

Christianity and Islam

by

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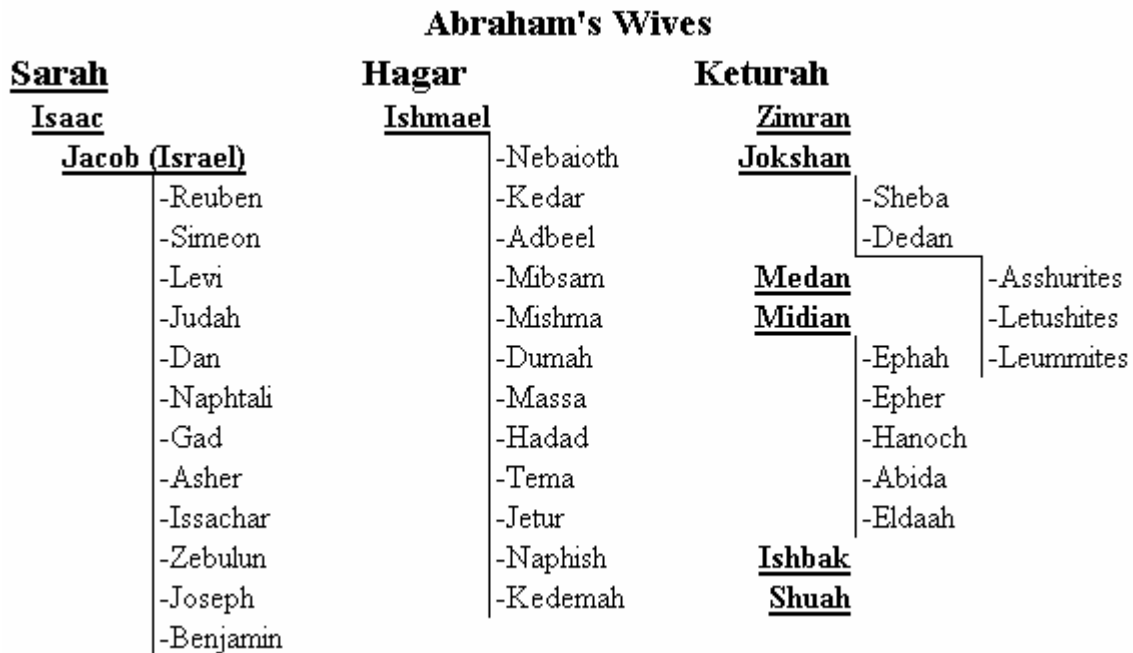
Preface

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City by Islamic terrorists on September 11, 2001 most Americans have become aware of the religion of Islam in a more direct way than ever before. The news media, periodicals and a wide range of other venues have put before the American public a plethora of ideas about Islam, ranging from the notion that the terrorists are nothing more than a group of wackos who themselves are false to their own religion to the idea that true Muslims are by definition open to violence against the infidels. Besides the national attention, of course, Metro Detroit has the largest Islamic community in America outside the Middle East. All this makes worthwhile a look at the Arabic people, who are the largest ethnic group of adherents to Islam, the religion of Islam, its origins and basic theologies, its similarities and differences from Christianity, and the appropriate responses Christians should make to their Muslim neighbors. Here, we will examine some relevant translated passages from the Koran, explore some of the “denominational” differences between different Islamic sects, and compare and contrast the Muslim concepts of God with those of the Bible.

Genealogies

For Jews and Christians, the spiritual ancestry of the people of faith stretch back to a Middle Eastern Hebrew named Abraham (Ge. 14:13) through his son Isaac (Ge. 17:15-19) and his twelve grandsons born to Jacob (Ge. 29:31-24; 35:16-18), whose name was changed to Israel (Ge. 32:22-30). For the Arabic peoples, their spiritual ancestry also goes back to Abraham, but through Ishmael (Ge. 16:1-16; 25:12-18) and the six sons of Keturah (Ge. 25:1-6).

Ishmael was Abraham's oldest son, and all other things being equal, in keeping with the ancient Near East law of primogeniture, he would have been considered the heir. However, all other things were not equal. Hagar, Ishmael's mother, was a slave wife who had become part of the family when they were in Egypt (Ge. 16:1-4; cf. 12:10-20). The law codes then current transferred the rights of inheritance to the free-born son (Ge. 21:8-10; cf. Ga. 4:22-23, 30).¹



¹ Hurrian law from Nuzi, for instance, as well as the law code of Hammurabi both stipulated that a wife who could not produce children from a legal wife could do so from a slave wife. cf. E. Speiser, *Genesis [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 119-121. However, if the free wife later had a son, the free son would be the heir, though the slave son had inheritance rights as well and could not be disowned.

Thus, the Hebrew Bible indicates that Isaac was Abraham's heir, and especially, the heir of the covenantal promise (Ge. 17:19; cf. 26:2-6). Nevertheless, Ishmael was not without a heritage. Yahweh promised Hagar, Ishmael's mother, that her son also would become a great people (Ge. 16:9-10), and he further promised to bless Ishmael, too (Ge. 17:18, 20). When Abraham died, both Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Macpelah that Abraham had purchased from Ephron ben Zohar, the Hittite (Ge. 25:7-10; cf. 23:3-20). As to the sons by Keturah, Abraham gave them gifts but sent them away into the Arabian desert (Ge. 25:6). So, both Isaac and Ishmael were blessed by God, and the sons of Keturah shared in the wealth of Abraham in his old age. Nevertheless, hostility continued between the descendents of Isaac and Ishmael (Ge. 15:11-12; 25:18b).

The Semitic (i.e., descendents of Shem, the son of Noah) families of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah became some of the ancestors of the Arabic peoples. The "land of the east" where Keturah's sons went probably refers to the Arabian desert (Ge. 25:6b). The locations of Havilah and Shur near the border of Egypt, though ambiguous, suggest the Sinai peninsula (cf. Ge. 16:7; 20:1; Ex. 15:22; 1 Sa. 27:8). Other ancestors of the Arabic peoples named in the Bible include Sheba and Dedan, clans from the line of Ham, the son of Noah (cf. Ge. 10:7; 25:3; 1 Chr. 1:9, 22, 32-33).

Of course, attempting to trace the ancestral origins of modern people into antiquity is difficult. Virtually no people group is ancestrally pure. Still, the origins of the Arabic peoples and their connection to Abraham is clearly stated in the Old Testament, and the Arabic peoples still look to Abraham as their spiritual ancestor.

The genealogical connections between Abraham and the Arabic peoples is more than coincidental, since Islamic monotheism traces backward to Abraham as its spiritual ancestor, just as does the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity. In this sense, Islam is closer to Judaism and Christianity than to Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto or any of the other polytheistic or pantheistic religions.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Galatians 4:22-23 speak of Ishmael as Abraham's son "according to the flesh" but Isaac as the son "through the promise." What does this mean?
- 2) How do you think that passages like Galatians 3:7, 9, 16, 29 and Romans 2:28-29; 4:9-12, 16-17, 22-24; 9:6-8, 24-26 bear upon the issue of genealogies?

Origins

In spite of the genealogical connection between the Arabic peoples and Abraham through Hagar and Keturah, the origins of Islam as a religion occurred much later—in the 7th century AD. Today, nearly a billion people in the world are Muslims. For the most part, they live in North Africa, the Middle East, Southern Russia, Malaysia and Indonesia, though there are Muslim communities to be found in the western world as well.

The name Islam is the infinitive form of the Arabic verb "to submit," and a Muslim is "one who submits" (i.e., to the will of God). Contemporary American media since September 11, 2001 has been urging that the name Islam means "peace" and that the religion of Islam is a religion of peace. This definition, no doubt, aims at softening the reaction toward American Muslims and to demonstrate that the religion of Islam is not inherently hostile or violent. Nevertheless, the idea that Islam means "peace" must be qualified considerably. It does not mean peace in the sense of the absence of war, but rather, peace in the sense of submission to God's will.² In fact, Islam divides the world into two zones, *Dar as-Salaam* (= House of Peace) and *Dar al-Harb* (= House of War). Muslims believe that it is Islam's destiny to extend its control until the whole *Dar al-Harb* is subject to Islamic law in an Islamic state. Hence, the idea of peace inherent in the word Islam refers to peace only after submission.³

The spread of the religion of Islam is truly remarkable. Within a century of the death of its founder, the Muslim Empire stretched from Southern France through Spain, North Africa, the Levant and Central Asia. The towers and domes of Muslim mosques have become famous throughout the world, and they can be found from the steppes of Russia to Jerusalem to Mid-western America. Adherents to Islam subscribe both to a common religion and a common way of life. Islam always has required of its followers not merely a form of worship, but also, a set of social and cultural norms. The goal of Islam is to build a world-wide society based on a full identity between religious requirements and a thorough-going code for everyday life. Hence, there is an extraordinary sense of community between Muslims, even though they may live in different countries, speak different languages, and derive from different races.⁴

² Technically, the word "Islam" is the infinitive form of the Arabic verb "to submit", while the term "Muslim" is the present participle of the same verb.

³ N. Anderson, "Islam," *The World's Religions*, ed. N. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 91 and S. Schlorff, *Questions About Islam* (Arab World Ministries, n.d.).

⁴ E. Burns, et al., *World Civilizations*, 6th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), I.370.

Muhammad

No one can understand the religion of Islam without knowing the history of its founder. Islam originated with Muhammad, considered by Muslims to be the greatest of the prophets (c. AD 570-632). Historically, little is known of his early life other than that he was born to a family of the Quraysh, an aristocracy of traders,⁵ and grew up as an orphan in Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula. His father died prior to his birth, and his mother died when he was only six years old. Afterwards, he was cared for by an uncle. According to Muslim tradition, as soon as he was born he fell to the ground, took a handful of dust and looked toward the heavens, proclaiming, “God is Great.” Also according to Muslim tradition, he was born clean, circumcised, and his navel cord already was cut.⁶ In his youth, he lived a normal life, working for his uncle as a shepherd boy and a trader.

