

The West Needs Clarity, not Confusion About Islam

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Hardly a day goes by without the news media reporting about the unrest and civil wars going on in parts of the Muslim world. For example, recently headlines in Western newspapers reported about Iran's "Second Front Along Israel's Borders." Another headline referred to "Iraq Struggles to Contain Protests Against the Government;" and a third one referred to "U.S. Officials Are Worried About Turkey's Forays into Syria." Throughout September 2019, Algerians kept up their weekly demonstrations against the military regime.

As a considerable number of Muslims now live in Western Europe, the Americas, and Australia, one can hardly need to emphasize the necessity of having a clear and accurate understanding of Islam. Unfortunately, this hasn't been the case. In the September 25, 2019 issue of *Crisis Magazine* William Kilpatrick posted an article entitled "*Pope Francis Doesn't Understand Islam*".

Following are excerpts from the article which explain the misunderstandings.

"What apparently rankles [Pope Francis] most are Catholic claims to exclusivity. For example, the belief that all men are saved through Christ can be looked upon as an impediment to interreligious harmony. Francis believes that all religions have "shared beliefs." A good example is the Abu Dhabi Declaration on "Human Fraternity" signed by Pope Francis and Amhad Al-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, in February 2019. "Of particular concern is the statement that "the pluralism and the diversity of religions... are willed by God." That's quite a concession for Francis to make, as it contradicts Christ's claim that "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me." (Jn. 14:6).

"Contrary to the evidence, the Declaration assumes that the one common religion already exists in nascent form, and that the teachings and values of all religions are essentially the same. Thus, "the values of tolerance and fraternity... are promoted and encouraged by religions." And, therefore: "These tragic realities [hate, extremism, and violence] are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings." Terrorism for example, "is not due to religion... it is due rather to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts.

"Pope Francis and other Catholic apologists for Islam claim that terrorist leaders simply misunderstand Islam. If that's the case, then the very first person to misunderstand Islam was Muhammad himself, who commanded that the hand of a thief be cut off. *The Life of Muhammad*—which, after the Koran and the Hadith, is considered the most important source of Islamic truths—is essentially a record of Muhammad's jihadist exploits. Approximately two-thirds of its 800 pages detail Muhammad's jihad raids, his beheading of captured prisoners, his slave trading, his endorsement of rape and sex slavery, and his use of torture.

“Al-Tayeb doesn’t misunderstand Islam, though Francis appears to. He must be acquainted with the darker aspects of Islam, and yet he seems sure that they have nothing to do with “true” Islam. Catholics are already badly misinformed about Islam. The Abu Dhabi statement, once it is widely disseminated, will only serve to reinforce their naïveté. That, in turn, will leave them unprepared for the next step in what has become a predictable progression.

“The next step is *Islamization*. That’s not a word one hears very often, especially in polite Catholic circles. But some Catholics can’t afford to be polite. Fr. Valentine Obinna told *Crux* that, in Nigeria, Fulani Muslims killed almost 9,000 Christians and other non-Muslims in a recent three-year period, as part of a program for the “Islamization of Nigeria.” President Buhari and those in power turn a blind eye to the activities of the Fulani and Boko Haram, he said, because they “want to make sure the whole country becomes a Muslim country.”

Professor Kilpatrick’s article reveals the unfortunate fact that Pope Francis did not exhibit an accurate knowledge of Islam by issuing that joint statement with The Grand Imam of Al Azhar in February 2019. Neither did he follow Catholic teaching regarding the exclusivity of salvation by Christ alone. It is a theological compromise of the first order.

Here is some of the language of the statement:

” This Declaration may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will; This Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism; an appeal to those who cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity that are promoted and encouraged by religions; This Declaration may be a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul;

”This Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South, and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another. This is what we hope and seek to achieve with the aim of finding a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life.”

The rest of the statement has an appealing, positive, tolerant ring to it. However, the statement neglected to bring up any negative ideas that might have put a damper on the feelings of good will between the Pontiff and the Imam. The Pontiff conveniently chose not to bring up the evil treatment of Jews and Christians by Muslims in the lands they conquered and then imposed Islam on its inhabitants. Neither did the Pontiff bring into the discussion the sufferings of Nigerian Christians in recent years. or the plight of Iraqi Christians in the backyard of the UAE, who had lived for two millennia in Iraq, and have now been forced to leave their homeland. Their number has dwindled from 2 million prior to 2003, to around 200,000!

