

Lexical Choice and Rhetorical Expression: Comments

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Many religions understand themselves as fundamentally aligned to a given culture or people. Hinduism is intrinsically connected to the Indian culture and caste system. Daoism and Confucianism are highly integrated into the Chinese spirit and the cultural mentality of the Orient. Shinto's cosmology, myths, and rites concern themselves solely with the Japanese. Even in the West, Judaism locates itself with the people of Israel. Jews welcome converts, but Judaism has never seen itself as a proselytizing religion. Islam is convinced that Muhammad's message is both universal and constitutes the highest revelation. Thus, it is a proselytizing religion. But Muslims historically and today believe that non-Muslims can be saved in the context of their own religious traditions, particularly if these are monotheistic. Christianity perhaps stands alone as a religion that has historically believed that membership in the church is necessary for salvation. Add to this that Roman Catholicism had believed that Catholic membership was necessary. As the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared, "There is only one universal church of the faithful, outside which none can be saved." More recently, most Christians, including Catholics, think that God's saving grace is available outside its ecclesial borders, but this is a modern idea.

What then to think of the religious other? In the seventeenth century, a Catholic had few conceptual choices. One was to consider religious others and their sacred texts as valuable preparation for the gospel, and thus admire what could be admired in them. They had something of what St. Justin Martyr called the *Logos spermatikos*, seeds of the Word. This included the principle of inculturation whereby European culture was not to be conflated with Christianity. This principle became policy, at least in theory,

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in 1622 with Pope Gregory XV's creation of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. We also see Jesuit exemplars inculturating themselves, such as Francis Xavier, Roberto de Nobili, and Matteo Ricci. Xavier took on the lifestyle of Hindu ascetics, De Nobili became a great Sanskrit scholar and dialogue partner with brahmins of southern India, and Ricci took on the mantles of Buddhist monks and Chinese scholars, depending on whom and where he was evangelizing. They were grounded in a deep respect for those they encountered. The second option was utter dismissal in most every way. Non-Christians were idolaters and blasphemers. If Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), then religious competitors were assuredly representing waywardness, falsity, and death.

Such was the tension that Ignazio Lomellini would have known in Rome during the early seventeenth century. Both sides of this tension come across in Paul Shore's examination of his 1622 translation and commentary of the Qur'an. The very title of his work (in English), *Observations, Notes and Disputations against the Pestilential Qur'an*, points to the fact that his intention is to undermine the Qur'an with "deliberate misinterpretations" and translation choices that overly heightened the role or person of Jesus. These include choices that lend ammunition "to indict the Qur'anic narrative...for its alleged *blasphemes* and *inaneities*." As Shore points out, Lomellini writes relatively early in his commentary (folio 67 of 323): "The Qur'an is the work of Satan...or composed through the suggestions of Satan." On the other hand, as Shore also points out, Lomellini respected the Qur'an enough to translate it as accurately as he could, given his limitations. Shore notes that "the very act of translating (rather than merely destroying or ignoring) the Qur'an implies another truth common to Jesuit culture: that Jesuits should 'seek God our Lord in all things.'" One cannot escape the conclusion that the Qur'an was, for Lomellini, a very important text. This is not simply because it represented a religious competitor's text that begrudgingly needed to be addressed.

While the Islamic faith was assuredly a competitor to Christianity, and one Lomellini wished to demonstrate as inferior to Christianity, Shore shows the tension. There is something religiously dense and important about this text, something one needs to take seriously. It was serious enough for him to devote years and possibly decades of his life. Given the missionizing and apologetic agendas of seventeenth-century Catholicism and especially the Jesuit order, one should not be surprised at Lomellini's direct attacks in his commentary and dismissive asides in his marginalia.

What stands out as well, however, is his respect for the text and his desire to produce as accurate a translation as he could.

It is perhaps this very attitude that gets reflected in Catholicism's modern view of Islam, which is noted in the Second Vatican Council's (1962-65) crucial documents on the church and on non-Christian religions: "But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst 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" (*Lumen Gentium* #16); "The Church has also a high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting" (*Nostra Aetate*, #3).

Shore locates Lomellini in a unique time and place, which he regularly refers to as "baroque Catholicism." It is the baroque context that leads Lomellini at times to sound "more like a preacher painting vivid pictures of the enemies of his faith." It is also a baroque context that seeks God in all things. Shore's detailed and critical analysis of Lomellini's translation and commentary is a gift, because it is a window into seventeenth-century Catholicism, and particularly the Jesuit order. The view from this window is principally imperialistic, and one should not be surprised at that. It is also a view that suggests a future shift of winds that would culminate with a deep Catholic respect for Islam and its most sacred text.