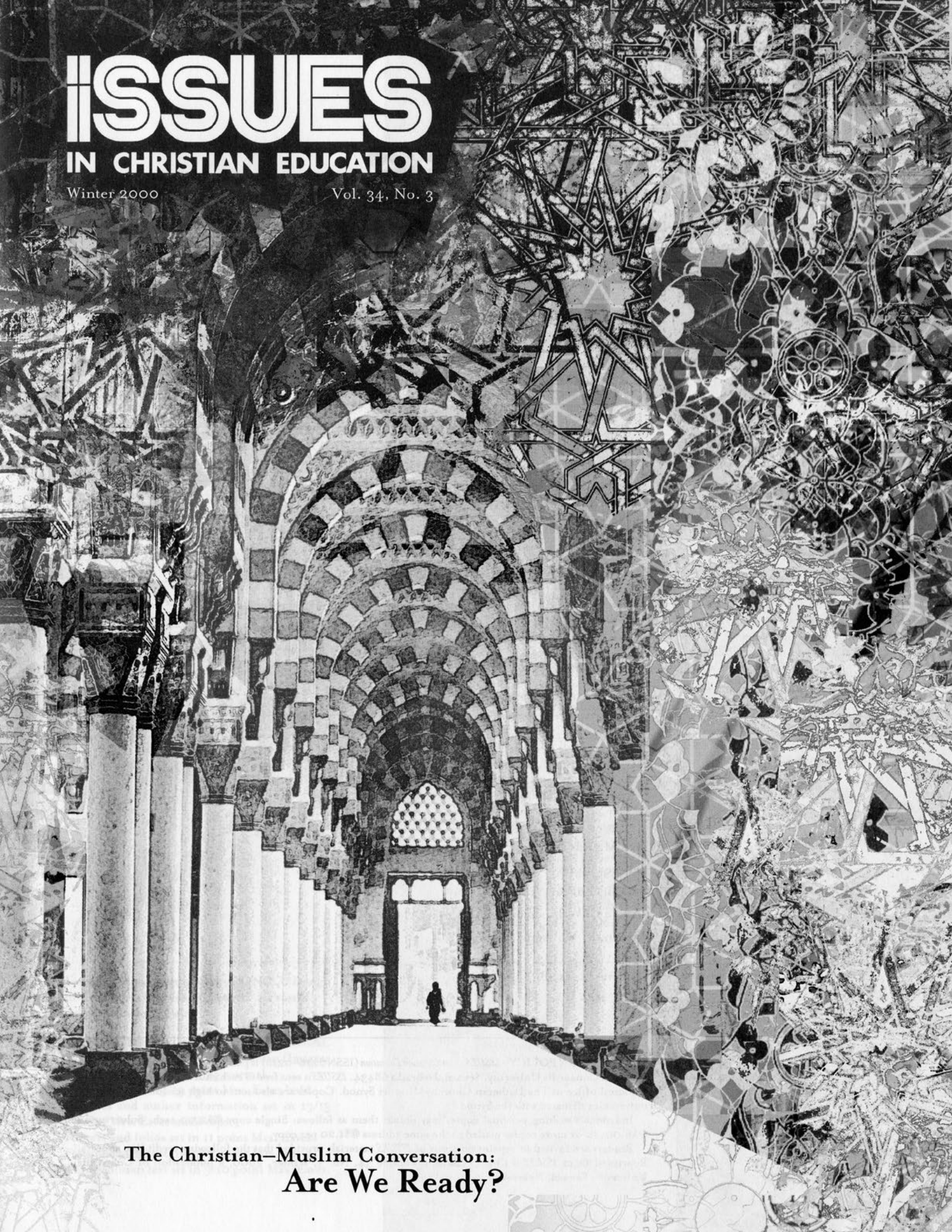


ISSUES

IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Winter 2000

Vol. 34, No. 3



The Christian–Muslim Conversation:
Are We Ready?

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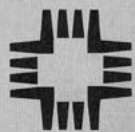
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reflections

"GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19). In earlier times, Lutherans often emphasized sharing the Gospel in far-off lands. Today one of the largest mission fields is right here in the United States.

This edition of *Issues in Christian Education* highlights our Great Commission opportunities among Muslims, in this country and beyond. Herein are historical perspectives on Islam, its origin and development, the growth of Islam in the United States, and identification of opportunities and strategies for Christians to engage in dialogue with and witness to Muslims.

Today Islam is arguably the fastest growing religion in North America and in the world as well. Islam is both a religious faith and political ideology, as well as a mark of personal and group identity.

This edition of *Issues* answers important questions: What is Islam and who are the Muslims? How should Christians respond to Muslims who ask our opinions about Muhammad? What are the five main beliefs in Islam? What are Muslim practices? How many mosques are there in the United States today? Why do Christians stutter when witnessing to Muslims?

Author Hahn reminds us: "Through this introductory presentation of Islam and our Muslim neighbor, we should find reason to thank God that Muslims too acknowledge Him alone as their Creator, Sustainer and Lord, seeing themselves as His servants, accountable to Him and in need of His forgiveness. Yet just as clear is their need to recognize Jesus the Messiah not simply as another prophet, but as their Redeemer, to hear and confess that God was in the Messiah reconciling the world to Himself, and to know themselves as His dear children."

Orville C. Walz, President

The Comprehensive Commission

Fourteen hundred years ago, Arabic people were overlooked by Christians and Jews who selectively applied the Great Commission. Left to themselves, this multiplying people group translated and interpreted the Bible, and ultimately received their instruction, vision and religion from a source other than the almighty God we serve.

We have been given a great commandment in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Every Christian is a missionary, commissioned by the Lord Himself, to share and spread His good news of salvation, a free gift for all nations. Why, then, are we so shy in proclaiming the Gospel to all nations? In contrast, Muslims and many cults are very aggressive in sharing and spreading their beliefs and practices, capturing the hearts of seekers. We can live near, work with and befriend Muslims and Hindus for many, many years and still not share our faith with them, pass a Bible to them, or invite them to our worship service.

This is a true story: While working in Saudi Arabia, my house was visited by one of my colleagues, Arun. He was an electrical engineer from India, a Hindu who lived in Dallas, Texas, for 35 years. While sitting in my living room, he noticed books on Islam, especially *The Traditions of Mohammad*. He asked, "If you're a Christian, why do you keep these books?" He told me that he has read all nine volumes of *The Traditions of Mohammad*.

I was surprised! These were expensive and not easily accessible items in the market. Adding to my surprise, Arun told me of his Lebanese neighbor in Texas who had purchased this set of books and given them to Arun as a gift for Christmas.

"Have you ever read the Bible?" I asked Arun.

"No," he replied. "Nobody has ever given me one."

Why is it that on Christmas Eve, this Muslim, a foreigner, found a gift of his sacred books, bought them and gave them as a present to a Hindu neighbor, while no one has presented a single Bible to the Hindu neighbor in 35 years. He was overlooked by people who had been given the Great Commission.

Islam sprouted in the midst of a Christian world. A century and a half later, it is taking deep root in our own country with a Christian heritage. Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion in North America. This is not happening because of the effectiveness of its message, but because of the effectiveness of sharing. In contrast, we must humbly admit that Christ's own church, including The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, has not matched the Muslim level of intention, commitment and effort to "spread the news."

It is time to do our part. Awareness and education will help. Equipping our youth for their emerging cultural future will help. However, let us not put off our responsibility another day waiting for these to happen, because *today* we can do something different. The first step in reaching out to a Muslim is communicating and building a relationship. The second step is sharing the Gospel message and passing the written Word to the people in the language of their hearts. You and I can give the greatest Christmas present our ethnic neighbors may ever receive. As keepers of our Lord's Great Commission, we must not be selective.

Khurram Kham, Deacon
People of the Book Lutheran Outreach

Setting an Example

Over the decades Palestine has been a special place of encounter between people of different cultural, religious and social backgrounds. Its geographic location, which is a crossroad of Asia, Europe and Africa, helped Palestine become a meeting point between the various groups. Two thousand years ago the first Christian congregation was established in this country. Over the centuries Christians in this part of the world have kept the Christian faith alive in good as well as in bad times. In the seventh century, Islam came to this country. In contrast to other countries in the world as well as in the region, Christians welcomed Islam in this country, expressing through their welcome a unique example of tolerance and respect. The story of the meeting between the Kalif Omar, who entered Jerusalem in the seventh century, and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sofronious, and their Memorandum of understanding have influenced the Christian Muslim relations in this country over the centuries. Although 14 centuries have passed, people still talk about the fact that the Kalif Omar refused to pray in the Church of Jerusalem but rather chose to pray nearby in order not to give people in the future a chance to claim the Church as a mosque.

Such an example of tolerance and respect is urgently needed in these days. In the 21st century the Christian-Muslim relationship in Palestine continues to be one of mutual tolerance and respect. In a time where this relationship is characterized worldwide by a mere academic dialog, respect for one another in Palestine is evident in many day-to-day encounters. Two recent examples come to mind.

1. During the visit of Pope John Paul II to Palestine and the Mass on Manger Square, the noon prayer at the Umar Mosque was postponed for a few minutes in order for the Pope to finish his sermon. This change was deeply appreciated by the local Christians, who know that in Islam prayer times are kept and cannot be changed in any circumstances. Patriarch Michael Sabbah commented on this event saying, "His Holiness has greeted the local population of Bethlehem with 'Peace be upon you' and the Sheik of the Mosque responded to this greeting with another peace greeting."

2. A few weeks ago I read an article in one of the local newspapers written by a Muslim entitled "Will Palestine be Palestine without its Christian Population?" The writer of the article was addressing the issue of the ongoing emigration among Christians in Palestine, due to both political and economic situations. His point was that all efforts should be undertaken to safeguard the Christian presence in Palestine in order for Palestine not to lose its living soul.

3. Our Lutheran schools, since their establishment about 150 years ago, have opened their doors to all Palestinian children regardless of their religious, ethnic or social background. Over the decades Christians and Muslims have been educated together in the spirit of love, respect and tolerance. On Christmas Eve of last year a young female student stood in front of the altar of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem singing the Christmas carol, "O, Little Town of Bethlehem." It was her choice to give glory to the born child of Bethlehem by singing in Arabic. The fact she was a Muslim was even more powerful for the local congregation in revealing Jesus' words: "Let all children come to me."

