

Opinions

Common Ground: Exploring the 'Muslim Jesus' Class

By Ali Sana '13
Herald Contributor

Fifty-four percent of the world's population identifies either as Christian or Muslim, and the two religions make up 35 and 19 percent of the world's population, respectively. Many religious studies departments in colleges and universities have courses that focus on either of the individual traditions, but rarely do they bring both to a common ground. Although the confessions hold to two ultimately contradictory stances, they share far more in common than not, a reality as misunderstood as often as it is overlooked.

I have always been keenly interested in the study of religion, but it was not until I took the course "Muslim Jesus" that I realized how closely Christianity and Islam are related. The Christian tradition revolves around Jesus of Nazareth, and I came to understand that Islam as well attributes great importance to the figure of Jesus.

The role Jesus plays in the Islamic tradition is especially important, though largely unknown. A number of friends were surprised to hear that such a class is offered, and asked half-seriously what it could be about. The confusion is understandable, as I myself was

hitherto unaware of the extent to which Islam appreciates Jesus' significance.

The Quran makes reference to Jesus by the name "Isa" almost 25 times, and in conjunction with other titles relating him to the Virgin Mary, and calls him Messiah, an epithet used 35 times. The epithet of 'Messenger' (Rasul) is accorded Jesus 10 times in the Quran; he is

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even is called Kalima, or the Word of God. As in Christianity, the miraculous nativity of Jesus happens through Mary, a virgin. Jesus is hailed as a "mercy," "witness," "sign" and "example."

The Quran refers both to the natural and healing miracles of Jesus, confessing his ability to walk on water, the "Feeding of the Five-thousand," the turning of water into wine at the Wedding at Cana, and the fashioning of birds from clay; he is even believed to have raised the dead. All these teachings of the

Quran affirm Jesus' supreme status in the Islamic tradition.

Perhaps most remarkably, both Christians and Muslims share the eschatological belief that the Day of Judgment will be presided over by Jesus, who will be sent back to earth in the Parousia. The Islamic tradition says that before the consummation at the end of time, there will be an 'Anti-Christ' (Dajal

in the Quran) who will deceive the world, but who will be overcome by a returned Jesus.

Rebecca Waldrop '14, a student in this class, commented, "Muslim Jesus has vastly changed my perception of the importance of Jesus in the Islamic tradition. Before taking the class, I had no idea that Jesus was such an important figure in Islam. To be completely honest, I did not even know he was mentioned in the Quran. I am incredibly pleased to be learning about the ways in which Jesus is

important to Islam, as this helps to further my understanding of Islam as a whole."

President of Episcopal Fellowship Matthew Hynd '13 remarked, "Unfortunately, for every one edifying and mutually beneficial response to the disparity between Christianity and Islam, there are 10 unhelpful attitudes one can have. It behooves Christians more than ever not merely to acknowledge what we have in common with our Muslim brethren, but to celebrate it."

Although there remain considerable differences between Christianity and Islam, by finding and focusing on their similarities, we can promote peace and a better understanding between the religions.

"I do think that learning about one another's religions, particularly the stories and rituals, can bring about closer relationships between people from different backgrounds," said Chaplain Lesley Adams. "The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, a Jew - Three Women Search for Understanding" is a good example of such an endeavor."

Elusive Conservatism

By David Luna '14
Herald Contributor

Today, political conservatives face a host of challenges, some of which are of their own making.

They must account for a war in Iraq that has dragged on longer and become more costly than had been foreseen. They must confront massive government deficits and answer for lobbying scandals in Washington.

The relentless criticism now being levied against conservative ideas and policies is in many respects the natural result of leadership.

But in this setting it can be difficult to appreciate the nature of the conservative philosophy, which often gets intermingled with Republican politics, regardless of whether those politics accurately reflect conservative ideas. Conservatism has also been tainted by the inevitable public backlash against those in power—backlash continually fueled by impatience with the slothfulness of progress.

With this in mind, the public is left to determine what a modern conservative consists of today—what are the strengths and weakness of their stances on issues and what advances or impediments can be accredited to them in terms of public policy. It remains to be seen whether this examination will prove useful for the

Republican Party during a time where the American public is perusing through candidates and their policies for the fall general election.

Conservatism is a philosophy that seeks to maintain and enrich societies characterized by respect for inherited institutions, beliefs and practices, in which individuals

develop good character by cooperating with one another. This cooperation takes place in primary, local associations such as families,

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churches and social groups aimed at furthering the common good in a manner pleasing to God.

Conservatives believe in Thoreau's dictum: "That government is best which governs least." Much as they are proud of America, conservatives trust American people more than any government. To them, government is an artifice that can only legitimately govern with the consent of the governed.

Conservatives also believe that individuals are smarter with respect to their own interest than the collective wisdom of government.

Conservatism supports a greater reliance on the free market, a market in which

the disadvantaged and minorities can support themselves, fewer government regulations, and lower taxes. The ideas, which reflect conservative thought and play a role in free market society, are taxation, government regulations and the minimum wage. These concepts govern the cost of doing business and therefore govern our free market. A competitive free market society is where conservatives believe individuals should be responsible for themselves. The stronger the free market the more it will allow minorities and the disadvantaged to develop a sense of

dependence and self-reliance.

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government and society as a whole for their success.

Coupled with external influences, their creed or motto,

if you will, comes to fruition in policy stances. These stances, however, now have been packaged to the public as tending to favor one group—the wealthy/elitists—over the other and in turn stays close to its roots of preservation.

This preservation comes to the fore with the issue of taxes. It has been widely disseminated that conservatives believe government is a bad money manager. People make money grow, and lower taxes allow for a livelier, growing economy. The inevitable result of trusting people with their own money is that the

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government, despite lower taxes, sees increased revenue.

The battle of ideology among parties blended with partisan stubbornness is injecting itself toward the debate over the Bush tax cuts. During his presidential campaign, Obama vowed not to raise income taxes on families with annual incomes below \$250,000. His pledge was coupled with his plan to raise taxes on wealthier

Americans who benefited the most from the Bush tax cuts. That plan is at the center of today's debate. Conservatives, on the other hand, want to extend the tax cuts for all, including elites—a prime example of sticking to its elitist foundation.

Conservatism defends a positive and fully integrated view of the individual and his role in society. True, conservatives are too skeptical of the power of abstract reason to believe that politicians can improve human nature, though they believe that politicians may corrupt it. True, conservatives believe that the individual, shorn of his inherited social ties, will act less morally because he will lose the bonds of affection that keep pride and selfishness in check.

But these are mere defensive responses to the overreaching claims of liberalism and its radical outgrowths. The roots of conservative opposition to liberalism lie in a very positive conception of the human person and the possibilities of social life. Conservatives are attached, not

so much to any particular regime or form of government, as to what they believe are the requirements for a good life for all peoples. In the American context, conservatives defend the ordered liberty established by the Constitution and the traditions and practices on which that Constitution was built.