

Da'wa in Manchester, the most bizarre one yet.

My daughter had business in Manchester last month, and spotted this da'wa stall setting up in the city centre.

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She couldn't stop but was able to take two photographs. She was totally bemused as to what the proselyters were on about in this big poster which they presented to the passing crowd.



The injunction about not eating pork is clear enough. A straightforward quotation from Leviticus prohibiting the meat of the pig; the Muslims are ignorant of God's instruction to Peter (Acts 10: 9-16) that anything wholesome that God has put on the earth is clean for His children to eat.

I can only imagine that the picture of King James I of England (VI of Scotland) is there to give authority to the quotations from the Bible below being from the version he authorised in 1611, which is the version they use.

I think the bit about Moses at the bottom is to make the point about the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Which Muslims insist has always existed and is the perfection of the earlier faiths, which have been corrupted from the perfection of always present Islam.



It is the bit in the middle which shows the complete lack of understanding of Christian worship. As we know Muslims dislike representations of the human form, although [representations of Mohammed](#), even ones made respectfully, produce threats. Satirical or unflattering representations produce fits of

murderous rage as seen in Paris recently.

I have been told by a Muslim that one day Jesus Christ will return and destroy the crosses, to the dismay of the 'Cross worshipers'. I could not make him understand that I do not worship the cross. I worship Jesus Christ, who died on the cross, and the presence of a cross in my church and on a chain round my neck is a symbol to remind me of His sacrifice and that He died to redeem me from my sins. Of course such an argument then brings us on to the divinity of Christ, which is not just a hard concept for anyone to understand, but to a Muslim attributing any partner to Allah is the darkest blasphemy. It follows that any pictorial representation of Christ, which we know is merely an artist's impression (possibly inspired by the Holy Spirit – and only the artist would know that) designed to educate, or inspire, or help focus prayer, could to a Muslim be interpreted as our worship of that 'graven image'.

And the middle of the poster, the bit about Pope Alexander VI and his illegitimate son the notorious Cesare Borgia is a convoluted, clutching at straws attempt to undermine and discredit Christian faith. Cesare Borgia was, unlike his great-nephew St Francis Borgia not a saintly young man and so unsaintly he didn't live to be an old man. But he was considered to be the most handsome man of his generation. And he was so notoriously violent that I don't think any rivals would have set themselves up in opposition.

There are no contemporary absolutely 100% authentic portraits of him. But there are several portraits traditionally believed to be of him, several of which are however posthumous. The best known is [this one, Portrait of a Gentleman](#), believed to be Cesare Borgia by Altobello Melone. This is the one used, or copied on the da'wa poster. On a purely prosaic level for the great artists of the day to use the son of the Pope and 'the handsomest man of his generation' as a model isn't unlikely. Even using an unsaintly man as a model for Christ

isn't out of the question.

But a conspiracy theory has grown up around the idea. I have read the suggestion that Pope Alexander VI had his son's portrait used as Christ to introduce the concept of a 'white and blue eyed' Christ, so that anyone slaughtering swarthy looking Muslims and Jews on crusade would not be reminded that they might look rather like Christ. Leave aside that the crusades were centuries earlier; there were still wars against the Ottoman Empire and the Barbary pirates. I have read the suggestion that the same use of Cesare's portrait was to introduce the idea of the 'white Jesus' and thus deprive black people of their real Jesus, who was black.

This dawa group are quoting from the apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon, on the subject of a father's grief for his son, which sounds rather like the pagans and ancestor veneration. And they suggest that Alexander dealt with his grief at Cesare's death by making him godlike. A slight catch here is that Cesare outlived his father by 4 years. But why let facts get in the way of a good conspiracy theory?

I don't know where the representation of Christ that they are using to illustrate the 'resemblance' to Cesare Borgia came from. It looks like any generic Sunday school picture, possibly Victorian. The most famous artist of the period was Leonardo da Vinci, and he is indeed one who had a lot to do with Cesare Borgia, although in the field of military engineering plans not religious imagery. Da Vinci painted two famous portraits of Christ. The [Last Supper](#) fresco and the [Salvatore Mundi](#). There is a story that when painting the last Supper da Vinci used the same model for both Christ and Judas, but with 20 years between sittings, during which (unknown to da Vinci) the upright young man had fallen into wicked ways which showed on his ravaged face. This has been debunked. The Last Supper only took 3 years to paint, not over 20 years, and being a fresco the execution did not allow for lengthy sittings as if in a studio before an easel.

The Salvatore Mundi shows a man with long hair and a beard. Long hair and beard was the conventional way to show Christ from the 7th century onwards. It was a common style in general use. Compare this [self portrait](#) by Albrecht Durer.

But note, that no matter how the bizarre allegations about pictures of Christ may be, we know they are only an aid to prayer, or an illustration to help education, or similar.

We do not riot, we do not kill, we do not rage.

Photographs S Sto Helit January 2015