At the age of twenty-five he married Khadija, a wealthy widow who owned a prosperous trading business. His marriage was a happy one, and the couple had six children, two sons who died in infancy and four daughters. Until he was about forty, Muhammad lived the prosperous life of a trader, though more and more he took to periods of meditation, fasting and seclusion in a cave a couple miles north of Mecca. Increasingly, he became discontent with the paganism and idolatry of the city. Mecca, which lay on an important trade route through Arabia, had long been a center for local religion centered around the Kaabah, a shrine that housed the Black Stone, a meteorite worshiped as a miraculous relic.

Profoundly dissatisfied with the polytheism and superstition in his native Mecca, he became convinced that there was only one true God. Though most Arabs at the time were polytheists who at most recognized the vague superiority of a more powerful god they called Allah, in AD 610 Muhammad claimed to have experienced divine revelations, some by voices and others by the angel Gabriel. At first, he thought he might be possessed by an evil spirit, a *jinn*, but his wife and her cousin encouraged him to take these revelations to be divinely given. The substance of his revelation was that there was no god but Allah alone. It is likely that his early adoption of monotheism can be traced to the influences of Judaism and eastern Christianity, but what is certain is that he became an uncompromising monotheist. His new faith he called Islam (submission), and he claimed to be a prophet called to warn his fellow Meccans against idolatry and paganism. They must believe in one sovereign god only, resurrection, and final judgment, and they must live in charity to the poor and orphans among them.

⁵ Muslims believe that the family of Quraysh are the descendents of Ishmael, Abraham’s son by Hagar, cf. Hazrat Mirza Bashir-Ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, *Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran* (London: The London Mosque, 1985), pp. 91-95.

⁶ N. Geisler & A. Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 68-69.

At first, his success at gaining followers was modest. The influential members of the Quraysh family opposed him, possibly because they feared his new religion would displace the Kaabah and weaken the society of Mecca. His opponents harassed him with ridicule and dismissed him as mad. In AD 619, Khadija died as well as his uncle, leaving Muhammad without protection. Nevertheless, he continued to rely on Allah's protection, and according to Muslim tradition, he was taken by the angel Gabriel to Jerusalem, where he ascended through the seven heavens to Allah. In each of the heavens, he spoke to former prophets (Jesus in the second, Moses in the sixth, Abraham in the seventh), and finally, he was ushered into the presence of Allah, the one true god, where he received careful instructions for Islamic worship. This spiritual journey into the heavens is believed to have occurred on Mt. Zion, and hence, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is a particularly sacred site for Muslims.

Though the initial response to Muhammad's revelations was not impressive, in AD 621 a small group of pilgrims, who came from Medina to the Kaabah shrine in Mecca, accepted his message. The next year, an additional group of seventy-five pilgrims from Medina accepted his message and invited him back to their city. Muhammad accepted, and with about 200 followers, he withdrew to Medina some 200 miles to the north, arriving on September 24, 622. This withdrawal, called the *Hijrah*, proved the turning point in Muhammad's career.⁷ In Mecca, he had been rejected, but in Medina, he soon became a statesman, legislator and judge.⁸ At first he expected support from the Jews, since he claimed to be in the succession of prophets from Abraham, the patriarchs and the Old Testament prophets. He even instructed his followers to pray facing Jerusalem and to observe *Ashura*, the Jewish day of atonement, as a festival. The Jews, however, would not accept his accounts of Old Testament events, because they were at variance with the Hebrew Bible. Eventually, he turned against the Jews, giving them over to banishment and massacre. He redirected his followers to pray facing the Kaabah in Mecca and changed the festival of *Ashura* to the whole month of Ramadan (the ninth lunar month in the Arabic calendar).

Soon, Muhammad permitted his followers to begin raiding the commercial caravans to and from Mecca, and Muhammad himself led three of the raids in the first year. The Quraysh tried to defend themselves against the Muslims, but over the next few years, the followers of Muhammad defeated them in several desert battles. Eventually, the Meccans attempted to put Medina to seige, but they were

⁷ In fact, the Muslim calendar reflects this event so that all Muslim dates are reckoned A. H. (after Hijra). Corresponding western dates can be calculated by adding 622 to the Muslim date and subtracting 3 for each century, since the Muslim calendar works on lunar rather than solar years.

⁸ The original name of the city was Yathrib, but Muhammad changed its name to al-Medina, which means "city of the prophet."

unsuccessful. Meanwhile, Muhammad's following was growing rapidly. By AD 630, with an army of 10,000, he was able to launch a successful offensive against Mecca itself. With the conquest of Mecca, Muhammad cleansed the Kaabah of its idols and granted pardons to his enemies in Mecca. After Mecca surrendered, the Quraysh submitted to the new faith, while the Kaabah became the main shrine of Islam and remains so today. Other tribes, also, accepted the new faith, and though Muhammad died in AD 632, he lived long enough to see Islam accepted by the greater part of the Arabian peninsula.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are some of the major differences between the life of Muhammad and the life of Jesus?
- 2) How do these differences affect the nature of the two faiths that derive from their teachings?

After Muhammad

Political Expansion

Muhammad's death left a crisis for the new religious movement. He died without naming a successor,⁹ and civil war between proud tribal factions threatened. As the last and greatest of the prophets, he could not be replaced, of course, but it was clearly necessary that someone succeed him, since the Islamic community was a theocracy. Some of Muhammad's closest companions succeeded in proclaiming the elderly Abu Bakr, Muhammad's father-in-law, as Khalif (= successor, or deputy of the prophet).

A tremendous struggle for power and continuity ensued.¹⁰ Some Bedouin tribes who had been loyal to Muhammad felt that his death dissolved their bonds of loyalty. They refused to pay *zakat* (the duty of alms), and Abu Bakr immediately began a campaign called the Wars of the *Riddah* (= apostasy) to bring them back into alignment. This military action was entirely successful, and eventually, the campaigns began to spread beyond the border of Arabia. Exhausted by the wars between the Byzantine and Persian empires, the people in Palestine and Syria offered little resistance. When Abu Bakr died after only two years as the Khalif, he was succeeded by Umar, an early convert of Muhammad, who continued the campaigns almost without interruption. In AD 636, the Muslims conquered the Byzantine army in Syria and quickly occupied Antioch, Damascus and Jerusalem. In AD 637 they routed the Persian army and marched into the Persian capital of Ctesiphon. In AD 646 they took Egypt from the Byzantines and swept across North Africa. By AD 651, the entire Persian empire had been brought under the rule of Islam. In AD 711, the Muslims crossed from Africa to Europe at Gibraltar and took most of Spain. Their encroachment into Europe was not stopped until AD 732, when Charles Martel (= Charles the Hammer) of the Franks turned back a group of Muslim marauders at Tours about 150 miles from Paris, after which the Muslims withdrew back across the Pyrenees into Spain. Thus, within a hundred years of Muhammad's death, the Islamic

⁹ Muhammad left no male heirs in spite of the considerable marriage privileges afforded him in the Qur'an, privileges that were stipulated as "for you [Muhammad] alone." He had the privilege to have more than the four wives stipulated for other male Muslims (33:49), he was permitted to marry the divorced wife of his adopted son (33:36-38), he could marry his cousins (33:50), he could divorce at will (33:51), he could marry divorced women at will (66:5), and he could take to his bed as many slave-girls as he owned (33:52). Though he promised one wife, Hafsah, that he would separate from a Coptic slave wife, he was permitted by the Qur'an to break this promise after she discovered them together (66:1-5). Hafsah and A'ishah, two wives who were aware of this broken oath, were instructed to repent or face divorce, not to mention the discipline of God, Gabriel and the angels, who were Muhammad's protectors.

¹⁰ This power struggle and the ensuing Muslim conquests in the Levant, Persia, North Africa, Spain and Anatolia are detailed in many historical sources.

Empire stretched over Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, North Africa, the Anatolian Plateau and Spain.

The stereotype is that the conquered peoples of all these areas were converted to the religion of Islam by the sword. This stereotype is at best an overstatement. Many conquered areas were able to maintain their former religious faiths without converting, and the Christian Copts in Egypt are a well-known example. The motives for expansion owed more to political than religious ambition. In fact, some historians point out that the Muslims were happy enough when conquered peoples did not convert, so their own status as rulers and tax-gatherers was not undermined. At the same time, it is fair to say that religious enthusiasm played a significant role in these conquests, since the Muslims believed they were carrying out the will of Allah. As far as the attitudes of the conquered peoples, the Muslims were often welcomed as liberators, since their requirements for taxation were less than what was exacted by the Byzantines and Persians before them.¹¹

Religious Diversification

While the expansionist wars were being carried out, the Muslims encountered their first serious internal division. When Abu Bakr was chosen as Muhammad's successor, not all Muslims were supportive. Some contended that Muhammad indeed had indicated a successor, his son-in-law Ali, husband of Fatima, his daughter. This dissent continued through the office of Umar, the second Khalif, who died in AD 644. His replacement, Uthman, not only was a weak administrator, he belonged to the Umayyad family who at first had rejected Muhammad. His ascension as the third Khalif did nothing to assuage the disgruntled supporters of Ali, who was perceived to be the stronger leader and the rightful heir. Uthman was murdered in AD 656, possibly by Ali loyalists, and Ali was proclaimed Khalif by his supporters, even though the powerful family of Uthman would not accept his claim. Ali, in turn, was murdered in AD 661, and the Uthman family regained control.

Muawiya of Damascus from the Umayyad family became the next Khalif in AD 661, and this line ruled Islam until AD 750. The capital was moved to Damascus. In AD 750 the Umayyad Khalif was overthrown by a new dynasty, the Abbasids, who moved the capital to Baghdad and ruled into the 10th century.