These are but some examples of the day-to-day Christian-Muslim encounter in Palestine. As Christian Palestinians we do believe that one will know us by our deeds rather than by only words. Therefore, in meeting people of other faiths, we witness our faith by recognizing that all human beings were created in the image of God, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and by setting an example for others to follow, just as we have followed Jesus' example in his encounter with the Samaritan woman not far from Bethlehem about 2,000 years ago.

Viola Raheb

Director of the Lutheran Schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and staff member of the International Center of Bethlehem

The Gospel, Answer to the Challenges of Islam

When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on earth? (Luke 18:8)

It took centuries for Christianity to spread throughout the world. Islam in less than a century conquered much of the world from China in the east to Spain in the west. Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world, tripling in number in less than half a century. In 1952 there were 250,000,000 Muslims in the world. Twenty-three years later, there were 500,000,000 Muslims. Today there are approximately one billion Muslims in the world. Syria, once known for a strong Gospel outreach, has a population which is 90 percent Muslim. In modern Turkey, places such as Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia and Bithynia, named in 1 Peter, are largely Muslim. In a country known as Christian Island, about 5,000 Christians are being converted to Islam every year. It is no wonder that Jesus once asked, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on earth?"

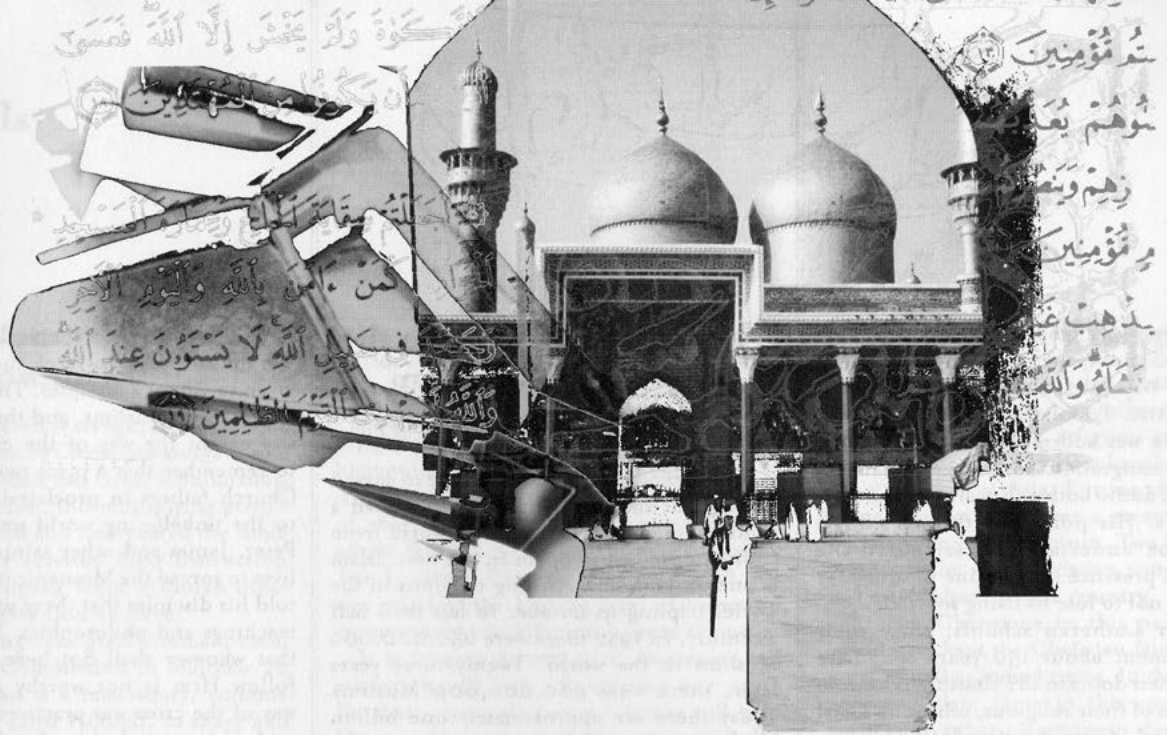
A basic belief of Islam states, "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight you." Jesus said, "Do not resist the evil; if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other" (Matthew 5:39). Islam is strongly mission-minded, willing to pay any price, exert financial pressure, engage in a holy war (*Jihad*), or do whatever it takes to bring a non-believer under the authority of Islam. It seems as though in the last half-century the window of heaven has opened for the Middle East, with sheiks, rulers or emirates influencing world economies through their oil. People are flocking from many parts of the world to the Middle East countries to share in the wealth. In developing countries, many exchange their names for Muslim identities such as Mohammad, Kadir or Kemal, and for women, Fatuma or Kedija. The Islamic religion claims everybody to be Islam by birth. From the time one understands that Allah is the one and only god, he is considered and automatically accepted as Islam. Many have strayed from the truth by saying that they are Christians in their hearts, but that they need to earn their daily bread by using an Islamic name. Christians are easily attracted by the Middle Eastern wealth and apply to enter Islamic states for better job opportunities.

What can be done? The challenges are many, but the authority to reach the unreached is given to Christ's disciples. There is no short cut to reach Muslims, and there is no other way except the way of the cross. We need to remember that a price paid by our early Church fathers in proclaiming the Gospel to the unbelieving world was costing Paul, Peter, James and other saints of God their lives to spread the Messianic truth. Jesus had told his disciples that there will appear false teachings and philosophies. He also taught that whoever shall not bear his cross and follow Him is not worthy of Him. This way of the cross was practiced by Paul, who said, "I have worked harder, been in prison frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again" (2 Corinthians 11:23). As the Psalmist states, "He who goes out weeping to sow the seed will return with songs of joy" (Psalm 126:6).

We have the full knowledge that no one has died to save others but Jesus. He paid the bitter price of our sin on the cross to save us from eternal death. He who believes the Son has life, and the Lord will raise him in the last day. Islam makes earthly promises, similar to the promise made to Ishmael, born of a slave (Genesis 17:20). In the Scriptures, the living God makes eternal promises that are good for now and forever, making His covenant with the son Isaac, born of the free woman, and the last promised son of Abraham, Jesus (Genesis 17:21 and Galatians 4:23). The promise of resurrection is true for those who are buried in baptism with Christ (Romans 6:4). The Gospel of a living Lord is the answer to the challenges of Islam.

Berhanu Moges

Graduate Student
Concordia University, Seward, Nebraska



ERNEST HAHN

Islam: Origin and Development

WHAT IS ISLAM and who are the Muslims? In its broadest sense "Islam" means "submission", submission to Allah (God) and to His will. Muslims are people who surrender themselves to God, who practice Islam. Both terms, "Islam" and "Muslim" are related to *salam* (peace) and share the common Arabic root, *salam*.

In turn, *salam* reminds us of *shalom* and the traditional relationship that exists between Jews and Arabs (and all Muslims) and their languages, Hebrew and Arabic. *As-salamu alaikum* ("Peace be with you") is how Muslims ought to greet Muslims, and how they may greet you and how you may greet them. After all, despite the centuries of frayed relationships between Muslims and Christians, both communities should wish the other God's peace, should they not?

DR. ERNEST HAHN SERVED AS A MISSIONARY IN INDIA FOR 25 YEARS, WORKING AMONG MUSLIMS AND HINDUS. AFTER RETURNING TO MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO, HE AND HIS WIFE GRETA BEGAN PHILOXENIA/HOSPITALITY, A MINISTRY AMONG ASIANS, WHICH ALSO AIMS TO HELP CHRISTIANS TO UNDERSTAND AND RELATE TO PEOPLES OF DIFFERENT CULTURES AND RELIGIONS. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF *Muslims: How to Respond*.

Arabia at the Time of Muhammad

Even before the time of Muhammad, the Byzantine and Persian Empires were fighting each other for control of Arabia, including the vital trade routes between East and West. At that time most Arabs were Bedouins, nomad tribesmen, settled throughout Arabia. Other Arabs had settled in towns such as Mecca and Medina and were skilled in commerce and politics. Muslim historians, while generally recognizing some of the pre-Islamic virtues of the Arabs, have described Arab society of that day as *Jahiliyyah* (barbarism, ignorance), an age characterized by idolatry and moral corruption. The Arabs acknowledged Allah as creator and supreme ruler, yet in practice they concerned themselves more with the prevailing animistic practices or with inferior deities, such as the daughters of Allah mentioned in the Qur'an (53:19-21).¹ Was not Allah Himself too high, too inaccessible? These deities could be worshipped in special sanctuaries. One of these, the *Ka'bah*, famous also for its Black Stone, was located in Mecca.

The Qur'an also speaks about the presence of Jews and Christians in Arabia at that time. Several Jewish tribes, with whom Muhammad had close contact, resided in Medina as agriculturists and industrialists. A few Arab tribes had become Christian. In addition the Qur'an

speaks of Hanifs, individual Arabs who had abandoned polytheism in favor of worshipping God alone. The Qur'an calls Abraham a *Hanif* and a *Muslim*, noting also that he was neither a Jew nor a Christian.

To understand Muhammad's ministry and much of the Qur'an's content, and even to appreciate difficulties which Muslims have with the Gospel today, it is imperative to have some grasp of the status of religion among the Arabs at the time of Muhammad.

Muhammad, the Apostle of Islam

It is generally accepted that Muhammad was born in Mecca about 570 A.D. to the Banu Hashim clan of the influential Arab Quraysh tribe. The Qur'an indicates he was an orphan and a pagan (93:6-8). Tradition surrounds his early life with miracles. Muhammad's father, Abdullah, died before his birth, followed by his mother's death six years later. Eventually his uncle, Abu Talib, cared for him and probably took him on trading expeditions to Syria. Eventually he married a wealthy Meccan widow, Khadijah, who had engaged him to conduct her business and had been impressed with his abilities and faithfulness, though she was probably some 15 years older than he. As long as she lived, she was Muhammad's only wife.

