

## Christian and Islamic Practice Compared

***Truly those who believe in what is revealed to you, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans: whoever (of them) believe in God, and the Last Day, and do good works, for them there is their reward with their Lord, and there shall be no fear for them nor shall they grieve. Qur'an (Suratul-Baqara) 2:62.***

The purpose of this essay is to describe the similarities and differences between Christian and Islamic practice. This is useful in understanding what others consider of importance in religious life, and thus how to achieve fruitful dialogue. From an Islamic point of view praxis is in fact of more critical interest than from the Christian point of view in general. Christians, especially Protestants, are more likely to focus on belief than practice. In sharing Islam, this is one of the vital areas. To put it concretely, difficult as it may be to convince a Christian of the unity of God, it is even more difficult to influence a Christian to pray in prostration with regularity.

### 1. Christian Practice

Christian practice may be divided into two categories: 1) those practices requiring the intervention of a priest and 2) individual practices, or those not requiring the intervention of a priest. The former are called sacraments in Western Christianity and mysteries in Eastern Christianity. This is the fundamental difference between Islamic and Christian practice. The Muslim does not need the Church as a channel of grace but may approach God directly in all matters. Historically speaking, medieval Islam had a strong influence on Christianity, notably in the radical reform which produced the freer forms of Christianity such as Baptists and Pentecostals, who also minimize the sacramental character of baptism and the Lord's supper.

The sacraments or mysteries number seven: these are baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, confession, marriage, ordination, and unction. These are all matters which convey a divine blessing through the medium of an ordained priest. One cannot perform them for oneself. Only two sacraments are retained in the reformed churches: baptism and the Eucharist. Islam knows no sacramental principle at all, but does consider certain of its practices central, much as the sacraments are central to Christianity. These

are termed the branches of the faith, and include prayer in prostration, fasting, pilgrimage, alms (zakat and khums), jihad, fostering good, avoiding evil, love of the righteous, and avoidance of the wicked.

In baptism the priest sprinkles or pours water on the infant, or immerses the infant in water, one or three times. Baptism is necessary for salvation according to most Christian belief. In exceptional circumstances, such as imminent death, a child may be baptized by an unordained person. Baptism is done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is done once and for all, and is often considered valid, even if the child eventually apostatizes. Thus Christian parents of young people who revert to Islam often comfort themselves with the thought that at least they have baptized their children.

In the radical reformation the sacramental character of baptism was challenged in several ways. Baptism was considered a sign of obedience and a witness of faith, rather than an objective channel of grace. Thus adults only, who were of an age to bear witness to faith, were baptized. Although ordination continued and baptism was still performed by an ordained person, the idea of priestly authority was dismissed. The form of baptism attempted to conform to earlier Judeo-Christian practices, specifically in requiring immersion. Finally, the formula was sometimes doubted, and the name of Jesus substituted for the trinitarian phrase. One or more of these variants are still dominant in the modern denominations coming out of the radical reformation, such as Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Mormons.

The Eucharist consists of the blessing of the wine and bread and the dispensing of it to the congregants. The traditional belief is that the action of the priest turns the bread and wine into the real body and blood of Christ, and by eating and drinking these, the communicant receives grace objectively into him or herself. The Reformation has caused some doubt and disturbance around this issue. The real presence has been doubted to some extent by the Lutherans and Anglicans, but more radically by the Calvinists, who consider the bread and wine to be symbols or signs of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the event.

There has been controversy on the issue of giving both elements or only one to the congregant. Again under the indirect influence of Islam on the radical reformation, some of the modern denominations issuing from it today reject the use of alcoholic wine, and replace it with non-alcoholic grape juice or even water. An ordinance or footwashing to precede the supper is an issue of controversy in the radical reform. This however seems to be the result of a literal interpretation of John 14 rather than an influence of Islam. Finally, in the same quarters there are controversies over the use of a single cup or individual cups in the Lord's supper.

Although the Reformation Churches traditionally accept only the first two sacraments, something of the sacramental character has remained with the others as well. In those churches having an episcopal system, a bishop is needed for ordination. In nearly all churches it is the practice for an ordained clergyman to perform marriages, and marriage by individual contract is not recognized as marriage in Christianity. Even the Quakers, who reject all traditional forms and sacraments, perform marriages in

public meeting. Baptism and the blessing of the bread and wine are performed by an ordained clergyman, even when the sacramental character of the rites is denied and the ordination of the clergyman is based merely upon the democratic election and blessing given by the congregation. Confirmation is still practiced by the churches which perform infant baptism. Even confession and the last rites of unction are becoming popular in Reformation Churches that used to consider them uniquely Catholic.

