

5-25-2014

## Apples to Apples or Apples to Dates? The Muslim Critique of Christian Scriptures

David D. Grafton

*The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia*, [dgrafton@ltsp.edu](mailto:dgrafton@ltsp.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Grafton, David D. (2014) "Apples to Apples or Apples to Dates? The Muslim Critique of Christian Scriptures," *Consensus*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol35/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

## **Apples to Apples or Apples to Dates? The Muslim Critique of Christian Scriptures<sup>1</sup>**

**David D. Grafton**

*Associate Professor of Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations  
The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia*

**W**hen my family has the luxury of playing a game, the current game of choice for my kids has been the game “Apples to Apples.” As any game, it is intended to be a social event, providing structured interaction between people. The game goes something like this. The person who is “it” picks a green card from the pile. On this green card is an adjective, gerund, or adverb. For the sake of argument, let’s say that the word is “Annoying.” Underneath this word are three synonyms: “irritating, bothersome, and teasing.” Every other person in the game has seven red cards which they have picked from a separate pile. Their cards also have the name of a person, place or thing. It is their job to select from their hand a card that they feel best matches up as a synonym to the selected word on the green card. Thus the name of the game: “Apples to Apples.” Players it try to match what they perceive is one kind of apple to another: likes to likes. However, it is not as simple as this. There is naturally some psychology involved in deciding which word the other person would choose. The question becomes less about matching up synonyms and more about trying to predict which of the seven words on your cards the other person would choose as “Annoying.” This psychology of the game can create some interesting dynamics, especially among spouses!

It is often the case that the when Christians and Muslims engage each other as communities for the purpose of initiating inter-communal relations, inter-faith dialogue, or even as joint social service projects, usually such comparisons are enacted. Christians and Muslims engage the other in what they assume will be a comparison of “likes.” “Let us compare our religions.” “Let us compare our holiday celebrations.” And most commonly as I have experienced, “Let us compare our scriptures.”

In this article (and the following article on Jesus and Muhammad) I hope to demonstrate that these assumed comparisons are not actually very helpful; in fact they can be downright counterproductive. I will very briefly demonstrate why these assumed comparisons of “likes” – of scriptures (and persons) do not work very well. I will then examine how Lutherans have traditionally understood the role of the “written” scriptures. This will lead me then to review a classical Islamic view of Revelation as it relates to the text (*mushaf*) of the Qur’an. To underline some unique differences, I will utilize a prominent Islamic critique of Christian scriptures through the thinking of the Andalusian medieval

scholar Ibn Hazm (994-1064). His work will provide the opportunity for some final reflections on scriptures.

My intent here is certainly not to curtail curiosities, interests and initiatives of interfaith engagement! Rather, I hope that by raising some important hermeneutical perspectives, Christian and Muslim communities might be able to have more authentic and productive self-defining interactions. While it is natural to try to fit another's faith tradition into our own frame of reference, it is usually better to allow the other to speak for themselves and articulate their own assumptions, narratives and beliefs on their own terms. It is my hope that this will allow for further opportunities of both intra-spective and inter-spective reflection. In my own personal experience, such reflection deepens faith.

## Standard Comparisons

Over the years I have attended many Christian-Muslim gatherings, primarily within church settings, with titles like "Islam and Christianity – The Bible and the Qur'an." Religious professionals or credentialed representatives of each faith community, perhaps a Christian pastor or priest on the one side, and a Muslim scholar, Imam or elder of a community on the other, are then charged with presenting what their Book says or means.

The first problem with this method is that it assumes such presentations can represent a religious system as one monolithic whole. Can one speak about one's own faith tradition without problematizing or nuancing even some of the most basic beliefs, doctrines or practices? Let me use two simple examples from my own experience within the Lutheran church that will suffice to explain this problem. 1) What does the Bible teach about women in ministry? Or, 2) what does the Bible teach about gender and sexuality issues? Of course, even among Lutherans, which is only one Protestant denomination in the midst of Catholic and Orthodox communities, we will find a wide variety of views on what the Word of God as scripture has to say of these matters. The same problem regarding monolithic representations of Islam can certainly be underlined. While all Muslims accept the Qur'an as verbally inspired by God, as God's literal Word, Muslims are often at odds over how to interpret those words. The history of Qur'anic interpretation (*ta'wil* and *tafsir*) has produced a wide variety of interpretations of God's Words.