The *Hadith* (Muslim Canonical Tradition) relates that on one occasion, when Muhammad was 40 years old and meditating at Mt. Hira, he received a divine call to prophethood and was commanded to recite the initial revelation of the Qur'an:

Read: In the name of thy Lord who createth,
Createth man from a clot.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teacheth by the pen,
Teacheth man that which he knew not.
(Qur'an 96:1-5)

God, through the angel Gabriel, had summoned Muhammad to call upon his fellow Arabs in their own language of Arabic to forsake their idols and to worship God alone, just as He had summoned a multitude of prophets in the past to address their respective nations. For the next 23 years until his death Muhammad continued to receive and to mediate such

revelations. These revelations now compose the Qur'an.

Muhammad's fellow Meccans hardly welcomed his new message. They began to view him as a threat to their leadership, commerce and traditional manner of life. The Qur'an itself is replete with references to their charges against Muhammad, his claims on behalf of the resurrection of the dead and final day of judgment, and his defense of himself. As Meccan opposition intensified, most of Muhammad's few followers, especially those who lacked strong tribal support, found refuge in Abyssinia, a Christian nation where the Negus treated them kindly.²

When Muhammad's own situation deteriorated after the death of Khadijah and his uncle Abu Talib, he accepted an invitation to settle in Medina, where most of his followers soon joined him. His emigration (*hijrah*) from Mecca to Medina, in the company of his lieutenant and eventual successor, Abu Bakr, in 622 A.D., marks the beginning of the official Islamic calendar and a new and decisive thrust in the development of the Muslim community and its religious and political ascendancy.

In Medina, Muhammad found a welcome and resources to carry on his mission to spread Islam, a task which virtually kept him in conflict with his enemies until he had subdued most of the peoples of Arabia before his death. Through a prolonged series of caravan raids and several battles, he was able to overcome all opposition from the Meccans, and in 630 A.D., he entered Mecca as victor and ruler. When he arrived at the *Ka'bah*, then the symbol of idolatry, he ordered that all the idols in it be destroyed and that it again be dedicated to God alone. A new era had begun and still continues.

Truth hath come and falsehood
hath vanished away.
Lo! Falsehood is ever bound to vanish.
(17:81; cf. 28:85)

When Muhammad first met the Jews in Medina, he recognized them as a separate community who had been favored by God and hoped they would accept him as a prophet. Though a few did accept him, most of them rejected him. Eventually Muhammad defeated them in battles and dispossessed them of their lands. Finally

they were driven out of Arabia.

Just before his death in 632 A.D. Muhammad returned to Mecca for his farewell pilgrimage. Tradition points to this event as the occasion for, some would say, the final words of the Qur'an:

This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion *Al-Islam*. (5:3)

The Status of Muhammad

According to the Qur'an Muhammad is a prophet, an apostle, a warner. He is the unlettered prophet, an indication for many Muslims that the illiterate Muhammad could not have invented the glorious Qur'an, the world's greatest literary masterpiece; God had inspired him to recite it! The *Tawrat* and the *Injil* (the Bible) prophesy his coming (7:157; 61:6). The faithful who obey Muhammad obey God. They are to prefer the prophet's life above their own. He is a prophet for all nations and the seal of the prophets, i.e., the final prophet. (33:40)

Yet the Qur'an also describes Muhammad as "nothing new among messengers" (46:9), a mortal and a slave; once a pagan (93:7); responsible for himself only; a doubter; a sinner; in fear of judgment. (6:15, 115: 47:19)

Later generations of Muslims elaborated on his high status. Al-Ghazali, one of Islam's greatest theologians, noted how Muhammad, empowered by God, miraculously prophesied, healed the sick and fed the multitudes, all signs pointing to the everlasting miracle of the Qur'an. He also described Muhammad as the most virtuous and most noble of God's creation in rank and power.³

Today also among many Muslims it is common to celebrate Muhammad as the perfect man (*insan-i kamil*), the Light of God and the embodiment of Truth, in a manner that may leave Muhammad resembling an Arian Christ. Little wonder, then, that in the most common of Islamic confessions, "There is no deity but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger," the name of Muhammad alone is proclaimed alongside that of God. Throughout the centuries, Muslims have reserved the

prayer: "God bless him and grant him peace" for Muhammad alone. They consider him to be the greatest person who ever lived. There are those who continue to invite evidence to prove it.

How, then, can we respond to Muslims who ask our opinions about Muhammad? No doubt, in the past especially, Christians have often spoken carelessly and unfairly about Muhammad (and Islam), to say the least. Surely we should inform ourselves better about him before we venture judgments about him. Likewise, we should be ready to acknowledge his extraordinary influence upon world history.

If the issue of comparison between Jesus and Muhammad arises, invite your Muslim friend to study at least portions of the New Testament before you engage in serious conversation on this topic. Then your friend will better understand your response, more so if you both establish what constitutes greatness in Islam and in Christianity. (cf. Mark 9:33-37; 10:35-45)

Sources of Islam

Muslims generally accept that Islam is based on four sources, the first two sources being the principal ones: The Qur'an, the Hadith (Muslim Canonical Tradition), *ijma'* (community consensus) and *qiyas* (analogy).

The Qur'an. In the language of the Qur'an, the Qur'an is a heavenly Scripture which comes from God, consists of recited revelations, and is revealed to Muhammad through the mediation of the angel Gabriel, whom Muslims usually understand to be the holy Spirit (2:97; 16:102). For most Muslims the Qur'an is the perfect revelation of God, perfect in content, language and style. It is the eternal Word of God, not the word of man. One may notice that what Jesus as the Word of God enfleshed is to Christians, the Qur'an as the Word of God embodied is to Muslims.

The Qur'an is composed of 114 surahs (or chapters), the longer followed by the shorter and in no chronological order. The earlier, shorter and more poetic surahs originated when Muhammad was in Mecca. In the Qur'an they follow the later, longer and less poetic Medina surahs. Yet *Surah Fatihah*, a short surah

and the most famous, is found at the beginning of the Qur'an and recited in all formal prayer:

Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
The Beneficent, the Merciful.
Owner of the Day of Judgment,
Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone)
we ask for help.
Show us the straight path,
The path of those whom
Thou hast favored;
Not (the path) of those who earn Thine
anger nor of those who go astray.

What, then, about the collection and transmission of the text of the Qur'an? According to a recently published edition of the Qur'an:

So well has it (the Qur'an) been preserved both in memory and in writing that the Arabic text we have today is identical to the text as it was revealed to the Prophet. Not even a single letter has yielded to corruption during the passage of the centuries. And so it will remain forever, by the consent of Allah.⁴

Yet despite this claim for the perfect status of the Qur'an, the Hadith and other Muslim Qur'an commentary clearly indicate that the official codification of the Qur'an took place only during the caliphate of Uthman, the third successor of Muhammad, some 20 years after the death of Muhammad. Moreover, the existence of other collections of the Qur'an clearly antedated and differed from Uthman's *textus receptus*, not to speak of other textual problems such as a defective Arabic script which lacked at the time clear representation of consonants and vowels.

In any case, let the reader be aware that the sensitivity Muslims have toward the status of the Qur'an is much like their sensitivity toward Muhammad. While many Muslims welcome historical-critical methodology when applied to the Bible, they generally resent this method being applied to the Qur'an. Yet somehow we must encourage both Muslims and Christians to go beyond any "battle of the books" to a serious study of both the Bible and the Qur'an by reading them and not just about them!

The Hadith. After the death of Muhammad, the Muslim community became increasingly

aware of the limitation of the guidance that even the Qur'an provided as the community expanded and confronted more complex civilizations and problems. For further guidance they looked to the *sunnah* (path) of especially Muhammad, even as the Qur'an itself directed them:

Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example of him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much. (33:21; cf. 33:36)

Given Muhammad's unique position as prophet, legislator, ruler, judge and other roles, it came as no surprise that in the course of time pious Muslims compiled accounts of his actions and sayings. Such an account is called a Hadith, that is, path or tradition.

Eventually, out of literally hundreds of thousands of traditions, the Muslim community accepted several collections of them, especially those of Bukhari and Muslim. They provide much indispensable information about the Qur'an and its interpretation as well as the circumstances surrounding many of its revelations. They also provide the details about Muhammad that have allowed innumerable Muslims to follow strictly the pattern of the prophet, *an imitatio Muhammadi*. Yet some Muslims, as well as some Westerners, have strongly questioned the credibility of portions of the Hadith with reference to both their content and their transmission. A few historians dismiss them altogether.

Most Muslims recognize the Hadith as the voice of the prophet and as an inspired voice and second source of Islam. It is said that Islam is the Qur'an; however, Islam is more than the Qur'an!

Ijma' (community consensus). A third source of Islam, *Ijma'*, also finds its sanction in the Qur'an: "We (God) have made you a normal (normative?) people" (2:143). A Hadith also legitimizes it: "My people will never agree in an error." Thus the Muslim community, itself authenticated, can authenticate the Qur'an and the Hadith. In this capacity the total Muslim community is democratically represented, though in practice the *'ulama'* (Islamic scholars) make the decisions.

Qiyas (analogy). An indication of its sanction is based on a Hadith in which Muhammad commends a Muslim judge for resorting to his own judgment after failing to find a clear directive to a problem in the Qur'an and the Hadith.

From these four sources the *shari'ah* (Islamic law, the duties prescribed by God) is derived. In contrast to all human codes of law, the *shari'ah* is God's law, the perfect manifestation of God's will for humanity. It regulates the whole of life, disdaining any distinction between the sacred and secular. It allows Muslims to become and to be truly God's community, God's people (*ummah*), Quranically "the best community that has been raised up for mankind" (3:110). Generally speaking, Sunni Muslims have recognized these four orthodox schools of law and differ from the Shi'i school of law.⁵

Islam's Principal Beliefs and Practices

BELIEFS. The five main beliefs in Islam appear in the following Quranic verse:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West, but righteous is he who believeth in Allah and the Last Day and the angels and the Scriptures and the Prophets. . . (2:177)

Allah. The name *Allah* means simply "the God," a designation which is not exclusively Islamic or Quranic. The Arabic Bible calls God "Allah"; so also Arab Christians called God "Allah" before the time of Muhammad. From the Qur'an it is clear that the pagan Arabs prior to Muhammad correctly acknowledged Allah as the high God. Their error was that they acknowledged other deities in addition to Allah. To grasp this vital distinction is to grasp the essential declaration of the Qur'an: "Not any God (*la ilaha*) except He (Allah)" and the reason why Islam's fundamental creed begins with a negative.

