

BOOK REVIEW: 111 Questions on Islam: Samir Khalil Samir, S.J. on Islam and the West

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WAS MUHAMMAD ILLITERATE?

QUOTE: Western scholars and many Muslim scholars deny that Muhammad was illiterate. When the Qur'ān mentions the word *ummī* (illiterate), it is opposed to the word that indicates those who have a sacred text. The *ummiyyūn* (plural of *ummī*) are not those people who cannot read but are those who do not possess a sacred book. The statement that "Muhammad is the prophet of the *ummiyyūn*" should be interpreted in the sense that Muhammad considered himself a prophet to pagans, not to Jews and Christians, who already had a sacred text.

COMMENT: It does not say he was only the prophet for the pagans! His challenging of Christians and Jews in the Qur'ān shows he was primarily about "correcting" their religions.

QUOTE: One reads: "Fight those who are *kāfirūn* [unbelievers] in God and in the Last Day, who do not declare *ḥarām* [unlawful] what God and the *rasūl* [messenger] have declared *ḥarām*. Fight, among the peoples of the Scripture, those who do not practice the true religion. Fight them until they pay, each one their tribute, and only then accept their submission." See also verse 47 of the Table, sura 5, which says: "Therefore, let those who follow the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed therein. Evildoers are those who do not judge according to God's revelations"; or verse 110 of the 'Imrāns, sura 3, which addresses Muslims, saying: "You are the noblest community ever raised up for mankind. You enjoy justice and forbid evil. You believe in God. Had the People of the Book accepted the Faith, it would surely have been better for them. Some are true believers, but most of them are evildoers." That is to say that the majority of Jews and Christians are evildoers and therefore must be fought as *kuffār* or *kāfirūn*, as unbelievers. We should not forget that here we are still talking about Christians and Jews and not about polytheists..

COMMENT: Good.

QUOTE: 106 of the Cow, sura 2: "If we abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, we will replace it by a better one or one similar. Did you not know that God has power over all things?"

COMMENT: God may edit but he does not change his mind about right and wrong.

QUOTE: Muslim scholars unanimously distinguish the suras of the Mecca period (610—622) from those of the Medina period (622—632). But scholars have not been able to agree on the exact order of internal succession of the suras from these two periods.

COMMENT: The mixing of the violent period and the peaceful period is clear. There is no real authoritative way to separate them to make out that Muhammad could be a beacon of peace.

QUOTE: A Muslim woman may not marry a man of a different faith, unless he first converts to Islam. This prohibition derives from the fact that in the patriarchal Eastern societies, the children always adopt their father's religion. It is also justified by the fact that the father is the guarantor of the religious education of children; therefore, only if he is Muslim can he provide for their training according to Islamic principles. In this regard, I would like to emphasize the fact that children born of a Muslim parent are considered Muslims, even if they are baptized into another religion. Therefore, all mixed marriages (between a Muslim male and a Christian female or between a Muslim male and a Jewish female, which are the only two cases addressed in *al-sharī'a*) increase the Muslim community numerically ...

COMMENT: Good. Baptism is discrimination against Muslims then!

QUOTE: This is the ambiguity of Islam, from its beginning to the present day: violence is a part of it, although it is also possible to choose tolerance; tolerance is a part of it, but it is also possible to choose violence.

COMMENT: Good! The ambiguity makes the tolerance nothing to crow about. It makes it something to fear and the only answer is helping Muslims to abandon their faith.

QUOTE: The legal testimony of one man is worth that of two women. This is based on one of Muhammad's *ḥadīth* that has

very widespread acceptance in Muslim environments despite its doubtful authenticity. It affirms that “woman is lacking in faith and intelligence”. When you ask the fuqahā’ (the experts of the Muslim law) to explain the reason for that statement, they answer that woman is lacking in faith because, in some situations (for instance, during her menses), her prayer and her fasting are not valid and her religious practice is therefore lacking. With regard to the second part of the affirmation, the “imperfection” in intelligence, perhaps in the past this could be explained sociologically by recalling that women were less educated, studied less, we

COMMENT: Good!

QUOTE: As far as the request for the Friday day of rest is concerned, I must mention some recent research conducted by the Fondazione Agnelli in Turin, which verified that in the nations of origin of the majority of Muslims living in Italy, Friday is not the weekly day of rest. Albania, Senegal, Tunisia, and Turkey observe Sunday, while Morocco allows freedom of choice among Friday, Saturday, Sunday, or the market day. Since the weekly day of rest on Friday has no foundation in Islamic doctrine or is practiced in the countries from which the majority of Muslims living in Italy come, there is no reason for Italy to adjust its calendar to accommodate this request.