Several important models of Christian-Muslim engagement for communities of faith that have been developed in the past few years have been through the *Building Bridges Initiative* of the Anglican Church and the *The Society for Scriptural Reasoning Organization*.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives provide opportunities for Christians and Muslims to gather and not only share perspectives on their own scriptures, but to own those perspectives as representations of one's individual faith viewpoint. Scripture is never just scripture an idea or a concept. Rather, in the good Lutheran sense, scripture is always "for me." It is important to remember when Christians and Muslims gather to share their own

perspectives on their scriptures that they although they may be grounded in a particular tradition within their faith, they speak for themselves.

The second problem with this common method that assumes singular presentations of the faith is that in the current post 9/11 context, most gatherings about the Qur'an have underlying antagonisms. An innocent underlying question: "Tell me what the Qur'an is?" In my experience the underlying interest by many Western Christians is not only "Tell me what it is – but tell me what it teaches about violence, terrorism, women...etc." In other words, it is often assumed or expected that one Muslim, however credentialed within their community, speaks for a monolithic religion that has been static over fourteen hundred years and is somehow responsible to answer to our Western Christian concerns or anxieties. When it comes to our engagement with Muslims, we often assume that they will either speak for the whole, or that the Qur'an has simple answers to any given topic. The point here is that it should always be remembered that Christian-Muslim engagement is always embodied in particular believers at specific times and contexts.

This is what Wilfred Cantwell Smith in his seminal work *What is Scripture?* means when he states that while adherents may consider scriptures to be Holy and transcendent writings, they are above all about human activity.<sup>3</sup> Scripture not only involves a revelatory act or actions, but it is also a reception where individuals attempt to make sense and respond to a text in any one given place and time. Preachers understand this point very well. Regardless of how any one text from Luke has been read or understood throughout the generations, there is always that point at which the preacher needs to decide what the pericope says to a particular congregation on any given Sunday morning.

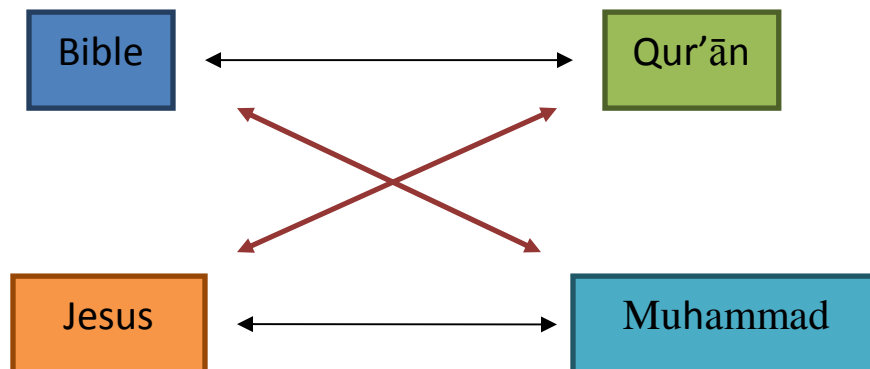
However this issue in terms of our desire to compare scriptures is not so much about what one adherent believes their scripture says or means in any given context. It is more foundational than that. The issue at hand is actually what an adherent understands the role and function of their scripture to be within their own faith. Why do they go to their scriptures, for what reason, and how do they go about accessing their scriptures? These are more foundational questions that will guide how an adherent expresses their understanding of any one particular text.