There is nothing in Islam which compares with the sacraments or the practices in free Christianity derived from them. From an Islamic point of view, the sacraments function primarily to establish the authority of the Church and its power over the fate of the people. Sacraments are essentially non-Islamic in form, function, meaning, and antecedents. The only point of contact is the tenuous Jewish root for baptism. The New Testament describes the transfer of Jewish proselyte baptism by immersion into a Christian rite expressing acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. There is thus an historical connection with the Jewish purity rites.

However, non-Jewish and non-Scriptural sources for baptism are much more visible, and baptism is a poor vehicle to try to get Christians to understand ablutions and the purity code of Islam. The Eucharist has a New Testament foundation as well, in the last supper of Jesus with his disciples as described in the Gospels. But it too in Christianity has taken on a good deal from pagan sacrificial rites which are thinly disguised ritual cannibalism. Such compromises were the necessary price in order to make Christianity the religion of the Roman state in the fourth century.

Although the Christian sacraments offer few openings for dialogue, the non-clerical Christian practices are that much better. The major traditional, non-clerical Christian practices are prayer, hymnsinging, fasting, and the giving of alms in charity. Three of these correspond to Islamic practice. Unfortunately, the one contrasting practice, hymn-singing, is the most popular. Christian pilgrimage to sacred sites used to be much more prevalent than it is today, although it continues to be important in some Catholic and oriental areas.

## **2. Prayer**

As in Islam, in traditional Christianity prayer appears both at set times and in voluntary individual events. The canonical hours, like the times of prayer in Islam, have their roots in Biblical and Near Eastern tradition. It is not difficult for Catholics and Orthodox people to understand this. The tradition has remained among Anglicans as well. Other Protestants divide prayer into public and private, with no daily set times of prayer.

This of course makes it difficult to reach them. Their immediate response to Islamic prayer in prostration is that it is a mere form. The source of this criticism is that its lack of spontaneity indicates a lack of spirituality. This criticism may be met by pointing out that Protestant prayer is also performed at a specific time in public worship and that includes traditional forms. If the lack of spontaneity condemns

Islamic prayer, then public Protestant prayer is condemned by the same argument. Furthermore, the times and forms of public Protestant prayer have only the weakest possible Biblical justification, as there is no Biblical reference to Sunday prayer, the folding of hands in prayer, or even the kneeling gesture commonly used. On the other hand, both the times and gestures of Islamic prayer are abundantly attested in the Christian Scriptures.

As for the voluntary prayers, again Catholics and Orthodox people will be able to relate to the Islamic use of set supplications. Even in public prayer, some Protestants reject composed prayers, requiring that the one who prays invent the phrases of the prayer at the moment of praying, thus preserving the spontaneity and thereby the spirituality of the prayer. Criticism of Islamic prayer on this basis can be met as follows. Firstly, all Islamic prayer traditions provide the possibility for personal, spontaneous expression of one's personal needs, desires, petitions, confessions, and words of praise.

The structure of Islamic prayer, its formalism, does not exclude personal choice of expression. Secondly, there are so many set prayers, that it is easy to find in the repertoire of Islamic supplications prayers which fit one's specific condition and situation. Thirdly, formalism is not necessarily a negative matter, but can form the structure for an act of obedience. Fourthly, a systematic observance of public Protestant prayers will show that, despite the demand that they be spontaneous, in point of fact, they are invariably composed of a set of traditional formula common to an individual, a congregation, or a denominational tradition. There is even a traditional intonation of voice, which may not be verbally described, but which is considered necessary.

There is a Protestant type of intoning. Presently there is a trend away from this, which is supposed to be more spiritual, but which in reality is a mimicry of emotional language, even the language of physical love. The use of the microphone has made it possible for the one praying in public to use a voice which is similar to the voice he or she might use when crooning in the ear of a lover. The level of spontaneity in any case in Protestant prayer is far lower than is generally perceived. Furthermore, the spontaneity which does exist does not always lend itself to increased spirituality.