In the meantime, Ali's supporters never gave up, and they eventually formed the minority religious party in Islam known as Shiites, insisting that only direct descendents of Ali could qualify as Khalifs. Those Muslims who supported the Umayyad family, on the other hand, became the Sunnis. The Shiites, for their part,

¹¹ This attitude is especially exemplified in one Syrian Christian writer, who stated that "the God of vengeance delivered us out of the hands of the Romans [i.e., Byzantine oppressors] by means of the Arabs," cf. Burns, I.375.

developed into an intensely militaristic movement with the unswerving belief that only they are the true preservers of the Islam. Though they comprise only about a tenth of Muslims world-wide, their influence came to its peak in Iran under the Ayatollah Khomeini. These two principle schools of Islam, the Sunni branch (majority) and the Shiite branch (largest minority branch, located mostly in Iran), continue into modern history. Though both branches fully accept the Qur'an, there remain theological and traditional differences between them.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) In some ways, the expansion of the Islamic Empire by the “will of Allah” and the concept of Islamic community is similar to the Christian concept of the kingdom of God. What is similar and what is different between Islamic expansion and the Christian concept of God’s kingdom?

- 2) How is the Muslim division between Sunnis and Shiites either similar to or unlike the Christian divisions of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox?

The Qur'an

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the infallible Word of Allah. It is the transcript of a tablet reserved in heaven but revealed on earth to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel (43:3-4; 85:22; 97:1-5). Apart from the opening verses and a handful of other passages in which Muhammad or Gabriel speak in the first person, all the verses in the Qur'an are purported to be the *ipsissima verba* (actual words) of God. Muslims believe that Muhammad could neither read nor write (7:157), hence the Qur'an is a miracle that authenticates his claim to be a prophet.¹²

Muhammad's revelations began during Ramadan in AD 610. Gabriel came to Muhammad in the cave near Mecca where he went to meditate and commanded, "Recite!" The word "Qur'an" is formed from the same Arabic word *iqraa* (= recite). Three times the order was repeated. Afterwards, revelations began to come to Muhammad at various intervals over the next twenty-three years. At first, they were committed to memory by associates. His revelations were written on palm leaves, tree bark, stones, bones, bits of leather or other materials that were available, and all of them were brought together under Umar, the second Khalif. Under Uthman, the third Khalif, four standard copies of the collection were placed at Medina, Kufa, Basra and Damascus, while all variant readings were destroyed. Similar to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the original writings contained no vowels or diacritical points. Hence, among Muslims variant readings are possible. The Qur'an is divided into chapters or *suras* (= degrees, steps) in order of length, the first being the longest, and the final being a single sentence. Altogether, there are 114 *suras* and 6666 *ayas* (= verses). Each *sura* has a title rather than a number, i.e., "The Cow", "Women", "The Prophets", "The Believer", etc. They are not chronological, and some chapters contain at the same time revelations from Mecca and from Medina, though most are from one city or the other. Each *sura* except the ninth begins with the expression, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful."¹³

Since the Arabic words of the Qur'an are believed to be the very words of God, it is not appropriate to translate them. Muslims assert that the Qur'an is untranslatable, and all versions of the Qur'an in English or other languages are considered to be imperfect "interpretations." Since the inspiration is mechanical, God

¹² There is doubt about Muhammad's illiteracy, despite Muslim claims. When the Treaty of Hudaibah was being signed, for instance, Muslim tradition says that Muhammad took the pen from Ali, struck out some words, and replaced them with others. Also, on his deathbed, Muhammad called for pen and ink to name a successor, but his strength failed before he could do so, cf. Geisler and Saleem, p. 190.

¹³ N. J. Dawood, "Introduction," *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 1-4; Anne Cooper, *Ishmael, My Brother: A Christian Introduction to Islam* (Turnbridge Wells, England: MARC, 1993), pp. 77-97.

himself gives the syntax, vocabulary and word sequences. Unlike the Christian Bible, which Christians confess to be the word of God in the words of humans, the Qur'an claims to have no human element whatsoever. It is an eternal heavenly book that became an earthly one, word for word, letter for letter.

According to Muslims, then, the Qur'an is unique among inspired books. While they acknowledge various other inspired books, some no longer available (e.g., Scrolls of Abraham) and others widely available (Torah, 32:23, 5:44; Gospel of Jesus, 5:46), only the Qur'an contains the very words of God. In this sense, the counterpart to the Qur'an for Christians is not the New Testament, but Jesus himself. For Christians, Jesus was the *Logos* incarnate. For Muslims, the Qur'an is God's Word incarnate. For Christians, the *Logos* became flesh. For Muslims, the Word became a Book.

Because the Qur'an contradicts statements of fact in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, Muslims believe that these other works, though inspired, have become corrupted.¹⁴ Furthermore, they also believe that in some of Muhammad's revelations, Satan was able to slip in false verses without the prophet noticing, hence, "the Satanic verses." Early on, in the *sura* of the Star, Muhammad actually approved intercession to three major idols in Mecca as part of a religious hierarchy, idols claimed by the pagans as being the daughters of God. Later, Allah took Muhammad to task for this slip-up, and the verses were replaced by what now appears in *sura* 53:19-23. *Sura* 22:52 exonerates Muhammad in this incident by declaring that Allah would cancel anything thrown in by Satan: "Allah abrogates the interjections of Satan and confirms his own revelations" (22:52; cf. 16:101; 13:39).¹⁵

What about the Muslim claim that the Qur'an is the pure Word of God? From a historical viewpoint, the claim is at least overstated. First, there is firm reason to believe that Muhammad drew considerably from Jewish tradition, since there were many Jews in Mecca and Medina. Many of the Old Testament stories in the Qur'an seem to have been adjusted from the stories in the Hebrew Bible. Also, Christian traditions, though more remote, were known to Muhammad.¹⁶ There is substantial historical evidence that early on there were several versions of the Qur'an before the

¹⁴ The list of contradictions is too long to be cited here, but the following examples serve as illustrations: **Qur'an:** humans were created out of blood clots (96:1), **Bible:** humans were created out of dirt (Ge. 2:7); **Qur'an:** Jesus did not die on the cross (4:157-158), **Bible:** Jesus was crucified and died (New Testament). In addition, Muslim theologians attempt to find internal inconsistencies in the Bible to demonstrate that these books are corrupt, cf. Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-din Mahmud Ahmad, pp. 33-68.

¹⁵ Because Salman Rushdie claimed that these verses showed the Qur'an was a product of Muhammad's wishful thinking—neither from God nor the devil—he was issued the *fatwa* death sentence after publishing his book *The Satanic Verses*.

¹⁶ Burns, I.372-373.

official revised version under the third Muslim Khalif.¹⁷ Since all variants of the text were destroyed at that time, no one today is able to conduct the historical and critical analysis that normally would attend such a text. Muslims, for their part, contend that the revised and accepted text is the only true one, but their assertion begs the question. If the Qur'an has been preserved perfectly through the centuries, its perfection is due only to an early drastic purging.

Unfortunately, this purging was not quite thorough enough. There are places where the Qur'an flatly contradicts itself, something we should not expect of God's unadulterated word. For instance, *suras* 7:54 and 32:4 claim the world was created in six days, but in 41:9-12 it says the world was created in eight days (two plus four plus two). Some statements in the Qur'an are hard to square with scientific knowledge that came later than Muhammad. The Qur'an, for example, says that Alexander the Great saw the sun set in a pool of black mud in west (18:86). Muslim attempts to find mathematical miracles in the Qur'an are similar to some of those used by Jews and Christians—sketchy and unconvincing. Finally, the abrogation of revelations by later revelations casts doubt on the claim that the Qur'an is a perfect copy of a heavenly document.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Some have said that the tension between Christianity and Islam is a “battle of books.” Is this a correct assessment?
- 2) Given the very different theologies of Christianity and Islam regarding God, salvation and the cross of Christ, is it possible to say at one and the same time that the Qur'an and the Bible are both inspired by God?

¹⁷ Geisler and Saleeb, pp. 191-194.

The Hadith

In addition to the Qur'an, Islam has collected the Traditions (*Hadith*) of what Muhammad said and did and uses them as rules of behavior. Though not considered to be inspired in the sense of the Qur'an, the collections are believed to be the uninspired record of inspired words and actions. Hence, the *Hadiths* are the second most sacred writings for Muslims. For Muslims, the practice of faith not only concerns the religious ideas revealed to Muhammad, but also the words and deeds of Muhammad himself. The prophet is the model of how a devout Muslim life should be lived. So seriously are his actions taken that Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. ca. AD 857), a famous Muslim Traditionalist, refused to eat water-melon because he could not be sure that Muhammad had eaten water-melon with or without the rind.¹⁸ One Tradition quotes Muhammad as saying that his commandments, even outside the Qur'an, are equal in quality to the Qur'an itself.¹⁹ This ongoing imitation of the prophet produces a sharp irony. Whereas Muhammad is supposed to be merely human, he is mimicked as though he were divine-far in excess even of Christians and their relationship to Jesus of Nazareth.

The *Hadith*-the sayings and actions of the prophet-were codified in six primary collections about two centuries after Muhammad died. Muhammad al Bukhari (d. AD 870) and Muslim (d. AD 874) were the main collectors who assessed many thousands of traditions and retained only those they believed to be authentic.²⁰ Each tradition has two parts, the *isnad* (the names in the chain of people preserving the tradition) and the *matn* (the text describing Muhammad's words or deeds). The *Hadith* concerns both religious life and everyday life. However, interpreting the traditions and applying them to contemporary life is not always easy. To help safeguard against inappropriate interpretations, two other sources of authority are considered, the *Ijma* (consensus of opinion) and the *Qias* (analogy from the Qur'an or *Hadith*). Muhammad claimed that his followers would never agree on an error. Hence, if there is a consensus of opinion among Islamic teachers, their conclusion has the force of law. If a parallel to a present circumstance can be found in the Qur'an or *Hadith*, the analogy is considered authoritative for applying the Tradition. Different collections of the *Hadith* are today accepted as authoritative by the different sects into which Islam is divided. Alongside the Qur'an, these Traditions are the primary source of Muslim theology, law and practice.

