

How the Crescent Honored the Christian Stars

By Imad Jafar

And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold.

*John X.16*¹

Our God is the God of all men.

*St. Patrick*²

Truth is always a quarry hard to hunt, and therefore we must look everywhere for its tracks.

*St. Basil the Great*³

¹ All of the biblical citations are taken from the Douay-Rheims version.

² Cited in Judith and Michael Fitzgerald (ed.), *Christian Spirit* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2004), p. 5.

³ *De Spiritu Sancto* II (tr. Blomfield Jackson, *NPNF*, II, VIII; italics mine). Unless otherwise specified, all of the quotations from the Church Fathers are taken from the nine-volume *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885-1896) and the twenty-eight volume *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886-1900); all references to both of these series will be denoted as *ANF* and *NPNF* respectively, followed by the relevant volume in which the quote appears.

Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which God hath revealed therein.

Qur'ān V.47⁴

Verily those who believe (in the Qur'ān) and those who are Jews and the Sabceans and the Christians, whosoever believeth in God and the Last Day and doeth good, no fear shall come upon them, and neither shall they ever grieve.

Qur'ān V.69⁵

Lo! This, your religion, is One Religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me.

Qur'ān XXI.92⁶

⁴ Pickthall translation. Unless otherwise specified, all of the Qur'ānic verses quoted in this essay are taken from either one of the following translations: (1) Marmaduke Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1930); (2) A.J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955); and (3) Martin Lings' *The Holy Qur'ān: Translation of Selected Verses* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2007).

Regarding V.47, some of the classical commentators, including Ibn Kathīr and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, argued that "the exhortation here to follow the Gospel" applied only to those Christians who "followed the Gospel prior to the coming of the Quran, which thereafter abrogated the scripture that came before it" (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Masse Dakake, Joseph E. B. Lombard, and Mohammed Rustom [tr.], *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* [New York: HarperOne, 2015], p. 300), an opinion held by many modern-day Muslims as well, who attempt to justify such an interpretation in light of the extra-Qur'ānic dogma of *tabrīf*. Be that as it may, exclusivist readings of this variety are rendered "implausible in light of other Quranic verses ... since v. 43 questions why the Jews have come to the Prophet for judgment (regarding two Jewish adulterers) when they have the Torah, indicating that Prophetic adjudication" was "not necessary (even during his lifetime) as long as they follow[ed] their own scripture" (Ibid.). Looked at objectively, V.47 clearly indicates that the Gospel message continues to remain a valid source of wisdom for the Christians, just as V.33-34 "suggest that the Jews can continue to find guidance in the Torah" (Ibid.). In this connection, cf. V.68: "O People of the Book! You stand on naught till you observe the Torah and the Gospel, and that which has been sent down unto you from your Lord" (tr. Nasr et al.).

⁵ Lings translation ("in the Qur'ān" added by me for clarity's sake). Cf. Qur'ān II.62, where the same doctrinal formula is phrased slightly differently. One may compare both Qur'ānic verses with Acts X.34-35: "In very deed I perceive, that God is not a respecter of persons [i.e. partial]. But in every nation, he that feareth Him, and worketh justice, is acceptable to Him." The startling correspondence between these passages has led Reza Shah-Kazemi to justly remark that the verses do indeed display a "tremendous similarity ... [and] a remarkable parallel" (James Cutsinger [ed.], *Paths to the Heart: Sufism and the Christian East* [Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2004], p. 264).

⁶ Pickthall translation. The Arabic phrase *ummatan wāḥidatan*, interpreted by Pickthall as "one religion" though rendered more literally as "one community" by Arberry and others, was nevertheless glossed by both al-Rāzī and al-Tabarī as meaning "This religion of yours is one" (Nasr et al., *The Study Quran*, p. 826). Cf. Malachi II.10: "Have we not all One Father? Hath not One God created us?" (Vulgate: *Numquid non pater unus omnium nostrum? numquid non Deus unus creavit nos?*); I Corinthians XII.13; Romans III.29-30; St. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* V.13; St. Epiphanius, *Panarion* I.1.2.3.

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