### **3. Fasting**

Fasting is another practice common to both Islam and Christianity which can be better appreciated by Catholics, Orthodox and even Anglicans than by the nonconformist traditions. The former are aware of set times for fasting, whereas the latter fast only as personal vows. Some non-conformist churches have a set time for fasting, such as a particular day of the month, but this is a matter of order rather than rule. Fasting and prayer are understood in Christianity as going together and are especially appropriate for petition, prayer for specific things, such as healing. Although the set fasting among Christians, most notably Lent and formerly Wednesdays and Fridays, generally merely limits the kinds of foods which may be eaten, Christians often have the habit of accusing Islam of hypocrisy in fasting because the fast does not apply to the night. It is a fact of human existence that a total fast, as in Islam, cannot be carried

out for thirty consecutive days.

Either the content of the fast or the timing must be adjusted for the very practical reason of preserving life and well-being. The Christian criticism of Islamic fasting is thus entirely irrational, and sometimes it is necessary to point that out. The actual discomfort involved in fasting is probably generally greater in Islam than in Christianity, since it pertains to drinking water as well as abstaining from food. If Islam contended for a total thirty-day fast, the hue and cry of Christians would certainly be greater than it is, since it would cost the life of many engaged in it. Does the Christian criticism imply that Muslims then should not fast at all? In that case Christians would be denying Muslims a practice which is also a part of their own tradition. If the Christian criticism implies that Muslims should fast in the way the Christians do, one may ask for the Scriptural justification for the Lenten fast. The Bible recognizes only the total fast, the fast which Muslims perform.

## **4. Alms and Purity**

Muslims and Christians share the tradition of giving alms in charity. The Christian concept probably relates mostly to the need to support the poor and the need to curb greed. The Islamic concept of alms relates to the broader issue of purity on one hand, and to the desire to empathize with the hungry on the other. It would be logical to approach Christians in dialogue about the purity code through the practice of alms in charity.

This is difficult, however, because Christians fail to see the connection between the two. For the Christian, the giving of alms is a practical matter relating to economics, whereas the concept of purity is completely incomprehensible to them. The reason for this is the fact that purity rites are of far less occurrence in European pre-Christian traditions than they are in the Middle East. Christianity is the European institution which carries most conservatively the pre-Christian values of European spirituality. To a great extent it is old European paganism which lives on in Christianity rather than a faith derived from Middle Eastern sources. This is true even of many aspects of Ashkenazi Judaism as well.

Among the Islamic purity practices are circumcision of male children, ablutions, alms in charity, and avoidance of impure food. Of these Christians are most likely to understand the food issue. There are in fact some sects of Christianity which follow a Biblical pattern of eating, at least to some extent. The one most likely to come into contact with Muslims is the Seventh-day Adventist. These people eat essentially the same meats as Ja'feri Muslims, but fail to take into account the Scriptural slaughter practices by which the blood is drained from the animal. The reason for this is obviously the fact that the purity code in general is misapprehended. Many Adventists consider their food laws to be a part of health practice rather than purity.

Needless to say, the Torah or Tawrat supports Islamic food practices. Despite the fact that the New Testament, in the only recorded verdict given by the early church in Acts 15, states that the laws of proper slaughter apply to non-Jewish converts to Christ, Christianity has failed to follow its own

Scriptures. The reason for this is the fact that all peoples are most conservative in their food practices, and the non-Jewish character of the Christian movement seemed to necessitate relinquishing food practices at the time.

The failure of Christians to circumcise their male children is based on two factors. The first is that circumcision is not traditional in pre-Christian Europe. The second is the Christian misapprehension of a first century split in Judaism. At the time some Hellenistic Jews favored the conversion of adult males to Judaism without circumcision, whereas the Palestinian establishment strongly urged circumcision on all male proselytes. The debate entered early Christianity as well, and the New Testament contains a great deal of matter on the quarrel in the writing of Paul, whose position was that for an adult male proselyte to become circumcised was incompatible with faith in the Messiah. Christians rely on his rejection of adult circumcision to justify their neglect of circumcising their children.

