

Season's Greetings or Islamic Propaganda?

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By Jacob Thomas

On Monday, 31 December, 2007, the Wall Street Journal published the following "Message" on page A9:

A Muslim Message of Thanks and of Christmas and New Year Greetings,
December 2007

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
May God bless Muhammad and his kin and bless Abraham and his kin
Al-Salaam Aleikum; Peace be upon you; Pax Vobiscum

Peace be upon Jesus Christ who says: Peace is upon me the day I was born, the day I die,
and the day I am resurrected
(Chapter of Mary; the Holy Qur'an, 19:33).

During these joyful holidays we write to you, our Christian neighbors all over the world, to express our thanks for the beautiful and gracious responses that we Muslims have been receiving from the very first day we issued our invitation to come together to 'A Common Word' based on 'Love of God and love of Neighbor' (see www.acommonword.com for the document and the responses).

We thank you and wish you all a joyous and peaceful Christmas Holiday Season commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, may peace be upon him.

We Muslims bear witness that: There is no god but God, without associate, and that Muhammad is Servant and Messenger, and that Jesus Christ is His Servant, His Messenger, His Word cast to Mary, and a Spirit from Him ... (Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya')

The "Message" continued by referring to the coincidence this year, between Muslim and Christian feasts: (Hajj, Christmas and New Year), and referred to the patriarch Abraham who was not allowed by God to sacrifice his son, thus affirming and proclaiming the sanctity of human life. Then in an attempt to assume a moral high ground by making Islam eminently "Pro Life," it referred to those "Muslim scholars who issued a historic declaration affirming the sanctity of human life – of every human life – as an essential and foundational teaching in Islam upon which all Muslim scholars are in unanimous agreement (see details at www.duaatalislam.com)."

The “Message” ended with these words:

“May the coming year be one in which the sanctity and dignity of human life is upheld by all. May it be a year of humble repentance before God, and mutual forgiveness within and between communities.

“Praise be to God, the Lord of the world.”

I would like to analyze this “advertisement-message,” and add my comments.

Analysis

The WSJ “ad-message,” coming on the last day of 2007, purports to be a “Season’s Greetings” addressed to the Christian World. It was prompted by “the beautiful and gracious responses that we Muslims have been receiving from the very first day we issued our invitation to come together to ‘A Common Word’ based on ‘Love of God and love of Neighbor.’

It must be noted here, that a Christian response to the Muslim overture, “A Common Word,” was drafted by some members of the Faculty of the Divinity School of Yale University, with several signatures of well-known academics and ministers appended to it.

Comments

In our attempt to understand the true meaning of the Islamic greeting of 31 December, it is first necessary to reflect on the context of the initial “Common Word” message, taken from Surat Al-‘Imran. This Qur’anic passage sets forth what I would like to call “The Rules of Engagement” for Muslims when they dialogue with Christians. Dialogue with non-Muslims can only take place on the basis of the Islamic authoritative texts. Here are some Ayat of Surat Al-‘Imran, in Arberry’s Translation of the Qur’an:

Say: ‘People of the Book! Come now to a word common between us and you, that we serve none but God, and that we associate not aught with Him, and do not some of us take others as Lords, apart from God.’ And if they turn their backs, say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims.’ V. 64

No; Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a Muslim and one pure of faith; certainly he was never of the idolaters. V. 67

People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God’s signs, which you yourselves witness? People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with vanity, and conceal the truth and that wittingly? V. 70,71

Whoso desires another religion than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers. V.85

Verse 85 in the Arabic original reads as follows:

“Waman yabtaghi ghayra’l Islami deenan, falan yuqbala minhu, wahua fil’akhirati min’al- khasereen.”

It is clear that those Muslims who issued the invitation to dialogue, and adopted the term, “A Common Word” (Kalimaten sawa’en baynana wa-baynakom,) from the Qur’an, wanted to declare their complete adherence to the teachings of their sacred book. Furthermore, it must be noted that the tone of these texts from Chapter III is decidedly polemical. Christians are charged with the sin of shirk, i.e. in claiming that Allah had associates! Then they are exhorted to “serve none but God.” Thus, if Christians want to engage in dialogue with Muslims, they must first renounce their belief in the Trinity.

