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What Do Latter-day Saints and Muslims Have in Common? - Part 1
A Christian Evaluation Of: Muslims and Latter-day Saints: Beliefs, Values, and Lifestyles
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Two religious groups which have garnered a great deal of attention in the United States over the last couple of decades are the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (AKA: LDS or Mormons) and the world religion of Islam (whose followers are called Muslims). Both of those religious movements have left large footprints in the American psyche. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gained national attention in 2012 when a member of that church ran for President of the United States. Islam has been indelibly embedded in the American consciousness since the September, 2001 terrorist attacks by radical Islamic Al-Qaeda operatives.

Since its founding with six members in 1830, the LDS has grown in its number of claimed adherents worldwide to more than seventeen million, with about seven million in North America. Islam, which began in AD 633, now claims nearly two billion followers globally and about four million in North America.

Recently the LDS released online and in booklet form a pamphlet titled *Muslims and Latter-day Saints: Beliefs, Values, and Lifestyles*. It purports to compare and contrast its faith's beliefs with those of Muslims. (Read the complete text here:

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/muslims-and-latter-day-saints?lang=eng>).

(Note: All direct quotations from the LDS pamphlet are printed in italics in this article series.)

The introduction of the piece gives five reasons for its publication:

- *Signifies a conscientious effort to provide dignity and tolerance for Muslim and Latter-day Saint believers.*
- *Represents hours of conversation and study by religious scholars and others, including Muslims from diverse backgrounds. It recognizes that no individual scholar or religious imam, or group of scholars or imams, can represent all of Islam.*
- *Does not interpret the Qur'an. It does seek to understand some Islamic tenets and practices as explained by Muslim scholars and religious leaders and to portray these tenets in a positive and engaging manner.*
- *Illustrates common themes found in Islamic and Latter-day Saint beliefs and practices but does not make judgments regarding these beliefs or practices.*
- *Seeks to provide mutual understanding while requesting forbearance and patience if any of its words or efforts fall short of that intent.*

Those five principles from the LDS are in and of themselves commendable. It is a positive thing for various religious groups to better understand each other's beliefs and practices. That being said, the text of the pamphlet does not delve very deep into the real beliefs of Mormonism or Islam. It glosses over the significant differences between the two religions focusing essentially on the commonalities – which appears to be the purpose for its publication.

It also fails to explain in any depth how, despite its use of Christian terminology, Mormon theology differs radically from Historic Christian doctrine. For those rea-

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sons, in this four part series (due to the lengthy nature of the LDS pamphlet) we will undertake to evaluate the content of the pamphlet and provide an evangelical Christian analysis of the LDS' statements about Islam and how it presents its own faith elements to the reader. The pamphlet breaks the comparisons into seventeen specific points. We will present each one as it is written (in italics) and then provide an analysis.

In Part One we will examine the first four points of the LDS pamphlet: (1) Mutual Respect ; (2) Profession of Faith in God; (3) The Posterity of Abraham; and (4) Prophets.

In Part Two we look at points five through nine: (5) Jesus Christ; (6) Scriptures; (7) Prayer; (8) Helping Those in Need; and (9) Fasting.

In Part Three we analyze points ten through twelve: (10) Physical Health; (11) Chastity; (12) the Role of Women; and (13) Family.

In Part Four we survey points fourteen through seventeen: (14) Holy Places; (15) Life After Death; (16) Humanity; and (17) Religious Diversity.

(Note on Acronyms - 1) SAW: Acronym for the Arabic phrase "prayers and peace be upon him," which Muslims use after they say the name of the Prophet Muhammad. **2) AS:** Acronym for the Arabic phrase "upon him be peace," which Muslims use after they say the name of prophets like Abraham.)

Point One: Mutual Respect

Muslims and Latter-day Saints express mutual respect for each other's beliefs.

Muslims

Islam teaches esteem for other religions, including Christianity. Rather

than teaching Muslims to compete in doctrine with people of other faiths, the Qur'an says to "compete with each other in righteousness." In the end when all return to God, He "will tell you the truth in the matter of your differences" (Qur'an 5:48; see also 5:82).

Latter-day Saints

Latter-day Saints are taught to show respect and love for people of other faiths. In 1978 the Church's First Presidency declared: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Muhammad ... received ... God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals."

