

Muslims and Mormons

Historical Foundations and Theological Beliefs

Tyler Gathro
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A few years back, while living in Jordan and working for an NGO based out of the Ministry of Social Development, I became acquainted with a man named Khalil. Khalil was a native Jordanian Muslim who, to my great surprise, studied at Brigham Young University, a Mormon university in Utah, in the United States. When we first met, I wondered why a Muslim from the Middle East would want to go to a Mormon Christian university in the States. A year later while in Dubai, I met a man named Riad, another Jordanian Muslim who lived and worked in Dubai. He too was a graduate of Brigham Young in chemical engineering. This began my interest in the subject of Muslim-Mormon relations and now years later, I present the question to you. What is the relationship between Muslims and Mormons? Many books and articles have already been written on the topic and so a comparison of the two religions is not new. However, in our time of pluralism and needed tolerance, it is a topic that needs refreshing.

Prior to 9/11, the words Muslim or Islam were rarely heard in America, let alone understood. The events of 9/11 brought Muslims into the news and minds of everyday Americans, for good or for bad. Unfortunately this ‘Muslim Moment’ has caused more people to associate Muslims with embassy bombings, ISIS members killing Christians, and women being suppressed than to truly seek for understanding and harmony. Occasionally good has occurred, like when

on January 4, 2007, the United States made history by allowing Keith Ellison, a Democratic Congressman from Minnesota, to be sworn into office by placing his hand on The Holy Qur’an. Keith Ellison said, “I will put my hand on a book that is the basis of my faith, which is Islam, and I think this is a thing of beauty—a wonderful thing for our country” (Kirkland, 2008).

Mormons (or members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) have also entered into their ‘Mormon Moment’ as many news outlets have called it. In 2009 top Mormon leaders hired two big-name advertising agencies to find out what Americans thought of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Using focus groups and surveys, they found that to describe Mormons, most Americans used adjectives like, “secretive,” “cultish,” “sexist,” and “anti-gay.” In response, the church launched a multimillion dollar ad campaign across major U.S. cities to change the Mormon stereotype. The campaign known as “I’m a Mormon” debuted in the summer of 2011 on television, billboards, taxi tops, and inside subway cars. Around the same time as this ad campaign, came the Mormon presidential candidate Mitt Romney, a hit musical about Mormons on Broadway titled *The Book of Mormon*, and a number of other Mormons in the popular culture and news (Goodstein, 2011).

With this backdrop in mind, this essay is an attempt to analyze some of the historical and theological relations between these two religious

sects. Doing so will give better understanding of the values and beliefs behind these two religious, social, and political powers that have both found themselves in the middle of their own ‘Muslim and Mormon Moments’ here in their history in the United States. Each topic addressed in this essay could rightly become a dissertation by itself, though analysis here will only go so far in order to stick to the purpose of the paper, that is, to provide a relational overview of these two great faiths. It should be noted that while my own faith tradition comes from the Latter-day Saint (LDS) Church, the writing of this essay is catered primarily to readers outside of both Islam and Mormonism. However, all readers, Muslims and Mormons included, will hopefully come to a greater understanding and mutual respect for both these traditions.

In order to make any epistemological justifications or conclusions about a religion, let alone to simply appreciate it’s beliefs and practices, it is first necessary to offer some historical and ontological context. The German historian Eduard Meyer (1855-1930), who was neither Christian nor Muslim, wrote a major comparison between Islam and Mormonism saying:

“Of the many new religious movements originating in our time, Mormonism very early awakened my interest, especially because of its surprising and close resemblance to the historical development of Islam. Without the least exaggeration, we may designate the Mormons as the Mohammedans of the New World according to their origins and their manner of thinking. There is hardly a historical parallel which is so instructive as this one; and through comparative analysis both receive so much light that a scientific study of the one through the other is indispensable” (Meyer, 1912).

