

The Religion of Islam

I. Introduction

As a result of recent terrorist attacks carried out by those claiming to be followers of Islam, there is increased interest in one of the world's fastest growing religions.

- A. Islam is the youngest of the 5 major religions of the world. According to best estimates, one of five persons on earth is a Muslim (around 1 billion). At present, 20 million Muslims reside in Europe (East and West) , There are over 2000 mosques now in England (approximately 900 were converted from churches)! There are currently about 4-5 million in the U.S. There are now more adherents of Islam in the U.S. than Episcopalians! Currently, there are around 50 nations where adherents of Islam are in the majority.
- B. The current resurgence of Islam began with the oil cartel following the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Millions of dollars from enormous foundations are being spend to fuel the worldwide expansion of Islam. Eighty percent of the mosques built in the U.S. are built from Middle Eastern oil wealth. However, there are several other factors fueling this world-wide resurgence: It's simplicity (as opposed to Buddhism or Hinduism), a population boom among Muslim families, heavy immigration from Muslim countries is changing the demographics all over Europe and in many communities in the U.S, and policies of Jihad (Holy War). There are almost a dozen hot spots, or mini-wars that could be shown to at least partly be due to the religion of Islam. These are in: the Philippines, Turkey-Greece, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Russia-Chechnya, Serbia-Albania-Kosovo-Bosnia, Nigeria, Sudan, Indonesia and Christian populated islands, Israel and the Palestinians, etc.
- C. Muslims claim the word *Islam* means *peace*, but the Arabic actually means *the peace that comes with submission*. A follower of the religion of Islam is called a *Muslim* which means *one who is in submission to the divine will*.
- D. Nota bene: In our opinion the greatest threat to world peace and stability in the 21st Century will be the result of the rapid spread of Islam. Almost every controversy in the Middle East can be traced to this religion, either through intra-party squabbles, or Islam verses non-Islam.

II. Historical Background

- A. The religion was founded by Muhammad who was born in 570 A.D. in a small village (Mecca) along a caravan route in what is today known as Saudi Arabia.
- B. The young Muhammad, an orphan at an early age, had an inquiring mind and an intense interest in religion. The prevailing religion at this time in Arabia was one of polytheism and animism. He inquired of both Judaism and Christianity. The Christianity that he came into contact with was of a very heretical sort. Christianity at this time was losing its vitality and was about to enter the Dark Ages.
- C. At about 25 years of age Muhammad married a wealthy widow 15 years his senior. Due to the ensuing economic security, Muhammad turned the more to religious contemplation often retiring to caves in the wilderness for long periods of time. He practiced fasting and was prone to dreams. He had a profound dissatisfaction with the polytheism and superstition of his day. He received his first of many "revelations" at 40 years of age, and thought at first he was possessed of a demon. Later he claims he was visited by the angel Gabriel who informed him to warn the people. This marked the beginning of his prophetic office.
- D. The response in Mecca to his claims was small and limited mainly to family members. Soon he and his followers (around 200) were forced to flee. This flight to Medina occurred in 622 A.D. and is known as *The Hegira*. In Medina, Muhammad became a leader and theocratic head of the town. Muslims reckon time from the Hegira. 622 A.D. = the year 1 A.H.
- E. In less than a 100 years Islam spread from the Atlantic Ocean across central Asia deep into India. This empire lasted over a 1000 years. Only a handful of countries have ever reversed themselves after becoming an Islamic nation in 14 centuries of history! Only the victory at the battle of Tours led by Charles Martel in 732 kept Europe from becoming an Islamic continent.

III. The Belief System of Islam

- A. Islam is a religion of rigid monotheism and an all-encompassing law. It is a belief system, i.e a world and life view. *Everything* is seen from an Islamic perspective. Because of this, Islam always has a socio-political agenda.

B. Islam's five fundamental articles of faith:

1. There is no God but God. *Allah* is the Arabic word for *God*. This god is the sovereign Lord of the universe. Everything that occurs is according to his will. He is also the source of both good and evil. The Koran assigns 99 names to Allah. The 100th name is secret and is known only to the camel! Allah is largely inscrutable; we know only his will. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian God, Yaweh, reveals Himself, as well as His will.
2. God gave prophets (the Koran mentions 28) to every age from Adam to Muhammad. Muhammad, the last and greatest prophet, was sinless as were all the other prophets. Jesus was the prophet of the previous age. They affirm that Jesus was born of a virgin and performed many miracles, but they vehemently deny that he was God, was crucified, or rose from the dead.
3. Islam believes that each age was given a book through its prophet, but all have been lost except portions of the Old Testament and the Gospel of Jesus which was corrupted by Christians. The Koran (*Quran*) was given to Muhammad and supercedes all other revelations. The Koran is divided into 114 Suras (chapters) and was given directly to Muhammad. To the Muslim, every word of the Koran is the Word of God and is of an eternal nature. In other words, it existed in heaven prior to being dictated by the angel Gabriel. The Koran governs every area of the life of a Muslim, from how to prevent crime to the proper use of a toothpick! It is often the only constitution of some Muslim countries.
4. There are good and bad angels. The chief good angel is Gabriel. the chief fallen angel is Shaitan (Satan).
5. There will be a day of judgement in which all the dead will be resurrected. Allah will be the judge and each person will be sent either to heaven, a place of sensual pleasure, or hell, a place of torment. Hell is for those who opposed Allah and his prophet, Muhammad. Salvation is attained by the quality of a person's obedience to the law as determined by Allah. Muhammad is seen as a mediator who helps a person attain salvation. The bridge to paradise is likened to a razor-sharp sword; Muhammad awaits to assist in crossing.

