



December 5, 2023

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My Dear Brother Jason Bradfield:

I am writing this formal letter as a response to your Facebook post in light of the current Israel-Hamas War in Gaza, and the underlying religious contention which this war is likely to aggravate in the coming days, weeks, months, and perhaps even years.¹

As you are aware, our prevailing American political discourse makes loving Muslims and Jews difficult, if not altogether impossible.

In light of this conflict, and the prevailing anti-Islamic/ Arab and anti-Semitic sentiments which are increasing in the United States, I think that it is the privileged and blessed position of the churches of Jesus Christ-- particularly in the West-- to set a positive example for the rest of the World and, thereby, to be the "city that is set on an hill." (Matthew 5: 14-16). It is for this reason that I have decided to take the time to craft an appropriate response to your Facebook post.

The question which you have raised in that Facebook post is this:

"Correct me if I am wrong, but it seems as though you are suggesting that a practicing Muslim or Jew, who rejects Christ, could nonetheless fulfill the will of God and be accepted. I'm not understanding how being a 'Good Muslim' translates to being a 'practitioner of the true Christian religion.'"

As to the Jewish question, I shall address that under a separate letter,² but, here, I wish to address your question as to how "being a 'Good Muslim' translates to being a 'practitioner of the true Christian religion.'"

1 I apologize for writing such a long response. Much of the substance of this letter was meant primarily for everyone else who shall read it, since I am aware that you already know most of what I have written here.

2 As an American lawyer, my connections with the American Jewish and the Jewish-American legal community is much more extensive and in depth than my connections with Muslims.

First, let me acknowledge that my theological analysis is guided by the “Sacred Scripture- Sacred Tradition- Reason- Experience” model that is called the Anglican-Wesleyan Quadrilateral. To that end, my “experiences” and one-on-one discussions with individual Muslims, whether as a fellow student or as an attorney, since the late 1980s-- including the followers to Minister Farrakhan, Pakistani-American Muslims, and Turkish Muslims-- have all be very positive. It does not appear to me that Muslims are so dis severed from the laws of nature (i.e., as Gentiles)³ that they cannot ascertain the difference between good and evil, or to engage in good behavior, or to carry out noble and charitable works.

Moreover, every Muslim whom I have ever spoken to have acknowledge a belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, a belief in the Old Testament, and a belief in the New Testament-- with, of course, certain variances that differ from our orthodox Christian beliefs.

But this leads me to the point that I have made with regards to comparing the Muslims to the “Good Samaritan” is Christs parable (Luke 10:25- 37).

I.

“Muslim-Christian Relations vis-a-vis Samaritan-Jewish Relations”

Are the modern-day Muslims’ relationship to modern-day Christians precisely the same as the ancient Samaritans’ relationship to the ancient Jews?

This brief note explains why this question may easily be answered in the affirmative, and, through analogy, even Jesus Christ himself might apply the standard of *Christian love*⁴ that is in the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” to Muslims who believe the Jesus is the Messiah; who do good; who love God (i.e., Allah); and who love their neighbors as themselves.

3 See, e. g., Romans 2: 11-16, stating:

11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

4 Luke 6: 32-36 (“32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”)

Indeed, the differences, and current rift, between modern-day Christians and modern-day Muslims are precisely the same as those ancient differences and ancient rifts between the Jews and the Samaritans.

These differences and rifts are deep-seated-- leading to long-standing suspicions, hatred, and even warfare!

II.

“The Samaritans in the New Testament”

Samaritans were the descendants for Israelites who were not deported in 722 BC during the Assyrian captivity and who lived in the northern Kingdom of Israel.

The Samaritan’s Temple was at Mount Gerizum, whereas the Jew’s Temple was in Jerusalem (Mount Zion).

The Samaritan’s only accepted the first Five Books of the Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch) in their sacred canon.⁵

Whereas the Jews included the Torah (Pentateuch); the Nevi’im(Prophets); and the Ketuvim (Writings) within their sacred canon.