Certainly, Muslims and Christians alike seek to understand and live by God's will, precepts or teachings as they understand them in either the Bible or the Qur'an. However, in my experience - as a North American ordained Lutheran male Islamicist – Christians and Muslims approach, engage, and utilize their scriptures for different reasons and purposes in the course of their daily lives. In a general sense, the Western Protestant tradition has utilized the Bible as a tool to *understand* God's message. There usually is a cognitive element. The Protestant principle of translating the scriptures into the vernacular has always involved a didactic element. Reading and comprehension of the text go hand in hand. Likewise, even the oral recitation of the scriptures within the gathered community has involved a proclaimed word, the sermon, which has more often than not involved a mental reflection on the meaning of the text. To put it another way, Christians have

approached their scriptures with a “faith seeking understanding.” This is certainly not to deny the emotive and mystical traditions (Shakers, Pentecostals, and monastics) that have focused upon experience as part of the encounter with the sacred text. But from the North American “mainline” Lutheran perspective scripture has been engaged primarily as a mental ascent.

The Islamic tradition too has sought to understand the meaning God’s Words in the Qur’an. But as a part of the ongoing faith life of Muslims, it is first and foremost to be *experienced*. One hears and recites the Words, and in such actions there is blessing in and of itself. Given the fact that only 18-20% of all Muslims worldwide are native Arabic speakers, and because there are restrictions on translating the sacred text into another language other than Arabic, the vast majority of Muslims may not even understand what they are reciting. In Qur’anic schools children first learn to recite and only later to comprehend. The prime importance is on the action of hearing and reciting. Legal scholarship (*fiq*), although vital to the faith, is a fairly specialized branch of learning. Most Muslims do not have the training to undertake such important tasks and rely upon scholars (for good or ill) to assist them in interpretation. Rather, on a daily basis, Muslims seek to experience the Qur’an.

Thus, in terms of personal piety and general theological understanding, as a theology from below, rather than comparing Books - the Bible and Qur’an - we are better off comparing the Bible to Muhammad and Jesus to the Qur’an. We would argue that the Bible functions for Christians in a similar way that Muhammad does for Muslims, and that Qur’an functions for Muslims as Jesus does for Christians. (Thus, the reader will see the importance of linking both this article and the next, on Jesus and Muhammad.)



This is not a novel idea, and I am not the first to suggest this. However, I do hope to provide some further reflections on this proposal that are pertinent to Lutheran-Muslim Relations.

## The Lutheran Understanding of the Word of God and Scripture as Inspired

The Bible and the Qur’an are both scriptures in that they are written texts. They are

now in their current forms as a written record of God's encounter, or God speaking to God's people. For Christians the Bible is literally a compilation of "Books" (*biblia*) that have been assembled over the centuries and bound together. This historical process has taken place not without some controversy. These books were translated over the years into a variety of languages (Syriac, Latin, English, etc.), again not without controversy AND not without some violent responses! Christians believe that these books provide a written record of God's story with the world, or perhaps even a record of a community's understanding and interpretation of God's story with the world. These books, this story, we say is "spirit inspired" (θεοπνευστο). This is God's Word, part of God's revelation to us. Article II, Section 3 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada Constitution states: "This church confesses the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments *as the inspired Word of God*, through which *God still speaks*, and as the only source of the church's doctrine and the authoritative standard for *the faith and life of the church*." As Lutherans, however, the Bible serves as only one form of the Word of God. We speak, of course, of the Word in three forms: not only the scriptures – but Christ – the living Word, and the proclaimed Word – the word enacted in Word and Sacrament.

My own denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America notes the three-fold understanding of the Word of God by Lutherans in Section 2.02 of its constitution:

This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

Jesus Christ is *the Word of God incarnate*, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.