- C. Each Muslim has five obligatory duties:
1. Reciting the creed. *There is no God but Allah*. The word *quran* in Arabic means *to recite*.
 2. Pray five times a day facing Mecca.
 3. Tithe to the poor and for the furtherance of Islam. It varies from 2 to 10 per cent.
 4. Fast for one month each year during the 9th month, the lunar month of Ramadan. This month of fasting is during the day only. Feasting takes place after sundown.
 5. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca a least once during a lifetime. A male who makes a pilgrimage to Mecca is called a *Haji* a title of honor similar to the English *Sir*.
- D. The concept of *Jihad* (literally it means *spiritual struggle*, but also in the physical sense *holy war* against infidels) is sometimes referred to as a 6th pillar. Jihad is also a religious duty of all adult males who must commit to any summons of war against infidels. Any who die in such a war are assured paradise. Today there is controversy as to who in the Arab world can legally declare a Jihad. In the past, as well as the present Jihad has been the most successful form of *evangelism*. Polytheistic cultures have been given the option of submission or death. Historically, Jews and Christians, since they were considered *people of the Book* were given a choice of submission or paying enormous tribute (taxes).

IV. Other Muslim beliefs

- A. The unforgivable sin to a Muslim is to attribute deity to anything other than God himself. To claim that Jesus is God or the Son of God is blasphemy to a Muslim. They believe that God is *unbegotten and begets not*.
- B. Most Muslims believe Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad when He said that He would send *another Comforter* in John 14:16. Muslims even refer to Muhammad as the *Holy Spirit*.

- C. Muslims are very anti-trinitarian. The Koran teaches that Christians believe in a trinity of gods, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and Mary the Mother!
- D. Most Muslims believe Judas died on the cross, not Jesus. God caused Jesus to be ascended into heaven.
- E. Most Muslims do not separate church and state, i.e. politics and religion. There is no such thing as secular and sacred. This is a cause of some of their intra-mural conflicts. Occasionally a ruler attempts to secularize the state. For this Sadat was assassinated. Turkey gets away with it, but it is resented in much of the Muslim world.
- F. The Koran allows a man to have up to four wives if he believes he can treat them equally!
- G. The Koran teaches that if a Muslim soldier kills another Muslim soldier in an unjust war he will go to hell! In the Gulf War, many Iraqi soldiers did not believe it was a just war, hence they deserted in large numbers (and probably for other reasons as well!).
- H. Muslim soldiers can declare a victory in battle even though they were stomped by the enemy, because to a Muslim, win or lose, it is the will of Allah. So if you lose, you win, because it is the will of Allah.
- I. The Koran teaches that Muslims should take up arms against infidels. The following quote from the Koran should give insight into fundamentalist Islamic behavior:

When ye encounter unbelievers, strike off their heads until ye have made a great slaughter among them, and bind them in bonds; and either give them free demission afterwards or exact a ransom... Verily if God please he could take vengeance on them, without your assistance, but he commandeth you to fight his battles... And to those who fight in defense of God's true religion, God... will lead them into paradise...

V. Reaching Muslims for Christ

- A. There is no more needy field today than Muslim countries. Muslims make up 20% of the world's population but only account for 6% of Christian missions.

We need to pray fervently that the Lord of the harvest will send forth laborers. Most specialists in Muslim evangelism say to be successful in this field, one must be patient, be loving, establish relationships, understand Islam, and be given to much prayer.

- B. Because of strong social pressure Muslims in most cases are not free to read about or consider other religions or worldviews. Therefore, evangelistic methods that work in other areas of the world will not work in Muslim countries. Preaching the Gospel openly in most Muslim countries is a capital offense. What has proven effective in recent years are the internet, radio, video tapes, and reaching international students in this country.
- C. In a postmodern world it is important to note that both Islam and Christianity believe their worldview is true in the old sense of the word true. Both religions believe they have a mandate to spread their beliefs. Many Imams and Muslim leaders in the U.S., have stated openly that their goal is a Muslim America. As Americans we should not have a problem with that since it is a free country. The problem always comes with methods of coercion when Muslims come to power. Christians can and must love people of other faiths but at the same time respectfully reject what they regard as untrue. Tolerance is not about accepting all religions as equally true as we hear *ad naseum* in the media, but accepting the fact that they have a right to their unique beliefs. We must also be vigilant of guarding our freedom to believe, worship and apply our faith as well as sharing it with others.

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