¹⁸ Anderson, p. 99.

¹⁹ Anderson, p. 100.

²⁰ Apparently, traditions were multiplying rapidly. One man confessed to fabricating about 4000.

Daily Life

There are thousands of Traditions from the *Hadith* that regulate Muslim daily duties, manners, conduct and so forth. Everyday actions are either *halal* (lawful) or *haram* (unlawful). Some of the Muslim dietary laws are similar to Jewish Kosher laws, as in for example the correct procedure for the slaughter of animals. The Traditions regulate the hand to be used for eating, the choice of a wife, the purchase of property transactions, drinking from a glass, praying, and thousands of other things. They forbid consumption of pork, blood and alcohol. They forbid usury. (Some devout Muslims, consequently, are uncomfortable with insurance and investments.) Circumcision is regularly practiced. Virtually every action of every moment from dawn until dusk is regulated.²¹

Shari'a

Shari'a (Islamic law) derives from the Arabic root “the trodden path” and refers to the path into submission to the will of Allah. Because of past European expansion, Islamic law was diminished in many Muslim countries, though now it is being revived. The most well-known examples of this movement back toward Islamic law are in the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Islamic law follows the ideal that all people are created to live in submission to Allah and that Islam's destiny is to extend its control until the whole world is subject to Islamic law. Hence, the world is divided into two zones, *Dar as-Salaam* (House of Peace) and *Dar al-Harb* (House of War). As a religio-political ideology, Islam hopes to bring the *Dar al-Harb* under Islamic law.²² It is an instinctive conclusion for most Middle-Eastern Muslims that Islam cannot be practiced properly under a non-Islamic government.

For a nation to be under Islamic law is no half-measure-it is total domination. Islam claims to be *din wadawla*, that is, both religion and state. Hence, apostasy and treason are nearly interchangeable. Under Islamic law, western notions of freedom and human rights are non-existent. Punishment by public flogging and amputation are in force. Death is mandated for Muslims who abandon their faith. Persecution is common against those of other faiths, and proselytism by other faiths is punishable by death. Oppression of women, including female genital mutilation, is widespread. Polygamy is encouraged in the Qur'an by “two, three, or four” (4:3). Among Shi'ites, *mut'a* (temporary marriage for enjoyment) is allowed and approximates licensed prostitution.²³ Men may divorce their wives at any time for any and all reasons by a

²¹ Cooper, 128-140.

²² Sam Schlorff, “Questions/Answers,” Update: Arab World Ministries (2001, No. 3).

²³ Anderson, 122. Sunnis, however, do not allow *mut'a*, and many Muslims encourage monogamy.

thrice-repeated repudiation, which is irrevocable. Women cannot divorce their husbands. Girls who are minors under their father's authority can be compulsorily married to whomever he wishes. It is legal for a Muslim man to kill his wife or close female relative for unchastity.²⁴

Traditionally, Islam has sanctioned slavery and the slave trade, not to mention the unlimited right for Muslim men to use slaves as concubines. Slavery still exists in a number of Muslim countries under *Shari'a*. Currently in the Sudan, basic human rights are violated as much or more than in any other Muslim country. Female Christians are in perpetual danger of rape, and male Christians are sometimes crucified. Recent harsh examples of Islamic law abound. In Egypt, Christian converts from Islam have been tortured. In Morocco, a three-year prison term was given to a student for taking a Bible correspondence course. In Iran, a pastor who converted from Islam was executed. Such examples are a mere sampling of the brutality that survives.²⁵

Discussion Questions

- 1) How is what Paul called the "law of Christ" (1 Co. 9:21; Ro. 13:8-10; Ja. 1:25; 2:8) different than Muslim *Shari'a*?
- 2) Repeatedly since September 11, 2001, the American government has explained its counter-measures as a war on terrorism but not a war on Islam. How difficult is this distinction to make?

²⁴ Anderson, pp. 121-124; James Beverley, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?" *Christianity Today* (January 7, 2002), p. 40.

²⁵ Sam Schlorff, *Understanding the Muslim Mindset: Questions About Islam* (Upper Darby, PN: Arab World Ministries, 1995).

The Five Pillars

There are five ritual observances, called the Five Pillars of Islam, that form the foundation of Islamic religious practice. These are duties that all Muslims are expected to perform as part of their *Ibadat*, or obligations toward Allah. Recording angels, one on the right and one on the left of every Muslim, serve as witnesses to every word and deed, and they will be called to give their testimony at a person's death (*Sura 50:17-18*). The five pillars are as follows:²⁶

***Shahadah* (recitation of the creed)**

This is the first and basic pillar. It is the formula by which all Muslims declare their faith. The content of the confession is simple, and in fact, is the shortest existing religious creed, "There is no God but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." The *shahadah* constitutes the first words said in the right and left ears of newborns. It also is part of daily prayer. There are some disputes about how the recital is to be made, whether aloud or inwardly, though more conservative Muslims contend that it should be recited loudly, understood with the mind, believed in the heart, confessed without hesitation, and held firmly until death.

***Salat* (ritual prayer)**

The most visible of the five pillars is daily prayer for which there are five regulated times (dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset, after sunset but before midnight). Prayer is to be performed at the stated hours, in Arabic, using particular postures and words, and facing Mecca. Prayers can be said at home, in public, in a mosque or wherever one might be, though it should be in a place that is physically and ceremonially clean (e.g., not in a lavatory).²⁷ The Muslim should wash before prayers in a particular way, or if water is not available, the cleansing can be done with sand. In many Muslim countries, prayers are said on the public street. A prayer mat (or clean sheepskin) is used, and the various postures for prayer are taken on it. The pattern, or *rakas*, are a series of bodily postures assumed in sequence, and the different prayer times have different numbers of rounds (e.g., two *rakas* for dawn, four *rakas* for sunset, etc.). On Fridays, congregational prayer is prescribed in the mosque at noon (*Sura 62:9-10*). Friday prayer is required for all male Muslims who live in a large enough Muslim community.

²⁶ G. Parrinder, ed., *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present* (New York: Facts on File, 1971), pp. 503-505; H. Luce, ed., *The World's Great Religions* (New York: Time, Inc., 1957), pp. 105ff.; Anderson, pp. 118-120; Cooper, pp. 113-127.

²⁷ Women cannot prayer during menstruation or after child-birth.

The five prayer times are publicly announced in the Islamic world, often using a loud public address system. The summons for prayer is either chanted or played with a recording device.

***Zakat* (compulsory payment)**

The giving of money to the poor is a required act of piety for every Muslim of means (*Sura* 2:177).²⁸ Because Muhammad was himself an orphan, he maintained a concern for the destitute and needy. *Zakat* is paid on a percentage basis, limited to 1/40th of money and merchandise, 1/10th or 1/20th of agricultural produce (depending on methods of irrigation), and different rates for animals.²⁹

In addition, there is *sadaqat* or charitable giving which, though voluntary, is encouraged.

***Sawm* (Ramadan)**

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year and the anniversary of Muhammad's first revelations, is designated as a time of fasting which “puts the devil in chains” (*Sura* 2:183-185). This ritual both encourages self-discipline and inculcates sympathy toward the poor and needy. Between dawn and darkness no food or drink is consumed, no smoking is allowed, and no sexual intercourse is permitted. Even the swallowing of saliva is forbidden. Women may not use perfume or wear make-up. Since the Muslim calendar is lunar, the fast sometimes falls in mid-summer, which makes abstinence from water a significant sacrifice, especially in Middle Eastern countries. In Islamic countries, the exact time of dawn and darkness is announced by the firing of cannons. Those who are ill, aged, young or pregnant are excused from the fast, though they may make up the fast days later on.

On the “Night of Power”,³⁰ the giving of the Qur’an is celebrated at the mosque, when Muslims gather to read through the entire Qur’an. Ramadan ends with the Little Bairam, a feast with congregational prayers and the exchange of gifts (similar to Christmas) and dressing the children in new clothes.

During Ramadan, trade and public business slow down considerably during daytime hours. The fasting during daylight is compensated for by increased activity at night, and the women cook special and elaborate foods as well as entertain relatives and friends. The average family, in fact, may consume twice as much food

²⁸ Though often called “alms-giving,” it is not strictly charity, since it is compulsory. On the other hand, it is not a tax, since it is to be spent under fixed headings (i.e., the poor, beggars, orphans, relatives, travelers, those wounded in a *Jihad*, ransom of captives, hospitals, etc.).

²⁹ 1 cow per 30, 1 sheep per 20, 2 sheep per 120, 3 sheep per 300, 1 sheep or goat per 5 camels, etc.

³⁰ Different strands of Islam calculate the night differently—some on the 27th and others on the 23rd or 25th.

during Ramadan as compared with any other month. Sometimes, Muslims sleep during the day in order to be awake for the festivities at night.

***Haji* (pilgrimage)**

At least once in his lifetime, every Muslim is called upon to make a *haji* (pilgrimage) to Mecca during the first twelve days of the twelfth month (*Sura* 22:26-30). This trip as much as any other single thing helps bind the Muslim communities into a single whole, where they approach the sacred city as members of the same family, wearing identical white garments, abstaining from sexual intercourse, suspending shaving or cutting their hair, and doing no harm to any living thing, whether human, animal or plant. Every step toward Mecca is believed to blot out a sin. Anyone who dies on the pilgrimage is considered a martyr. The Tradition holds that 700,000 come to the Plain of Arafat east of Mecca each year, and if the number is deficient, the extra places are made up by angels. For many Muslims who live remote from Mecca, this pilgrimage is the result of many years of saving and waiting.