The Qur'an constantly points to creation and history, as well as to Scripture, as signs pointing to God. Muslims know Him—or about Him—through His Beautiful Names and attributes. The Qur'an strongly testifies to His qualities manifested in relation to creation and

humanity, to whom He entrusts the earth: He is Creator and preserver of all; the Merciful and Compassionate; the Lord of the Day of Resurrection and Judgment.

Yet while God is called the Kindly, the Clement and the Loving, He is also called the Tyrant and the Haughty. He guides, but He also leads astray. What, then, gives unity and consistency to God's names, actions and relations? It is His will. Indeed, orthodox Muslims have concluded that God is sovereign Lord. He alone creates both good and evil. He creates what He wills. So also He guides and leads astray whomever He wills.

Other Muslims counter, "Does not the Qur'an describe God as just and fair?" How often the Qur'an declares people accountable to God! If, however, God leads people astray, how can He justly call them to account for their "astrayness," their sin? Does not, should not, God do what is best for His creatures? The following verse illustrates the difficulty:

Lo! Allah changeth not the condition of a folk until they (first) change that which is in their hearts; and if Allah willeth misfortune for a folk there is none that can repel it, nor have they a defender beside Him. (13:11)⁶

It is on the basis of the traditional Muslim's understanding of God's uniqueness and transcendence that Muslims reject the incarnation of Jesus, the Messiah. For Muslims the following Quranic passage confirms their rejection:

Say: He is Allah, the One!
Allah, the eternally Besought of all;
He begetteth not nor was begotten.
And there is none comparable unto Him. (112)

Angels. They too are the creation of God and God's servants, who praise God unceasingly, support His throne, expel demons and record the acts of all people. Under God they serve humanity as guardians and helpers. Jibril (Gabriel), known also as the holy Spirit, mediates God's revelations to God's messengers.

Apostles and Prophets. God inspires them from all nations of the world to proclaim His Word to their respective nations in their own languages. The Qur'an refers to a number of them, most of them Biblical characters, the

most significant being Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Muhammad is the final messenger, and hence for most Muslims the greatest of them all.

The Islamic portrayal of Jesus is based on several references to Jesus in the Qur'an, most of them brief and scattered throughout the Qur'an. For Muslims Jesus (*Isa*) is an apostle and prophet like other apostles and prophets. He is the son of the Virgin Mary (the only woman mentioned by name in the Qur'an), but not the Son of God, for God has no consort or child (6:101, 102). Yet the Qur'an also calls Jesus the Messiah (*Masih*), the Spirit of God and the Word of God with all these designations understood Islamically. He heals the sick, gives sight to the blind and life to the dead. He has disciples as helpers. He proclaims that God is one and that he is only a servant of God. He prophesies the coming of Muhammad (61:6).

When Jesus' enemies tried to crucify him, God rescued him and took him to heaven, where he continues to reside. (Many Muslims would add that someone, perhaps Judas Iscariot, was crucified in the place of Jesus.) From there, according to the Hadith, prior to the final day he will come again to earth, continue his ministry, marry, break all the crosses and destroy the swine. He will die and be buried in Medina to await the Day of Resurrection. Thus, on this basis, Muslims are able to dispose of the death of Jesus on Calvary, both the event itself and the significance of the event, as well as Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day. Like all messengers he mediates God's guidance; he does not redeem. He proclaims the message but He Himself is not the message.

Scriptures. The Qur'an frequently refers to Jews and Christians, calling them the People of the Book. Moses receives the *Tawrat* (Torah), David receives the *Zabur* (Psalms) and Jesus receives the *Injil* (Evangel). As all Muslims must believe in all the messengers of God, so they must believe in all His Scriptures. Yet the belief of many Muslims in these Scriptures is severely qualified. Somehow, in the past, they insist, the Scriptures now known as the Bible have been corrupted and are now trustworthy only to the extent that they conform with the message of the Qur'an and testify to the coming of Muham-

mad, all this despite the strong Quranic evidence in support of the integrity, preservation and availability of these previous Scriptures. Thus, Muslims hold Islam to be the last of God's revelations and, therefore, the continuation, the correction and culmination of Judaism, Christianity and other previous revelations of God.

The Day of Resurrection and Judgment

(Surahs 74,76). The Qur'an continually mentions these events and warns all people that there is no escape from them. God is aware of the thoughts and actions of all, and each must bear his/her own burden. It is His decision to determine who goes to heaven or hell, both graphically portrayed in the Qur'an.

How then is one saved according to Islam? In Islam, idolatry is the sole unforgivable sin. The Qur'an continually speaks about the need for faith and good works. Their faith and good works, the faithful hope, will outweigh their sins. Some Muslims seek the intercession of Muhammad or even of Muslim saints, or they trust that their membership within the *ummah* will save them. Others may rely on their repentance for God's forgiveness and His overwhelming mercy. Yet whatever their means to attain salvation, virtually all Muslims will add: "If God will." For when God alone determines the destiny of all, they can be sure only when their destiny is upon them. Only the martyr can be assured of salvation.

PRACTICES.

Confession (*shahadah*). Every Muslim must proclaim with pure intention Islam's fundamental confession: "There is no god except God and Muhammad is His messenger." The faithful are to believe in God and to obey Him and His messenger Muhammad.

Prayer (*salat, namaz*). Muslims are required to pray their ritual prayers five times daily. Before prayer they perform appropriate absolutions; during prayer they face Mecca. Normally the faithful join together to perform these prayers at fixed times, five times daily, in the mosque. A prayer leader leads the congregation in prayer. On Friday, the special day for prayer, he preaches a sermon. Some mosques provide special space for women. Muslims, of course, are to engage in personal prayer also.

Alms (*zakat*)

Lo! Those who read the Scripture of Allah, and establish worship, and spend of that which We have bestowed on them secretly and openly, they look forward to imperishable gain. . . (35:29; cf. 9:60)

After Muhammad the Muslim community developed a more complex system of *zakat* and other forms of benevolence and tax collecting. One writer, following the suggestion of others, states: "*Zakat*, correctly applied, appears to be a protective measure against both capitalism and communism. . ."⁷ Generally *zakat* is used in support of the Muslim community.

Fasting (*sawm, roza*; cf. 2:183-185). During daytime throughout Ramadan, the ninth month of Islam's 12-month lunar year, Muslims are to abstain from food, drink, smoking and sexual intercourse. Those such as the sick, the pregnant and travellers are exempted, though they should somehow eventually compensate. Many Muslims value the fast as a physical and spiritual discipline, a way of controlling the passions. It can be understood as "the gateway to divine service" and "the most fitting atonement for sins committed in the course of the year."⁸ After daylight disappears, the fast is broken. The Festival of the Breaking of the Fast is a time of great rejoicing.

Pilgrimage (*hajj*). All adult Muslims, male and female and physically and financially able, are expected to participate at least once in a lifetime in the Great Pilgrimage which takes place yearly in the 12th and final month of the Islamic calendar. It includes a visit to Islam's central mosque in Mecca, the circumambulation of the Ka'bah, located in the middle of the mosque, and the kissing of the Black Stone in a corner of the Ka'bah. The hajj is designed to stimulate the strong sense of community among Muslims scattered throughout the world and to revitalize memories of those holy persons and events linked so closely with Islam's sacred history, including Abraham and Ishmael. Muslims sometimes perform the Lesser Pilgrimage (*'Umrah*) and also visit Muhammad's grave in Medina.

The Muslim Community Islam's Universality

And whoso seeketh as religion other than the Surrender (*al-Islam*) (to Allah) it will not be accepted from him, and he will be a loser in the Hereafter. (3:85)

However one interprets this and similar passages in the Qur'an, it is evident that from the time of Muhammad onward Muslims have understood the mission of Islam to be a universal mission, free from geographical or ethnic impediments. Within a century after the death of Muhammad, Islam had become an empire greater than the Roman Empire. Despite periodical setbacks from without and within, it kept expanding through conquest (*jihād*), yet also through the witness of Muslim merchants and members of Sufi orders committed to its spread.

Today Islam is represented on every continent and is especially entrenched in equatorial regions from North Africa to the Philippines. Though Indonesia has the largest Muslim population of any Muslim nation, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India combined claim about one-third of the world's Muslims. About one-quarter of the Muslim world is Arab. Significant numbers of Muslims continue to come to Europe, North America and South America. Throughout the world they now number about 1.2 billion, about one-fifth of the total population of the world. Currently their numbers are doubling about every 25 years.

Muslims and People of Other Religions

Historically, Muslims divide the world into three groups:

The Muslim community (*ummah*). Muslims regulate their lives according to the *shari'ah* and thus view themselves as God's people, the visible expression of God's Kingdom on earth.

The People of the Book, i.e., Jews, Christians and others with a holy book recognized by Muslims. The *shari'ah* views these people as subject people, inferior to Muslims, yet with some independence on condition of their payment of a tax (*jizya*). A Muslim is allowed to marry a

Jewish or Christian woman; however, a Muslim woman can marry a Muslim man only. Islamically also, Muslims are not to force members of the People of the Book to become Muslims.

Polytheists. According to the *shari'ah* they are inferior to Muslims and to the People of the Book; traditionally, they are called to convert to Islam or to forfeit their lives.

Muslims have also viewed the world as divided into "the House of Islam" (where Islam prevails) and "the House of War" (where Islam does not prevail). While many Muslims understand *jihād* to be only defensive war against non-Muslims, technically it also signifies war against non-Muslims until world sovereignty is in the hands of Muslims.

Divisions in Islam

The Muslim community, like the Christian community, is a divided community. The two main divisions are:

Sunni Muslims. They follow the *sunnah* (path) of Muhammad as delineated in the Hadith, and they form about 90 percent of the total Muslim community. While Sunni Muslims often display strong community unity, political and theological differences divide them also.

Shi'i Muslims. The major conflict between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims focused on who was to succeed Muhammad. Shi'i Muslims rejected the first three successors of Muhammad. They insisted that Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad and hence a member of Muhammad's family, should have succeeded Muhammad as the leader (*imam*) of the Muslim community and in turn Ali's descendants should succeed Ali. According to Shi'i Islam the imams themselves are endowed with superhuman qualities and are therefore also infallible interpreters of the infallible Qur'an.