Another Islamic requirement is to accept the authenticity of the Qur’anic version of Sacred History. This implies the rejection, for example, of the Biblical accounts of Abraham’s life. Thus verse 67 of Chapter III, categorically states: “ma kana Ibraheemu Yahudiyyan wala Nasraniyyan, walaken kana Hanifan Musliman ...” (Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Nazarene, but he was a Hanif and a Muslim...) [Translation mine]

Verses 70 and 71 address the Christians, as those who mix truth with vanity, and who refuse to believe in Allah’s signs. A pretty bad trait for those who are to dialogue with Muslims!

Finally, the exclusivist nature of Islam is seen in verse 85:

“Waman yabtaghi ghayr’l Islami deenan, falan yuqbala minhu, wahua fil’akhirati min’al khasereen.” (He who seeks a religion other than Islam, that will not be acceptable of him, and at the Last Day, he will be among the Lost.) [Translation mine]

Having dealt with the Qur’anic context of “A Common Word,” I turn to the contents of the 31 December “Message.” I find it very difficult to receive it as a bona fide “Season’s Greetings.” While its title seems genuine, as one proceeds to analyze its contents, it reveals expressions and views that are thoroughly alien to the history of Christianity as recorded in the Bible, a book that antedates the Qur’an by several centuries.

For example, the reference to Jesus Christ is taken from the text of the Qur’an. It naively assumes that Christians would gladly accept it, rather than stick to the authentic accounts of the life of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. These words from Surat Maryam 19:33, make Jesus say, “Peace is upon me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I am resurrected.” It is rather ludicrous to quote from this chapter regarding Jesus Christ. Among other things it recounts a Mary who was alone under a palm tree, about to give birth to Jesus; who after he was born, addressed the critics of his mother for her supposedly immoral conduct, while yet a baby! Did those who drafted the “Message”

really expect Christians to be that gullible and prefer that bizarre account, to the ones given in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke?!

The “Message” continued, “We Muslims bear witness that: There is no god but God, without associate, and that Muhammad is Servant and Messenger, and that Jesus Christ is His Servant, His Messenger, His Word cast to Mary, and a Spirit from Him ... (Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya’)

All Christians (Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant,) subscribe to the doctrine of the Trinity, and the deity of Jesus Christ. Arabic-speaking Christians begin their prayers by invoking the name of God in this way: “Bismil Aab, wal Ibn, wal Ruh al Qodos, Ilah Wahed, Amen.” (In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Amen.” They would not regard it as a compliment, or a basis for dialogue, that Muslims consider Jesus Christ merely as “Servant, or as Messenger.”

The “Muslim Message of Thanks and of Christmas and New Year Greetings,” was a genre of Islamic propaganda aimed at Western people. The drafters of the “Season’s Greetings” hoped that their attempt would bear fruit among Christians. After all, who should ignore at this time of the year, such a gesture of good will? Here are Muslims who publicly declare that they honor and recognize Jesus as a prophet, isn’t that great? But who is this Jesus they honor? He is certainly not the Jesus Christ whose birth Christians celebrated on the 25th day of December. He is a pale shadow of the Biblical Christ; in fact he is a pseudo-Messiah. He is the Messiah of Surat Maryam (19) that contains an intensive polemic against the historical and real Messiah of the Bible.

I don’t know how many of the readers of the 31 December, 2007, Wall Street Journal, received at its face value the “Message of Thanks...” I guess some who have been impacted by political correctness, may have welcomed the message as an expression of good will, especially at this time when we are involved in wars within Islamic lands. But I certainly hope that other savvy readers, who have done their homework on the history and sacred texts of Islam, would have realized that the WSJ ad is contradicted by the concrete facts of history. Islam remains an imperialistic worldview, and has never surrendered its dream of world domination. This they keep on trying to accomplish, either by force, or by subterfuge!