Indeed the two have much in common historically and Meyer goes so far as to make the comparison that “Mormons are the Mohammedans of the New World”. He could likewise have said that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, is the American Mohammad, a comparison that has been made by many besides Meyer, such as Jennie Fowler Willing in her book, *Mormonism: The Mohammedanism of the West* (Louisville, Ky: Pickett Publishing Co., 1906) or Bruce Kinney in his book, *Mormonism: The Islam of America* (New York: Revell, 1912). The question here is why and how did this Mormon-Islam/Joseph Smith-Mohammad analogy develop?

To begin with, let’s take a quick look at some of the obvious comparisons between the two faiths.

Muhammad was born in the year 570 and due to the death of both his parents, (his father before he was born and his mother at the age of six) Muhammad was raised by his uncle Abu Talib, a merchant and shepherd. The uneducated Muhammad could not read or write and often retired to caves to ponder and be alone. Similarly, Joseph Smith (1805-1844) was born into a poor farming family and therefore had to help with the duties of farming life. This left young Joseph with nothing more than a third grade education.

As the account goes, while pondering in a cave near Mecca, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad to delivered a message. That angel appeared on multiple occasions over the course of 23 years, each time delivering a part of what was later compiled into *The Holy Qur’an* (the fundamental sacred text for Islam). Even though Muhammad himself did not transcribe the angelic messages, he was the receptacle of God’s divine word and through him, the world received a sacred book of scripture. Likewise, Joseph Smith was one day pondering and praying in a grove of trees when, in his words:

“I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me... When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other, ‘This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!’” (Smith, 1902).

Like Stephen in the New Testament (Acts 7:55-56), Joseph Smith claimed to have seen God the Father and His son Jesus Christ. Later he claimed to be visited by an angelic messenger named Angel Moroni who told him about an ancient record he would be charged to translate. According to Smith’s testimony, he translated into English an ancient record by the gift and power of God. That translation is known today as *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (the fundamental sacred text for Mormonism and the source of the common nickname ‘Mormon’ for all members of the LDS Church).

In addition to both Muhammad and Joseph Smith being traditionally uneducated, having angelic visitations, and producing a sacred book of scripture, they were both the means of starting a ‘new’ religion. What is worthy of discussion here is the term ‘new’. To any outsider, both men created new religions, but to the believer and follower of each faith, these two men were prophets of God called to restore or fulfill the true ‘primaeval religion’—the religion of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob that Christians believe was fulfilled and made new by Jesus Christ. Both Islam and Mormonism had a tremendous appeal for its followers due to the electrifying announcement that the heavens had again opened and God had spoken after 600 years of silence according to Muhammad and after 1800 years of silence according to Joseph Smith. A prophet was again on the earth!

Richard F. Burton (1821-1890), English explorer, writer, egyptologist and diplomat, well known for his visit to Mecca disguised as a Muslim notable, traveled through Utah in 1860 and then published his book, *The City of the Saints* the following year about the Mormons. Having discovered earlier the Muhammad–Joseph Smith comparison, Burton agreed that there were indeed a number of similarities. “Mormonism claims,” he observed, “like El Islam, to be a restoration by revelation of the pure and primaeval religion of the world. Mormons, as well as the followers of the Arabian Prophet, have obeyed the command of their God to restore it” (Burton, 1862). This dispensational concept of the restoration of prophetic gifts and divine authority after long periods of apostasy and darkness through the sending of a great prophet is a fundamental doctrine that, while found in the Qur’an, has been rejected by conventional Christianity and Judaism, but has always been a part of Mormonism. Hugh Nibley (1910-2005), one of the only Mormon theologians and a professor of history and religion at Brigham Young University states that “this doctrine was necessary to justify Mohammed’s appearance as a new prophet but became a dead letter in Islam after his death” (Nibley, 1972). Herein lies a fundamental difference between Islam and Mormonism. While both groups believe in a prophet who restored the original religion of Adam (the first man), Islam firmly declares, as one renowned Muslim scholar wrote, that, “the holy Prophet Mohammed closed the long line of Apostles ...there has been and will be no prophet after Mohammed” (Ali, 1938). For Mormons, however, the glad tidings that God continues to speak to his people through a prophet, is alive and well even today.

