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“An Economic Comparison for Black America: Christianity versus Islam”

Purpose: **To remind us that our adherence to faiths is important in determining our economic outcomes, to provide a lay person’s comparison of Christian versus Islamic principles and to infer the logical and “better” economic outcome, and to do this using nine functional areas of life on which the *Long-Term Strategic Plan for Black America (LTSPFBA)* is based.**

Introduction

Recently an economist colleague shared with us a new article, “Religion and Economic Growth: What we Know and Why it Matters.”ⁱ The expert authors of the article cite their own and classic historical works to explore how, *inter alia*, religions, ethics, culture, and historical developments determine and are clearly visible in economic outcomes. We recommend that interested parties read the just-mentioned article. It alone is sufficient to motivate the comparison that we undertake here. Notably, over 20 years ago, we conducted similar research on this topic.ⁱⁱ

It is common knowledge that African culture generally and Black American culture specifically are deeply rooted in “religious traditions.” By “religious tradition” we mean adherence to scriptures, ethical and moral principles, and practice that form this tradition. However, we have recently concluded that each individual has a “religion” irrespective of whether they adhere to specific scriptures, principles, or practices. We believe that the word “religion” is best defined as “the living and reliving of our lives day in and day out, which reflects our principles and practices.”

The following facts point us to the need for the economic comparison undertaken in this essay: (i) “Black Americans are more religious than the American public as a whole...;”ⁱⁱⁱ (ii) religion and faith affect economic outcomes; and (iii) the majority of Black Americans are adherents of the Christian faith, but we are increasingly converting to the Islamic faith for a variety of reasons. This is an attempt to provide useful information for those who stand on the precipice of a decision to convert.

Christian versus Islamic Principles

As we have discussed elsewhere, the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions share many commonalities. In fact, although Christians say that they are no longer “subject to the law (*Torah*)” because they are only subject to the unending “grace and mercy of God,” most Christian services reflect worship liturgies that take substance from the *Old Testament* (the scripture that reflects the

law) and from the *New Testament* (the book that discusses the life and works of Christ). One could argue that the only reason the two books are adjoined is because Hebrews/Jews were the first Christians and they established this inextricable link. The chain link between the Judeo-Christian traditions is extended when the Islamic tradition is added. For those who have not read the *Holy Qur'an*, its reading will readily reveal a very strong link with the *Taurat (Old Testament)* and the *Injeel (New Testament)*.

In other words, it is not the case that there are very serious discontinuities between the principles of the three religious traditions. However, key differences between the traditions exist between their practices. As we examine differences in practices, we find that Judeo-Islamic practices are more closely aligned than either of the two are with Christian practices. The latter results mainly from the influence of European Paganism on Christianity. Europeans were unable to influence Judaism and Islam in a similar way.

Another important reason for the comparison we undertake here is that as many as 30 percent of Africans that were brought into chattel slavery in North America were adherents of Islam, but who were converted—according to some, forcibly—to Christianity by their slave masters. By that time, Christianity had become a faith with clear and bold advocacy for a “White Supremacy” doctrine.^{iv}

Comparing Using Nine Functions of Life

We begin this section of this essay with the following caveat. Most of our academic training is as an economist, and we have limited formal “religious studies” to our credit. Hence, the comparison that we perform must necessarily be at a broad, not detailed level. We undertake this comparison using nine functions that are consistent with *Classifications of the Functions of Government (COFOG)* used by most nations of the world when developing budgets to meet the needs of their citizens.^v *COFOG* reflects ten functions, two of the Functions (Defense and Public Order and Safety) were combined for purposes of preparing the *LTSPFBA*. We take each function in turn and augment each title with a phrase that highlights the focus of our comparison.

General Public Service (Administration and Leadership): Our characterization of Christian administration which is reflected ubiquitously in organizations is hierarchical in nature: From God (Jesus—the CEO) to the Pope→ Cardinal→ Bishop→ Priest (middle manager) to lay priests→ deacons→ missionaries (shop floor persons), who then execute orders from on high. Islam, on the other hand, is nearly non-hierarchical. Each adherent of Islam is to take worship and practice as an individual duty and responsibility with a direct connection to the one on high. Most Muslim Ummahs (communities) are independent, but are increasingly forming relationships with national organizations and associations. Selected or appointed Imams represent the most steeped in knowledge of the *Holy Qur'an* and of the *Hadiths*. Yet, non-Imams may be called upon to deliver talks (Khutbahs) during weekly Jum'ah (Friday) Prayer Services. **Are hierarchical or direct connections with the perceived deity better from a religious perspective?** What about as a framework for managing an economy?