When the pilgrims arrive at Mecca, three sacred rituals are to be performed. The first is to circle the Kaaba, the holiest shrine of Islam, seven times (three times quickly, four times slowly), pausing on each circuit to kiss the Black Stone. This site is believed to have been enshrined by Abraham himself (*Sura* 2:125). The shrine of the meteorite is believed to have been built first by Adam and later rebuilt by Abraham. The stone was supposedly white in Adam's time but has become black due to human sins.

Second comes the Lesser Pilgrimage, in which the pilgrims trot seven times across the valley between the hills of Safa and Marwa in honor of Hagar's frantic search for water to sustain Ishmael (cf. Gen. 21:14-21).

Finally, there is the Great Pilgrimage to the Mount of Mercy in the Plain of Arafat (25 miles east of Mecca), where from noon to sunset the pilgrims "stand before God." Here, according to Muslim tradition, Adam and Eve were reunited after their expulsion from Eden. Here, also, Muhammad preached his farewell sermon, in which he proclaimed, "Know that every Muslim is a brother unto every other Muslim, and that you are now one brotherhood." After their visit to the Plain of Arafat, the pilgrims collect seventy small stones, and when they arrive at Mina, where there are three shrines, they throw the stones at "the steep one", symbolizing the stoning of Satan. The Great Pilgrimage climaxes with an animal sacrifice commemorating Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael, three days of feasting, and a final circuit around the Kaaba.

A Muslim who completes the *haji* can now add the title to his or her name. (A male named Omar, for instance, would become *Hajj* Omar. A woman would become *Hajja* plus her given name.) This privilege confers special status in the Muslim

community.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do the Muslim rituals of the five pillars compare with the Christian rituals of baptism and the Lord's table and the Christian disciplines of prayer, fasting, charity and devotional life?

- 2) Muslims believe that sins are "blotted out" by every step they take on the pilgrimage to Mecca. How does this concept differ from the Christian doctrine of forgiveness of sin?

Jihad

Though not one of the five pillars of Islam, the religious duty of *jihad* (struggle) is incumbent on all Muslims who are adult, male and free to answer any legally valid summons to the struggle against unbelievers. *Jihad* means “the exerting of one’s power in repelling the enemy or in contending with an object of condemnation” (*Hadith*). Its importance in Muslim thought cannot be underrated:

A man came to the Messenger of Allah and said, ‘Guide me to a deed which is equal to jihad.’ He said, ‘I do not find it.’ (Hadith, Bukhari 56:1)

Nobody who enters paradise likes to go back to the world...except a person who is involved in jihad, who wishes to return to the world so that he may be martyred ten times, because of the dignity he receives from Allah. (Hadith, Bukhari)³¹

To understand the concept of jihad it is necessary to understand the goal of Islam. The fundamental goal is to bring the world into submission to Allah, and jihad, or “striving in the way of Allah,” is the means by which that goal is to be accomplished. Jihad is the struggle to establish the supremacy of Islam, whether by preaching, apologetics, economic inducement, coercion or war.³² Jihad has been fought with speech and printed material as well as with swords, but the essential nature of this duty is that it is a continual conflict, both by the Muslim within himself and by Muslims against non-Muslims. Some Muslims emphasize jihad as ethical and moral struggle rather than violence, and in so doing, are reluctant to approve of terrorism. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that violence has been characteristic of the Muslim struggle dating from Muhammad himself, and this feature is inculcated repeatedly by groups within the Muslim world. Such violence can be seen both inside and outside the Muslim world. Muslim leaders who are perceived to reject the path of Islamic law, for instance, may themselves be the object of a jihad. The Shah of Iran, who emphasized his heritage in Cyrus the Great rather than Muhammad, was forced from his throne by reformist Muslims. Anwar Sadat of Egypt was assassinated by

³¹ Abdul Saleeb, “The Dark Side of Islam,” (radio interview with R. C. Sproul via Ligonier Ministries, Orlando, Florida, Copyright 2001).

³² One expression of this struggle can be seen in the establishment of the Islamic Council of Europe in 1973, with missions, cultural centers, and mosques to coordinate efforts of governments, national and international organizations. A more militant expression can be seen in the Seljuk and Ottoman dynasties who understood themselves as soldiers of Islam with the mission of establishing a world Islamic empire. This effort resulted in the conquest of Anatolia and Transcaucasia through holy war and the genocide of the Armenians in 1915.

members of the Jihad Organization, because he was perceived to be an apostate. Countless acts of terrorism are committed against civilians in Palestine/Israel in the belief that this action is the will of Allah.³³ Most recently, jihad ideology guided the act of terrorism on the World Trade Center in New York.

So, whence comes this aggression? The theological roots of jihad lie both in the Qur'an and the Hadith. From earliest times, Muslims divided the world into Dar as-Salaam (House of Peace, i.e., those countries submitted to Islam) and Dar al-Harb (House of War, i.e., non-Muslim countries). The latter was the object of jihad, the area where Islam should be extended by whatever means possible. More than half a century ago, Sir Norman Anderson, an expert in Middle Eastern cultures and Islam, described the Muslim understanding of jihad: "...he who dies in a Jihad is a martyr and assured of paradise. The Jihad, with the fanatical courage it evokes, has been by no means limited to the inception of Islam, and its possible relevance for the future can scarcely be ignored."³⁴ His words were prophetic!

While in the aftermath of September 11th, 2001, the American media persistently urged that Islam was a religion of peace-no doubt out of a very real concern about a severe backlash against Arab Americans, not to mention the more conventional ideology of multi-culturalism-the fact remains that while many Muslims urge peace, the much longer-standing tradition of Islam does not.³⁵ Following are some of the roots of jihad in the Qur'an.

Fight for the sake of God [Allah] those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. God does not love aggressors. Slay them wherever you find them. Drive them out of the places from which they drove you. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed. Fight against them until idolatry is no more and God's [Allah's] religion reigns supreme. (Surah 2:191, 193)

Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it. But you may hate a thing although it is good for you, and love a thing although it is bad for you. God knows, but you know not. Idolatry is more grievous than bloodshed. (Surah 2:216, 217)

Those that make war against God [Allah] and His apostle [Muhammed] and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on

³³ PLO terrorism against Israel, of course, does not justify Israeli injustices toward Arabs, but the point stands nonetheless.

³⁴ Anderson, p. 121.

³⁵ A good example of American media soft-reporting was the cover and article in *U.S. News & World Report* (Oct. 15, 2001), where the cover subtitle read, "How Islamic radicals are hijacking one of the world's great religions." In the article, the writer states, "What has become clear, of course, is that their actions [the September 11th attacks] cannot be justified according to the main currents of Islamic teaching and practice." For anyone who has read the Qur'an, such a sentiment is not at all clear. At the very least, it is badly misinformed.

alternate sides, or be banished from the land. Believers, have fear of God and seek the right path to Him. Fight valiantly for His cause, so that you may triumph. (Surah 5:33, 35)

As to you We have revealed the Book [Qur'an] with the truth. Therefore give judgment among men according to God's revelations, and do not yield to their whims or swerve from the truth made known to you. Pronounce judgment among them according to God's revelations and do not be led by their desires. If they reject your judgment, know that it is God's wish to scourge them for their sins. (Surah 5:48-49)

God revealed his will to the angels, saying: 'I shall be with you. Give courage to the believers. I shall cast terror into the hearts of the infidels. Strike off their heads, strike off the very tips of their fingers.' Believers, when you encounter the infidels on the march, do not turn your backs to them in flight. If anyone on that day turns his back to them, except for tactical reasons, or to join another band, he shall incur the wrath of God and Hell shall be his home: an evil fate. (Surah 8:12, 16)

Make war against them [unbelievers] until idolatry shall cease and God's religion [Islam] shall reign supreme. (Surah 8:39)

When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. (Surah 9:5)

Make war on them [unbelievers]: God will chastise them at your hands and humble them. (Sura 9:14)

Fight against such of those to whom the Scriptures were given [i.e., Jews and Christians] as believe in neither God [Allah] nor the Last Day, who do not forbid what God [Allah] and His apostle [Muhammed] have forbidden, and do not embrace the true Faith [Islam], until they pay tribute out of hand and are utterly subdued. The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are! (Surah 9:29-30)

Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal harshly with them. Hell shall be their home; an evil fate. (Surah 9:73)

When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Thus shall you do. Had God [Allah] willed, He could Himself have punished them; [but He has ordained it thus] that He may test you, the one by the other. (Surah 47:4-5)

The contrast with Jesus' teachings in the New Testament could hardly be more blunt (e.g., Mt. 5:3-12, 38-39, 43-48; 7:1-2; 26:51-52; cf. 2 Co. 10:3-4; 1 Pe. 2:21-24). Muslims who are uncomfortable with the above war passages in the Qur'an object that they apply to the early wars of Muhammad, but should not be applied universally. They counter that the Old Testament has many war passages as well,³⁶ and just as Christians say the war passages of the Old Testament reflect special circumstances, the war passages in the Qur'an do, too. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Jesus was a man of peace, and Muhammad was a man of war. In Muhammad's conflict with the Jews, he once cut the heads off hundreds of Jews in the Beni Quraiza tribe who did not side with him in battle. According the Hadith, Muhammad said, "The sword is the key of heaven and hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of Allah, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer: whosoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven, and at the day of judgment his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubim."³⁷ In another Hadith citation of Muhammad's words, when one of his companions asked whether or not it was permissible to attack pagan warriors at night with the probability of killing women and children, the Prophet answered, "They [i.e., women and children] are also from them [i.e., the pagans]."³⁸ The Hadith also records Muhammad's instruction that it was not fitting for a Prophet to have prisoners of war and free them with ransom until he has made a great slaughter among his enemies in the land.³⁹ Again in the Hadith, the Prophet said, "I have been ordered to fight with the people 'til they say, 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah,'" and also, "Paradise is under the shades of swords."⁴⁰

The passages in the Qur'an and the Hadith offer no time limitations on such wars, and increasingly, Middle Eastern Muslims are urged by the fundamentalist sides of their faith to embrace violence as an appropriate measure. Whereas Jesus pointedly revoked the war passages in the Old Testament, the war passages in the Qur'an and in Muhammad's life remain as a continuing paradigm. To be sure, Christians have dark sides to their history as well, including the Crusades, the ongoing terrorism in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants and so forth, but it should also be pointed out that such actions are in fundamental conflict with the

³⁶ There is at least one major difference between Old Testament wars and Islamic wars, however. In the Old Testament, the booty of war was *herem* (devoted to God, cf.), since these wars were wars of judgment ordered by God. When Achan disobeyed the *herem* in the conquest of Jericho, he received the maximum penalty (Jos. 6-7). This policy cut the nerve of waging war for personal gain. By contrast in the Islamic wars, the booty of the enemy always belonged to the Muslim warriors.