Shi'i Muslims are openly divided. While all agree on the centrality of the imamate, they differ about the identity of the later imams. By far the largest segment of Shi'i Muslims, "The Twelvers," live in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon and on the Asian subcontinent. The Ismailis, including the Agha Khanis, are also Shi'i Muslims.

Surfism is less a division than a penitential and mystic movement within Islam, which may

influence both Shi'i and Sunni Muslims.

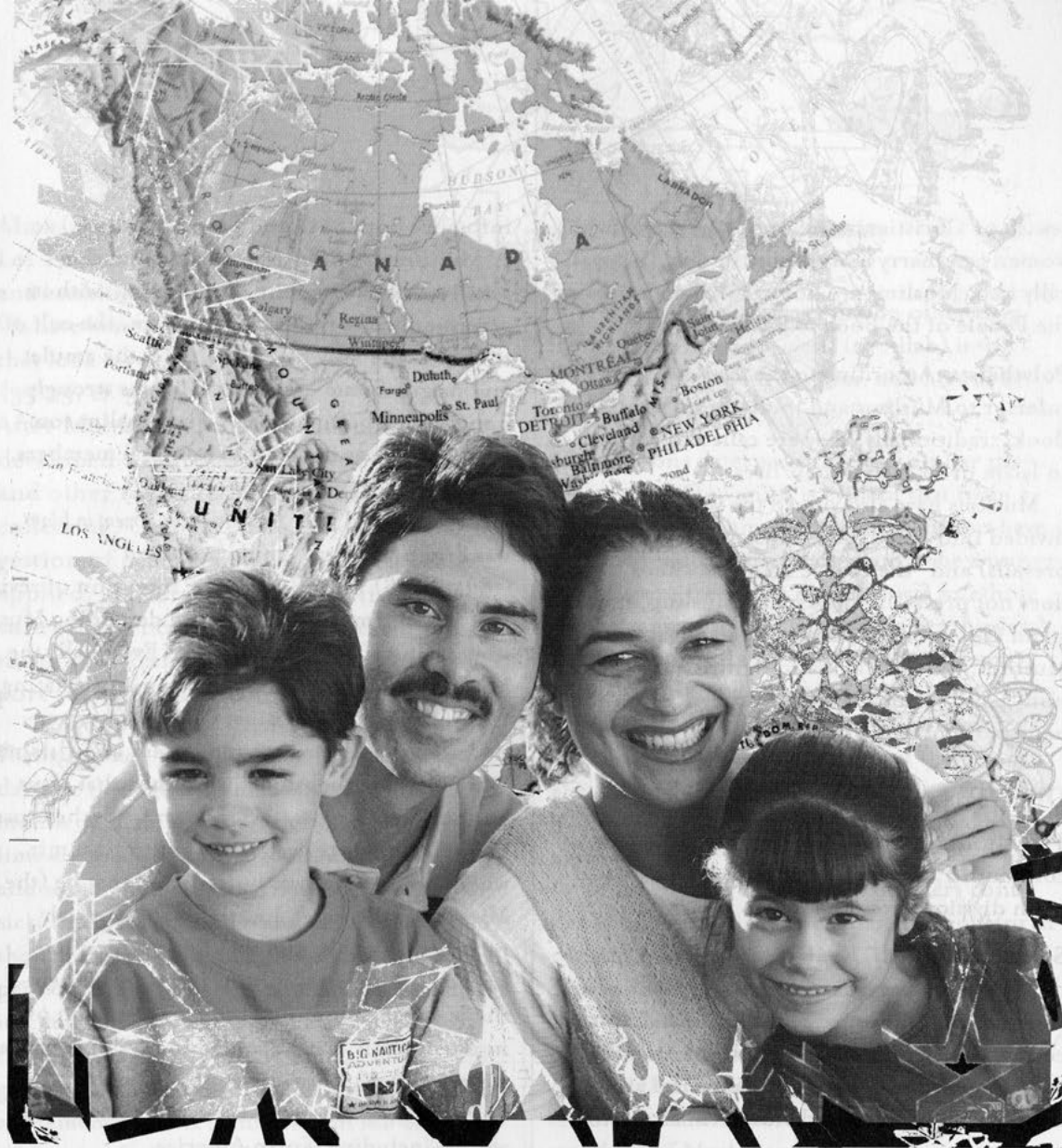
Multitudes of Muslims throughout the Muslim world engage in "folk Islam," with its accent on tribal tradition, animism, the cult of the saint, the holy place, the relic, the amulet and magic. Some orthodox Muslims strongly oppose such popular piety. The Muslim community also has its share of nominal members.

Other Groups. The *Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam* was begun by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) in India with the intention of reviving the Muslim community and defending Muslims against Christian missions. Eventually the Muslim community, though often appreciating the Ahmadi attacks against Christianity, pronounced the Ahmadiyya movement as unIslamic. Why? Because the Ahmadis claimed that Jesus was put on the cross, taken down from the cross before he died, revived and went to Kashmir where he died and was buried; and that he (the Mirza) was the *mahdi*, i.e., Jesus the Messiah returned to earth, and that he was the avatar of the Hindu deity Vishnu. Just as resolutely the Muslim community rejected the claim of most Ahmadis that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was a prophet. Both Ahmadi groups (Qadianis and Lahoris) have missions in various parts of the world, including North America.

The *Druz* (Druses) and *Baha'i World Faith*, both with roots in Shi'i Islam, have their own scriptures. The *Druz* movement considers the Fatimid caliph of Egypt, al-Hakim, to be divine, and await his return as conqueror and judge of the world. *Baha'i World Faith* views their leader, Bahauallah, as the latest of God's manifestations and, therefore, a prophet superseding Muhammad. Hence both movements do not consider themselves, or are considered by others, as part of the Muslim community.

Conclusion

Through this introductory presentation of Islam and our Muslim neighbor, we should find reason to thank God that Muslims too acknowledge Him alone as their Creator, Sustainer and Lord and see themselves as His servants, accountable to Him and in need of His forgiveness.⁹ Yet just as clear is their need to recognize Jesus the Messiah not simply (*continued on back cover*)



JAMES P. DRETKE

The Growth of Islam in the United States

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Unexpected Places—Unlikely Peoples

THEY SETTLED IN UNEXPECTED PLACES like Ross, North Dakota; Belzoni, Mississippi; Biddeford, Maine; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Michigan City, Indiana; and New Castle, Pennsylvania.

They came from a variety of nationalities. They were originally Albanians, Lebanese, Syrians, Asian Tartars from Poland, and Yugoslavians. They quietly settled into farming in some places, opened businesses in others, worked in factories elsewhere. They began coming in the late 1800s, their communities steadily growing until 1924. They had been preceded, as early as 1717, by Muslim slaves brought from Africa.

These, many unnamed, were the people who introduced Islam into the United States.

The Beginnings of Rapid Growth

The Asian Exclusion Act and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 greatly slowed the immigration of Arabs into the United States, for they were designated as "Asians." It was not until the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 that the stream of Arab immigration suddenly turned from a tiny rivulet into a continually flowing river. Governmental legislation such as the McCarron-Walter Act of 1952 and the 1965 changes in immigration law opened up the possibility of renewed steady immigration.

At the same time, growing post-World War II Detroit-based auto industry demands opened the way for hundreds of Yemenis to join the immigration stream.

The Extensive Growth of the Last Three Decades

More recently, the pull of American universities has drawn many of the brightest and best from the Arab, Iranian, Indonesian, Turkish, and Indo-Pakistani worlds. This, combined with the capacity of widening world conflicts to create refugees, has opened the floodgates to even more immigrants. Thousands upon thousands of Somali, Afghan, Iranian, Bosnian, Kurd, and Iraqi refugees have come to join the early immigrants in an unprecedented new *diaspora* from Muslim countries.

This steady Muslim immigration shows itself in a steadily growing number of mosques, which now number more than 2,000 compared to one-third of that number a few years ago. Besides large showcase buildings appearing in major American cities, smaller mosques are popping up in places like Beloit, Wisconsin; Peoria, Illinois; Westbury, New York; and Fairbanks, Alaska. Many of the new mosques were former church buildings.

Estimates of the total Muslim population in the United States vary from four to 10 million. Complicating the enumeration process is the fact that Muslims do not join mosques as Christians join churches, so it is impossible to count them from membership rolls. It is a common

practice to estimate the number of Muslims by the size of immigration from each Muslim country, assuming, for example, that Iranians are Muslim because Iran is a Muslim country. The truth is that many Iranian immigrants are Jewish, a certain number Bahai and Zoroastrian, while an even larger number are Christian, mostly Armenian.

The changing religious horizon in the United States is seen in apartments occupied by Somalis in Minneapolis and San Diego; Afghans in Washington, D.C. and Fremont, California; and Iraqis in Lincoln, Nebraska. There is hardly an American city that does not have a growing Muslim presence, whether Austin, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio; or Madison, Milwaukee, San Francisco and Seattle.