Analysis

The statement that "Islam teaches esteem for other religions" does not square with history or current reality. The history of Islam is one of harsh intolerance of other religions. In nearly every case when Islam has become the predominant religious and political force in a society, other faiths are systematically oppressed or eradicated – with many who resist facing death. According to the latest World Watch report from Open Doors, an organization that monitors Christian persecution worldwide, of the fifty worst offender countries, thirty-three are predominantly Islamic.

LDS leaders are certainly aware of this fact. Islamic countries have been off-limits to LDS missionary work since the church's founding. The LDS First Presidency's 1978 statement commending Muhammad is hard to understand.

As evangelicals we certainly desire to maintain peace with Muslims. Nonetheless, we cannot overlook the harsh realities which our brothers and sisters must endure under Islamic regimes.

Point Two: Profession of Faith in God
Faith in an omniscient and omnipotent God is a foundational belief of Muslims

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and Latter-day Saints. Both express their faith in God in thought, word, and action.

Muslims

Muslims believe that Almighty God – "Allah" – is the Creator of all in the heavens and the earth. God sent messengers and prophets to guide and direct people. To become a Muslim, a person must testify, "There is no deity but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger." This two-part profession of faith (shahada) in one God includes the belief that salvation and peace are to be found in submitting to God's will as revealed in the Qur'an.

Latter-day Saints

Latter-day Saints believe that God – "Heavenly Father" – is the literal father of all human spirits. He loves and cares for all His children. The word saint refers to someone whose character has been changed through obedience to God. A Latter-day Saint's expression of faith (testimony) is a personal conviction of belief in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, whose Atonement and Resurrection make salvation possible for all humankind.

Analysis

As we know, both Islam and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are based on a theistic worldview. Yet their concepts of what God is like are mutually incompatible, and neither is compatible with Historic Christianity. The LDS statement does accurately express the Islamic concept of deity (*Allah* is the Arabic word for God). It correctly explains the Muslim statement of faith, the *shahadah*. In any case, the Islamic perspective on God is not the same as that of Historic Christianity. True, Islam teaches that God is Creator of the universe and is infinite and eternal, but it rejects the two most basic Christian theological tenets: the Holy Trinity (One God in Three Persons)

and the Deity of Jesus Christ. Islam regards both of those teachings as blasphemous and pagan.

The LDS, though it strongly insists it is a Christian system, is even further removed from Historic Christianity in this regard than is Islam. As the statement asserts, "*Latter-day Saints believe that God – 'Heavenly Father' – is the literal father of all human spirits.*" This brief statement, however, does not reveal the full meaning of those terms for the LDS. According to traditional Mormon doctrine, God, "Heavenly Father," is actually an exalted male human being who once lived physically on a world like ours. At some point eons ago, because of his obedience to his "heavenly father," he was exalted to godhood and, while still inhabiting a physical body, became the literal father (with his wife, our Heavenly Mother) of all people who have lived on earth in a pre-existent spirit world.

Obviously this a major deviation from Historic Christian teaching that God is the Eternal and Infinite Creator of the universe. He has always existed and never lived as a man before He became God on any earthly planet (God the Son was incarnated as Jesus at a specific point in time). He has no wife and is not the physical progenitor of humanity.

One other point needs to be made. Point Two says that a Latter-day Saint's testimony is "*a personal conviction of belief in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, whose Atonement and Resurrection make salvation possible for all humankind.*" Most Christians would find that wording acceptable. Nonetheless, it is important to note that it does not mention that in LDS religious life a "testimony" is primarily a subjective inner feeling acquired by a new convert. It supposedly confirms to him or her that the LDS is God's one true church on the

face of the earth, that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, and that the LDS scriptures (eg.: *The Book of Mormon*) are true.

Also, the LDS' concepts of who Christ is and its views of atonement and salvation are contrary to those of Historic Christianity as we will examine later.

Point Three: The Posterity of Abraham

Muslims and Latter-day Saints view Abraham as an example of faithfulness, honesty, and obedience to God. They see a bond between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism because of a common spiritual heritage linked to Abraham. For this reason, these three religions are often referred to as the "Abrahamic faiths."

Muslims

Muslims believe that Ibrahim, or Abraham (upon him be peace, AS), is a prophet who plays a prominent role in Islam as an example of faith and obedience to God. He never worshiped other gods or idols (see Qur'an 3:67). He brought his son Ishmael to Mecca. Abraham (AS) was responsible for building the Ka'bah in Mecca for the worship of the One God. Islam teaches that Abraham's character and his willingness to submit to God's will gave him a special place as a Friend of God.

