# Christianity and Islam

Michael Brown
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*The essential difference between Christianity and Islam is the difference between Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus was a spiritual leader who laid down His life to save the world. Muhammad was a spiritual leader, who became a political leader, then a violent military leader. Jesus accomplished His mission by dying on the cross. Muhammad accomplished his mission (at least in large part) by ruling by the sword.*

There are, of course, great similarities between the world's two largest religions. Both point to a holy book, allegedly inspired by God, for faith and practice. Both call for high moral standards and serious personal commitment.

Both share common traditions, since Muhammad learned from Jews as well as Christians. And both have a vision to spread their faith around the world.

But this is where the two faiths diverge. One follows the example of a crucified and risen Savior. The other follows the example of a prophet and military leader.

And so, the biblical verses of violence (as in, "Kill the Canaanites") were limited to a specific place and time, and no such commands are found on Jesus' lips. The Quranic verses of violence (as in, "Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them") do not have such obvious limitations. And so, while many Quranic interpreters and Islamic jurists claim that those verses cannot be applied indiscriminately today, others differ, proudly citing them in their jihadi manuals.

Again, the difference is that of the cross vs. the sword. That's why Jesus and His followers never established the death penalty for leaving the faith. Muhammad established it once he assumed military dominance. And the death penalty for apostasy from Islam remains in force in a number Islamic countries today.

In the same spirit, Muhammad beheaded some of his enemies. Jesus forbade His followers from taking up the sword in His defense. The differences are glaring and clear.

Just compare the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels with those of Muhammad in the Hadith. Jesus never calls for violent acts against enemies of the faith; Muhammad often does. That's why there's no gospel (or apostolic) equivalent to the lengthy collection of Muhammad's military raids.

Accordingly, the most tolerant expressions of Islam are found when: 1) Muslims are the minority in a country, as in America; or 2) the Muslim-dominated country is quite secular, as in Indonesia. In contrast, in strictly observant Muslim countries, there is limited tolerance for non-Muslims.

If you don't believe me, try setting up a public Christian mission to Muslims in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan or Afghanistan or Iran. Tell me how many minutes it lasts.

I do commend those Muslims who call for a more tolerant expression of their faith, and they abhor the terrorism carried out in the name of their religion. But if they are honest, they will have to admit that violent Islam has a long and rich history.

To quote the noted Catholic scholar of Islam Samir Kahlil Samir, "I speak about the violence expressed in the Qur'an and practiced in Muhammad's life in

order to address the idea, widespread in the West, that the violence we see today is a deformation of Islam. We must honestly admit that there are two readings of the Qur'an and the *sunna* (Islamic traditions connected to Muhammad): one that opts for the verses that encourage tolerance toward other believers, and one that prefers the verses that encourage conflict. Both readings are legitimate."

## Bp Paprocki's norms on 'same-sex marriage'

*Edward Peters, Canon Lawyer*

A few days ago, doubtless in response to pastoral questions he had been receiving from ministers in his local Church, **Springfield IL Bp Thomas Paprocki** issued **diocesan norms** regarding ministry toward persons who had entered a 'same-sex marriage'. These norms, hardly remarkable for what they say, are nevertheless noteworthy for being necessary and for Paprocki's willingness to state them clearly while knowing what kind of vilification he would suffer in their wake.

Predictably **New Way's Ministry attacked Paprocki's norms** using equally predictable language and arguments and by hosting a combox replete with personal attacks on the bishop. All of this is sad, but none of it is newsworthy. Worth underscoring, though, is the glibness with which Robert Shine, an editor at New Ways, attempts to school Paprocki, of all people, on canon law, of all things. A little background.

