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Maryam in the Quran and Bible Comparison of Mariam in Islam and Catholicism

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Abstract

This article contains research about the commonalities between the character of Mary or Marian in the Bible and the Quran. In hopes of bringing the two major religions and their followers closer through knowledge and understanding rather than typical stereotypes and a lack of understanding spreading pious individuals further away from one another. In hopes to create a spark in research and education of religion. Mary is contemplated through the Bible and Quran based on the similarities in her characteristic

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traits such as piety and virginity, and the symbol of her veil which is an obligation put on believing women from their Creator.

Keywords: Mary, Mariam, Bible, Quran, peace, commonalities, veil, Islam, Catholicism, religion(s), Abrahamic religions

Introduction

There are many unparallel truths when it comes to Abrahamic religions. One derived even perhaps from another in the continuous quest for truth. Inevitably the desire of man from cradle to grave is indeed the search for eternal truth.

Regardless of the path that one takes, the quest is the same. Human beings unfortunately get caught in this douyna and the idealistic view that what they have chosen for themselves is better than what another man has chosen for himself.

Consistently it is brought to the attention to “save” the other. Perhaps “saving” the other comes from understanding and mannerism that show the best of us. Tolerance, open discussions on faith and spirituality, and debates in honesty.

In a world that is full of hate and egocentric mentalities a shift needs to be placed into full-drive towards acceptance and toleration towards one another for indeed Imam Ali (as) has told us that “If a person his not your brother in faith, he is your equal in humanity” (NajulBalagha letter 53) Essentially we are all the created; made by

the Creator, thus we should attempt firstly to know one another rather than to fight one another on pre-based biases and judgements.

In the end we have more in common with our brethren than we are led to believe. One of the most fundamental concepts in Catholicism is the concept and belief in the Virgin Mary, a woman who was untouched by man, chaste, and close to Allah swt.

A woman who spent her years in worship and became the mother of the Saviour Jesus Christ. So much that so that one of the fundamental prayers is directed towards Mary and said in ever rosary, every mass, and ever religious holiday. That her status is so high in the eyes of Allah swt, the reciter of the prayer seeks intercession for their sins through her. So thus, through Mary we can lay our common ground in Islam and Catholicism.

The name of Mary the Mother of Jesus is mentioned twelve times in the Gospel of Luke, five times in the Gospel of Matthew, once in the Gospel of Mark and once in the Book of Acts. Nearly all of these mentions by name are within the Christmas story, bringing a total of 18 times throughout the entire Bible.

The Quran gives reference to the same Mary a total of 77 times and dedicates an entire chapter to her, named Mariam. Both books tell the story of Mary and how close she is to God. Both books alike speak of how Mary should be a role model for believing women.

Now that it is understood that throughout the two major religions Mary is significantly mentioned we can see that she is an important figure to compare. She is a mutual character within both religions and thus we can take lessons from her and her role within the religions.

Concept of the Figure of Mary

In order for one to understand the concept of the figure of Mary they must first be acquainted with the Bible as well as the Holy Quran. It is through these two scriptures that one can comfortably know the role that she plays in each religion as well as the commonality within her role as a religious figure.

Mary's main role in the Bible is the role of the mother of Jesus. The biblical view on the life of Mary tells a tale of a woman who is touched by no man, yet betrothed to a man named Joseph, who while goes with her to the manger to give birth to Jesus, calls her a liar and is uncertain of her dignity and word of being a chosen individual by God the Almighty.

The Bible, particularly from the Chapter of Luke, verse 26-27-48 tells how Mary was notified by God to be the mother of Jesus (as) During Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin girl who lived in Nazareth, a town in Galilee.

She was engaged to marry a man named Joseph from the family of David. Her name was Mary. The angel came to her and said, "Greetings! The Lord is with you; you are very special to him." But Mary was very confused about what the angel said. She wondered, "What does this mean?"

The angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, because God is very pleased with you. Listen! You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You will name him Jesus. He will be great. People will call him the Son of the Most High God, and the Lord God will make him king like his ancestor David. He will rule over the people of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." Mary said to the angel, "How will this happen?"

"I am still a virgin." The angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the power of the Most High God will cover you. The baby will be holy and will be called the Son of God. And here's something else: Your relative Elizabeth is pregnant. She is very old, but she is going to have a son.

