

# Good News

*And give good news to those who do good (to others) – Holy Quran 22:37*

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## What Jesus Can Teach

### Today's Muslims

*[An abridged version of an article written by Mustafa Akyol that appeared in the New York Times and reproduced in the April-June 2017 edition of the Light and Islamic Review, USA, with commentary by its editor.]*

***'And in their histories there is certainly a lesson for men of understanding.'* – Holy Quran 12:111]**

Jesus claimed to be the very saviour — the Messiah — that his people awaited. But unlike other Messiah claimants of his time, he did not unleash an armed rebellion against Rome. He did not bow down to Rome, either. He put his attention to something else: *reviving the faith* and reforming the religion of his people. In particular, he called on his fellow Jews to focus on their religion's moral principles, rather than obsessing with the minute details of religious law. He criticized the legalist Pharisees, for example, for 'tithing mint and rue and every herb,' but neglecting 'justice and the love of God.' Christians, of course, know this story well. Yet Muslims need to take notice, too; because they are going through a crisis very similar to the one Jesus addressed.

While being pressed by a foreign civilization, they are also troubled by their own fanatics who see the light only in imposing a rigid law, *Shariah*, and fighting for theocratic rule.

Muslims need a creative third way, which will be true to their faith but also free from the burdens of the past tradition and the current political context. Would it be a totally new idea for Muslims to learn from Jesus? To some extent, yes. While Muslims respect and love Jesus — and his immaculate mother, Mary — because the Quran wholeheartedly praises them, most have never thought about the historical mission of Jesus, the essence of his teaching and how it may relate to their own reality.

A notable exception was Muhammad Abduh, one of the pioneers of Islamic modernism in the late 19th century. Abduh, a pious Egyptian scholar, thought that the Muslim world had lost the tolerance and openness of early Islam and had been suffocated by *a dogmatic, rigid tradition*. When he read the New Testament, he was impressed. As a Muslim, he did not agree with the Christian theology about Jesus, but he still was moved by Jesus' teachings, which were relevant to a problem Abduh observed in the Muslim world. It was the problem of 'being frozen on the literal meaning of the law,' he

wrote, and thus failing to ‘understanding the purpose of the law.’

Some other Muslim scholars noted the same problems as Abduh. But no Muslim religious leader has yet stressed the crucial gap between divine purposes and dry legalism as powerfully as Jesus did. Jesus showed that sacrificing the spirit of religion to literalism leads to horrors, like the stoning of innocent women by bigoted men — as it still happens in some Muslim countries today.

He also taught that obsession with outward expressions of piety can nurture a culture of hypocrisy — as is the case in some Muslim communities today. Jesus even defined humanism as a higher value than legalism, famously declaring, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ Can we Muslims also reason, ‘The *Shariah* is made for man, not man for the *Shariah*?’ Or, like Jesus, can we also suggest that the Kingdom of God — also called the Caliphate — will be established not within any *earthly* polity, but *within our hearts and minds*?

If Jesus is ‘a prophet of Islam,’ as we Muslims often proudly say, then we should think on these questions, because Jesus addressed the very problems that haunt us today and established a prophetic wisdom perfectly fit for our times.

*[Peace and blessings on the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary –ed.]*

## Golden Qualities and *Jihad*

*[Compiled by Ebrahim Mohamed from the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, latter day Mujaddid - Reviver of the Faith - and Muslim Messiah who came in the spiritual likeness of Jesus.]*

He writes and I quote:

‘Be kind and merciful to humanity, for all are His creatures. Do not oppress them with your hands or tongue, or hand, or in any other way. Always work for the good of mankind. Never unduly assert yourselves with pride over others, even those who are placed under you. Never use abusive language to anyone even though he abuses you. Be humble in spirit, kind and gentle, and forgiving, and sympathetic towards all and wish them well so that you should be accepted.

There are many who pretend to be kind, gentle, and forgiving, but inside they are wolves. There are many on the outside who look pure, but in their hearts they are serpents; you cannot be accepted in the presence of the Lord unless you are pure, both on the outside and the inside.

If you are big have mercy and not contempt on those who are small; if you are wise and well versed in learning, serve the ignorant with words of wisdom. Never desire to

bring disgrace on their ignorance by trying to show off your own learning. If you are rich, instead of treating people with egoistic and scornful pride, you should serve the poor.

Beware of the paths of destruction. Fear the Lord, be righteous and do not worship the creation of God. Turn wholly and solely to Him so that you lose interest in this (material) world. Become entirely His, living solely for His pleasure, for His sweet sake, hating everything impure and sinful, for indeed, He is the Holy One. Every morning should be a witness for you that you spent the night in righteousness, and every evening should be a witness for you that you went through the day with the fear of God in your heart.’ – unquote.

### Abuse of *jihad* by Muslim clerics condemned

One hundred years ago H M Ghulam Ahmad condemned the *abuse* of the concept of *jihad* (a struggle or striving for good) by Muslim clerics. He dealt with the subject extensively in his writings but I will confine myself to the following quote because of its contextual relevance. He wrote:

‘Remember, the doctrine of *jihad*, as understood by the present day Muslim scholars, who are called Muslim priests, and the form in which they state this doctrine to common people, is *absolutely incorrect*. Its result is

nothing except that they, through their passionate sermons, turn the men of brutish qualities into venomous beasts dispossessed of all pious virtues of humanity. Thus, so it happens. I know for certain that the sin for all the brutalities and unjust bloodshed that results at the hands of these ignorant conceited persons... rests on the shoulders of these Muslim priests who secretly keep teaching such doctrines, which lead to such sorrowful bloodshed.’ Unquote<sup>1</sup> –



**We strongly condemn all forms of gender-based violence against women; all human rights and environmental abuse. We especially condemn the ruthless killings of all innocent parties in the name of Religion or State!**

#### The Good News

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<sup>1</sup> *The British Government and Jihad*, pg 5