Liturgically, the Samaritans “didn’t perform the religious rituals correctly and had all sorts of incompatible ideas about God.”⁶ “The Samaritans embraced a religion that was a mixture of Judaism and idolatry (2 Kings 17:26-28).”⁷

“The [Samaritan] race came about after the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. Certain people from the nation of Israel stayed behind. These people intermarried with the Assyrians producing the Samaritans.”⁸

“Hatred between Jews and Samaritans was fierce and long-standing.... Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans.”⁹

Following the Jews’ return from the Babylonian captivity, their rift with the Samaritans worsened.

5 “Eventually, the religion of the Samaritans evolved to the point that they held only the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as being the law of God, rejecting all the books of poetry and prophecy.” <https://housetohouse.com/jews-samaritans-hate-one-another-much/>

6 <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202005/why-didnt-the-jews-and-samaritans-get-along/>

7 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Samaritans.html>

8 https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_1319.cfm

9 <https://bible.org/illustration/hatred-between-jews-and-samaritans>

When Cyrus permitted the Jews to return from the Babylonian exile, the Samaritans were ready to welcome them back. The exiles, however, despised the Samaritans as renegades. When the Samaritans wanted to join in rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, their assistance was rejected. You will find this in the Book of Ezra, Chapter Four.

With the rejection came political hostility and opposition. The Samaritans tried to undermine the Jews with their Persian rulers and slowed the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its temple. Nehemiah tells us (Nehemiah 13:28-29) that a grandson of the high priest, Eliashib, had married a daughter of Sanballat, the governor of the province of Samaria.¹⁰

Returnees from Babylon had composed books of history and collected prophecies to add to their holy books. Some of their prophets—Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, and Micah—had nothing good to say about people from Samaria.

Judean leaders tried to resolve the conflict. The priest Ezra thought there could be reconciliation between these two societies. But the governor Zerubbabel took a racist approach: Their blood is impure. They're simply "not us." Verbal disputes led to insults, insults to violence.

The communities separate. Samaritans centralize in the northern area of Shechem. As Greek control of the land succeeds Persian, then Egyptian, and finally Roman, the region of Samaria becomes increasingly Hellenized; that is, more like the empire. Judeans resist outside influences at all cost. By the first century C.E., the worst thing you can call a Jew is a Samaritan....¹¹

This was the political, social, and historical backdrop of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1- 42), who said to Jesus, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)" (John 4:9).

When Jesus told the "Parable of the Good Samaritan," (Luke 10:25-37), he juxtaposed a Samaritan man against two of the most "orthodox" (i.e., right beliefs, right liturgical practices) members of Jewish society-- namely, a priest and a Levite.

III.

"The Good Muslim Comparison to the Good Samaritan"

When we return to the present-day context of Christian-Muslim relations, the natural question which Christians must ask themselves is, "Can there be any 'Good Muslims'?"

10 <https://stsabinaparish.org/wp-content/uploads/Why-the-Hatred-Between-the-Jews-and-Samaritans.pdf>

11 <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202005/why-didnt-the-jews-and-samaritans-get-along/>

Just as there were major liturgical and theological differences between the ancient Jews and Samaritans, there are likewise major liturgical and theological differences between the present-day Christians and Muslims.

At least from an Islamic perspective, Christians are their brothers, because Christians and Jews are “People of the Book.” See, e.g., The Holy Quran, Sūrat al-Mā`ida 5:68–69.

The Muslims also generally hold that Jews, Christians, and Muslims worship the same God.

Both Christians and Muslims hold that Jesus of Nazareth among a series of Hebrew prophets and the Jesus is the “**Christ**” or the “**Messiah**” (i.e., chief Judge over the Last Judgment).¹²

The Holy Quran has some slight differences as to the accounts of Christ’s miracles.

And, of course, the Muslims do not believe that Jesus was actually killed or that he is a part of the Trinitarian God.

Nor do the Muslims participate in the Christian sacraments (whether the 7 sacraments under Catholicism or the 2 sacraments under Protestantism).

The theological question presented, then, is whether a Muslim can be a “Good Muslim” in the spiritual or theological sense in which the “Good Samaritan” was presented in Christ’s parable (Luke 10: 25-37).

The Samaritan “orthodoxy” rejected the Nevi’m (Prophets); and the Ketuvim (Writings), but Jesus Christ himself never did.