³⁷ J. Beverly, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?" *Christianity Today* (Jan. 7, 2002), p. 37.

³⁸ Saleeb, "The Dark Side..."

³⁹ Saleeb, "The Dark Side..."

⁴⁰ Saleeb, "The Dark Side..."

teachings of Christ, regardless that they are committed by those who claim Christianity. In not a single word or deed did Jesus give approval to religious war. In Islam, on the other hand, violence and terrorism go directly back to the verbatim words of Allah and Muhammed himself.

The modern upsurge in Muslim terrorism especially derives from the teachings of Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1787), hence Wahhabism. Terrorists such as Osama bin Laden perpetuate his teaching. In this interpretation of the war passages, it is appropriate to kill civilians as well as armed enemies. The early Wahhabis, for instance, decimated the city of Qarbala in 1801, slaughtering some 2000 citizens. The chilling statement by Osama bin Laden follows in kind: "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies-civilians and military-is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."⁴¹

While many Muslims world-wide distanced themselves from the recent terrorists attacks in New York and Washington, their protest largely has been weak and ineffectual. Muslim demonstrations in support of bin Laden have been adequately covered to show that a protest against terrorism and violence is by no means even close to a Muslim consensus. Given the roots of violence from the Qur'an and the Hadith, both in the purported verbatim reporting of the words of Allah and in the life and sayings of Muhammad himself, it could hardly be otherwise.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How should Christians respond to the acts of terrorism and violence promoted by the more militant side of Islam?
- 2) It has been said that Islam, in light of September 11, 2001, is at a crossroads: will it rise to become a religion of peace and human rights, or will it spiral downward toward more violence? Do Christians have a voice in this struggle for the soul of Islam?

⁴¹ J. Beverly, p. 34.

Beliefs

All Muslims acknowledge half a dozen basic articles of faith. They are called upon to believe "in God, his Angels, his Books, his Messengers, in the Last Day, and....in the Decree both of good and evil" (*Sura* 4:136 and the *Hadith*). These six articles do not cover everything Muslims believe, but they are the required beliefs by the command of Allah in the Qur'an.

It is probably fair to say that Muslims are not given to theological reflection in the same way as Christians. This is not to say that Islam produces no original thinkers, but rather, that compared to Christian theology, which over the centuries has produced massive amounts of theological reflection concerning the human dilemma, the meaning of life, salvation, the supernatural, the future, and so forth, Muslims have channeled their creative energy into other areas, especially Islamic law. While Christianity is covenant-oriented, Islam is law-oriented. Law and legal theory are more important to Muslims than abstract doctrinal beliefs. Faith, at least in Muslim terms, is submission to Allah's law rather than trust in God's faithfulness to his covenant.⁴²

Ours is a law-governed universe and everything in it is following the course that has been ordained for it... As the whole of creation obeys the law of God, the whole universe, therefore, literally follows the religion of Islam-for Islam signifies nothing but obedience and submission to Allah, the Lord of the universe.⁴³

God

At the simplest level, the theology of Islam revolves around the belief that there is only one God, Allah. His greatest and final prophet is Muhammad. The first *sura*, named "The Exordium," is an invocation that describes the essence of Islam.

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful! Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Universe, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Sovereign of the Day of Judgment! You alone we worship, and to You alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favored, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.

⁴² S. Schlorff, *Understanding the Muslim Mindset: Questions About Islam* (Upper Darby, PA: Arab World Ministries, Inc., 1995).

⁴³ Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi, *Towards Understanding Islam* (Leicester, England: Islamic Foundation, 1980), p. 18

Particularly objectionable to the Muslim is the Christian belief in the Trinity. Muslims conclude that the Christian doctrine of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is a capitulation to three deities.⁴⁴ Hence, the Qur'an condemns the basic Christian belief about the identity of Christ as God's Son. In the Muslim view, God could never have a Son; he does not beget anyone.

Unbelievers are those who say: 'God is one of three.' There is but one God. If they do not desist from so saying, those of them that disbelieve shall be sternly punished. (*Sura 5:73*)

Unbelievers are those who declare: 'God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.'" (*Sura 5:16*)

The Messiah, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle. (*Sura 5:75*)

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle and His Word which he cast to Mary: a spirit from him. So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: 'Three.' ...God forbid that He should have a son! (*Sura 4:171-172*)

As for the unbelievers, if they offered all that the earth contains and as much besides to redeem themselves from the torment of the Day of Resurrection, it shall be not accepted from them. Woeful punishment awaits them. They will strive to get out of the Fire, but get out of it they shall not. Lasting punishment awaits them. (*Sura 5:36-37*)

The Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are! (*Sura 9:30*)

Sometimes the idea is suggested that the Allah of Islam is the same as the God of Christians.⁴⁵ To be sure, both religions are monotheistic. However, the Christian confession "Jesus is Lord", which acknowledges the deity of Christ, and the Christian

⁴⁴ Muhammed and the community of Muslims seem unaware of that the classical Christian triune designations refer to distinctions within the inner being of the one God as opposed to three independent beings. The Trinitarian conception has always been of three persons (*hypostases*) in one substance (*ousia*), and the Nicene Creed begins with the statement, "We believe in one God..."

⁴⁵ In fact, Vatican II of the Roman Catholic Church officially promoted this concept. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; they profess to hold to the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day." (Catechism, sec. 841; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 16).

belief that God took upon himself humanity are utterly blasphemous to orthodox Muslims. For Muslims, the oneness of God is simply mathematical. God is utterly transcendent. For Christians, the oneness of God-the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit-is relational.⁴⁶ He is both transcendent, and he also has come near us in Christ.

Angels and the Created Order

The Qur'an describes Allah as the Creator of the universe, which includes the seven heavens and the earth (*Suras* 2:29; 10:3; 17:44; 25:61; 32:4; 50:38; 55:3-7). A critical part of Islamic belief concerns angels, who are prominent within the created order.

The highest order consists of the four archangels, *Gabriel* (messenger of revelation), *Michael* (guardian of the Jews), *Israfil* (summoner to resurrection) and *Izra'il* (messenger of death). Next, there are an indefinite number of ordinary angels. Two recording angels attend every human person, sitting on their right and left shoulders, to register his/her good deeds and sins. They will serve as witnesses at the last judgment, and on the basis of their testimony, individuals will be rewarded or punished. Next in the order are creatures called *jinn*, beings of smokeless flame who procreate and are capable of either belief or unbelief. They sometimes appears as animals, sometimes in human form. They can possess humans as well as be expelled by exorcism. The devil is normally perceived to be a *jinn*. He was created as an angel but turned into a *jinn* when he disobeyed God by refusing to worship Adam. Humans have special dignity in the created order, as illustrated in the command of God to the angels that they prostrate themselves before Adam when he was created. Adam was placed in the world as Allah's deputy (*Sura* 2:30). The Qur'an does not describe Eve's creation, though in the *Hadith* she is believed to have been created from Adam's rib. Islam does not conceive of humans as made in God's image, since God is absolutely transcendent and there is nothing like him.

Muslims believe in the account of Adam's disobedience, which is recorded four times in the Qur'an (*Suras* 2:30-39; 7:10-27; 15:28-42; 20:115-127). However, there is a major difference between the biblical account of Adam's sin and the account in the Qur'an. In the Bible, Adam's sin radically altered his relationship to God as well as that of all his descendents. Christians call this alienation "the fall." For Muslims, humans are no more fallen than they are saved. They are born innocent into the world, and there is no concept of original sin. Adam may have made a mistake, but he was not a sinner in the Christian sense of the word (i.e., depraved). People remain innocent after birth until they make themselves guilty by a wrong

⁴⁶ T. George, "Is the God of Muhammad the Father of Jesus?" *Christianity Today* (Feb. 4, 2002), pp. 28-35.

deed. They do not have a sinful or fallen nature, though they are intrinsically frail and tend to forget God. Their salvation depends upon their good works, not a Savior. The most common Muslim description of God and his relationship to humans is on the order of a *rabb* (lord) and an *abd* (slave).

I created the jinn and mankind only that they might worship me. I demand no livelihood of them, nor do I ask that they should feed me. (*Sura* 51:56)

Prophets and Books

Muslims believe that God appointed prophets for every age, beginning with Adam, the first prophet (*Sura* 10:47; 16:36; 40:15).⁴⁷ Altogether, there have been as many as 124,000 prophets from Adam to Muhammad,⁴⁸ all sent to call humankind back to Allah and all preaching the same message that there is only one God.⁴⁹ All such prophets are fully human, and there is no room for ideas of incarnation. Generally, prophets are believed to be sinless or at least free from any major errors or faults. Of the various prophets, five have the highest rank: Muhammad, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Of these five, Muhammad is the last and greatest prophet.