Everyone thought she could not have a baby, but she has been pregnant now for six months. God can do anything!" Mary said, "I am the Lord's servant. Let this thing you have said happen to me!" Then the angel went away. Mary got up and went quickly to a town in the hill country of Judea. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the unborn baby inside her jumped, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she said to Mary, "God has blessed you more than any other woman. And God has blessed the baby you will have.

You are the mother of my Lord, and you have come to me! Why has something so good happened to me? When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. Great blessings are yours because you believed what the Lord said to you! You believed this would happen."

Then Mary said, "I praise the Lord with all my heart. I am very happy because God is my Savior. I am not important, but he has shown his care for me, his lowly servant. From now until the end of time, people will remember how much God blessed me (Trinitarian Bible Society, 2011).

These particular passages give us insight into some of the life of Mary from the perspective of our Catholic friends. We see commonalities in some aspect, the foremost being that Mary was indeed a virgin, chaste, and chosen by God.

While other elements are not in the Quran such as the character of Joseph, this is little room to cause conflict. Through thought-provoking discussions, that are with open and honest hearts, we can agree to disagree about specific elements and note the commonalities that the Bible and Quran hold just in Mary herself.

While the Quran gives light to the fact that Mary has an exalted place in Islam, naming her as one of the best creatures. Divine grace surrounded Mary from birth, as a young woman, she received a message from God through the archangel Gabriel that God had chosen her, purified her, and had preferred her above all "the women of the worlds."

The fact that Mary is pure and untouched is both within the Bible and in the Quran giving light and reference to the same character. It showcases that indeed the two major religions share commonalities on the traits of Mary.

We often see Mary depicted in Bible like images of being downed with a veil, a covering of the hair, which according to Catholic scholars showcases a sense of piety in women. The Bible itself shows the need for women of the religious sense to have to wear a veil on their heads.

The Bible states "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head-it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil" (1 Corinthians 11 3:16).

This furthermore proves the piety of Mary and a commonality amongst the two religions. Hijab is a known element within the religion of Islam. Women are commanded from their Lord to cover and be modest in the sight of other men. The Quran states in surah Nur verse 30 “...and not display their beauty except what is apparent, and they should place their khumur over their bosoms.”

When the ayah is dissected it comes to our attention that we have to contemplate first the word “khumur.” This is an Arabic word Khumur **كُمُرٌ** is plural of khimar **خِمَارٌ**, the veil covering the head. Fakhru 'd-Din al-Turayhi in Majma'u 'l-Bahrayn (which is a dictionary of Qur'anic and hadith terms) defines al-khimar as “scarf, and it is known as such because the head is covered with it.”

The second issue to contemplate is the idea of placing the khimar over their bosoms. If we look into Islamic history we find that women use to tie their scarves back behind their heads leaving the neck and area open.

According to the commentators of the Qur'an by saying “place the khumur over the bosoms,” Almighty Allah ordered the women to let the two ends of their headgear extend onto their bosoms so that they conceal their ears, the neck, and the upper part of the bosom as well (Rizvi, Sayyid Muhammed 2014).

Seeing as how both religions state the importance of modesty in women, with the Bible actually being more harsh in tone, calling women to shave their heads if they do not cover, and implying that a shaved head is not a source of dignity for women, we can conclude that although it is not a mainstream practice for many Catholics- the command from Allah swt is the same.

The depictions of Mary with a veil is a sense of pride for many Catholics around the world, so much that showing her without a veil would be considered blasphemous, proves that indeed a veil represents piety within the individual and a person who is close to God. The same for a Muslim practising woman who wants to amplify the women within the Quran and follow such a command, bringing the religions closer together.

Conclusion

Our commonalities can be showcased just through the life of Mary. While we continue to get trapped in ideologies of one verse another, it is indeed that we need to contemplate and learn the deeper understandings of our religions to better understand one another. While yes- we can argue that indeed the respected religions hold differences in opinions, our commonalities should be on the spotlight to enable us as human beings to come closer to one another.

Those who would restrict religion to its outward expressions open the way to the exploitation of religion for worldly gain, because it is the spiritual dimension of religion that supports the kind of heartfelt dedication needed for the nourishment of moral fiber (Legenhausen, Muhammed 2013).

Indeed, if we act upon what Abrahamic religions teach us and look at one another with a spiritual lenses and not secular worldly gains we will find our common truths.

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