Latter-day Saints

Latter-day Saints believe that Abraham was an exceptional prophet and example of obedience. He was a seeker of happiness, peace, and knowledge. Through his righteousness and faith in God, Abraham secured blessings for his posterity and became the father of many nations. God promised Abraham that his posterity would receive His truth and teach it to the peoples of the world in the latter days (see Pearl of Great Price, Abraham 1:2, 19).

Analysis

The first paragraph above contains a kernel of truth. Certainly Jews, Christians, and Muslims, followers of the world's three largest monotheistic religions, trace their faith's heritages to Abraham. However, the claims of Islam concerning Ishmael and Abraham building of the *Ka'bah* (or *Kaaba*, "the cube") in Mecca has no historical basis. The Mecca site was one of a number of shrines built in ancient Arabia to honor various Bedouin gods. When Muhammad began to teach his monotheistic faith and gained political domination, he eliminated the others and designated the one in Mecca as authentic for *Allah*.

The statement also cites one of the LDS canonical scriptures (*Pearl of Great Price, Abraham 1:2, 19*). The Book of Abraham is a section of the *Pearl of Great Price* which, according to traditional LDS doctrine, was written by Abraham while he was in Egypt (Gen. 12). Joseph Smith claimed that in 1835 he had obtained an actual papyrus manuscript upon which Abraham wrote and was able to translate it by the power of God into English. Extensive textual evidence, uncovered by Egyptologists in the 1960s called into serious question Smith's claims about its date, authorship, and his miraculous renderings. Yet the LDS stills regards it as divinely inspired. (read all about it here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/the-book-of-abraham-and-the-church-of-jesus-christ-latter-day-saints-the-mormon-church-finally-admits-joseph-smith-got-something-wrong-but-he-was-still-right/> and here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2020/10/new-light-on-the-book-of-abraham/>)

Point Four: Prophets

Muslims and Latter-day Saints believe in the vital role of prophets to provide guidance from God.

Muslims

Muslims believe that both the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and Jesus Christ (AS) are direct descendants of Adam (AS) through Abraham (AS). Muhammad (SAW) was sent by God to reform the Abrahamic religions. The revelations given through the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) reestablished faith in one God and principles of righteous living. Muslims believe in Old and New Testament prophets, and it is a central belief of the faith that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is the final prophet.

Latter-day Saints

Latter-day Saints believe that God leads His children through prophets. God called prophets in ancient days, as recorded in the Holy Bible, but the gospel of Jesus Christ was lost centuries ago and had to be restored. For this reason, God called Joseph Smith as a prophet to restore Christ's church and gospel. Latter-day Saints believe in continuing revelation from God through an unbroken chain of prophets from 1820 to the present day.

Analysis

It is interesting that this pamphlet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints makes no effort to critique the Islamic view that Muhammad had to "*reform the Abrahamic religions*" and to "*reestablished faith in one God and principles of righteous living.*" Neither of those supposed assertions were necessary or true. The Abrahamic monotheistic religions of Judaism and Christianity, at the time of Muhammad (7th century AD), were both quite strong in the middle-east and north Africa. In fact, the historical evidence is that Muhammad had extensive contact with itinerant Jewish and Christian merchants in Arabia. Through them he likely became somewhat aware of the Old Testament prophets, learned a little about Jesus Christ, and heard told many Bible stories. Thus, he embraced basic monotheism. He then added his own Islamic concepts which essentially corrupted both of the older faiths.

The reason LDS theologians do not argue against the Islamic assertion that the religions of Judaism and Christianity needed reforming is because they actually agree with it. A key LDS principle is that "*the gospel of Jesus Christ was lost centuries ago and had to be restored.*" That precept of Mormonism is historically baseless and is offensive to Bible believing Christian churches and believers. There is no evidence, as the LDS still teaches, that there was a "Great Apostasy" in the post New Testament era wherein true Christianity and genuine ecclesiastical authority was lost. Thus, there was no reason for God to call "*Joseph Smith as a prophet to restore Christ's church and gospel.*"

Actually Joseph Smith was not a true prophet of God nor were any of the LDS "prophets" (Presidents) after his death. In recent decades the LDS has understated this teaching in its public discourse, yet, as this pamphlet clearly indicates, it has not officially changed its exclusivist doctrine.

In the next installment we will examine points five through nine: (5) Jesus Christ; (6) Scriptures; (7) Prayer; (8) Helping Those in Need; and (9) Fasting (see above for full agenda).

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