Defense, Public Order, and Safety (Collective and Individual Security): Because Black Americans do not have nationhood status, consideration of national defense is not considered. However, on Public Order and Safety (POS) it is worthwhile considering whether a Black

American Christian or Muslim operational perspective is better. The *LTSPFBA* Common Country Analysis (CCA) that describes proposed methods that Black Americans might use to provide POS. The main features of the proposals or plans is to carve out semi-independent areas wherever sizable Black American populations exist, and to secure fair-share funds and other resources from local governments to provide for our own POS—to the greatest extent possible. This is a logical approach that is open to challenge, but it would likely be adopted by Black American Christians or Muslims.

The main consideration here is: Which POS mentality would prevail for the two faith groups? It is true that, as discussed in the above section titled **Christian versus Islamic Principles**, Christians may consider the *Old Testament* Lex Talionis Law (“an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth”), but they are likely to favor Jesus’s peace principles from the *New Testament* that emphasize kindness and nonviolence, which may have philosophical merit, but are unfavorable when an enemy launches physical attacks and land injurious or fatal blows.

On the other hand, Muslim’s holy book, the *Holy Qur’an*, includes references to appropriate reasons to fight enemies to win, and references to God’s (Allah’s) support during battles.^{vi} The power of those *Qur’anic* references are sufficient today to steel poorly supplied Islamic armies and militias to never backdown from battles with some of the world’s most technologically advanced, equipped, and trained armies. They lose battles and even wars, but they crop up repeatedly to fight another day. **Such an undying spirit of fighting to reclaim peace may be an important factor in drawing more Black Americans to Islam.**

Economic Affairs (Economic Development, Principles, Practices): You should know that one of our late mentors taught that God was a Monopolist. He is billed in the *Old Testament* (the First of the “Ten Commandments” no less) as the only one from which to “purchase/receive” grace, mercy, and loving kindness. Also, in the book of *Exodus*, God is said to instruct Moses and Aaron concerning prices that should be set for the sale of various goods/services.^{vii} In addition, Jesus is billed as one who foretells of a “socialist-type or communal based economy.” That is, he and his disciples took a few fish and five loaves of bread and fed thousands. Importantly, Christianity today clearly permits individual ownership. On the other hand, based on African-based communalism or socialism, there appears to be a leaning toward community ownership among Muslim Ummahs. **Both Christian and Islamic traditions emphasize caring for all in their community, but Christianity in its best form permits individual ownership. Both traditions appear to sanction more favorable treatment for those in their versus other religious communities.**

Environment Affairs (Preserving Mother Earth): While scriptures and other important books for Christian and Islamic traditions emphasize the need for adherents to “dress and keep,” nurture, or serve as vicegerents (provide oversight for) the Earth, history reveals Christian societies that feature capitalism as their economic framework appear to have failed in preserving the Earth by lifting up economic growth—especially wealth accumulation—as a hallmark of success with little-to-no consideration of the impact on the environment. At the same time, oil-rich Muslim countries show no aversion—in fact, just the opposite—to selling their oil, which they must know—according to most scientists—produces adverse environmental outcomes. Considering only the US, it may be safe to say that **Christian and Muslim Black American entrepreneurs may reflect**

similar concerns about the impact of their business operations on the environment based on a Black American tradition that values preserving the land.

Housing and Community Affairs (Developing and Preserving Our Physical Community):

The fact is that about 45 percent of Black American households own their housing unit; this compares with nearly 70 percent for the nation.^{viii} Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in perspectives on community development among Christian versus Muslim Black Americans. Christians continue to hold high the tenants of “prosperity gospel,” which touts wealth as reflected in the largest and highest quality homes and neighborhoods that are affordable—irrespective of location. Muslims on the other hand, tend to congregate in neighborhoods (communities) that they dominate and practice “group economics” intently—to the extent possible.^{ix} Determining the most favorable of the two perspectives appears to hinge on where we are in history. That is, if the broader society accepts our presence and does not engage in genocidal efforts, then the Christian perspective may produce the best economic outcome. However, if and **when Black Americans are deemed societies’ pariahs, then the Muslim perspective would appear to be favored.** Of course, this perspective is based on economics alone. It is important to also consider other socioeconomic factors.