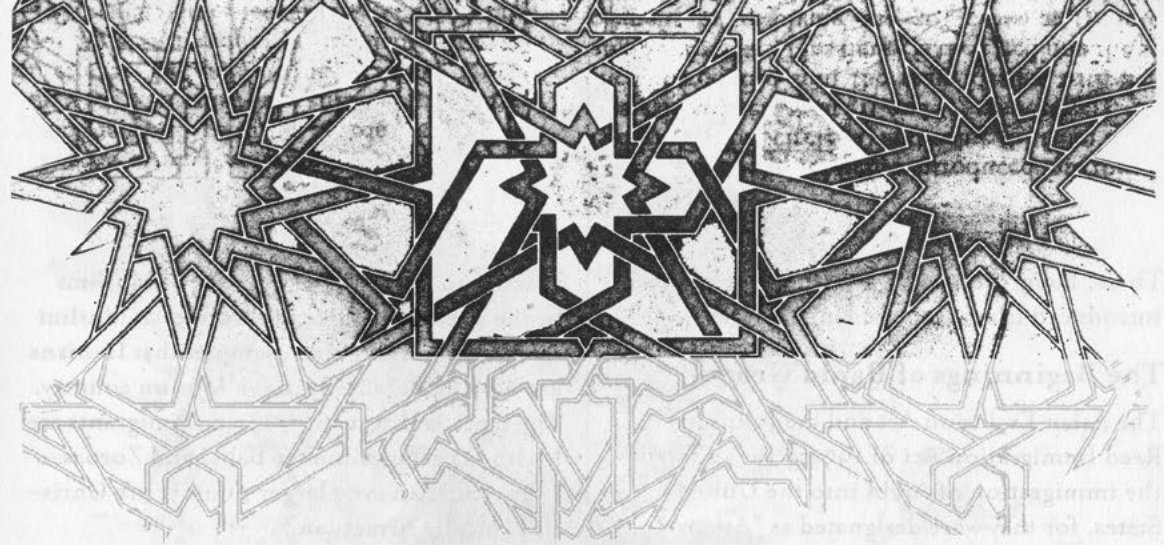
African-American Islam

Islam in African-American communities has quite a different history. It is a story of recent development that began only in the last century, for nothing survived of the Islam that came with some of the slaves brought from Africa.

Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Louis Farrakhan are prominent names, but there are many more names of importance. What stands out in preliminary investigations is how much the growth of Islam among black Americans was a reaction to failures in the message and ministry of the Christian church. Abdul-Jabbar, for example, documents his personal spiritual struggles and search in his autobiography (1983).

Louis Farrakhan's group is only a very small percentage of African-Americans in this country, numbering less than 20,000. Because Farrakhan is so vocal, however, almost everyone is aware of him and his radical racism. His followers are far outnumbered by those of Warith Deen Muhammad who are trying to bring themselves into the fold of orthodox Islam. Changing direction has been difficult because, for so many years, the black Muslim movement was more a civil rights struggle than a religious one.

It is estimated that about 42 percent of Muslims in the United States are African-American, numbering some two and a half million (Poston and Ellis: 22).



Islam and Ethnicity

Islam teaches a universal brotherhood of all mankind, but what stands out in the new waves of immigration is the ethnicity of the new settlers and their problems in relating to one another. Arab and Indian Muslims have problems getting along, as do Iranians and Arabs. Hence, wherever possible, Muslims are building mosques to serve their own ethnic groups.

At the same time, in spite of a history of strained relations among Iranian Christians, Jews and Muslims, it is quite interesting to see people from these different religious orientations gather together in Los Angeles and Orange County parks to celebrate the Iranian New Year together. On such occasions ethnicity gives way to nationalistic loyalties, much as Americans gather together for Fourth of July celebrations regardless of their religious and ethnic origins.

United States Muslim Populations— “A Microcosm of Muslim World Populations”

Roland Miller (1995:25, 396-400) conveniently gives two listings of Muslim world populations, the first from M. A. Kettani; the second, a Year 2000 projection compiled from various sources. The first list below was put together by Sam Wilson, who tabulates world Muslim populations for the Zwemer Institute.

	Wilson 1998	Kettani 1986	Miller 2000
Indonesia	163,846	171,702	186,322
Pakistan	137,075	127,450	144,627
India	118,644	107,118	114,675
Bangladesh	107,358	113,186	124,610
Turkey	64,476	61,554	67,620
Iran	62,818	64,859	74,186
Egypt	53,972	56,283	64,929
Nigeria	43,848	62,910	73,360

Interpreting Population Statistics

It is very striking that when most Americans think Muslim, they think Arab. Only an eighth of the world's one billion Muslims are Arabs, however, while the far greater numbers are elsewhere, mostly in Asia. Had India not been partitioned into Pakistan and Bangladesh, it would be by far the world's leading Muslim country! While Muslims make up only about 12 percent of the population in India, it is still the third largest Muslim country, with the distinct possibility of soon moving ahead of Pakistan. It should not be surprising then that the overcrowded populations of all three of these countries result in a flood of immigrants into the United States.

Indo-Pakistani peoples (including Bangladesh) make up the largest concentration of Muslims in New York, Newark and Chicago. Gradually, they are scattering across the whole country, taking up residence in many smaller cities and communities. Among them are doctors, nurses and educators, as well as motel, convenience store and service station owners and operators.

Each of these cities also has sizeable Arab populations, probably larger than the number of Arab-Americans in Detroit, which is often perceived as the center of Arab immigration into the United States. For a long time, Detroit provided the primary gateway for Arab entrance into this country, but this has changed in recent years. We should also note that many of the Arabs who are scattered across our country, as well as in Detroit, are Christian. Christians have been emigrating from Egypt, Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Jordan in sizeable numbers, gradually decimating Christian populations that survived for many centuries under Islam.

Conversion to Islam

During the 1960s Islam began to draw a noticeable number of African-Americans into its ranks. This process continued into the 1990s, but has drawn almost to a standstill in recent years. There seems to be some movement to African-American Islam among prisoners, but how much of that is from conviction, and how much grows out of the felt need for protection from gangs within the prison system has yet to be researched. Meanwhile, immigrant Muslims have had little success in winning Americans through conversion. The one exception to this pattern is American women who marry Muslims. Muslim sources estimate their number to be about 7,000 per year.

Muslims are determined to change this situation. Hence, a number of Muslim organizations are active in missionary activity, called Da'wa (the backwards apostrophe represents a guttural consonant in Arabic). Da'wa is interpreted as an "invitation" or a "call" to accept Islam. During each Thanksgiving recess a Da'wa Conference is held in Chicago, sponsored by Muslim students.

What the Growth of Islam Means for United States Churches

Islam will present the Christian Church in the United States, and our democracy, some of their greatest challenges in this new century. Islam joins secularism, humanism, Mormonism and Christianity in the quest for adherents. As Americans become more and more uncertain in religious conviction, Islam will prove to offer concrete attractions to offset the uncertainty. There is a certain magic and mystery in the usage of a religious language, Arabic. There is a certain attraction in set forms of worship like the five times daily prayer ritual. There is simplicity in outward forms like dietary rules and prayer movements that give people a sense of performing something for God.

For Christians who take seriously Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, it is a great thrill to see so many Muslims on our doorsteps. While we cannot easily gain entry into their countries, countries into which the Lord Jesus sends us, God has brought them to ours.

Bringing the Gospel to them right here on our own doorsteps calls for new, creative cross-cultural evangelism strategies, from simply being friends and providing hospitality in times of need to efforts to share the Gospel with them in their own languages. It also means taking a stand against prevalent anti-ethnic inclusivistic attitudes, even in our churches, to embracing strange and different peoples with the love of Christ.

This task is all the more difficult because of the growing resentment against immigrants all across the world, from the former nations of the Soviet Union to Switzerland to Great Britain, across the Atlantic to North America, and across the Pacific to Singapore, New Zealand and Australia. This hostility is not new, which may be why "the Lord watches over the alien" (Psalm 146:9), a strong hint we should do the same. Moses warned his people, "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens because you were aliens in Egypt" (Leviticus 23:9). Jesus expects even more. When describing the last judgment, He honored some by saying, "I was a stranger and you took Me in" (Matthew 25:35). Jesus expects much from us in accepting foreigners, including Muslims! In dying for all, He put great value upon each person. Can we love them less? After all, we "love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Resources

- The Internet is becoming an increasingly valuable resource for learning about Islam and for monitoring what Muslims are saying and thinking. Simply type "Islam USA," or "Mosques USA," or "Mosques Iowa," or simply "Islam" or "Muslims" into any online search engine like AOL or Yahoo. You will be amazed at the resources at your fingertips. A very useful Muslim Web site is www.answerislam.com, while a very helpful Christian Web site is www.answering-islam.org.
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RANDALL DUNCAN

Mission and Ministry Among Muslims

LAUGHTER AND CONVERSATION filled the poorly lit room as I sat gasping for air in a smoke-filled coffeehouse while playing Double Pinochle. I was the only Christian in the joint, and all of my Muslim friends were having a great time beating me in the card game. The fact that they had only moments earlier taught me the game and taught it to me in Arabic (of which I am a novice) seemed not to lessen their joy one bit!

Our conversation began to gravitate toward a more spiritual nature, which is never difficult when speaking with a Muslim, and I became emboldened by either the caffeine from the Turkish coffee or the Holy Spirit to share the Gospel. As I began to speak about Jesus, a Muslim friend of mine blurted out: "I don't get you Christians. You think Muslims are stupid! We are not stupid. We know how you will teach us English and give us food. But we also know whether or not you *really* care for us. Christians don't care for us; they only want to conquer us! Instead of a sword, they use 'niceness.'"

Ouch! Are we that obvious? That statement wouldn't hurt so badly if it didn't ring so true.

An interesting quotation from the Qur'an states, "Closest to the Muslim is the Christian who loves." According to their standard, how close are we to our Muslim neighbor? More importantly, according to the Great Commission (make disciples) and the Great Commandment (love) of Jesus, how are we doing?

The love with which Jesus wants us to love Muslims is more than "being nice." His love is self-giving and self-sacrificing. His love is 'other' focused. And His love always needs to

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accompany truth. Love without truth is deceptive. Truth without love is destructive. So, the question we must ask is: "How can we communicate the Gospel of Jesus to a Muslim in truth and love?"

What's Needed

To do this we need to incorporate an incarnational approach to evangelizing Muslims. Jesus bids us to follow Him and do some soul fishing. An incarnational ministry to Muslims follows Jesus Himself, the Ultimate Missionary, who left His comfort zone to take up flesh and dwell among us. As David Livingston said, "God had only one Son, and he made that Son a missionary." That's bridging a culture gap!

Let me state that no "formula" of ministry among Muslims has become so successful as to become the standard for effective evangelization. The traditional missional approach to working with Muslims often has involved little attention to the contextualization of the message and the forms of the church.

I know I am entering where angels fear to tread (a job description for missionaries), but if we are to effectively communicate the Gospel of Jesus, we need to love people as well as we love Pieper (our beloved systematic theologian)! The Muslim world, as the rest of the world, is silently crying out for a clear and meaningful communication of the Gospel, and we are stuttering. Our stuttering comes not from bad theology, but from lousy anthropology!