As these two men preached the messages they had individually received, they began to establish followers. In both the ancient arabian peninsula and in upstate New York, early Muslims and Mormons were persecuted and driven from their homes. The pre-established culture in Mecca was a clan system where the loyalty to the tribe was so strong that it could make a husband give up his wife. Clans stuck together for general security of life and property. An arabian poet wrote, “He who defends not his wells

with his own weapons, will lose them. He who does no harm to others is trampled down.” Religious power during this time, paralleled political and economic power and therefore when Muhammad rose to a religious power and went against the religious customs of the time, he was ‘trampled down’, persecuted and ultimately provoked to migrate from Mecca to Medina (Sannah, 2014). This gives validity to Jesus’ saying in the New Testament that, “No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24). This idea is also seen with Joseph Smith, who was ridiculed as a 14 year old boy for his claims of seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ. Later in his life, he and his followers were persecuted by mobs and driven out of New York, causing them to flee to Kirtland, Ohio, and then Jackson County Missouri, Nauvoo Illinois, and finally, Salt Lake City Utah. Joseph Smith was tarred and feathered, beaten, and imprisoned on several occasions before being shot and killed by a mob that believed Joseph Smith and the Mormons were trying to take over politically.

A comparison of the two prophets and the early history of Islam and Mormonism could be written into an entire book, but our brief comparison is sufficient enough to allow us to now return to the question that still remains as to why and how this Mormon-Islam/Joseph Smith-Mohammad analogy developed? Arnold H. Green, Mormon scholar of modern Middle East history and professor at the American University of Cairo and Brigham Young University, wrote that Muhammad’s claims to prophethood were rejected by Christians as fraudulent long before Mormonism arose. “The Roman Catholics,” he explained, “often vilified Protestantism by comparing the Reformed doctrine to that of Mohammedanism.” He went on to say that, “a metaphor-loving cleric might refer to someone claiming divine guidance for a departure from prevailing Christian norms as ‘a Muhammad’ just as a politician might refer to an ex-supporter as ‘a Benedict Arnold.’” Green explains that this figurative reference is really a “subjective linguistic symbol” rather than an “objective historical reality”. Giving an example, he explains that “George Washington might stand for an opportunistic rebel in eighteenth-century England but a nation-founding hero in the United States” (Green, 2002).

Now in the United States in the early 19th century, the Protestants, who had once endured the accusation of Mohammedanism themselves for a century or two in Europe, were now confronted with a ‘new’ religion by a prophet named Joseph Smith who coincidentally held a number of similarities to the ancient Arabian prophet Muhammad. It is easy

to see from this why Mormons and Joseph Smith were compared with Muslims and Muhammad at such an early period in Mormon history. With strong similarities between both the founders and the early developments of both these faiths, it is natural to ask if there are also strong similarities between their core values and theological beliefs. While the similarities in their values and beliefs are many, Hugh Nibley suggests that, “the resemblances... are quite superficial, while the differences are profound and fundamental” (Nibley, 1972). The fundamental difference, and similarities, will be made clear as we look at the theological foundations.

First of all, what is the foundation of a religious life? What are the pillars upon which a persons faith stands or what is the keystone that keeps everything from collapsing in on itself? Mormonism declares that *The Book of Mormon* is “the keystone of [their] religion” (Smith, 1981) while “Jesus Christ himself [is] the chief corner stone” (Ephesians 2:20). Aside from that, Joseph Smith wrote 13 articles of faith as a declaration of fundamental beliefs. *The Articles of Faith*, as they are collectively known, contains, but is not limited to, declarations such as:

- We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.
- We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.
- We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
- We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul-We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

The closest Muslim equivalent to the creedal *Articles of Faith* are the *Five Pillars of Islam* found in the Hadith of Gabriel (notably one of the single most important Hadiths), which contains the best summary of the core of Islam. These five ‘pillars’ are five statements of belief and practice that are essential to the Muslim life. They are:

1. *Shahadah*: declaring there is no god except God,

and Muhammad is God’s Messenger

2. *Salat*: ritual prayer five times a day
3. *Zakat*: giving 2.5% of one’s savings to the poor and needy
4. *Sawm*: fasting and self-control during the holy month of Ramadan
5. *Hajj*: pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one is able

An analysis and comparison of each of the articles of faith and each of the pillars of Islam as they relate to both Mormonism and Islam could be made, although a full book would be needed to do so. Here, we will only look at three pillars as they relate to the conception of God and our relationship to Him, communicating with and worshiping God through prayer, and the significance of God’s holy house on earth and the journey to go there. Comparing these three pillars with Mormon belief and practice will be helpful in understanding the theological relations of the two faiths.