COMMENT: Let politically correct do-gooders be warned if they want to make Friday another Sunday as a way of being "inclusive" to Muslims.

QUOTE: The biblical accounts contained in the Qur’ān are almost all drawn from the canonical and apocryphal books of the Old Testament and the Gospels. The account of the Annunciation in the Qur’ān, for example, resembles the one quoted in the Gospel, while the miracles performed by Jesus as a young boy or even the account of Mary’s nativity are drawn from the apocryphal “infancy gospels”, which seem to have been widespread among the Christian pre-Islamic Arabs. The Islamic interpretation of the dogmatic aspects of Christianity cannot be found in any of the Christian traditions, not even in the heretical ones. For example, when the Qur’ān says that the Christian Trinity is formed by God, Jesus, and Mary, it is impossible to find a sect ever stating this. The only hypothesis that I can formulate is that we are faced with a distorted interpretation of the Christian theological statements about Mary as the Mother of God and about Jesus the Son of God. It was quite logical for Muslims to conceive these dogmas according to a story line from Arab mythology: a god takes a wife, and they conceive another god. A confirmation of this hypothesis is the criticism addressed in the Qur’ān to Christians for maintaining that God had a concubine (Ṣāḥiba, that is, a mate): “He (exalted be the glory of our Lord!) has taken no consort, nor has He begotten any children”; “Creator of the heavens and the earth. How should He have a son when He had no consort? He created all things, and He has knowledge of all things.” Or the famous verses of sura 19, Mary, that condemn the idea of God begetting a son. “God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When He decrees a thing He need only say: ‘Be,’ and it is”; “Those who say: ‘The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,’ preach a monstrous falsehood. . . . That they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become the Lord of Mercy to beget one!”

COMMENT: It does not care about the gospels or the New Testament at all but hard to get obscure works. That is a tacit denial that the gospels are valid or reliable in any sense.

QUOTE: In the Qur’ān, we find some of the healings and resurrections quoted in the canonical Gospels but also other miracles quoted only in the apocryphal gospels, such as the episode in which Baby Jesus makes a clay bird fly. In fact, Jesus says in the Qur’ān: “From clay I will make for you the likeness of a bird. I shall breathe into it and, by God’s leave, it shall become a living bird.” The interesting thing is the double action of creating and breathing, which in the Qur’ān is typically divine. The verb “to create” is quoted 177 times, always as a specific act of God, apart from the 2 times it is used in reference to Jesus. In this, we can perhaps detect a trace of the doctrine of Christ’s divinity, despite the contrary affirmation of Islam. It is probably with the intention of eluding this idea that some translate the Arabic verb khalāqa (to create) with “mold”. Christ is presented as an authentic Muslim: he teaches absolute monotheism and, consequently, total submission to God, the only Lord. In other words, he teaches Islam and its precepts: almsgiving, prayer, and piety toward parents. Furthermore, Jesus strongly rejects the idea of being God. Verse 116 of the Table, sura 5, is emblematic: “Then God will say: Jesus son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: ‘Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?’ ” And Jesus answered: “Glory be to You. . . . I could never have claimed what I have no right to.” Christ asks his disciples to obey him but only as a leader, not as the Lord, because “God is my Lord and your Lord: therefore serve Him. That is a straight path.” In the Qur’ān, the prophet Jesus announces the coming of Muhammad. In fact, he says to the sons of Israel, “I am sent forth to you from God to confirm the Torah already revealed, and to give news of an apostle that will come after me whose name is Ahmad.” In Arabic, the word “Ahmad” is another form of “Muhammad”; both mean “the praised”. In the an

COMMENT: It is not a trace of Jesus' divinity for Jesus is presented as an instrument of Allah "by God’s leave, it shall become a living bird". Jesus turns clay into birds and cannot come back from the dead! Islam does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The story seems to be included as showing Jesus could rise if he asked God but he did not.

QUOTE: Saint John, and not to the corruption of the Greek parakletos (which means “consoler”) to periklytos (which means “praised”, that is, Muhammad), as is commonly believed. In Muslim theology, probably influenced by Christian

theology, there is the idea that the authentic prophet is always announced by those who came before, and this is why Muslim theologians try to find in the Old and in the New Testaments some indications of Muhammad's coming. In reality, however, this is an artificial operation, for they make arbitrary applications of some verses as referring to Muhammad.