*The proclamation of God's message* to us as both Law and Gospel is the Word of God, revealing judgment and mercy through word and deed, beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

*The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

Thus, for Lutherans the Bible is approached with this particular hermeneutic, with a particular Canon already in mind – that is the Gospel – the Message of God in Christ. For Martin Luther, the Bible pointed to all things Christ:

... think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ

lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.<sup>4</sup>

For Luther and for Lutherans, scripture is that which bears witness to God in Christ, “what shows forth Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Christ is first and foremost the Word of God, which we have come to know as revealed to us through the Written Word, the scriptures. This is the ultimate meaning of Word of God for Lutherans. We can get to this ultimate meaning in any one particular text through any number of avenues: language study, text criticism, redaction criticism, narrative criticism, *lectio divina*, etc., all for the purpose of Proclaiming the Gospel.

It is because of this hermeneutic then, that we as Lutherans do not normally go directly to Leviticus, or Numbers when reading the scriptures. Even though we may consider certain portions authoritative, they are so only by virtue of their relationship to what we understand that God’s Word comes to us in the form of both Law and Gospel – to convict and to make alive, to free us from the bondage of sin. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The reason for this indwelling, its record, and its continuing indwelling is what we understand to be the purpose of scripture. In this regard Lutherans have never been literalists. The import of God using the Written text and human language is for the purpose of “doing something” in that it reveals to us Christ.

### **The Orthodox Muslim Understanding of *wahy***

We should now move to the Muslim perspective of scripture, at least as far as I understand it in reference to my own Christian belief (as this is my only frame of reference). As the late Anglican Bishop and Islamicist Kenneth Cragg has stated, while in Christianity we talk of the “Word Made Flesh” [Jn 1:8], in Islam it would be best to speak, at least in Christian terms, of the “Word made Book.”<sup>6</sup>

From the orthodox Islamic perspective the Qur’an is the literal Words of God, spoken in Arabic to the Angel Gabriel and then ultimately spoken to Muhammad. Muhammad then recited these words to others. This *recitation* (which is the meaning of “Qur’an”) was then first and foremost memorized by Muhammad’s companions. Unlike Bible, within one generation these recitations were written down and compiled into a book, which is called the *mushaf*. This physical book is only an icon, if you will, of the recited Words of God in Arabic in Heaven (see Q 85:22). Thus, Islam does not speak of the “Word of God” in reference to the Qur’an, but more precisely the “Words of God.” Ingrid Mattson, a Canadian Muslim scholar has said, “Recitation precedes writing.”<sup>7</sup> It is in the reciting that one encounters a living, speaking God. The great Islamic exegete al-Tabarī (d. 923) wrote: ‘... it is obvious that there is no clear discourse more eloquent, no wisdom more profound, no speech more sublime, no form of expression more noble, than [this] clear discourse and speech with which a single man challenged a people...’<sup>8</sup> Thus, from the very beginning

Muslims memorized the recitation and the correct pronunciation of the recitation as sacred. That is the most important aspect of the Words. I would argue that it is in the act of recitation that there is a sacramental moment, the reception of blessing and even forgiveness of sin for the Muslim.

This is the Islamic concept of *wahy*, or revelation, is God's literal speaking. The Book itself, the *mushaf*, is what bears witness to the Words and ultimately the Will of God. The recitation continues to be the primary focus of religious piety, study, and theological understanding. Throughout Islamic history, the first concern was always in the correct pronunciation of these recited Words; only then was its interpretation and understanding.

Muhammad, as a human being who is fallible and finite, is not according to Islamic orthodoxy a creator of God's Words. He is merely a conduit, a pipe, through whose mouth ushered forth the clear Words of God. The Western Orientalist tradition has often spoken of Muhammad as the author of the Qur'an. Even Luther himself understood that Muhammad had taken bits and pieces from the Old and New Testament, under the influence of Nestorians and Jews and created a hodgepodge for his own purposes.<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is painful for Muslims to hear. Such language demeans what they understand to be a holy and precious event, God speaking to the Prophet Muhammad.