The first pillar, *Shahadah*, expresses a belief in one God, thus making Islam a monotheistic faith. The second part of the same pillar addresses Muhammad as God’s messenger, though since Muhammad was discussed earlier, the focus here will be on the Mormon and Muslim view of God. Because Islam professes to be the fulfillment of the Jewish and Christian faiths, and because both the Christian and Muslim faiths believe in one supreme Creator-God, they are obviously referring to the same Being. Although there are real differences in their understanding of God, to think that the Muslim and Mormon God is not one and the same would not only be incorrect, it would hurt our goal of creating interfaith dialogue. Kenneth Cragg (1913-2012), an Anglican bishop and Oxford scholar of Muslim-Christian relations, wrote that “those who say that *Allāh* is not ‘the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ are right if they mean that God is not so described by Muslims. They are wrong if they mean that *Allāh* is other than the God of the Christian faith” (Cragg, 1956).

If there is confusion, perhaps it comes from calling God by different names. The term *Allāh* simply means ‘God’ in Arabic just as the word *Dios* means ‘God’ in Spanish. For Muslims, Arabic is the divine language in which God revealed his word to Muhammad, therefore even for non-Arabic speaking Muslims, the Arabic term *Allāh*, is still used in place of the English term *God*. In the LDS Church, there is a strong importance on both earthly families and heavenly families and a belief that God is not only the Father of Jesus Christ, but that all people, both

men and women are spirit children of God created in his image. Therefore Mormons typically refer to God as ‘Heavenly Father’, ‘Father in Heaven’ or ‘God the Father’. These patriarchal names for God in Mormonism make God much more personable than in Islam, where even though there are 99 official names, *Allāh* is the one most commonly used.

The *Shahadah* states that ‘there is no god except God’. In other words, ‘no god except *Allāh*’. This clearly suggests that there was already an established belief in *Allāh* in pre-Islamic Arabia. The declaration made by Muhammad was to worship only one god as opposed to the polytheistic traditions that were the custom at the time. Islam is clear that there is only one god, who is, as Mormons would say, ‘God the Father’. But what about ‘God the Son’? In other words, how do Muslims view Jesus Christ, the Christian God of the New Testament? Here is where the earlier statement by Nibley that “the differences [between Mormons and Muslims] are profound and fundamental” becomes most apparent.

Throughout the Qur’an Jesus is referred to as *Isā*, though not much is known about the origins of this name. For Muslims, Jesus is born of a virgin, but is only a man. Surah 3:44 of the Qur’an quotes Jesus as saying, “I have come unto you with a sign from your Lord” indicating that he is not Lord. He is a prophet, a teacher, and a healer of the sick sent from God, but he is not the messiah. According to the Qur’an Jesus had disciples, but there is no reference to Jesus’ education of his disciples. In fact, the crucifixion is vehemently denied and the ascension “is an arbitrary kind of exit from the human scene.” The Qur’an says that “he does not beget and is not begotten” (Surah 112:3). This is a formal rejection to the doctrine of the divine Sonship of God. Cragg explains that to allow this doctrine “is to commit the supreme sin against the basic assertion of the Muslim *Shahadah*, or ‘Creed,’ that there is no god except God” (Cragg, 1956).

For Christians, Jesus Christ is considered the ‘Messiah’, the ‘Savior of the world’, ‘Lord’, and ‘Son of God’, not to mention the numerous other names associated with Him. Conventional Christianity declares that God came down in bodily form, miraculously born of a virgin, and thus became part human and part deity. In A.D. 325 the Roman emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea to discuss, along with other things, the growing topic of the ‘trinity’ or God’s ‘three in one’. After 125 years and three more major councils by churchmen, philosophers, and ecclesiastical dignitaries, the Nicene Creed was created declaring that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three persons, yet not three Gods, but one; that they

are without body and incomprehensible. The doctrine around this triune God may differ slightly between each Christian sect, such that some Christians pray to God the Father while others pray to Jesus Christ.

