a major naval victory over the Turks, which "saved Europe from the Mohammedan peril."

Catholics and Muslims regard pilgrimages as a means of obtaining favor from God. The *hadj*, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a required (one-time) journey to Mecca. For Catholics, pilgrimages historically have been acts of religious purification, often induced by the promise of indulgences. Multi-millions of Catholics travel yearly to hundreds of shrines (nearly all dedicated to Mary) located throughout the world. The Crusades were indulgence-stimulated attempts to regain Jerusalem from the infidel Muslims in order to re-establish Catholic pilgrimages. Incidentally, the Church of Rome offered the crusaders full pardon from purgatory should they die trying to liberate the Holy Land. Similarly, Islam offers rewards in and assurance of Paradise to those who die in religious battles (*jihad*), including suicide bombings.

Roman Catholicism recognizes Allah as the God of the Bible. In 1985, Pope John Paul II declared to an enraptured audience of thousands of Muslim youths, "Christians and Muslims, we have many things in common as believers and as human beings...We believe in the same God, the one and only God, the living God...."

But how is that possible?

Historically, Allah was a pagan idol, supreme among many idols worshiped by Muhammad's Quraish tribe long before he was born. Will Durant in his classic, *The Story of Civilization*, writes:

Within the Ka'aba, in pre-Moslem days, were several idols representing gods. One was called Allah; three others were Allah's daughters, al-Uzza, al-Lat, and al-Manat. We may judge the antiquity of this Arab pantheon from the mention of Al-il-Lat (Al-Lat) by Herodotus [fifth century b.c. Greek historian] as a major Arabian deity. The Quraish paved the way for monotheism by worshiping Allah as chief god....

Archaeological evidence uncovered in Arabia is overwhelming in demonstrating that the dominant pre-Islamic religion was the worship of the moon-god, Allah. Muhammad simply eliminated the other 300-some deities, including Allah's daughters, making Allah supreme while retaining many of the pagan rituals and symbols associated with him. For example, the crescent moon was the symbol of the moon-god from the time of the Sumerians and the Babylonians through the time of Christ and right up until Muhammad's arrival. It's hardly a coincidence that Ramadan, the Muslim time of fasting, begins and ends at the time of the crescent moon. Nearly all of the moon-god rituals and other idolatrous practices, including kissing the Black Stone, praying toward Mecca, running around the temple and between the two hills of Safa and Marwa, were pre-Islamic rituals.

Catholicism's zeal to relate to Islam makes one wonder how honest it is about its own perspective on God, based on the "Sacred Scripture." God is referred to as Yahweh or Jehovah about 9,000 times in the Bible. Never is He thus referred to in the Qur'an. He reveals himself in the Scriptures as "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob/Israel." He is the Father of the Jews, "the God of Israel." In the Qur'an, Allah never refers to himself that way. God calls the Jews His "chosen people." He gave them the land of Israel as a heritage "forever:" "And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever" (Ezk 37:25). God's covenant is with Isaac (Gn 17: 19 -21), while Muslims believe Allah's covenant is with Ishmael.

Allah has a completely different attitude toward the Jews than does the God of the Bible. Allah commands his followers to "Take not the Jews...for friends" (Sura 5:51). While the Jews are referred to in the Qur'an as "the people of the book" (i.e., the Bible), if they refuse to convert to Islam they must pay a tribute tax to their overlords and become subservient to them: "Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by his messenger, and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low" (Sura 9:29). According to the *hadith*, which most Muslims regard to be nearly as authoritative as the Qur'an, Muhammad is quoted as saying, "The last hour will not come before the Muslims fight the Jews, and the Muslims kill them." Again, the *hadith* says that, related to the Day of Judgment, Muslims will fight and kill Jews, who will hide behind trees that say, "Oh Muslim, Oh servant of Allah, here is a Jew hiding behind me. Come here and kill him." Catholicism has its own grievous and well-documented history of slaughtering the Jews.

Further comparisons between Jehovah and Allah demonstrate clearly that they cannot be one and the same. Jehovah has a Son: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (1 Jn 4:14). Allah has no son: "And say: Praise be to Allah, Who hath *not* taken unto Himself a son, and Who hath no partner in the Sovereignty..." (Sura 17:111); "Allah hath not chosen any son, nor is there any God along with him" (Sura 23:91). Whereas God the Father declared from heaven concerning Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17), Allah of the Qur'an condemns such a belief: "...the Christians say: Messiah is the son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouths. They imitate the saying of the disbelievers of old. Allah's Curse be on them, how they are deluded away from the truth!" (Sura 9:30 - The Holy Qur'an www.orst.edu/groups/msa/index.html).

While there are both clear and critical differences between the biblical God and Allah, nevertheless, the Roman Catholic Church accepts them as one and the same God. The following quote is from Vatican II:

“The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.”

Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly evoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting (Nostra Aetate, Vatican II).

Consider carefully the above quote (taken from what the Roman Catholic Church claims is an *infallible* council) and you will realize what truly binds Catholicism and Islam together: *They both have a Jesus who cannot save their souls.* The Qur’an teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross: “And because of [the Jews] saying, We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger, They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain” (Sura 4:157). Vatican II may give Muslims credit for “venerating” Jesus, but in fact, it’s a bogus Jesus. Sadly, Catholicism also has a false Christ. It teaches that His death on the cross was not sufficient for our salvation. Not only must His sacrifice (which, according to the Scriptures, was offered *only once* to take away our sins *completely* [Heb 9:28]) be “re-presented” as a daily sacrifice for sins on altars around the world, but Catholics must expiate their own sins through sufferings here on earth and in purgatory.

Finally, Vatican II spells out clearly what Islam and Catholicism regard as their hope for salvation: “...they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.” *This is works salvation.* In Islam, a person is accountable for every thought, word, and deed. His or her life is to be lived according to what is pleasing to Allah as found in the Qur’an and the *hadith*. In addition, there is *shari’a*, which is the body of rules that attempts to cover the *totality* of Islamic religious, political, social and domestic life. Breaking such laws involves various forms of temporal punishment. At the Last Judgment Allah will determine one’s eternal destiny as He places one’s good and evil works on the divine scale: “Then those whose scales are heavy [with good deeds], they are the successful. And those whose scales are light are those who lose their souls, in hell abiding” (Sura 23:102,103). The *hadith* vividly describes the tortures of hell.

A friend of mine, James McCarthy, produced a video titled *Catholicism: Crisis of Faith* in which he interviews about a dozen people leaving Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. He simply asks them on what basis they expect to get to heaven. Only one made any reference to Jesus. The overwhelming response was that they felt they were pretty good people, and were fairly confident that their good deeds outweighed their bad ones. Although the Catholic Church

states that it is only by God's grace that one can enter heaven, it becomes very clear that what is meant is that grace is required *to enable one to do the works which qualify one* for heaven. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, they "obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ" (par 1821) and they "can merit for [them]selves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life" (par 2027).

Pope John Paul II addressed a Catholic community in Turkey with these words: "I wonder if it is now urgent, precisely today when Christians and Muslims have entered a new period of history, to recognize and develop the spiritual bonds that unite us." No! What is "urgent" is that Catholics and Muslims be set free from the spiritual *bondage* of attempting to qualify for heaven by their good deeds. Pray that their hearts would be open to receive the gift of eternal life (Rom 6:23).

Reference:

The Berean Call <http://www.thebereancall.org/newsletters/nov02.htm>

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