### **Secondary Sources: *Hadith, Sira, Tarikh, Tafsir* and the New Testament**

Over time Muslims have utilized a number of secondary sources within their tradition to help them understand the meaning of the Qur'an. The first body of literature was the sayings and stories collected about Muhammad and his views. The *Hadith* is a collection of his sayings, or reports, from his followers about what he said and did in response to various Revelations. There are six different canonical collections of *hadith* (although the collections do differ between Sunni and Shia). It is reported that one of the original collectors, al-Bukhari (d. 870), reviewed some 600,000 different reports but only accepted 7, 275. The other most famous collector by the name of Muslim (d. 875), reviewed some 300,000 and only accepted 9,200. Much like the different teachings or parables of Jesus in the canonical Gospels there are often slight differences between the *hadith*. In some cases the sayings might have opposing messages. Validating and interpreting these sayings with any particular Qur'anic passage has traditionally been the role of scholars. The recent availability of *hadith* collections on line, however, have provided direct access to a wide assortment of *hadith* literature, both prominently accepted sayings and the more dubious ones. Such access by the untrained individual has caused a great deal of debate among Muslim scholars.<sup>10</sup>

The theory behind this important collection of reports is that as Muhammad was the last person who actually spoke God's Words directly (albeit through Gabriel). He then is the one human being closest to God's Words, and thus his understanding carries special weight. He is the best source for understanding God's Will. One can find *hadith* on just



about any matter of life and how one should act, engage or react from preparation for prayer to what appropriate clothing can or should be worn. In this regard, there are many commonalities with the Muslim legal corpus and the rabbinical literature of *halakah*.

The second form of literature that became important for Muslims is closely related to the first. This is the biography of Muhammad, the *Sira*. The concept here is that if one was to understand a particular passage of the Qur'an then it would be helpful to try to put it into some form of historical frame of reference during Muhammad's life. Thus, the biography takes on early prominence.

One of the things that non-Muslims, especially western Christians, notice when reading through the Qur'an is that there is no real historical narrative sense. Unlike the Bible which is arranged in some form of a historical progression, say from creation to the final judgment; the Qur'an is not compiled in a narrative or historical progression. Its passages were put together in chapters that were arranged from longest to shortest. This was a very common way to organize material in antiquity. Think for a moment how the letters of Paul are arranged in the New Testament: Romans being the first and Philemon being the last. They are arranged according to their *stixoi*; that is their number of lines.

As Christians read the *Sira* they might find themselves in fairly familiar territory of an Old Testament historical narrative, such as found in 1 Samuel or perhaps even within a synoptic Gospel narrative. This being the case, it is vital to recognize that this type of literature is not considered scripture for Muslims. It is human compilation.

There are a two other forms of secondary literature that become important for Muslims as they seek to understand the Qur'an. The third body of literature is called *Tarikh*, or the histories of the early Islamic community. Finally there is *Tafsir*, or the commentaries by scholars who take all the preceding literature and attempt to make sense of God's Will. These commentaries might focus on the Arabic literary roots of words. They may focus on the biography Muhammad and histories of the Muslim communities, or they may focus upon some theological point of any given passage.

It has been the common belief for most of Islamic history that in order to understand the Qur'an that a good Muslim simply needed to read through the commentaries. These works written by well known scholars explicated all that there was to be known about God's Words. This has changed, however, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. There is now what I call the "Protestantization of Islam," in that the average Muslim now have access to the Qur'an and the secondary sources (like *hadith*, *sira*, *tarikh*, and *tafsir*) through the internet, and now have the ability to interpret these for themselves. This has led to very different kinds of interpretation that breaks down any attempt to come up with any one understanding of what Muslims believe about any given topic. The same Qur'anic passage might lead one Muslim to a feminist interpretation and another to a radical jihadist perspective. One passage might be understood as providing Apocalyptic predictions of the end times, or another a blueprint to support for stem cell research.<sup>11</sup> The point here is that Muslims make a clear distinction between the transcendent Words of God

and the bearer of those words, Muhammad, along with human compilation, organization, and understanding of those Words.