For Mormons, this ambiguous idea of a three-in-one God is indeed incomprehensible. What separates Mormonism from mainstream Christianity is that there are very clearly three distinct beings. The first article of faith states, “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.” A passage in modern Mormon scripture sheds more light on this by saying, “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us” (D&C 130:22). So if God the Father and God the Son are two separate beings with individual bodies, than are Mormons monotheistic or polytheistic? Do Mormons consider Jesus to be a God or only a great prophet as He is considered in Islam? Mormons respond emphatically that they believe Jesus to be the Christ, the Holy Messiah who is not just a prophet, but is literally the Son of God, the Firstborn of the Father. Mormons do worship Jesus Christ along with the Father and in this way are very clearly polytheistic. However, for Mormons, despite there being two distinct persons whom they worship, they consider themselves monotheistic because the Godhead (the trinity) is one in purpose and God the Father (Elohim) is worshiped and given all glory through His Son, Jesus Christ (Jehovah). Jesus is considered to be a mediator between mankind on earth and God in heaven; a conduit through which humanity comes to Heavenly Father.

Even though both Muslims and Mormons believe in the same God who created the heavens and the earth and all things therein, it is here on the divine Messiahship of Jesus that they agree to disagree. To Muslims, Jesus was a prophet—a man born of a virgin and given the gift of healing and teaching, but to Mormons, Jesus is everything. He is at the center of their lives and it is through Him and only Him, that they can return to live with God after this life. A 2012 article in the Huffington Post titled, “Are Mormons closer to Muslims or Christians?” ignorantly suggests that “Islam is about as close to Christianity as Mormonism” (Wood, 2012). What the author, Eliza Wood, misunderstood is that Mormons are Christians due to the very belief that Jesus is the divine Messiah; a fundamental difference for Muslims.

Even those, like Wood, who know little about Mormonism or Islam, know that prayer is of great importance to Muslim life. You may have

seen a Muslim in the corner of an airport prostrate on his small prayer rug, or perhaps you have seen a photograph of the rows of prostrate bodies filling the wide empty space of a mosque. “Islam and prayer are in truth inseparable” (Cragg, 1956) and hence the second ‘pillar’ is *Salāt*, the ritual prayer five times a day. But for Mormons, rather than praying only five times a day, they are taught to “pray always” (D&C 10:5), “both morning, mid-day, and evening” (Alma 34:21), and that when they are not crying to God, to “let [their] hearts be full, drawn out in prayer unto Him continually for [their] welfare, and also for the welfare of those who are around [them]” (Alma 34:27). For Mormons, there are only a few set prayers which are found only in temple ordinances, in the two Eucharistic prayers, and in the baptismal prayer. In all other instances, Mormons express themselves in their own words, yet more important than the words is the sincerity and feeling that accompanies prayer. An example of this can be seen in a prayer by the *Book of Mormon* prophet, Alma, who said “O Lord, my heart is exceedingly sorrowful; wilt thou comfort my soul in Christ. O Lord, wilt thou grant unto me that I may have strength” (Alma 31:31), (Ludlow, 1992).

Similarly for Muslims, the *niyyah*, ‘intention’ or declaration of purpose, makes sure that true prayer is not vain repetition, but is sincere. What is of interest is that at first glance, the *niyyah* seems contradictory to the strictly ordered pattern of prayer, known as *Salāt*. This pattern has several requirements including praying five times a day—at dawn, at noon, in late afternoon, at sunset, and before retiring to sleep, but not after midnight. *Salāt* also requires a number of ritual movements known as *raka’āt*. *Raka’āt* will not be described in any real depth here, but consists of standing, bending, kneeling, touching the head to the floor, and holding the hands in certain positions. Here, “the physical embodies and expresses the spiritual” (Cragg, 1956). One might wonder how you can have such strictness in prayer such as how to hold your hands and what to say, and still have sincerity and not be ‘mechanical’. Cragg teaches us that “the movements [or words] no doubt become habitual, but habituation should not lead to forgetfulness” (Cragg, 1956). The question here is forgetfulness of what? What is it that Muslims are trying to remember as they perform such a structured prayer? The answer is found in the *qiblah*, or the direction Muslims face when they pray.