Health (Practices for Good Health): We will be concise here. While there are Muslim populations in certain nations that reflect relatively liberal lifestyles (permitting non-strong drinks (beers or wine, smoking, etc.), most Muslim nations seek to maintain a more conservative position on such consumption. Importantly, the Muslim (halal) diet and ablution procedures should produce more healthy outcomes, at least theoretically, than the dietary and cleanliness practices of Christians.^x Also, most Christian faiths permit the consumption of strong drink and smoking. If all the foregoing is true, then **Islamic life offers the better alternative.**

Recreation, Religion, and Culture (Developing the “Best” Cultural Capital): We began this essay by noting that religion, which is embodied in culture (i.e., selectively defined as race, language, and religion) impacts economic outcome. **If we restrict our analysis for this function to its religious component, then all remaining eight functions discussed herein and their related conclusions concerning whether Christianity or Islam is the preferred religion tradition provides answers about the faith that may serve Black Americans best.**

Education (Obtaining Knowledge for Living One’s Best Possible Life): The current view on the “purpose” of education is: “To acquire the ‘tools’ required for solving problems that we confront.” For well-established Black American Christian denominations, this just-given purpose may be a secondary consideration. The primary consideration is—especially where “prosperity gospel” is pervasive—to acquire education that will optimize one’s income and wealth. On the other hand, the prime objective may be to just ensure that earned credential will help ensure capturing available jobs. In some respects, these views may also be true for Black American Muslims writ large.

However, there appears to remain a significant difference between Christians and Muslims with respect to education: The role of religion/morality/ethics in education. Because Christians appear to be more closely aligned with politics, and the current politics across much of the nation on education is to exclude religion—except parochial or church schools. For a variety of reasons,

there seems to be greater “distance” between Islamic adherents and politics and governance relative to their Christian counterparts. A partial explanation for this “distance” can be found in the culture of the people of these faiths. The *Bible* offers: “Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s” (*Matthew* 22:21; *Mark* 12:17; and *Luke* 20:25). The *US Constitution* mirrors this idea by including an important Amendment that codifies “Separation of Church and State.” It stands to reason, then, that Christians assign far less weight to forcing the provision of biblical (Christian) knowledge to their youth than do Muslims, who make explicit and persistent efforts to ensure that their youth are well grounded in the Islamic faith.

Hence, we believe that the role of education in deciding adherence to a faith hinges on the intensity of an adherent’s liberal versus conservative philosophy or posture vis-a-vis their faith. If conservative (i.e., a comprehensive and sound grounding in the faith), then Islam is likely to be preferred; Christianity would be preferred otherwise.

Social Benefits (Providing Care for the “Least of These”): At bottom, generically speaking, and theoretically; ethically, both Christianity and Islam have laudable histories as providers of assistance to their “least of these” (LOT). The Black American Christian tradition of social benefit programs was founded out of necessity because US governments had not developed frameworks or budgets for such programs and because of the exclusion of Black Americans from social benefit programs operated by White Americans. And even after US governments began to develop national social benefit programs such as the Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI or Social Security Program), many Blacks were excluded because they worked in informal industries (i.e., agriculture (especially migrant workers), transportation, and other service industries). Reliable and longstanding social benefit programs were made available mainly through religious and social organizations, and mutual aid societies; including, but not limited to, churches, Masonic Lodges, The Eastern Star, and Greek Letter (Divine Nine) organizations. A significant difference between the methods used to provide social benefits by Christians and Muslims, is that the former provided benefits to Black individuals generally who experienced unmet needs, while Muslims focus first on easily identifiable members of their communities. Benefits to nearly all comers versus to a narrower set of Muslims remains an efficient method for addressing needs because the two religious traditions have distinct differences in requirements for meeting basic needs.

Are Black American Christian social benefit programs more highly favored than Muslim social benefit programs? The answer to this question most likely rests on the religious affiliation of the person in need. While the Christian “poor” are likely to prefer benefit services from Christian-based service providers, “poor” Muslim adherents would likely prefer services from social benefit organizations in their community.

Conclusion

Black American readers are challenged here to consider seriously an economist’s and religious layperson’s research and views on whether the prevailing religious tradition, Christianity, or a rapidly rising and popular religious tradition, Islam, can offer the most successful path to victory in the over 400 year undeclared war between Black Americans and the remainder of the nation. It is important to not overstate the case nor to insight violence. However, it is unreasonable and, in a

perfect world of random chance, nearly impossible for the current *status quo* to exist today except on a contrived basis. This is why Black America finds itself at or near the bottom when observing metrics for several key socioeconomic variables. We learn again from Becker, Rubin, and Woessmann (2026) what we already knew from other scholars that religion is a very important variable to include in econometric models when identifying and explaining socioeconomic outcomes.^{xi}

Table 1.—Favored Religious Traditions by Functions

Function	GPS	DPOS	ECON	ENV	H&CA	Health	RRC	EDU	SOCB
Results: Christianity (C) versus Islam (I)	I	I	C=I	C=I	I	I	I	I	I

Table 1 provides a summary of Favored Religious Traditions by Functions. Our analysis indicates that the Islamic (I) religious tradition supersedes the Christian (C) tradition in the likelihood of producing preferred outcomes for seven of the nine functions considered. The C=I indicator reflects a “toss up” between the two traditions.