Paprocki has, besides the master's degree in theology that Shine claims, a further licentiate degree in theology and, even more, a licentiate and doctorate *in canon law* from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. While I can't quite say that Paprocki "wrote the book" on the defense of rights in the Church, he certainly wrote *a* book on it, his 580 page doctoral dissertation, *Vindication and Defense of the Rights of the Christian Faithful through Administrative Recourse in the Local Church* (1993), which tome I can spy from my desk right now. And before his canon law studies, Paprocki had already earned a civil law degree from DePaul University and had **centered his legal practice around services to the poor**.

And now *Shine* (sporting zero legal credentials) is going to tell *Paprocki* how canon law should be understood? Okay …

According to Shine, among the "other things wrong with Paprocki's new guidelines" is their use of **Canon 1184** which, as Shine correctly notes, restricts ecclesiastical funeral rites for, among others, "manifest sinners" whose funerals would provoke scandal. But then Shine attempts to explain what Canon 1184 means by the phrase "manifest sinners".

Per Shine, "It is discrimination to target LGBT people when, in a certain sense, all Catholics could be deemed 'manifest sinners.'" Channeling **Fr. James Martin's outrageous claim** that "Pretty much everyone's lifestyle is sinful", Shine apparently thinks that, because it is manifest that everyone sins, everyone's sins must be "manifest". But Paprocki, having actually studied canon law, knows what canon law means by the phrase "manifest sinners".

Paprocki knows, for example, that the *CLSA New Commentary* (2001) discussing Canon 1184 at p. 1412, understands one in "manifest sin" as one "publicly known to be living in a state of grave sin". That's a far cry from Shine's rhetorical jab, delivered as if it were the *coup de grace* to Paprocki's position, "Who among us, including Bishop Paprocki, does not publicly sin at different moments?" Hardly anyone, I would venture, and so would Paprocki. But the law is *not* directed at those who, from time to time, commit sin, even a public sin; it is concerned about those who make an objectively sinful state *their way of life*. Fumble that distinction, as Shine does, and one's chances of correctly reading Canon 1184 drop to, well, zero.

Yet Shine goes on, thinking that offering some examples of supposedly-sinning Catholics who yet are not refused funeral rites should shame Paprocki into changing his policy, citing, among other debatables, "Catholics who … deny climate change." Yes. Shine actually said that. And this sort of silliness is supposed to give a prelate like Paprocki pause?

There are several other problems with Shine's sorry attempts to explain the **canon law of ecclesiastical funerals**, but I want to end these remarks by highlighting a much more important point: Paprocki's decree is *not* aimed at a category of persons (homosexuals, lesbians, LGBT, etc., words that do not even appear in his document) but rather, it is concerned with an *act,* a *public* act, an act that creates a civilly-recognized *status,* namely, the *act* of entering into a 'same-sex marriage'. That public act most certainly has public consequences, some civil *and some canonical*.

Bp Paprocki, by long training and awesome office, understands what the consequences of 'same-sex marriage' are and are not and he is much more likely to be thinking clearly about them than is Mr Shine.

## Preaching and the Four Senses of Scripture

*Randall Smith*

Christian biblical exegetes have traditionally distinguished four senses of Scripture: the literal, the allegorical, the anagogical, and the moral. In the Middle Ages, the differences among them was summed up with this little Latin poem:

*Littera gesta docet,*
*Quod credas allegoria.*
*Moralia quod agas,*
*Quo tendas anagogia.*
The literal sense teaches what happened,
The allegorical what you should believe,
The moral what you should do,
The anagogical where you are going.

The Catechism tells us that, "The profound concordance of the four senses guarantees all its richness to the living reading of Scripture in the Church." Indeed, such was the case for centuries.

And yet one rarely hears any mention of the three "spiritual" senses anymore. This is odd, not only because making use of all four senses has been at the heart of great preaching throughout the centuries, but also because the modern lectionary was arranged with Old Testament readings to match the Gospel reading precisely to foster a sense of how, as St. Augustine famously said, "the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old is made manifest in the New." The modern lectionary is tailor-made for allegory and the other spiritual senses.