As for ablutions, there remain in Christianity only what ancient Middle Eastern practices of ablutions may have contributed to baptism and the very limited practice of foot-washing. The former is usually seen as a rite of entrance into the church and symbolic of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. The latter is seen as an expression of humility. Both have thus lost their character as rites of purity and taken on the focus of submission to the authority of the church. The discussion of ablutions in the New Testament is limited to an argument between Jesus (AS) and some interpreters of the law on the question of ablutions of the hands before eating. Since this Jewish custom is not mentioned in the Torah at all, Jesus (AS) is perfectly consistent in rejecting it. The implication is that he accepts ablutions mentioned in the Torah. Although this argument is eminently rational, the Christian aversion to ablutions cannot generally be overcome merely by an appeal to their own Scriptures.

## **5. Hymn-singing**

Perhaps the favorite Christian spiritual practice is hymnsinging. This is completely unacceptable in Islam, and even the tradition in some countries of using the *ilaahi* does not compare with it. The only point of contact is to be found in some exaggerated forms of Sufism, where music is used as a vehicle for producing ecstatic behaviour. Music has had several functions in Christianity. The earliest was in the propagation of dogmas about which various Christian groups disagreed. Music was thus a major vehicle in the struggle between Christian heresy and orthodoxy.

One might expect that debate and reason would be preferable tools, but historically speaking this is not so. The second great function of music in Christianity was historically the expression of the Trinity, and this found its way not only into the words of the songs, but in the very musical structures themselves, which repeated tri-part patterns. The third great function of music in Christianity was the support of authoritarian institutions through emotionally overwhelming pageantry. Western music thus supported the European monarchies on one hand, and a religion with a monarchical character on the other. Both Calvinist and Lutheran reform utilized music for their own purposes against Rome.

Anglican music has been of such a character to emphasize both the monarchical character of the church as well as its Englishness in contrast to Rome. Part of the break with Rome was bolstered by the incorporation of folk styles into Lutheran and Calvinistic worship, and this corresponded with the rejection of the pontifical authority. The intrusion of folk styles of music into Christian worship gave rise to an increasing play on the individual emotions and the individual spiritual experience. This has resulted in the varieties of religious music we find today.

These are traditional styles in the more conservative churches, reflecting their role in the Reformation, and new styles in the more radical movements. Since the introduction of the Protestant hymn in England in the early 1700s, Anglo-Saxon Christianity has gone on a deeper and deeper progression toward utilizing the sensual emotions of the individual as a vehicle for spiritual experience. That is why there is little or no difference between the music styles found in non-conformist churches and those found in discos and nightclubs. Both appeal to the same emotions.

The justification for using such music is generally that the young people like it, and it attracts them to the church. This is the old argument used for the inclusion of Greek theatre music in Byzantine worship as early as the fifth century. That concession has resulted in the development of the Byzantine liturgical tradition. It is doubtful that the rock mass will produce anything as esthetically appealing as that, however, to say nothing of Baptist and Pentecostal crooning.

Music which appeals to the emotions of awe, although it may well have originally served to support an authoritarian church, may well have the same esthetic value as music intended to support the royal courts of Europe. An interest in such classical music may not be harmful. Research indicates that for the most part it fosters balanced physical functions in the body. The same research clearly suggests, however, that not only rock but other lighter styles which were developed and became popular in the twentieth century actually cause physical imbalances in bodily functions, such as increasing heart rate and galvanic skin responses, and correspondingly causing indigestion and even weakening the immune system.

Despite the plethora of such research over the last twenty years, music of this type continues to be not only an expression of Western culture, but a foremost and effective means of propagating it. Put briefly, music which appeals to sensual emotions is a medium of control. Christians do not use such music out of obedience to God, or because they think it fosters strong morals or spiritual development. They use it because they like it. They use it because it has a drug-like effect on mind and body.

The Islamic rejection of such dangerous types of music may be the most important distinction between Christian and Islamic practice. Considering the proven harmful effects of rock and popular music, it may well be that the benefits of prayer in prostration, fasting, pilgrimage, and alms are largely outweighed by the deleterious effects of such music. Western music, with the exception of parts of the classical tradition, is among the greatest threats to Islam. There can be no compromise nor any path of approach between the two faiths on this matter.

## 6. Modesty

Although following fashions in dress has an aspect which seems inimical to Islam, it is worth considering that Islamic dress is the practice which is most visible to non-Muslims. Islam cannot make any concessions to Western criticism or desires in the matter of bodily modesty. Muslims ought, however, to foster concession in this matter in terms of style. It is perfectly appropriate for immigrant Muslims to continue to use the dress styles of their home country. It is not appropriate to give the impression that Europeans reverting to Islam ought to follow the same styles. They ought to follow the same standards of modesty, but in styles appropriate to their own country and culture.