This analysis excludes other important religious traditions that have won considerable adherents in the US. However, for Black Americans, Christianity and Islam are the top two traditions by population size.

What we know is that the point of the nation’s political pendulum continues to swing mainly to the right. There is evidence that the nation’s governance is unique and troubling when compared to other historical periods. Therefore, it is in each Black American’s interest to consider and provide answers to the following four questions:

1. What are our expectations concerning our future individual and collective preferred positions in the nation and the world?
2. How do we intend to reach those positions?
3. What work are we willing to perform, and which sacrifices are we willing to make to reach our individual and collective preferred positions?
4. Given the importance of religion in producing favorable outcomes, especially economic outcomes, are we willing to consider changing our religious practice and adherence if we believe that it can assist us in reaching our preferred individual and collective positions?

We would appreciate receiving your responses to these questions very much. We believe that “renewing our mind” is the fundamental starting point for changing Black America’s condition. Because religious traditions and adherence to them are central to shaping our culture and, therefore, our mind, it is natural for us to focus intensively when assessing our religious traditions during a mind renewal process.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Sascha Becker, Jared Rubin, and Luder Woessmann (2026). “Religion and Economic Growth: What we Know and Why it Matters.” *RFBerlin Research Insights*. <https://www.rfberlin.com/research-insights/religion-and-economic-growth/> (Ret. 061826).

ⁱⁱ Brooks Robinson (2002). “Income Inequality and Ethnicity: An International View.” This paper was originally prepared for the 27th General Conference of the International Association for Research on Income and Wealth in Stockholm Sweden (Djaronset) during August 18-24, 2002. <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/iie.pdf> (Ret. 061826). This paper employs a standard panel data model for 22 nations to explore how ethnicity (defined as race, language, and religion) contributes to income inequality in nations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Besheer Muhammad, Kiana Cox, Jeff Diamant, and Claire Gecewicz (2021). “Faith Among Black Americans.” Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/02/16/faith-among-black-americans/#black-americans-more-religious-than-the-u-s-public-overall> (Ret. 062026).

^{iv} Saeed Khan (2019). “Muslims arrived in America 400 years ago as part of the slave trade and today are vastly diverse.” *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/muslims-arrived-in-america-400-years-ago-as-part-of-the-slave-trade-and-today-are-vastly-diverse-113168>. (Ret. 062056).

^v Eurostat (2007). Manual on Sources and Methods for the Compilation of COFOG Statistics. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/5901713/KS-RA-07-022-EN.PDF.pdf/42751ae2-aa62-4ed3-ba90-a92ad7d8c6d0?t=1414781385000> (Ret. 062026).

^{vi} For example, the two most important Muslim battles against their arch enemy, the Quraish, were the Battles of Badr and Uhud. It was during the Battle of Badr that the Muslims claim that God (Allah) sent angels to assist in fighting the battle (Surah 8 of the *Holy Qur’an*). The Battle of Uhud is covered in Surah 3.

^{vii} See references to the prices of various goods in shekels in the *Holy Bible* [KJV] (*Old Testament*) *Exodus* 21:32, 30:23, 30:24 and more.

^{viii} Census Bureau (2026). “Quarterly Residential Vacancies and Homeownership, First Quarter 2026.” <https://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/currenthvspress.pdf> (Ret. 062026).

^{ix} Brooks Robinson (2025). “Group Economics for Black Americans.” BlackEconomics.org. <https://www.blackeconomics.org/BELit/gefbaa112924.pdf> (Ret. 062026)

^x Ponn Mahayosnand, Gloria Gheno, Z. Sabra, and D. Sabra (2021). “Muslim-majority countries have fewer COVID-19 cases and deaths: a cross-country analysis of 165 countries during the 3 global peak dates in 2020-2021.” *HPHR Journal*. <https://bcphr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Edition-48-%E2%80%93-Muslim-majority-countries-have-fewer-COVID-19-cases-and-deaths-A-cross-country-analysis-of-165-country-during-the-3-global-peak-dates-in-2020-HPHR-Journal.pdf> (Ret. 062226).

^{xi} Authors of three additional important sources that explore the relationship between religion and successful lives are: Max Weber (1930), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; R. H. Tawney (1926) *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*; and Maxime Rodinson (1960), *Islam and Capitalism*.