Muslims also believe that the greatest prophets left inspired writings. These writings, like the Qur'an, were pre-existent and sent down to each of the prophets. The books revealed to Noah and Abraham, like those of many other early prophets, no longer exist. The books of Moses (the Torah), David (Psalms) and Jesus (Gospel), though still existing, have been corrupted, and therefore are unreliable.

The first five books of the Old Testament do not constitute the original Torah, but parts of the Torah have been mingled up with other narratives written by human beings and the original guidance of the Lord is lost in that quagmire. Similarly, the four Gospels of Christ are not the original Gospels as they came from Prophet Jesus...the original and the fictitious, the Divine and the human are so intermingled that the grain cannot be separated from the chaff. The fact is that the original Word of God is preserved neither with the Jews nor with the Christians. Qur'an, on the other hand, is fully preserved and not a jot or tittle has been changed or left out of it.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ The words "prophet" and "apostle" seemed to be used more-or-less interchangeably in Islam for some 313 of the prophets, cf. Anderson, 117.

⁴⁸ Some Muslims say as many as 248,000, cf. Anderson, 116.

⁴⁹ McCury, p. 3. More than twenty of these prophets are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Some, such as, Adam, Joseph, Moses, David and Ezra are well-known biblical characters. Others, such as, Hud, Salih, Idris, Lugman, Dhul-qarnain, Shu'aib and Dhu'l-Kifl, are clearly Arabic, Geisler and Saleeb, p. 53-54.

⁵⁰ Alhaj A.D. Ajjola, *The Essence of Faith in Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1978), p. 79,

Considerable effort is expended by Muslim clerics to show that the Old and New Testaments are self-contradictory and untrustworthy.⁵¹

Salvation and Judgment

In Islam, it is impossible to speak about salvation outside the context of the last judgment. On the “Day of Doom,” Allah will judge the world, and every person’s deeds will be weighed in a balance, the good against the bad.

Every soul shall taste death. You shall receive your rewards only on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever is spared the Fire and is admitted to Paradise will surely triumph; for the life of this world is nothing but a fleeting vanity. (*Surah* 3:185; cf. 23:15-16)

The time of God’s final judgment is hidden, though there will be signs of its approach (*Sura* 20:15; 81:1-14; 82:1-5).⁵² When it comes, the dead will be raised and the books of human deeds will be examined. Humans will be divided into three groups (*Sura* 56:2ff.): those on the right (the saved), those on the left (the damned), and those to the fore (the very best of men, mostly from ancient times, but a few from the latter generations). The blessings of the saved are described in very masculine terms. Saved men are admitted to Paradise, where they recline on soft couches, drink wine served by virgins (*Huris*), eat fruit from the heavenly garden, and marry as many virgins as they want (*Sura* 44:54ff.; 55:50-78; 56:27ff.). Women also may gain Paradise, but their rewards are shrouded in obscurity, the most important being the escape from hell. The damned, on the other hand, will be consigned to the torments of hell, which include fire, boiling water and black smoke (*Sura* 11:106; 14:16-17; 25:12-13; 55:44; 56:42-43; 67:7-8). They will be chained together to burn (*Sura* 69:30-32), and lashed with iron rods if they try to escape (*Sura* 22:19-21).

But when the supreme disaster strikes—the day when man will call to mind his labors—when the Fire is brought in sight of all—he that transgressed and chose this present life shall have his home in Hell; but he that feared to stand before his Lord and curbed his soul’s desire shall have his home in Paradise. (*Sura* 79:30-45)

quoted in Geisler and Saleeb, p. 58.

⁵¹ Ahmad, pp. 27-68

⁵² Obviously, many of these signs are taken straight from the Bible, and according to the *Hadith* they also include the anti-Christ, the rise of Gog and Magog and the second coming of Jesus, cf. Geisler and Saleeb, p. 113-114.

Many Muslims believe in three kinds of salvation, perfect, imperfect, and deferred. Perfect salvation is achieved in this life, that is, salvation in which a person can go from earthly life straight to Paradise at death. Very few achieve this kind of salvation, though martyrs are among the few. Imperfect salvation also is achieved in this life, but it will gradually progress toward perfect salvation after death. Most Muslims expect this second kind of salvation for themselves, where after death each individual will experience a period of torment, some heavy and some light, depending upon the quality of their earthly life. In this sense, the Muslim concept of imperfect salvation is more-or-less on the order of the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Finally, deferred salvation is attained only after a period of severe suffering in Hell. In the end, every human will be saved, but some only after severe reformatory treatment by torture after death.

Life after death consists of a new universe, called Paradise, in which a person receives a new body. This new body is a spiritual one peculiarly adapted to the new state. Perfect souls will immediately enter Paradise upon death. Those who have imperfectly developed in this life will temporarily go to Hell, where they will be purged of their spiritual ills. Afterwards, they may enter Paradise. Eventually, many Muslims believe the state of Hell may be altogether terminated.

The concept of salvation in Islam is exclusively future. Unlike Christianity, with its past and present tenses of salvation, salvation lies in the future for Muslims. Since Islam does not have a theology of original sin and regeneration, there is no place for salvation in the present life. Even though Allah is repeatedly exalted as merciful and benevolent, a God who forgives the sincerely penitent, there is no concept of atonement as in the sacrificial death of Jesus. Equally, in Islam there is no assurance of salvation, and it is common for Muslims to fear their eternal destiny, which in turn becomes a motivation toward continued submission and obedience.

The Decrees

Orthodox Muslims believe that everything, good or evil, is decreed directly by Allah. God is sovereign, and the Muslim definition of sovereignty means that Allah is responsible for everything (unlike Christianity, where God's sovereignty includes the power of self-limitation, thus allowing for freedom in history and human life). Allah guides whom he wills, he leads astray whom he wills, and no person can withstand his decree. According to one Muslim theologian, "Not only can He (Allah) do anything, He actually is the only One Who does anything. All other things are passive, Allah alone is active."⁵³ This sort of fatalism seems to cut the nerve of moral

⁵³ G. Hehls, *Christians Ask Muslims* (Bellville: SIM International Life Challenge, 1987), p. 21 as quoted in Geisler and Saleeb, p. 30.

responsibility. For extremists the set-backs in the Muslim world are often perceived as divine judgments due to a relaxing tendency and apathy about Islam. Hence, intensification and a “back to the sources” mindset are urged.

To be fair, some Muslims also argue for free will, especially the freedom to believe or not to believe in Allah and Islam. In particular, the Mu'tazila sect dating back to the early periods of Islam upheld the freedom of the human will, denying that Allah predestined evil and unbelief. Most Orthodox Muslims, however, counter that all human actions are predetermined from eternity on the “Preserved Tablet,” the indelible heavenly record.⁵⁴ The Mu'tazila were frequently unpopular and even regarded as heretics.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How would you approach a Muslim regarding their objection to the Trinity?
- 2) Christians strongly believe in the assurance of salvation because it is based upon grace and faith. How does this belief differ from the Muslim concept?
- 3) If Allah decrees all things, what does this theology say about the origin of good and evil?

⁵⁴ Anderson, p. 109.

Islam and the West

One of the questions that remains uppermost in the minds of westerners in general and Americans in particular concerns the hostility of Middle-Eastern Muslims toward them. The tragedy of September 11, 2001 is both historic and symbolic in this regard. To most westerners, it is inconceivable how people half a world away could hate so vehemently as to indiscriminately kill civilians with no pretense of aiming at a military target. Westerners are accustomed to the just war theory, which assumes formal declaration, limited objectives, proportionate means and non-combatant immunity (though Americans certainly went considerably beyond some of these principles in using the atomic bomb in Japan). Nevertheless, for terrorists to target innocent bystanders, especially when there is no declared war, seems to us incredible and insane. The words of Australian activist, Helen Darville, who is a long way from being a conservative, speak for many:

*I have watched, since that day, the cozy leftist pieties of my youth disintegrate. ...The images of Palestinians cheering as planes carved into skyscrapers made me sick at heart. One fat woman in ugly specs will stay with me for a long time. Don't go there, I chanted under my breath as she ululated with joy. Don't go there. That's where the Nazis went, and that way lies madness.*⁵⁵

The visual images of little Arabic children gleefully stabbing their right index finger between two upraised fingers of their left hands, a potent symbol of the New York catastrophe, leave westerners aghast and incredulous. Any understanding of such hostility must be traced backward through many years and a history of which most westerners are only vaguely aware.

In a word, this hostility is a reaction against western influence, interference and control in Muslim countries. Relations between Middle-Eastern countries and Western Europe has long been hostile. In the early periods of Islam, Muslims swept across North Africa, the Middle East and Spain, areas that were formerly largely Christian. Christians responded with the crusades, temporarily recapturing Jerusalem. By the late 1400s, the Muslims lost their last foothold in Spain, and by the late 1500s they lost their naval power in the Mediterranean. What they lost in the west, however, they gained in central Asia under the Turkish raider Tamerlane. For most Americans, the dusty history of this struggle is no longer relevant to modern life, but for Muslims, it remains part of a story that is ongoing.

⁵⁵ Quoted by J. Beverley, "Is Islam a Religion of Peace?" *Christianity Today* (Jan. 7, 2002) p.42.

