

will experience the same effects as the rest of the world. The only difference is that the effects will be more pronounced in the Muslim world.

Moreover, the system, the society, and the culture may differ from the West in a way that will affect the way the West and the Muslim world interact. For example, the Muslim world may have a different understanding of justice and fairness, and this may affect the way the West and the Muslim world interact.

The fact that the West and the Muslim world are different in these ways does not mean that they are incompatible. In fact, the West and the Muslim world may be able to learn from each other and to work together to solve the problems of the world. The key is to understand the differences and to find ways to bridge the gaps between them.

The West and the Muslim world are different in many ways, but they are also similar in many ways. The West and the Muslim world both have a long history and a rich culture. The West and the Muslim world both have a strong sense of justice and fairness. The West and the Muslim world both have a strong sense of community and a strong sense of responsibility. The West and the Muslim world both have a strong sense of hope and a strong sense of faith.

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Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims: Prayer, Passion, and Politics

James A. Bill and John Alden Williams

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Comparing Roman Catholicism and Twelver Shi'i Islam suggests itself for several reasons: the parallel passions of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad's grandson Husayn; the suffering of and devotion of their mothers, Mary and Fatimah; and perhaps most prominently in recent years, the powerful hierarchies of authority within each faith, headed by the Pope on the Catholic side and by several leading jurists (*mujtahidun*) who bear the title of legal authority for laymen (*marji' al-taqlid*) on the Shi'i side. In fact, the papacy is frequently mentioned in contemporary debates about the *marji' al-taqlid's*

position within Twelver Shi'ism, often with a hint of envy. Some Shi'i thinkers aspire to the unity, efficiency, doctrinal uniformity, and political clout that a single, universally recognized legal authority for the Twelvers might provide. Bill and Williams' new publication is, however, the only work of which I am aware that undertakes this comparison in a sustained and rigorous manner.

After two introductory chapters that provide the basic historical background of the two faiths and the lives of the Twelve Imams, the authors begin the comparison proper. Chapter 3, "Sacred Actors and Intercessors," compares the figures of Jesus and Husayn, Mary and Fatimah, and the Imamzadas (descendants of the Imams) and Catholic saints. Chapter 4, "Redemptive Suffering and Martyrdom," treats redemptive suffering and the importance attached to the concept of martyrdom in both faiths, stressing the rituals or passion plays through which believers participate in the tragedy of the deaths of Jesus Christ and Husayn.

Chapter 5, "Catholic Mystics and Islamic Sufis: The Confluence of Experience," compares Catholic and Shi'i mysticism, stressing the Catalan Raymond Lull (ca. 1235-1316) and the famous Sufi martyr Abu Mansur al-Hallaj (858-922). Chapter 6, "Law and the State," treats the political philosophies that have developed within each faith. Finally, chapter 7, "Authority, Justice, and the Modern Polity" discusses issues related to the hierarchies of authority within each faith, with particular attention paid to issues of social justice.

The authors do not set out to argue the influence of one faith on the other through obscure channels, nor do they write in the vein of revealing amazing and uncanny coincidences. Instead, they claim that comparing them will help us understand each one better. Judged by this yardstick, the work is a success. The non-specialist reader comes away with a good understanding of the particulars of, and the broad similarities between, the two faiths. Consequently, the reader also learns that two very different religious traditions, separated by barriers of space, time, language, and cultural background, have come up with very similar answers to some of humanity's main religious questions. The possibility for reaching cross-cultural understanding thus has a very real basis within the religious traditions themselves, a message worth repeating in times of interreligious tension.

The authors stray from strict adherence to the comparative method when they use Sunni material or marginal figures to represent Shi'i Islam, particularly in chapters 5 (mysticism) and 6 (political philosophy). While the result may often not be off the mark – Shi'i and Sunni Islam share a

great deal, after all – this approach risks blurring one pole of the comparison and misrepresenting specific Twelver features. Hallaj was certainly a mystic and a Shi'i, but he was roundly rejected by the Twelver authorities of his day, who played an important role in his denunciation. While important mystical trends have existed within Twelver Shi'ism, that tradition has been much more inimical to Sufis on the whole than Sunni Islam.

This is in marked contrast to modern Iranian culture, where the Twelver religious tradition has become so fused with the literary tradition of Persian mystical poetry that many see them as inseparable. The authors seem to have adopted this fusion's validity, which finds its most important intellectual expression in the writings of Louis Massignon and Seyyed Hossein Nasr. It should be tempered by consulting such works as Kamal al-Shaybi's *Al-Silah bayn al-Tasawwuf wa al-Tashayyu'* (The Link between Sufism and Shi'ism). Iran's greatest poet, Hafiz, was actually probably a Sunni, as the authors suggest, as were the other famous poets Rumi and Sa'di.

The chapter on political philosophy cites certain leading historical figures as having Shi'i tendencies: the doubtful Shi'is al-Farabi (870-950) and Ibn Sina (980-1037), and the obvious Sunnis al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Ibn Rushd (1126-98). Only Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (1201-74) can really be claimed as a representative of Twelver thought. Similarly, Jalal al-Din al-Afghani's credentials as a Shi'i are suspect. An Iranian Shi'i by background, he spent most of his adult career operating as a Sunni in Sunni circles in Afghanistan, Egypt, and Turkey. The extent to which Twelver Shi'i tradition shaped his thought or to which he represents that tradition is debatable. The reader comes away thinking either that Twelvers had little to say about mysticism or political philosophy, or that there was very little difference between Sunni and Shi'i doctrine concerning these matters.

The corollary of the resemblance of Shi'i Islam to Catholicism is that of Sunni Islam to Protestant Christianity. A comparison between the first two is often made in Islamic studies, where Protestant thinkers have played an influential role, with an implied condemnation of both. Like Protestant Christianity vis-à-vis Catholicism, Sunni Islam has been viewed as more democratic and less reactionary than Shi'i Islam, with greater focus on individual piety and the individual's unmitigated relationship with God. Above all, Sunni Islam, like Protestant Christianity, has been seen as devoid of the controlling and corrupt hierarchy that characterized both Shi'i Islam and the Catholic church. Of course, such blanket statements do not do justice to the facts, including the emphasis on individual piety in Catholicism and Shi'i Islam as well as the hierarchies of religious authority existing in both

Sunni Islamic societies and the various Protestant churches, but they have been influential nevertheless.

In *Roman Catholics and Shi'i Muslims*, Bill and Williams have taken an important step beyond this negative and superficial approach and produced a sympathetic and even-handed portrayal of both Roman Catholicism and Twelver Shi'i Islam. In adopting this sympathetic approach, however, they have missed an important opportunity for another comparative chapter. As a by-product of clerical power, both Catholic and Shi'i societies have developed rich anti-clerical folk traditions, involving myriad jokes and anecdotes about lecherous, greedy clerics, whether they be priests in France or mullahs in Iran.

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