At this point, it's important to add that previous statements and documents of the Catholic Church revealed serious misunderstanding of Islam. The pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council 1962 – 1965, as well as the *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1992 make it clear. “. . .the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day.” So, the concept of there being “*Three Abrahamic Religions.*” was accepted. The conclusion was that the three theistic faiths, have one spiritual ancestor; and, notwithstanding some differences in details, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, worship the same God.

It is important to realize that the term, “*The Three Abrahamic Religions*” is of recent origin and is used mostly among English-speaking people. Before it became popular, the exact designation was the “*Three Theistic Religions;*” which set Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, apart from the Asiatic faiths, which are, either *polytheistic, or pantheistic*. Nowadays, thanks to the momentous changes that have taken place in communications, brought about by the Internet, it is possible to consult some Arab scholars about their views regarding the “*Three Abrahamic Religions.*”

According to the works of *Hamed Abdel-Samad*, a political scientist, and his colleague, *Professor Muhammad al-Musayehi*, a Moroccan expert on Islamic History, and the manuscripts of the Qur'an, there is no mention of the existence of Mecca, prior to the Third Century A.D!

The Mecca that existed in Muhammad's days, was not there in Abraham's time.ⁱⁱⁱ Both *Hamed Abdel-Samad* and *Muhammad al Musayeh*, have discussed this subject at length. Their opinion is that the Prophet Muhammad invented the account that Abraham, accompanied by Hagar and Ishmael, came to Mecca, and built the Kaaba.

Even if Mecca had existed 1800 years B. C., Abraham, a very old person, couldn't have made the arduous journey of 1200 kilometers, from *Hebron to Mecca*, with Hagar and her young son. The Genesis narrative makes sense, since a move of 150 km., from Hebron to Paran, where Hagar and Ishmael settled, was both possible and practical.

When Christians accept the thesis of the ‘*Three Abrahamic Faiths,*’ they give credence to an unsubstantiated myth, namely that Abraham was the father of the Arabs, as well as the spiritual ancestor of Muslims. The scholars above have debunked this theory as well as the one that Abraham went to Mecca with Ishmael and Hagar and built the Kaaba.

The Biblical account relates the facts of history, and its teachings are normative for Christians. It leaves no grounds for the claims of the Roman Catholic Church regarding similarities between the major teachings of Christianity and Islam. It is enough to compare Surah 112 in the Qur'an with the basic teachings of the historic Christian faith, to realize how utterly different they are!

“Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, the Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.” Translation of Yusuf Ali.

Christians approach God with this Invocation: “In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and

the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.

[Among Eastern Christians, the words 'One God' are added to emphasize that Christians worship One God, in Three Persons.]

ⁱ **Hamed Abdel-Samad** is a German-Egyptian political scientist and author. He was born as the third of five children, the son of a Muslim Sunni Imam. He came to Germany in 1995 at the age of 23. Abdel-Samad studied Japanese, English and French in Cairo as well as political science in Augsburg. He worked as a scholar in Erfurt and Braunschweig. He taught and conducted research until the end of 2009, at the Institute for Jewish History and Culture at the University of Munich; his dissertation topic was: **“Bild der Juden in ägyptischen Schulbüchern.”** **“Image of Jews in Egyptian textbooks.”** Subsequently he decided to become a full-time professional writer. His works have been printed in German, Arabic, English, and in French. His lectures are archived on YouTube.

ⁱⁱ Professor **Muhammad al-Musayeh**, is a Moroccan scholar, specialized in the Qur’anic manuscripts; he worked with the German expert on the Qur’an, **Christof Luxenburg**; In this dialogue with **Abdel-Samad**, we learn about the various manuscripts of the Qur’an.
<http://ar.le360.ma/culture/103741>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hamed Abdel Samad & Professor Muhammad al-Musayeh on the History of Mecca, Sunduq al-Islam #101

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=hamed+abdel+samad+on+youtube+box+of+islam&&view=detail&mid=8FB66912D142F775B6728FB66912D142F775B672&rvsmid=447B3145C77647B0651C447B3145C77647B0651C&FORM=VDRVRV>

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** (Latin: *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae*; commonly called the **Catechism** or the **CCC**) is a catechism promulgated for the Catholic Church by Pope John Paul II in 1992

<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm> Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 16, November 21, 1964 “But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.”

Note: For a commentary on Pope Francis and his visit to the Arabian Gulf states, please read: Graeme Wood’s article of 6 February 2019 on, The Vatican and the Gulf Have a Common Enemy

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/why-pope-francis-visiting-united-arab-emirates/582088/>