The Islamic *qiblah* derives from a root meaning “to face, to receive, to look toward.” When a Muslim prays five times a day, what direction does he (or she) face? (Nibley, 1992). To the religious centrality of the world—Mecca. He turns in solidarity with his

Muslim ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ towards Mecca, where stands the great Kaaba, the “sacred house” believed to be erected by Abraham, after the manner of Adam’s fashioning of the holy altar. Indeed, the Kaaba, the Al-Masjid Al-Haram (“Sacred” or “Grand”) Mosque, and Mecca itself are all considered by Muslims each and every day when they pray. What does such a constant consideration do to the soul of a person? This consideration of the Kaaba and Mecca would obviously bring a reminder of Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) and its rituals, thus becoming not merely an annual or even one-time observance for distant Muslims, but a mental and spiritual engagement of daily significance.

In *The Book of Mormon* there is a story which in part says, “And it came to pass that when they came up to the temple, they pitched their tents round about... every man having his tent with the door thereof towards the temple” (Mosiah 2:5-6). There is a prevailing teaching in the LDS Church around this scripture, which Elder Ronald A. Rasband, a prominent leader in the Church known as a Seventy, shared in a world-wide church broadcast address saying, “I love the imagery of these verses. Figuratively speaking, are the doors of our homes pitched towards the temples we so love? Do we attend as often as we can, showing our children through our example the importance of these sacred and special places?” (Rasband, 2006). Here we find an example of the Mormon *qiblah* where Mormons are figuratively taught to face the temple, the sacred house of God. For Mormons, LDS temples are a centralized constant where earth and heaven unite—the location where truth can be circumscribed into one great whole.

Even with this beautiful teaching to ‘face the temple’, the Mormon *qiblah* is not so much applied directly to prayer as it is to the general thoughts and activities of life. So when a Mormon prays to God, he/she can certainly have pure intention, sincerity of heart, and no vain repetitions, but the constant and clear reminder of the temple and all the spiritual rites and significance that it holds, is not necessarily present. The difference here lies in the very fact that for Mormons, having the ‘qiblah’ become figurative can make it easy to forget, whereas for Muslims, literally facing in the direction of God’s sacred house, causes the spiritual significance of the Kaaba to enhance their daily prayers and lives.

The fifth ‘pillar’ of Islam is *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime if one is able. Like Mormonism, Islam claims to be a global religion for all people, despite the fact that the Qur’an belongs to the Arabic text and language. Each year, millions of individuals from all over the globe come to

centralized Mecca to take part in the sacred rituals of the Hajj. As Cragg writes:

“By reason of the qiblah, Islam made Mecca the center of day-to-day devotion. Pilgrimage... makes it the focal point of a yearly homage that often represents the aspiration of a lifetime. The pilgrimage is, so to speak, the annual expression of the constant centrality of the Ka’bah and its environs in the practice and faith of Islam” (Cragg, 1959).

The practice of making a pilgrimage or journey to a holy site can be found in Mormonism in the practice of going to the temple. Young children sing during Sunday School a popular children’s song that states, “I love to see the temple. I’m going there someday... For the temple is a house of God, A place of love and beauty” (Perry, 1980). Unlike Islam where there is only one house of God on the earth, Mormons believe that temples (different from regular Sunday church houses), can be built all over the world. While the number of Mormon temples in the world is growing quickly, there are still only 143 temples currently operating as of today, causing some Mormons to have to travel across a continent to attend the temple. For example, Mormons in Ethiopia have to go to Nigeria or Ghana, Mormons in India have to go to Hong Kong, and Mormons in Jordan or Israel have to go to Germany or Switzerland (Satterfield, 2014). But for Mormons, the focus is not so much on the journey or the ‘going’, but rather the ‘becoming’. As Elder David Bednar, an Apostle in the church and former University president has stated:

“In our customary Church vocabulary, we often speak of going to church, going to the temple, and going on a mission. Let me be so bold as to suggest that our rather routine emphasis on going misses the mark. The issue is not going to church; rather, the issue is worshipping and renewing covenants as we attend church. The issue is not going to or through the temple; rather, the issue is having in our hearts the spirit, the covenants, and the ordinances of the Lord’s house” (Bednar, 2005).