COMMENT: The Muslims apply Jesus' prophecy of the Holy Spirit coming to Muhammad. That is a denial of a core Christian concept.

QUOTE: How are the Gospels presented in the Qur'ān? The Qur'ān uses a single word, Injīl, always singular, which is the contraction of "Evangel", and it is not used in the plural form Anājīl, the Gospels. The Qur'ān does not cite the other books of the New Testament—not even minimal allusion is made to the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of Paul, or the Apocalypse. When the Qur'ān talks of Injīl, it does not refer to a specific book but to Jesus' teaching.

COMMENT: Good.

QUOTE: The Qur'ān denies the doctrinal foundations of the Christian religion: Christ's divinity, the Incarnation, the crucifixion, the redemption, and the Trinity. If it had ignored them, we could say that silence does not mean a denial, but it explicitly denies them. By denying Christ's divinity, the Qur'ān meant to save God's honor and Jesus' reputation. Therefore, in different places, the Qur'ān asserts that it is inconceivable that God has children. Some examples are: "Creator of the heavens and the earth. How should He have a son when He had no consort? He created all things, and He has knowledge of all things." "Say: 'Praise be to God who has never begotten a son; who has no partner in His Kingdom; who needs none to defend Him from humiliation.' Proclaim His greatness." "Never has God begotten a son, nor is there any other god besides Him." "Sovereign of the heavens and the earth, who has begotten no children and has no partner in His sovereignty." For a similar reason, the Qur'ān denies the crucifixion. The scandal of the Cross is unacceptable; so God exalted his prophet by raising him to heaven before the crucifixion. However, it is the concept of the Trinity that constitutes the greatest scandal. In the Qur'ān, there are many polemical verses aimed at Christians about this issue. "Unbelievers are those that say: 'God is one of three'. There is but one God. If they do not desist from so saying, those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished." Or again: "People of the Book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle and His Word which He cast to Mary: a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: 'Three'. Forbear, and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son!"

COMMENT: Good.

QUOTE: For Christians the "Seal of the Prophets" is John the Baptist...

COMMENT: That is why Christians see Jesus as God rather than a prophet - he is the last word so no prophet is needed and John is the last of them. It hints that Christian doctrine is irrevocable and unchangeable.

QUOTE: Christians never need to be ashamed of witnessing their faith to all the people they encounter. If this were not so, the shelters and pantries supported by the Church would run the risk of becoming "solidarity supermarkets", carrying out a certainly praiseworthy activity but betraying their true motive of giving visible Christian testimony. It is not a matter of proselytism but of authenticity, of the ability to express the truth about ourselves in what we do. It would certainly be wrong to condition the bread that we offer to Muslim immigrants with conversion to Christianity; this would be an unacceptable act of proselytism.

COMMENT: It is true that Christian virtue is about promoting God alone.

QUOTE: Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph 5:21-33).

COMMENT: Love your neighbour as yourself does not mean love yourself so you can love your neighbour. It means to love the other not yourself is to love yourself. The love of a man for his wife is to be a mirror of love between man and neighbour.

QUOTE: John Paul II underlines that whoever knows the Old and New Testament, and then reads the Qur'ān, clearly sees the process by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God said about Himself, first in the Old Testament through the prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam all the richness of God's self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testament, has definitely been put aside. Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Qur'ān, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as a prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad. There is also a mention of Mary, His Virgin Mother, but the tragedy of redemption is completely absent. For this reason not only the theology but also the anthropology of Islam is very distant from Christianity. (English ed., 92ff.; Italian ed., 103ff.)

COMMENT: Good!

QUOTE REGARDING CORE CHRISTIAN TEACHING ABOUT GOD MAKING MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE: This is absolutely denied by Islam. Many Muslim scholars think that one of Muhammad's ḥadīth, "God created man in his image", is the counterpart of the biblical verse in Genesis 2. In reality, the meaning of the adjective "his" in Islam is "in the image of man", while in the biblical text it is "in the image of God", as it is made clear in the rest of the verse.

COMMENT: Good!

CONCLUSIONS: This book is a good way of highlighting how Christians and Muslims have no core agreements. A religion that is ambiguous on violence needs to be abandoned.