The truth is that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism share traditional standards of modesty. There are still areas of the world where Christians dress with the same modesty as traditional Muslims, although they have greatly decreased in the last century. It is a misapprehension that modesty is a trait unique to Islam. It is scandalous that a political conflict has been made of this issue in many areas, especially in Europe, considering that Christians in theory have the same duties, according to their own faith, as do Muslims.

European Muslims have sometimes failed in the matter of style. Perhaps some propagators of Islam have put too much emphasis on the principles of modesty and too little on how they ought to be adapted to new situations. There has been a tendency, especially among women, to copy foreign styles. This is one of the foremost barriers to embracing Islam by Westerners. They get the impression that one must dress in black and cover the face, because that is the way women dress in one or another country. There should be a movement among European Muslim women towards designing and acquiring styles of clothing which preserve Islamic modesty while at the same time recognizing features of Western dress styles. Unless this is done, Islam has a future in Europe only among those who marry immigrant Muslims or are attracted by exotic, foreign dress.

## 7. Social Contracts

Islam and Christianity differ greatly in the matter of social contracts. In Islam, a free individual has the right and indeed obligation to make certain contracts with others which are binding under religious law and consequently even under secular law in such countries which recognize Islam. The right of individual contract is greatly diminished under other religious and legal systems, such as those dominant in the West. Marriage, for example, has already been seen to have a sacramental character in Christianity, and even where this is minimal, to be established only through the intervention of an authoritarian establishment. Two individuals do not have the right in Christian contexts to contract a legally binding marriage.

The attempt of Christians to do so is generally considered fornication. The same generally holds true for other types of individual contracts, such as buying and selling, renting, or other matters. The law



intervenes to determine the forms of individual contract, which are rights essentially granted by law rather than recognized by law. Thus the marriage of church and state in Western societies continues, even when ostensibly weakened, to govern individual freedom of contract in ways which contrast with Islamic practice, whether or not actual conflict is present.

In dialogue with Christians, therefore, the issue of personal contract is one difficult to get across. The Christian has a tendency to consider contracts not having legal or ecclesiastical control to be less than serious. In such cases they depend solely on the word of honor. For Muslims, personal contracts are made within the Islamic experience, and imply binding responsibility before God and consequently legal binding as well. Perhaps the best way to get this across to a Christian in dialogue is to make a comparison to Christian sacraments. An Islamic contract has for the Muslim the same sacredness as a Church sacrament for a Christian. Some Christians may be positively surprised that Islam recognizes an individual freedom in such matters which is lacking in Christian society.

## **8. “Holy War”**

The practice of jihad or “holy War” as it is so often called in English is one of the areas in which Islam is much criticized. Much of the problem arises from a misapprehension of Islam and a desire to find fault with the religious tradition perceived to be behind “acts of terrorism.” Much of this can be dispelled immediately with the realization that struggle in the way of God is primarily a struggle with oneself rather than with others. Furthermore, the struggle of the pen is of much greater importance than the struggle of the sword.

In addition, historically speaking, it is Christianity which is the faith of the sword and not Islam. With few exceptions, Islam has been spread by peaceful means, mostly through commercial ties. With no exceptions the whole of Europe was Christianized through military conquest. If there are any criticisms to be made about the historical spread of Islam, they should certainly not be tendered by a Christian, who on the issue of forced conversions has no honorable recourse but embarrassed silence, or the dishonorable recourse of ignorance.

Muslims have rarely lost sight of the Qur’anic principle of no compulsion in Islam. Christians have nearly always lost sight of the fact that the greatest single massacre in the history of the world was the conquest of Mexico, in which millions of Indians were baptized by force, only to join the millions more who lost their lives in the first three years of Catholic power. Before that catastrophe all people should be struck dumb with the determination that it should never happen again.

Nevertheless, struggle in the way of God is an Islamic imperative. It implies active participation in the defence of good before the onslaught of evil. Beyond that, it implies offensive measures whereby good might overcome evil. The range of action is not only individual, but within the family, the neighbourhood, and in all society. In this there may be both contrasts and similarities between Islam and Christianity. The practical ideal, at least since the Reformation, has been to make Christianity the handmaiden of the

State. Although in practice Islam has been the handmaiden of empires, a more fundamental perception would be to see the State as the handmaiden of Islam. Whatever the case, there is a tendency in both religions to see a religious duty in fostering good and opposing evil. To what extent this is seen to be the duty of the individual or the State depends on the time and situation more than on religious considerations.