What stands out here with specific relation to the Hajj is: 1) the idea that it is possible for an individual to go to the temple and not have the spirit of the temple with them, and 2) the mention of the Lord’s house as a place of covenant making and conducting of vital ordinances. Kenneth Cragg said that, “it should be clear that pilgrimage, like any other pillar of Islam, can be physically performed without being spiritually fulfilled” (Cragg, 1956). Again, just as with *Salāt*, the intention and sincerity must be present, something that

is essential to both Mormons and Muslims. Secondly, there are many rites and symbols found throughout the *Hajj* that have a significant resemblance to some of the rites and symbols found in LDS temples.

The *Hajj* is a time to set earthly titles and status aside in order to have pure harmony and equality. All worship together and are clothed in the same white garments, males and females. Instruction is given that no political statements are to be made at *Hajj*, nor contextualization of theology. The purpose and intent of collective rite, by forcing a neutralization of socio-economic class, is to help the pilgrim realize that they are just one part of a great whole—the humble people of *Allāh* (Sanneh, 2013). The exact same principle is found in LDS temples. Upon entering the temple, worshipers, both men and women, change into all white clothing. Such clothing holds symbolic meaning; “for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10). Earthly titles and symbols are striped away. Mormon Apostle, Boyd Packer wrote in his book, *The Holy Temple*, “You feel a oneness and a sense of equality, for all around you are similarly dressed” (Packer, 1980), and thus Mormons and Muslims become the humble people of God.

But what about individuals who honestly cannot make the long pilgrimage to Mecca? The Shi’ite tradition holds the belief that proxy pilgrims can go on behalf of incapable, but pious Muslims. In the book of 1 Corinthians 15:29 there is a reference to the early Christian practice of proxy baptisms for deceased relatives: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all?” It is interesting to note that the Greek Septuagint translates the word “for” as “in behalf of” or “for the sake of.” This practice of having able members of the faith act as proxy to perform sacred ordinances (a prescribed religious rite, sacrament, or observance) in order to satisfy justice and the law, is practiced today in LDS temples. Cragg notes that, “believers who are genuinely incapable of pilgrimage enter in part into an awareness of Mecca that compensates for their inability to go there” (Cragg, 1956). Therefore this vicarious participation of a ritual, mercifully allows those who for whatever reason were “not able” to receive such ordinances, to “enter into an awareness of it” and receive the blessings of God’s salvation (Ludlow, 1992).

These three pillars, *Shahadah*, *Salāt*, and *Hajj*, carry some of the fundamental principles of Islam and yet so much more could be said about the relationship between Muslims and Mormons. We could talk about their laws of health and chastity, treatment of scripture,

alms to the poor and needy, fasting, their strong emphasis on family and their view on the relationship between 'church and state', but we will save those topics for a lengthier discussion. What is important to realize after this brief theological comparison is that even though the very core of Mormon belief, that of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, is in stark contrast to Islamic beliefs, the two faiths have much in common and are bound together by their common historical relations and similar theological understandings and shared values.

"We both come from traditions where there has been persecution in the past and continues to be prejudice," said Steve Gilliland, LDS director of Muslim relations for Southern California. "That helps us Mormons identify with Muslims." And identify they do. Haitham Bundakji, former chairman of the Islamic Society of Orange County said that whenever he has gone to a Mormon church, he feels at ease. He went on to say that, "when I heard the president [of LDS] speak a few years ago, if I'd closed my eyes I'd have thought he was an imam" (Haldane, 2008). Whether these 'Mormon and Muslim moments' will continue or not, the historical and theological commonality between both these faiths will always remain strong.

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