As Muslims have read Jewish and Christian scriptures with their own particular hermeneutic of *wahy* (revelation) they often see a compilation of human records that are at best jumbled and at worst “corrupted” (*tahrif*) and thus unfit to be understood as God’s Words. They read through passages of the New Testament, including the narratives of the Gospels and the personal correspondence of the epistles, and they might recognize these writings to be human compilation of biography (*sira*) and commentary (*tafsir*) but certainly not revelation (*wahy*).

### The Islamic critique of Christian Scripture: Ibn Hazm

To this point it should be clear to the reader that, at least from my perspective, Christians and Muslims understand the role and purpose of their scriptures differently. This different perspective in the understandings of scripture can be clearly seen through the work of the tenth century Andalusian medieval scholar Ibn Hazm (994-1064 CE).

Ibn Hazm lived and worked in Cordoba, Spain in the eleventh century CE. He was a well-respected scholar and philosopher and a prominent exponent of the Zahiri school of Qur’anic interpretation that focused upon the “manifested,” or the outward meaning of any passage. We might call this school the “literalist” school of Qur’anic interpretation as opposed to those that were interested in the deeper or “hidden” meanings.

In his work *Kitab al-fasl fi al-milal wa-l-ahwa’ wa-l-nihal* [The Book of Explanations] Ibn Hazm takes up a simple reading of the Gospels. In one part he reviews the call of the first disciples. In his Muslim understanding he finds disparities in the narratives:

So, some of them say that the first companions of Jesus were Peter and his brother Andrew and that this was after the arrest of John the Baptist. That is what Matthew and Mark say. [Mt 4:12-22; Mk 1:14-20] But one of the others says that the first companions of Christ were certainly Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, but this was before the arrest of John b. Zakariyya. This is what John says. [Jn 1:35-42]

Again, some say that Peter and Andrew began to be companions of the Messiah when he found them casting their nets to fish; then they left them (the nets) at once, and became disciples. This is what Matthew and Mark say. [Mt 4:18-20; Mk 1:16-18] But another of them says that Peter and Andrew began to be companions of Christ when Andrew [was] still a companion and disciple of John the Baptist ... Then Andrew left John (the Baptist) and, from then on accompanied Christ. Then he went to find his brother Simon, appraised him that he had found the Messiah and took him to him. Thereafter, he became his companion. This is what John says [John 1:40-41].

Here Ibn Hazm is basically doing what we would call redaction criticism.<sup>12</sup> For preachers, Ibn Hazm’s work here would be a helpful way to begin working on a particular pericope for

a Sunday in Epiphany where such readings come up. The comparison of the Synoptic Gospels with John has always been, at least for me, a good way to begin getting at the particulars of each individual text.

For Ibn Hazm, however, as for most Muslims, these narratives read very much like *hadith* literature; that is humanly collected and transmitted. Such narratives then are definitely not part of God's literal speech or Revelation and are subject to critique. The simple fact that there are four such "Gospels" that Christians claim are Revelation can only mean that they have "corrupted" God's Revelation. He thus concludes: "Here then are four lies in one narrative. The first concerns the time when the companionship of these two disciples with Christ began. The second concerns the place where this companionship began. The third concerns the order of succession of the same companionship, together or after one another. The fourth concerns the condition in which Christ found them at the beginning of their companionship."<sup>13</sup>

For other Muslim scholars who want to dig into these different Christian reports of the words that Jesus may have said, in order to get at the literal words that God gave Jesus through the angel Gabriel, they would find kernels of God's Revelation in places like the Sermon on the Mount where there is a clear example of Jesus speaking. The next question would be whether that speech itself has been transmitted correctly or corrupted through transmission. For example see Matthew 5:1-7:27; but compare this with Luke 6:17-49.

Christians (at least Lutherans – at least this Lutheran) and Muslims (at least some Muslims) approach their scriptures for different purposes with different expectations. What we understand as "Inspired Writings from God" (that is narratives or reports of Jesus' life, and letters or tracts interpreting the faith by the Apostles) are what Muslims would normally consider to be human construction and transmission and not from God. What Muslims understand as God's literal Words (or speech) that is now manifested in the Qur'an, Christians would see as the incarnation not in book form but in the living Christ.