This lack of contextualization has hindered the ministry of the church. For example, the Muslims abhor the teaching of Christ's suffering and death on the cross because they understand the reality of the cross as shaming Jesus. Similarly, the absence of the Muslim custom of removing one's shoes in a place of worship is also perceived as dishonoring God.

It seems clear that a successful approach to Muslim ministry must include the concept of contextualization. Not only that, but also the element of genuine spirituality must be present in order for the church to present a relevant

and credible witness. As Francis of Assisi said, "Proclaim the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words."

Contextualized Ministry

What would a contextualized ministry look like? Contextualization has been succinctly defined by Phil Parshall in *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* as "The effort to understand and take seriously the specific context of each human group and person on its own terms and in all its dimensions—cultural, religious, social, political, economic—and to discern what the Gospel says to people in that context."

If one looks at the ministry of Jesus and Paul, we see evidence of contextualization throughout their ministries. Jesus spoke differently to the Samaritan woman at the well than He did with Nicodemus. Paul incarnated the message differently to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens than he did in the synagogue in Antioch.

The task at hand is to take the changeless Gospel and communicate it in a relevant and meaningful way to an ever-changing world—to take the first century message and communicate it to the 21st century Muslim who is entrenched in 7th century Arabian culture!

The danger involved here when applying the principle of contextualization is syncretism. Syncretism occurs when the essence of the Gospel is lost through the process of contextualization. It is possible for new meaning to be infused into old forms as long as the form and substance are not prohibited by Scripture. A missiological principle is that it is possible to contextualize to the point that only the core of the Gospel message offends.

To ensure effective communication among Muslims, the communicator must not only have knowledge of his audience, but also identify with them. The congregation or individual must be sensitive to the cultural context of the person with whom we want to engage in Gospel talk. In other words, although we as Lutherans might think that the best way to evangelize someone is over beer and brats, we must resist our natural inclination, because a Muslim is prohibited to consume pork or alcohol. Muslims take "Deviled Ham" literally! Using the various thought bridges from Islam to Christianity can also help contextualize the

message of the Gospel. It may mean using some Qur'anic verses and concepts to begin the dialogue. The Qur'an itself can become a bridge. For example, in the Qur'an an incident is related which says, "For this was obviously a trial—And We (God) ransomed him (Abraham) with a momentous sacrifice" (Qur'an 37:106-107). We can ask our Muslim friend, "What was the momentous sacrifice that ransomed Abraham?"

The details are not given in the Qur'an, so we can go to the *Kalam-e-Muqaddas* (the Holy Bible). *The Kalam-e-Muqaddas* informs us that God's Messiah, the 'Isa (Arab for Jesus), was made the *Kurban* (sacrifice) and the ransom for the whole world. *Hazrat Yahya* (John the Baptist) said of Him, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the world's sin!" (John 1:29).

Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, "...the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus has been presented as a sacrifice and a ransom in the *Torah* (the Law), in the *Injil* (the Gospel), in the *Zabur* (the Psalms) and in the *Sahaif-e-anbia* (the writings of the prophets).

Where We Agree

Another subtle handle or bridge to bring the Gospel to the Muslim is to affirm those tenets of Islam concerning Jesus with which we agree. In other words, effective Gospel presentation should flow from what people know to what they do not know. For example, Muslims agree that Jesus:

- Was of the virgin Mary.
- Is the Messiah (although that term is not defined in the Qur'an).
- Is the Word of God: "Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, was an apostle of God and His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles" (Sura 4:171). The Islamic concept of the Word of God is that the Word is eternal and proceeds from God. Obviously, this is an excellent bridge!
- Is the Spirit from God. This is different from Adam and Mary, for both were created from the Spirit of God.
- His death and resurrection—although commonly taught that Jesus did not die on

the cross, but only appeared to—Sura 19:33 clearly shows the infant Jesus in the cradle prophesying of His own death and resurrection: "So, peace is on me the day I was born, the day I die, and the day I shall be raised up to life again."

- Ascended to heaven.
- Is coming again as a sign of the last hour. Sura 43:61: "And Jesus shall be a sign for the coming of the hour of Judgment."
- Is an Intercessor. In Sura 3:45, Jesus is "held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of the company of those nearest to God." Many Muslims believe this "honor" is the ability to make intercession.
- Was a Miracle Worker as seen through His supernatural knowledge, healing the sick and raising the dead.
- Was sinless.

Differences

What wonderful bridges for discussion! But if we are to have truth accompany love, then we must openly and unapologetically confess that there are some very significant areas of difference. The longer we wait to admit these differences, the more arduous it will be to begin the Gospel dialogue. What differences do we need to be aware of?

First, the Muslim perception of God is by no means the same as that revealed in the Bible. Islam portrays God as unknowable and may reveal His will, but He never reveals Himself. Neither is He Triune. The Qur'an says, "Believe in God [alone] and His messengers, and do not say: 'Three!' Stopping [it] will be better for you. God is only One God; glory be to Him, beyond His having any son!" Sura 4:171

Second, though Jesus is presented as a sinless, miracle-working prophet and messiah, Islam denies that He is the Son of God or Savior of the world. Most Muslims will deny that Jesus even died at all and definitely not vicariously for the sins of the world.

Third, Islam denies the sinful nature of man and his need for a Savior, as the Bible so clearly teaches. Sin is not considered treason against a Holy God, but merely "forgetfulness." People are capable of submitting to God's laws and winning God's approval. This leads to the soterio-

logical conclusion that since in Islam acceptance by God is something we must earn by our works, it cannot possibly provide the sense of security that can be found in the Gospel of grace.

Questions

An incarnational way to begin a Jesus-focused dialogue with a Muslim is to ask questions before spouting answers. Realize, however, that many Muslims are discouraged from asking questions about their own faith. The Qur'an says, "O ye who believe! Ask not questions about things which if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith." Surah 5:101-102

I have gathered a list of questions that I use, not only with Muslims, but also with any seeker. Questions such as "What is God like? What do you know of his character? What does God think of you? What is God's attitude to you? How does he feel about you? How has he made his presence known to you?"

We have all been created with a Jesus-shaped void in our hearts, and that void can be filled only when it is recognized. We are created, not for religion, but for a relationship with the Living God. A true seeker of God will be troubled by these questions until one's heart finds rest in Jesus.

Once someone starts becoming vulnerable enough to honestly ask these questions and seek the answers, then he is in a position to humbly receive the truth.

Environments for Dialogue

If we are to lovingly incarnate the message for the Muslim, we must not only be concerned with doctrinal issues, but also with practice. We need to concern ourselves with the proper environment for such dialogue. For example, the setting for religious instruction and activity should be evaluated. The use of home groups should be considered. Central to the Muslim world view is the concept of *umma* (family/community). The place where the Muslim finds support and identity is in the *umma*. A small group is the most natural equivalent to the *umma*.

Various forms of Islamic culture such as meeting on Friday, segregation of the sexes,

and removing shoes could be adopted in these small group settings. The leader of a house church could be modeled after an Imam, the leader of the Mosque. In addition, the group should probably bear an inoffensive name such as the *Followers of Isa* (Jesus).

This method will also help remove the misconception that becoming a Christian means becoming a Westerner. You don't need to become exactly like us to be like Him. Cloneliness is not next to godliness!

With regard to practice, we need to remember that contextualization without genuine spirituality is destined to fail. I am not speaking of false pietism and legalism. That is the last thing a Muslim needs. I am speaking of a life fueled by the means of grace. Certainly, contextualization is important, but we must not forget to continually nurture our relationship with God. Then and only then will the missionary present a credible witness. The Muslim has a saying, "The messenger is the message."

Islam attempts to present itself as monolithic and impenetrable. The truth is that we must never relate to the Muslim persona or stereotype; to do this is to affirm and reinforce both. We must see people as they truly are, not what they try to be. We can be bold, and yet loving, about our faith in Jesus.

An incarnational model of ministry to Muslims will also encourage Christian women to get involved. There is "a wall of genders" in Islam, which means that sometimes a Muslim woman can relate more closely to a Christian woman than to her husband.

To embrace this incarnational model, we need to release some cultural baggage. We need to confront our individualism and space issues. We need to battle impatience and discouragement. I have heard the statement that Muslims have to hear the Gospel more than 100 times before the truth of it sinks in. And they need to hear it from different angles, in bits and pieces, until all of a sudden the pieces start falling together. We need to pray for the recognition of divine appointments.

Counting the Cost

What will it take for the Muslim to embrace Jesus for who He really is? It takes both the church and the Muslim to count the cost.

There is as much need to prepare the church for the Muslim as there is to prepare the Muslim for the church.

A Biblical, incarnational model of witnessing will coax us into addressing the issue of prejudice within our midst. Paul, the great missionary, put it this way: "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view . . ." (2 Corinthians 5:15-16a).

The cross is the best prescription for killing prejudice. We love Muslims, not because we have to, but because the love of Jesus causes us to have a case of the "Can't help it!" The walls of separation are broken down because of the Prince of Peace (Ephesians 2:14).

In conclusion, I wish to relate a story I recently heard of a Muslim who became a Christian in Africa. Some of his friends asked him, "Why have you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly the road forked in two directions. You didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one dead and one alive. Which one would you ask which way to go?"

Effective evangelism among Muslims means incarnating the love and life of the Risen Jesus through genuine, loving friendship and Holy Spirit-empowered resolve. It means bringing people to the crossroad. . . not just pointing down the right road to Jesus, but leading and accompanying others down that very road.

When all is said and done, it all comes down to Jesus Christ. He is the One they do not have. He is the One they need. He is really all we have to offer.

Recommended Reading

- 'Ali, 'Abdullah Yusuf. *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary*. Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corp., 1989.
- Goble, Phil and Salim Munayer. *New Creation Book for Muslims*. Pasadena, Calif.: Mandate Press, 1989.
- Hahn, Ernest. *How to Respond to Islam*. St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1995.
- McDowell, Josh, and John Gilchrist. *The Islam Debate*. San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Pub., 1983.
- Parshall, Phil. *The Cross and the Crescent*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale Pub., 1989.
- Parshall, Phil. *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Woodberry, J. Dudley, ed. *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1989.

Islam: A Very Short Introduction by Malise Ruthven. Oxford University Press, 1997.