In dialogue with Christians, the subject of struggle in the way of God, when carefully and rightly perceived, can be a major area of common ground. There are many matters of social and moral importance in which Muslims and at least some segment of Christianity agree. The abuse of alcohol is among the most obvious, and there exist entire sects of Christianity, not to mention the temperance movements, which join Islam in its rejection of alcoholic drink.

A newer area of possible common interest is the popular one of animal rights. It is strange that Islam is often perceived as the aggressor in this matter, when the well-being and welfare of animals intended for slaughter is so fundamental an issue in Islamic law and practice, that an animal which has been mistreated in any way just prior to being slaughtered is considered unfit for consumption. Animal rights activists have generally chosen to ignore Islam or to include it in their camp of enemies, and this comes from both a misapprehension of Islamic practice and the desire to tap into prejudices against Islam in order to bolster their own cause in the eyes of the public.

The former factor is one of ignorance, and the latter simply immoral. Animal rights activists would do well to show integrity by recognizing the real contribution of Islam to their area of interest. Although Islam supports the use of violence in defence, its rejection of violence goes far beyond that of Christianity in both practice and principle, so that the violence perpetrated on animals in the Western meat industry would be inconceivable in an Islamic context.

In the matter of jihad, the dialogue with Christians can well be made through participating in areas of social, economic, and even political reform which in principle attract both parties. Participation in such movements can open contacts of trust and good-will between Muslims and Christian so that further dialogue can take place.

## **9. Breast-beating, Weeping, and Reverential Prostration**

There are Islamic practices which seem exotic and foreign to Western Christians, but which when examined carefully provide opportunity for dialogue. Among these are the practices of breast-beating and weeping to express sorrow as a religious value, and reverential prostration as distinct from prostration in worship. These practices in Islam are useful openers to dialogue for two reasons. First of all, their exotic foreignness can awaken curiosity in some people. Such interest can be stimulated as well by inviting non-Muslim friends to observe Ashura practices and events.

The second way such practices are an opportunity for opening dialogue is their Biblical antecedents.

These practices do not conflict with Christianity and are not intrinsically polemic. The fact that they are supported by Biblical texts will come as a surprise to Christians. By establishing that the Bible supports Islamic practices that Christians will generally consider innocuous and perhaps even interesting, the Muslim prepares the way for Christians to consider that their own Scriptures perhaps support Islam in other areas as well. It is better to start finding common Biblical ground in non-polemic matters, before presenting Biblical arguments for such issues as the unity of God.

## 10. Summary

Islam and Christianity are sister faiths. They have more in common, both in belief and practice, than they have which separates them. This fact is clouded by a history of conflicts and the tradition of focusing on differences often to the exclusion of common ground. In terms of practice, Islam and Christianity share prayer, fasting, alms, pilgrimage, and in reality even the famous “holy war.” There are definite differences in detail, but the principle practices remain similar.

It is both a psychological imperative and a recognition of reality to approach dialogue from the point of view of common ground. This approach often ends in merely ignoring differences and agreeing to an uneasy and unrealistic truce. Rather, it can be the point of departure for an aggressive mission, one which is realistically tempered by the realization that the common ground may also provide an area in which each can learn from each. There is nothing more futile than one-sided, bigoted missionizing.

The differences between Christian and Islamic practices go beyond mere details, however. There are certain practices, such as the Christian use of music, which are completely unacceptable to Islam, and have to be recognized as such. More subtly, even the practices in common have fundamental differences, some of which go to the very foundational differences between the faiths. When such Christian practices function to foster ecclesiastical authority and even sacramentalism, they depart essentially from Islam. In dialogue with Christians, it is essential eventually to get across not only the details of Islamic practice, but what they mean psychologically, functionally, and spiritually. There is always the danger that in reverting to Islam, a Christian will bring along spiritual baggage which is inconsistent with Islamic faith and practice. But even dialogue which does not result in people embracing Islam is most useful when it increases real understanding of why people practice what they do and how they experience the practice of their faith.

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