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Nadine L. Jackson, Editor-in-Chief

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THE TELLER REVIEW OF BOOKS™

Nadine L. Jackson, Editor-in-Chief

The Teller Review of Books™ (Editor-in-Chief: Nadine L. Jackson) provides succinct overviews and critical reviews of the seminal books shaping contemporary culture in the areas of law, faith, society and public policy. Milestones in political, cultural and religious thought, whether contemporary publications or the classics, form part of the corpus of reviewed works.

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I. Islam

A. A Deadly Misunderstanding (Mark D. Siljander)

“A Misunderstanding of Christianity”

Mark D. Siljander’s *A Deadly Misunderstanding* is the account of a congressman’s discovery that the Christian-Muslim divide is not so wide after all. Indeed, Islam and Christianity in many ways share the same essential tenets. It has been linguistic mistranslations and centuries of misunderstandings between Islam and the West that have caused a wide chasm between the two faiths. If Christians and Muslims sincerely search for the central message of their respective faiths, they will find the major differences to dissipate.

Arriving at these points, the author has misunderstood the basic and central messages of Islam and Christianity and their incompatibility. He states, for example, that nothing in Christianity “contraindicates acknowledging Muhammad as a prophet or ‘messenger of God’” (p. 115). That may be true, until Muhammad’s prophecies are read. His writing on the question of salvation—perhaps the most important issue—is fundamentally different from the teachings of Christ as recorded in the Gospels. The Quran teaches that our salvation is secured through good works that are recorded in a “ledger (of their deeds)” (Qur’an 18:49), which Allah will use on Judgment Day. “Then you will see the sinners terrified at its contents.” (*Id.*). The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that we are *all* sinners (Romans 3:23) deserving punishment. Yet a sacrificial Lamb (Christ) was offered for our sins (John 1:29), and all who put their faith in Him will be saved (Ephesians 2:8).

Within this context, all of the similarities that Mr. Siljander has highlighted become secondary and unimportant. For even if, as he says, Muslims have far more in common with Christians than we thought, the most important question of how we are saved is fundamentally different. Nonetheless, the commonalities that he highlights caused me to realize that there is more in common between the two faiths than I had known. For example, the Quran teaches that Jesus died (3:55, 4:159, 5:117, 19:33) and resurrected from the dead (2:72-73, 19:33) (p. 224).

However, Mr. Siljander makes several overstatements to support his points. On page 116, for example, after summarizing the pillars of Islam in five brief statements, the author asks, “what Christian ... could object to

any of these five statements [of the five pillars]?” and boldly states that any good Christian, “adhering to his own faith in all ways and also following all five of these central tenets, could at the same time be considered a Muslim.” Yet a Christian’s adhering to his own faith in all ways while following the five pillars is an inherent contradiction. A Christian cannot at once proclaim that the Bible is God’s Word while at the same time declaring, as required by the first pillar of Islam, that Muhammad is God’s prophet. To do so would be to deny that Christ was slain for our sins, that he rose again on the third day, and that it is through faith in Him that we are saved. It is to deny that God became man, the very essence of Christianity that was affirmed and reaffirmed in the ecumenical councils that rejected the notion that he was a mere man or prophet, as Islam would hold. It is to deny the Bible as the inspired and uncorrupted Word of God. It is to reject the Eucharist in remembrance of the sacrifice of God’s Son who was offered once and for all for their salvation, and to instead make sacrifices to Allah by slaying male goats, lamb, or other animals in a yearly ritual. Christ claimed to be both God (John 14:11, 10:31-33) and the Son of God (Mark 14:61b-62), thus fulfilling the messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. He also claimed to be the only way to God (John 14:6). Through His death, the sins of humankind were paid for, and through His resurrection, all who placed their faith in Him were given renewed life and salvation (Rom 3:26). To become a Muslim would be to profess that Muhammad is God’s prophet and to deny these basic biblical teachings.

Mr. Siljander’s effort is a valiant one and his desire to bridge the Muslim-Christian divide is noble. Yet he does it at the expense of truth and misses the mark of true Christianity. For fourteen centuries, Christians and Muslims have recognized that the teachings of their respective faiths were irreconcilable. This is why Christians have not accepted Mohammed as a prophet and why Muslims have not accepted the Christian Scriptures as the authentic Word of God. Muslims instead believe that the entire New Testament, which proclaims in each of its books that God became man for the salvation of the world, is a corruption of the original texts. The Christian church, according to Muslims, for nearly two thousand years, has been able to hide the truth about Jesus: he was a great teacher and prophet who proclaimed God’s Word, but he was not God and he did not die for the sins of the world, thus conquering sin and death. Christians who have had an encounter with the living, reigning Christ instead pledge allegiance to a different creed--Christ was who He is claimed to be in the

Christian Scriptures, as best exemplified by the words of the Apostle Peter, who called Him “my Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

B. What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East (Bernard Lewis) (2002)

“A work that demonstrates Lewis’s gifted eloquence, mastery of foreign languages and persuasive scholarship”

Sampling a broad collection of historical accounts, diplomatic cables, journals, and official correspondence, Bernard Lewis illustrates the historical development of Middle Eastern political and religious institutions. This work, which is rich in vivid imagery and erudition, demonstrates Lewis’ gifted eloquence and mastery of foreign languages, with a wide range of French, Turkish, Arabic, German, and Italian sources cited throughout the study.

Like Lewis’s other works, including *The Crisis of Islam*, widely considered his best work in the field, *What Went Wrong?* presents the reader with a profuse collection of accounts that describe the internal struggle battling for domination in the modern Muslim world: on the one hand, moderate Islam seeking to embrace the liberties of modern democracies and alignment with the West, and on the other, a fundamentalist strain of Islam that condemns any departure from ancient practices as a deviation from and corruption of true Islam. Lewis enters the minds of the disciples of the latter school and describes not only their struggle against outside influence but also their struggle against the enemy from within (p. 107):

In the literature of the Muslim radicals and militants the enemy has been variously defined. Sometimes he is the Jew or Zionist, sometimes the Christian or missionary, sometimes the Western imperialist, sometimes—less frequently—the Russian or other communist. But their primary enemies, and the most immediate object of their campaigns and attacks, are the native secularizers—those who have tried to weaken or modify the Islamic basis of the state by introducing secular schools and universities, secular laws and courts, and thus excluding Islam and its professional exponents from the two major areas of education and justice. The arch-enemy from most of them is Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic and the first great secularizing reformer in the Muslim world. Characters as diverse as King Faruq and Presidents