And yet we rarely hear them in modern preaching. The usual little moral lessons in Mass – be "nice," "tolerant," "accepting" – have little to do with the moral sense as traditionally understood, which involved acting in accord with the Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the cardinal and theological virtues.

Even the literal sense of the text often disappears from sight because preachers rarely repeat the Bible readings for the day even though, by the time they make it into the pulpit, many people in the congregation have forgotten them. In my experience, priests will mention the Gospel occasionally, the Old Testament reading rarely, and the Epistle never. This is a shame because the readings from the Pauline epistles contain some of the most important theological material in the entire Bible.

Instead of delving right into the Scriptural readings for the day, it is not uncommon for modern preachers to start with a personal story or a joke. In the Middle Ages, there was something analogous: little pious stories preachers loved, called *exempla*. There were volumes filled with them, just as we have "preaching guides" today.

Although widely popular among others, neither Thomas Aquinas nor

Bonaventure ever used *exempla*. Here we have arguably the two greatest preachers of the thirteenth century, and neither of them used these popular little stories. Why not?

St. Thomas Aquinas Preaching Trust in God During a Tempest by Ary Scheffer, 1824 [Petit Palais, Paris]

In *Paradiso* 29.109–117, Dante has Beatrice chastise preachers for their use of these jokes and little stories:

Christ did not say to his first company:
"Go, and preach idle stories to the world";
but he gave them the teaching that is truth,
and truth alone was sounded when they spoke;
and thus, to battle to enkindle faith,
the Gospels served them as both shield and lance.
But now men go to preach with jests and jeers,
and just as long as they can raise a laugh,
the cowl puffs up, and nothing more is asked

So, too, the Dominican friar, Jacopo Passavanti (ca. 1302–1357), suggests that some of his fellow preachers were acting more like "jongleurs and storytellers and buffoons" than like the preachers they were supposed to be.

Thomas Aquinas wrote to his contemporary, Gerard of Besançon, that, "it is not proper for the preacher of truth to be diverted to unverifiable fables." And

Thomas's biographer, Fr. Jean-Pierre Torrell, tells us: "Thomas believes orators need an art that can move feelings, but he refuses to reduce that art to the wisdom of this world. That is why we scarcely find in him those little stories (*exempla*) so valued by so many preachers. He warns us, on the contrary, against what he calls 'frivolities' (*frivolitates*)." Good advice, that.

In retrospect, one imagines there were both good *exempla* and bad. Many of us have had the privilege of hearing sermons with interesting and illuminating stories or especially illustrative examples from great literature or the lives of the saints. But this is not common.

I don't deny the value of using concrete "examples" to help illustrate the points in a sermon since, as many medieval preaching manuals pointed out, the common people tend to enjoy visual imagery more than abstract reasoning. And

yet, these little stories can also be overused or poorly used. I know a good number of priests who can't get through a homily without telling a story about themselves. Many seem to think this is a good way to "make the Scriptures relevant" to their congregations.

It isn't. Such preachers are replacing the universal word of God with a particular story from their own lives. The story of Moses isn't just another story about some person I've never met; it has significance for me as a moment in salvation history. Moses is also a "type," a prefiguration, of Christ, as are David, Abraham, and Melchizedek. When most Catholics go to Mass, they want to hear about Christ and salvation history, not about Father Dave's trip to Cleveland or what cute thing Fr. Brad's niece said to her mother.

The way to make the Scriptures "come alive" is with an intelligent use of the spiritual senses. Too many priests are leaving the Church's best tools for lively preaching unused. The results are often a thin gruel, lacking the spiritual nourishment educated adults require in a toxic, increasingly anti-Catholic culture.

Catholics with high levels of secular training in law, business, or medicine who have an eighth-grade level understanding of their faith are likely to be dominated by their secular training alone. "Faith" becomes something for children, but not something to guide one's everyday activities or the course of one's life. Little stories about "being spiritual" will not change that. An educated congregation needs educated preaching, as St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure understood.