In fact, Jesus expressly acknowledged that his mission was not to destroy but rather to fulfill the law and the prophets. “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” (Matthew 5:17).

Moreover, Jesus himself quoted from the Ketuvim (Writings) and thereby legitimated them within the Christian canon.

Nevertheless, Jesus saw fit to acknowledge the humanity and the goodness of certain Samaritans, even though they did not hold the correct “orthodoxy” of Judaism.

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_in_Islam (“In the Quran, Jesus is described as **the Messiah** (al-Masīh), miraculously born of a virgin, performing miracles, accompanied by his disciples, rejected by the Jewish religious establishment, but not as crucified or dying on the cross (nor resurrected), rather as miraculously saved by God and ascending into heaven.”)

<https://www.islamicity.org/> (“**Messiah** -It is obvious that Jesus holds an exalted place within Islam. Some of the honorable epithets of Jesus (pbuh) mentioned in the Qur’an are ... prophet / nabi, messenger of God / rasul, of the Righteous / min-as-salihin, word of Allah / kalimatu-Llah), spirit from God / ruhun mina' Llah, positive sign/symbol for humanity / aayatun lin- naas, mercy from God / rahmatan minna, the son of Mary / ibne Maryam, eminent in this world and the next / wajihan fid-dunya wal-aakhirah, and most unique of all... the Messiah / masih.”)

Whether Jesus would see fit to acknowledge the humanity and goodness of certain Muslims who do good, who love their neighbor as themselves, and who love God, even though they do not hold to the correct “orthodox” practices of Christianity is the question presented.

And I hold that the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” defines the ultimate meaning of the Christian religion: it elevates “orthopraxy” (right practice) above “orthodoxy” (right belief). This does not mean that “orthodoxy” is not important-- it certainly is!

But I hold ultimately that within the Christian religion, “orthopraxy” is far more important than “orthodoxy.”¹³

IV.

“Conclusion”

As an orthodox Christian who believes in the veracity of the New Testament, I cannot theologically reconcile several Muslim beliefs with many Christian theological tenets.

The Muslim interpreters and redactors who assembled the Holy Quran came more than 600 years after Christ and the first Christians appeared, and so their interpretations of Christ’s death and resurrection do not appear to me to be as credible as that of, say, the authors of the Gospels and of the Letters of Paul.

Nevertheless, the Muslim belief that Jesus Christ is the Messiah is as compelling as the story of the Samaritan woman at the well who spoke to Jesus and whose testimony alone persuaded several other unorthodox Samaritans to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. (John 4:1- 42).

Like the ancient Samaritan religion, the Islamic religion thus appears to be rent apart with local Arabic and Persian cultural practices and patterns that are foreign to both Judaism and Christian-Western civilization.

Nevertheless, the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” demonstrates that Jesus of Nazareth overlooked such cultural practices and patterns-- however deficient they appeared to be-- and focused instead upon the heart and soul of true religion-- agape or charity. See, e.g., Romans 2: 11-16.¹⁴

13 Regarding the Christian “orthopraxy,” compare the following: “The Parable of the Two Sons” (Matthew 21: 28-31) (Jesus asked, “Which of the two did the will of his father?”); and see, also, Matthew 7: 21 (“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”)

14 See, e. g., Romans 2: 11-16, stating:

11 For there is no respect of persons with God.

12 For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;

13 (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

From this, I conclude that even within Christian theology, just as there could be conceptually exist a “Good Samaritan,” there may be a “Good Muslim,” whom Jesus Christ himself would accept as his joint heir.

I believe that reasonable Christians may disagree with this conclusion. But as I read the New Testament, I come away with a description of Jesus Christ eating with Publicans and sinners, and speaking with Samaritans, and as a Rabbi and master interpreter of the Law of Moses, whose focus was always on the “heart of the matter” and the “weightier matters of the law.” Jesus Christ was much more concerned with inner righteousness and righteous needs, than with religious ritualism taken out of its true context.

For it is within this interpretation of Jesus Christ that I conclude that a “Good Muslim” might carry out the true substance and essence of the Christian religion.

Yours Faithfully,

Rev. Roderick Andrew Lee Ford

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

16 In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.