In 150 pages, Malise Ruthven tackles confidently and knowledgeably the religion of Islam, the Qur'an and the great prophet, divine unicity, Islamic law and rituals, Muslim women and the two jihads.

Any study of Islam must consider the many complexities of the religion and the cultural biases of Western cultures. Ruthven therefore begins the book by discussing the religion of Islam as believed by Muslims who follow the teachings of Islamism. He cautions Westerners about categorizing Muslim perceptions, pointing out that Islam is both a religious faith and political ideology, as well as a mark of personal and group identity.

The author explains that no religion can prosper as Islam has without binding adherents to outward (exoteric) observances. Yet in spite of these observances there is a crisis for many Muslims in maintaining their identity in a modern contemporary world. The crisis is not so much a spiritual crisis, but a crisis of authority, for the Muslim world is lacking organization and leadership. Without an organization which articulates and formulates doctrine and agendas, there is often a following of those who have established themselves in the role of leader. Yet this most interesting characteristic of Islam has resulted in a religion that is followed by more than one-fifth of the world's population.

In describing the Qur'an, the author develops and emphasizes the great importance of this religious book. It is not just an account of the history of the world's creation from Adam, but it is the speech of God, dictated to the prophet Mohammad without editing. It is God's words, and therefore, the Qur'an must be treated as such. Not only does the writer describe the practices of Muslim, how they revere this book and its organization and style, but he also includes key excerpts from the text, highlighting their importance for the reader.

What is the driving force that holds Muslims together? The author identifies this primary impulse as *tawhid*, the making of one, or unicity, and it is summed up in the creedal formula, "There is no god but God." The author includes an introduction to this unicity and traces it from Mohammad's lineage through the various branches of Shi'ism to modern Islamic thinking today.

"Just as there is no doctrine of divine incarnation, so there is no church, no separate institution or body distinct from

the rest of society charged with the task of conveying God's will or the Prophet's teaching. In Islam, 'God has not revealed Himself and His nature, but rather His Law.'" At some length the author expounds upon the *Shari'a*, the law. It is interesting to read many rituals and practices described in this introduction: the Five Schools of Jurisprudence, the use of alcohol, religious and social duties, and behavior in society. Especially of interest is the chapter devoted to the role of women and the family.

In this introduction, the author portrays a respectable account of the history of successes and failures of Islam, giving particular attention to the problems of authority and power. The practices and rituals described in the book are exemplary and are enhanced by excerpts from the Qur'an. Ruthven has written an excellent book for one beginning an investigation of Islam and for the student of religions and culture.

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The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? By John L. Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press. Third Edition, 1999.

This book has earned a place in the academic library of anyone seeking a better understanding of Islam as a political force in the world. The author is not a Christian apologist by any means. He is a secular author trying to analyze the political mind of Islam without allowing militant Muslims to dominate the political arena. Indeed, the bin Laden forces, Al'Gamaha Al'Islamiah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Nation of Islam under Farrakan, project an image of Islam as a militant, no-holds-barred, political-religious force malcontent with living in a world of infidels. With approximately 25 countries having a 90 to 100 percent Muslim population, and some eight countries claiming 68 percent of the world's Muslims, it is little wonder that a nervous secretary general of NATO would suggest that Islam is a new communism.

The discussion in Chapter Two, "Islam and the West: Roots of Conflict, Cooperation and Confrontation," attempts to blunt the fear that the cultural war will soon be a military confrontation, spearheaded by the Hezbollah, Hamas, Isama bin Laden and

supported shamelessly by Iraq, Iran and Syria, with manpower provided by Islamic religions in Africa. The complexity of reformations in Islam suggests for Esposito that the West too quickly views them as efforts to destroy the "Satan" of the West. There is the strong theme in the book that economics plays a vital role in the caustic rhetoric of outspoken radicals. Should the West find ways to improve the sagging economies of Islamic countries, the rhetoric and call for an "Islamic NATO" would disappear. (This reviewer is not as optimistic. Christians in "reformation/revolutions" have at times paid a heavy price.) Even an elementary understanding of Islam religion reminds the reader that Sunnites and Shi'ites constitute two modes of being Islamic, with the latter making up only about 15 percent of the world population. It is from the latter group that the militant elements have sprung.

In understanding the Islamic threat, I commend other resources, such as Roland E. Miller's *Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling* (Concordia Publishing House), which would add the dimension of a religious understanding of Islam. Another helpful resource is Ernest Hahn's *Muslims*, which is part of the "How to Respond" series also published by Concordia Publishing House. For users of the Internet, an initial starting point is <http://huiizen.dds.nl/~chhr/links/Apolog.htm>.

While segments of the Christian community, caught up in Dispensational Millennialism or simple "sensationalism," would dismiss Esposito's apologetic treatment of modern-day Islam, Christians can seek out avenues of exchange with Muslims, appealing to a review and consideration of the Koran's account of Jesus and listening anew to the New Testament witness to Jesus. We need to be bridge-builders, inviting and helping the individual Muslim to cross over the bridge. Esposito's work is worthwhile and profitable for Christian and Islam readers alike. Muslims in the United States will find the book refreshing and would commend it to Christian neighbors convinced that their lives may be endangered by the "Muslim next door."

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The Changing Face of Islam in America: Understanding and Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor by Larry A. Posten with Carl F. Ellis, Jr. Camp Hill, Pa.: Horizon Books, 2000.

When the lead author arranged for a meeting with a Muslim in Chicago to ask questions in doing research for a dissertation investigating Islam, he found himself being questioned. Some questions left him speechless, and through the conversation, he discovered that he was not equipped to answer Muslim challenges to the Bible and the Christian faith. When he left the room, he was not only disappointed in himself, but also disillusioned about his ability to engage in a ministry among Muslims.

Out of that experience emerged a commitment to develop a knowledge base and the skill needed to engage in constructive conversation with Muslims as well as the decision to pursue his earlier plan for ministry. One of several missionary ministries which followed included serving as the Director of the Institute for Muslim Studies at Wheaton College.

In this book, he and a colleague describe some of the results of their studies and experiences with Muslims in the United States and overseas. Their purpose is to offer a street-level view of Muslims in this country, to describe various groups of Muslims and their arrival in the United States, to distinguish between orthodox Islam and the teachings of several splinter groups such as those led by Elijah Muhammad and Louis Farrakhan, to evaluate the teachings and practices of Islam on the basis of an evangelical perspective, to find parallels and contrasts between the Scriptures and the Qur'an and to identify strategies of witnessing to ethnic Muslims and converts to Islam.

The authors' investigations of the backgrounds of converts to Islam, revealed that many converts came from environments in which individuals lacked identity, dignity, and masculinity and experienced alienation from mainstream America and the African-American middle-class, resulting in pain and rage. Muslims who convert report being attracted by the ethical standards of Islam, the experience of affirmation and solidarity of the Muslim community, and satisfaction in being given a sense of personal righteousness.

The authors focus attention on the gulf between the Bible and the Qur'an and the

most significant void in Islamic teachings, the grace of God. As many have noted, the message of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ encounters a high level of resistance among Muslims which is motivated by multiple factors. The Bible is seen as being inferior to the Qur'an. Compounding the challenges are a host of stereotypes and memories of tragic events in the history of Christian-Muslim relationships.

Missiological and educational implications for the church suggested by this resource are many. For example, if meaningful dialogue and witness involving Christians and Muslims are to occur, members of the Christian church will need to develop a grasp of the Qur'an, the history and theology of Islam, the content and structure of the worship, rituals, community, ethics and lifestyles of Muslims, their outreach strategies, significant issues in the history of Christian-Muslim relationships, strategies for engaging in service and witness among Muslims, ways of reshaping stereotypes, and experience relating to Muslims. People who are really serious about this ministry will want to learn Arabic for study of the Qur'an and other sacred writings.

Dialogue and witness also call for the involvement of a cadre of experienced workers among Muslims who will teach the church and recruit members of the younger generations to develop needed competencies for this ministry. Publishers and educational technology specialists need to be engaged in providing resources for high school classes, college and university courses, seminaries, faculty and the laity as well as pastors, teachers and directors of Christian education. If we value participating in this big conversation and in encounters between Muslims and Christians, the choice is: preparing or risking being speechless.

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as another prophet but as their Redeemer, to hear and confess that God was in the Messiah reconciling the world to Himself, and to know themselves as His dear children.

But how shall they believe if they have not heard (Romans 10:14)? Have you ever pondered your debt to the Muslims (Romans 2:14-17)? Have you considered how you can become God's messenger of His Gospel among them (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)? Have you ever looked at your Muslim neighbor through the eyes of Jesus (Matthew 25:31-40)?

Notes

- ¹ Pickthall, M.M., trans. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: New American Library, n.d. Most quotations from the Qur'an are taken from Pickthall's translation. Islamically, only the Arabic Qur'an can be called the Qur'an.
- ² Are you aware of Muslim refugees in the U.S.A.? To help Iranian refugees, some of them converts from Islam, please contact Iranian Christians International, Inc., P. O. Box 25607, Colorado Springs, CO 80936-5607. Phone 719-596-0010.

³ Zolendek, L. *Book XX of Al-Ghazali's Ihya Ulum al-Din*. Leiden: Brill, 1963, *passim*.

⁴ *The Holy Qur'an, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Preface, p.v. Muslims, whether aware or unaware of the serious textual difficulties within the Qur'an, constantly contrast the perfectly preserved Qur'an with the corrupted Bible.

⁵ Yet among Muslims few community issues are so passionately debated as the current status of the shari'ah, e.g., as God's eternal law, must the shari'ah remain unchangeable forever, even its injunctions about slavery, polygamy, theft, adultery, apostasy from Islam, etc., or can it be reinterpreted and changed in line with changing times and places?

⁶ Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*. New York: Orbis, 1992, pp. 29-60. An excellent text for Christians and Muslims!

⁷ Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam An Introduction*. Albany: State University Press, 1992, p. 52.

⁸ *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953, p. 507. A valuable reference work!

⁹ Other common societal concerns of Muslims and Christians: the traditional family, the care of the elderly, youth discipline, racism, Hollywood and T.V., drugs, abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, the idols of science, nation, power, sex, wealth and productivity, etc



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