## Conclusion

I would hope that the previous review of Ibn Hazm's critique of Christian scriptures have demonstrated fairly clearly that it is not particularly helpful to speak about comparing our Books. The Lutheran and orthodox Islamic views of the underlying theological purpose of scripture within each faith community is different. When it comes to personal piety, Christians refer to their Jesus – their Jesus of faith – in the same loving fashion by which Muslims refer to and treat their Qur'ans with reverence and some form of intimacy. Muslims will often place the physical Qur'an in places of honor in their homes or on the dash boards of their cars much like you might find a statue of the virgin Mary or a St. Christopher medal.

The recitation of the Qur'an, which may not even be understood by non-native Arabic speaking Muslims (and even by native Arabic speaking Muslims!), is the guiding

value of interaction with the transcendence, mercy and compassion of God. Traditionally for Protestants, interaction with the scriptures has involved either an intellectual understanding of the text, or an emotional response to the text. What we Lutherans call the Gospel as the incarnate Word and the Proclaimed Word is similar to what Muslims understand to be the expression of God through what Kenneth Cragg calls the “event” of the Qur’an: its reciting. And, what Muslims understand as humanly contrived, constructed and transmitted tradition or *hadith* is what we call Christian scripture: Gospel and Epistle.

Finally, there might be some who ask well, so what? What does this matter? What are we to do with this? Are we so different then that we cannot talk or share? I will leave that to the reader to determine whether she believes that this is important to any given local ministry or to the Church at all. For me, however, I can say, that in my own personal engagement with the Muslim community’s expression of their faith these issues have helped deepen my own understanding of my own scriptures and the Jesus of my faith. I would argue that Muslims and Christians have a great deal to share and there are many possibilities for further conversation. But, it is important to understand whether we are first and foremost talking about apples or dates. Perhaps then we might just be able to recognize each fruit for their unique flavors and not just as some generic fruit. Whether apples or dates, or particular kinds of each fruit, are good for one’s constitution is another matter entirely.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This article, along with the following article, were originally presented as the first of three lectures at the 2013 Study Conference of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Saskatoon. I am thankful to President Kevin Ogilvie and Dean Gordon Jensen for both the opportunity to be invited and present the papers.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/networks/building\\_bridges](http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/networks/building_bridges) and <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/about-sr>.

<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, “Prefaces to the Old Testament,” *Luther’s works*, 35, eds. J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) 236.

<sup>5</sup> Diane Jacobson, Mark Alan Powell, and Stanley N. Olson, *Opening the Book of Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008) 20.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration* (Oxford: OneWorld Publishing, 1999) 251.

<sup>7</sup> Ingrid Mattson, *The story of the Qur’an: its history and place in Muslim life* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Press, 2013) 84.

<sup>8</sup> Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *The Commentary on the Qur’ān*, ed. and trans. J. Cooper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 30.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Sarah Heinrich and James L. Boyce, “Martin Luther—Translations of Two Prefaces on Islam.” *Word & World*. 16/2 (Spring 1996) 258-259.

---

<sup>10</sup> A good example of the contentious use of *hadith* were the *fatwas* of Osama bin Laden, who provided any number of “unsound” sayings by Muhammad to justify the killing of innocent Americans. Bin Laden was heavily criticized by numerous religious scholars for this.

<sup>11</sup> See David D. Grafton, “Reading Their Book of Faith: North American Muslims and their Interpretations of the Qur’an In the Post 9/11 Era,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 48/3 (Fall 2009) 257-266.

<sup>12</sup> Ghulam Haider Aasi, *Muslim understanding of other religions: a study of Ibn Hazm's Kitab al-Fisal fi l-milal wa l-ahwah wa l-nihal* (Islamabad, Pakistan: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1999); Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Hazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: The Scholars Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters & Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History II Texts* (Rome: PISAI, 2000) 207-8.