The more recent rise of western imperialism in the past two centuries threatened Islamic lands in significant ways. The French penetrated Algiers. The British took control of India. The French and the British dominated Egypt in succession, and both attempted to capitalize on the economic advantage of the Suez. Prior to World War I, most Middle Eastern countries lived under the rule of the Ottoman Turks, but when the Ottoman Empire broke apart at the end of the war, new possibilities arose, not all of them favorable to Islam. In particular, the Balfour Declaration began a policy of favoritism toward Israelis in Palestine and initiated a process that aimed at establishing a national homeland for Jewish people as well as preserving the rights of non-Jewish communities. By 1922, Egypt, though still maintaining strong ties with Britain, became an independent state. In the mid-1930s, due to the persecution of Jews in Germany, the British relaxed its immigration limitations and allowed more than 130,000 Jews to settle in Palestine. The Arabs resisted, and terrorism from both sides became a weapon of choice. By 1938, the British had 20,000 troops in Palestine, and still they were unable to keep order. After World War II, the United Nations established the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948, a stigma for all Arabs and a symbol of western imperial interference in Islamic lands. In the first twenty-five years of its existence, the State of Israel fought no less than four wars with its Arab neighbors, and its success was due in large part to the massive economic and military aid of the United States. Further east, the British, the Russians and the Americans occupied Iran after World War II because of its strategic importance. In the face of Iranian nationalism, a CIA-directed *coup d'état* overthrew the Iranian government and established the rule of the Shah, under which 40% of Iran's petroleum industry was allotted to five American companies.

Events of the past few decades have only served to exacerbate the Arab loss of face due to western interference. When Anwar Sadat of Egypt took positive steps toward peace at the Camp David Accords (1978), he was denounced as a traitor to Islam and later assassinated by Muslim extremists. The rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) has been largely unsuccessful in curtailing the encroachment of Jewish settlements on the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The growing economic power of oil rich countries belonging to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) has provided new strategies in this struggle. The United States has ongoing involvement in the Middle East due to its energy concerns. With the abdication of the Shah of Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini, a devout Shiite, gained control of Iran and returned it to *Shari'a* law. When the exiled Shah was admitted to an American hospital in 1979, a group of Islamic militants seized the U.S. embassy in Teheran and held 52 hostages captive for over a year. Meanwhile, Iraq, under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, began to assume significant influence due to its large oil reserves. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the early 1990s, the United States responded with the Gulf War to protect its oil interests.

Once again, the Muslim peoples suffered humiliating defeat by a western power. The above historical sketch offers only an outline of some of the more important events underlying Arab hostility toward the West.

Finally, alongside the political and economic maneuvering between the West and the Middle East, there is the growing cultural exchange due to technology, communication systems, travel and international media. Not so very long ago, the Middle East remained isolated from the west by geography. Now, satellites bouncing television transmissions to the whole world make American television programming—along with the values of Hollywood—available in ever-increasing ratios to Middle-Easterners. For many, the values of Hollywood are the values of the Christian West. In the minds of many Islamic leaders, this media invasion constitutes a concerted threat to the Muslim way of life, and it earns America the title of “the great Satan.” In fact, much of the disintegration in values that Christians themselves decry in their own secular West is perceived in the Middle East to be the direct result of Christianity. In the West, we are accustomed to sharply separating the sacred and the secular. Such a separation does not exist for most Middle Eastern Muslims.

Added to all this is the strong sense of honor among the Arabic people. They are a people of the land and a unique culture, and they feel that their land and culture has been and its being taken away from them by Westerners. Israel is both a real and symbolic expression of this loss. America, with its flagrant materialism and promiscuity, is viewed as the primary perpetrator of this evil.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you think that the Arabic resentment against westerners and Americans has any substance?
- 2) What do you think Americans can do to bridge the ever-widening rift between themselves and Middle Easterners, and should they even try?

Reaching Out to Muslims

Missionaries say that among Muslims, even Middle-Eastern Muslims, there is a growing level of openness to the gospel of Christ. This openness is to some degree a result of disillusionment over the oppressive measures of *Shari'a*, the growing violence of terrorism, and the realization that both these elements are deeply rooted in Islam's primary sources, the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*.

For many Muslims, the growing trend in Islamic fundamentalism is deeply troubling. The following excerpt from a Pakistani Muslim seeker, sent to Philip Yancey on September 12, 2001, describes this inner tension:

...I don't know whether this is the appropriate time to write about something personal. But perhaps because of what happened, I think I should write this letter, because I am convinced now that evil does exist in this world.

...the most painful discovery for me about the Islamic faith has been its concept of militancy. I always used to think that these fanatics were just misguided people who give Islam a bad name...but as I have found out, its teachings are quite different from those of Jesus, who wants you to turn the other cheek. As I know now, violence does have a strong precedent in Islam.

...My mom is so distressed. She has been pleading with me not to abandon my faith. I love her so much. But how can I force my heart to believe in something that just doesn't seem right? I still have a lot of questions about Christian beliefs, but I know that if I decide to convert, I will be causing an immense amount of heartbreak. I would be ostracized by all my relatives. Also, my legal status in this country expires next year, and considering my views about Islam now-and my sympathetic and favorable view about the Christian faith-I can't imagine going back to Pakistan.

Do you think I would find loving and open-minded friends in the church? ...I really am so confused, so lost. Please tell me what to do. God bless you.⁵⁶

In one sense, Islam is at war with itself over what Islam will become. Moderate Muslims, who are trying to steer Islamic nations toward some level of compatibility within the international family of nations, stand on one side, and fundamentalist Muslims, following radical Mullas who sometimes are themselves in tension with their own governments and who urge the propagation of Islamic law to all citizens of the world-even if by violence, stand on the other. The politics of the West affecting the Middle East will play a significant role in determining which side emerges the stronger. Radical Islam has been gaining ground, and moderates are feeling increasing pressure

⁵⁶ Philip Yancey, "The Back Page: Letter from a Muslim Seeker," *Christianity Today* (Dec. 3, 2001), p. 80.

to conform. In light of September 11, 2001, the actions of the American government in its war on terrorism must proceed with considerable caution to avoid tipping the balance even further toward the side of extremist Islam.

In the meantime, Christians have their own sort of *jihad* (struggle) in their evangelistic efforts, but it manifestly rejects violence at every level based on the teachings of Christ. It is a struggle for truth, not supremacy. The weapons of Christian warfare still remain: truth, the gospel of peace, faith, the assurance of salvation, the Bible, and above all, prayer (Ep. 6:10-20). In the West, Christians should make every effort to befriend Muslims, especially in the face of the backlash and profiling that are unavoidable after September 11, 2001. Showing concern for their well-being and responding to their “felt-needs” is the sum and substance of Jesus’ parable about the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25ff.). Paul’s willingness to extend himself culturally so that, as he said, he became “all things to all” surely means that Christians must be willing to move beyond their personal comfort zones in order to share the good news with Muslims (1 Co. 9:19-22). Paul’s advice that believers should confront opposition with gentle instruction is also in order (2 Ti. 2:24-26).

The New Testament also advises Christians to be prepared to give answers for their hope in Christ (1 Pe. 3:15-16). This suggests that they educate themselves about their own Christian message as well as about Muslim objections to Christian ideas. Primary Muslim objections to Christianity include:

- The Bible is corrupt; it has been changed from its original form, which is why it contradicts the *Qur’an*.
- God, if he is truly the transcendent God, could not have a Son. God cannot become human. Hence, Jesus cannot be divine. The Trinity is a capitulation to polytheism
- Jesus did not die on the cross. He only appeared to die.

Primary Muslim claims about their own faith include:

- Muhammad is the last and greatest of the prophets.
- Islam is the “final” religion, that is, it supersedes and is an intellectual advancement over all other religions, including Christianity.
- The *Qur’an* contains the very words of God. They have remained unchanged since they were recorded.
- Muhammad’s life is the norm for all humans.

In the face of such claims, Christians should graciously point out the long

history of manuscript support for the Bible as well as the dubiousness of the claim that the *Qur'an* has never been changed. Not only does the history of the transmission of the *Qur'an* cast doubt on the Muslim claim, the abrogation of divine revelations in the *Qur'an* undermines the claim that these words were eternally inscribed in heaven prior to their revelation to Muhammad. If they were eternally inscribed, why change them? The Satanic verses contradict the notion that the *Qur'an* are the very words of God.

Christians should help their Muslim friends see that the mystery of the incarnation is about God coming near to us. Allah, by contrast, is always distant. The possibility of a personal relationship with God is virtually non-existent in Islam. Though Allah is ascribed as merciful and benevolent, there is little evidence of his mercy and benevolence. Rather, he is a God of whim and arbitrary power. Furthermore, if he decreed all things, as Muslim theology asserts, then there can be no fundamental way of distinguishing Allah from Satan. He is both good and evil.

Already Muslims believe in some important religious concepts, and in some ways, they are more approachable on this level than secular westerners. Certainly they believe in such things as prayer, religious discipline, revelation, judgment and salvation. They even accept Jesus' birth to the virgin Mary. At the same time, their theology offers them no assurance of salvation. Most Muslims expect to suffer punishment after death, and they have no place to take their guilt. The Christian teaching of atonement and the assurance of salvation is surely good news!

Finally, the Muslim claim that Islam is the supremely intellectual religion, far advanced to Judaism and Christianity, can only be regarded as naive. If Judaism is like primary school, Christianity like high school, and Islam like college, as many Muslims claim, how is a religion that supports *jihad* any improvement at all on any ancient religion one cares to name. To be sure, there are war passages in the Old Testament, but Jesus transformed the war motif entirely into spiritual categories. Islam leaves war virtually unmodified and flagrantly open to self-aggrandizement, aggression and social injustice. The tragic state of women under *shari'a* law and the description of future salvation in almost exclusively masculine terms seems to leave women as less than fully human.

In the end, of course, coming to faith is not solely dependent on reason, apologetics or socialization, even though God may use some of these things as vehicles for the gospel. Ultimately, faith is the gift of God (Ep. 2:8), and the gospel itself is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe (Ro. 1:16). It is God who enables people to believe (Jn. 6:44). Hence, evangelistic

success is not due to the expertise of the messenger, but the power of the message, and that power comes through a work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, Christians can hinder this work of the Spirit by making it difficult for people to come to Christ (Ac. 15:19). They must always remember that the offense is the cross, not the offensiveness of Christians.