

Christianity and Islam

Christian Reflection

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NO GOD BUT GOD

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? The question is too simplistic. It is more helpful to ask, "What kind of God is revealed in Christianity and Islam?" Though the traditions agree that God is one, they diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed.

HOW MUSLIMS SEE US

Islamic revivalist movements are reshaping culture, politics, and ethics in the Muslim world. Islamists are impatient with their regimes, their way of life, and the intrusion of western materialism and sexual promiscuity. Unfortunately, many link Christianity with the evils of the secular west.

WISE FOREIGN RELATIONS

Men and women in the ancient Middle East were educated in the tradition of wisdom as a paradigm for conducting diplomacy. Indeed, the Bible's much neglected wisdom tradition is a source of fresh possibilities in U.S. foreign policy vis à vis the Muslim world.

READING TOGETHER

While many good books can tell us the facts "about" Judaism and Islam, we can learn some deep truths "from" these Abrahamic traditions by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning. We may broach even the hard issues among these faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.

PEACE AND JUSTICE IN THE QUR'AN

In submitting to God, according to the Qur'an, we opt for peace over against war and heed the divine command to act with justice in conversation, in business transactions, and in treating others. How similar, then, are the Islamic notions of peace and justice to their Christian counterparts?

BEYOND THE VEIL

While for many non-Muslims the veil has become the characteristic symbol of modesty in Islam, the reality is more complex. Modesty is at home in our own faith journey, and by reflecting on this virtue beyond the veil, we may discover a fruitful new avenue for dialogue with Muslims.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

As two divergent Abrahamic faiths, Christianity and Islam share a long and often tragic history. By recognizing the family resemblances and learning to bear witness in mutual engagement, we can grow to respect Islam's adherents without compromising our own beliefs.

Church historian Mark Swanson has challenged Christians to “think through” Islam in four ways: “to think about things ‘by means of’ Islam; to get Islam straight in [our] own thinking; rigorously to interrogate and be interrogated by Islam; and to bear witness to Muslims in mutual engagement.” Our contributors take up this four-fold challenge to explore fruitful avenues for engagement between Christianity and Islam.

In *No God but God* (p. 11), Christian van Gorder suggests that the question “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” is too simplistic, and invites us to explore what kind of God is revealed in Christianity and Islam. “Though the traditions agree that God is one, they diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed,” he explains. “This fact is vital to Muslims and an important starting point for dialogue.”

Many Muslims in the Middle East, who are “already hyper-sensitive to a thousand years of European and American intervention, feel they are being targeted by a new ‘Crusade,’ led this time by the U.S. military and Christian evangelicals,” Donald Wagner observes in *How Muslims See Us* (p. 18). Furthermore, Islamic revivalist movements often link Christianity with the sexual immodesty and pervasive consumerism of the secular west. Wagner urges us to live and communicate the Gospel with integrity above this din of politics and culture.

In response to the downward spiral in relations between the United States and the Muslim world, Charles Strohmer’s *Wise Foreign Relations* (p. 28) explores the biblical wisdom tradition as a source of fresh possibi-

lities in foreign policy. The wisdom way seeks “common ground on which to frame policies that are as just and good for all sides as possible.” Strohmmer is optimistic that “moderate and progressive Islamic reformers would be receptive to the wisdom way, for it corresponds in part with the Islamic tradition of *ijtihad*, or ‘critical reasoning.’”

“How similar are the Islamic notions of peace and justice to their Christian counterparts?” asks Mustansir Mir in *Peace and War in the Qur’an* (p. 36). Cooperation toward peace “is not simply a question of Christians studying their sources on their own and Muslims studying theirs on their own and then of both sitting down across the table as academics comparing notes over freshly brewed coffee,” he concludes. “It is a question of reflecting, within the context of a changed and changing world and in recognition of the potential of outlooks other than one’s own, on the vocation of the religious person, on the common destiny of humankind, and on the possibility of taking concerted action not only to solve present-day problems but also to bring into existence a newly configured future.”

Heidi Hornik reminds us of the ongoing Christian dialogue with Islamic art. About the Dome of the Rock and other early structures, she writes in *Building of Mystery* (p. 43), “Muslim architects established characteristic building styles that were distinctive and recognizable, even though they were influenced by early works of Christian art.” In *Shared Stories in Metal* (p. 46), she examines the remarkable Freer Canteen. “With its Christian narrative motifs, this canteen made in the Muslim world in the thirteenth century reminds us how cultures can learn from one another new techniques, conceptions of beauty, and even interpretations of shared religious narratives.”

In a service of worship (p. 52) and companion sermon, *God Is Greater* (p. 62), Karen Thomas Smith considers two biblical stories—Jethro’s visit to his son-in-law, Moses, and Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman—as she guides us toward a faithful encounter with Muslims in worship. “At the heart of Jethro’s visit to Moses is a divine mystery,” she writes. “Israel’s unique covenant with God is blessed at its birth by a priest who is outside that covenant. This is a mystery we should ponder as we, who partake of the new covenant in Christ Jesus, encounter the descendants of Jethro and his fellow Arabs outside that covenant.” Her reflection on Jesus and the woman of Samaria is the inspiration for Terry York and David Bolin’s new hymn, *Hear the Prophet Speak of Water* (p. 49).

The veil has become for many non-Muslims not only a characteristic, but also a controversial symbol for modesty in Islam. “Many conversations between Muslims and Christians stop after they disagree about the veil,” Evelyne Reisacher laments in *Beyond the Veil* (p. 76). She helps us appreciate a richer Qur’anic view of modesty, which is primarily “about purity, marriage, male-female relations in the society, and our relationship to God.”

Other stereotypes about Muslims were shattered for Mark Long through his conversations with Kurdish professors in a remote corner of Iraq. In *Reading Locke on the Tigris* (p. 65), he reports that he also learned “something about my faith. How often I have felt ‘right’ about my faith only by convincing others they were ‘wrong’ in theirs. How often I have done apologetics but forgotten to give grace, to declare through my life as well as my words the gospel of our Lord.”

How can congregations prepare for dialogue with Muslim friends in the community? While we can study the facts *about* Islam and Judaism in many good books, we can learn some deep truths *from* these Abrahamic traditions by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning, as Kristen Lindbeck explains in *Reading Together* (p. 68). This still developing method is “a fresh form of interfaith dialogue and scripture study” in churches, on campuses, and in community study groups. In Scriptural Reasoning groups, Lindbeck suggests, “we may broach even the hard issues among these faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.”

In *First Steps in Understanding* (p. 89), Dale Walker recommends three books for their very different approaches in helping the uninitiated investigate the ways of Islam. Roland E. Miller’s *Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling: An Introduction to Islam* offers an imaginative conversation among Muslim friends, while *Islam: The Straight Path* by John Esposito provides an accessible survey of the political dimensions and worldwide manifestations of Islam today. Then, in reading Sayyed Hossein Nasr’s *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization*, Walker reports, “we find ourselves in a totally different world” as a distinguished Muslim intellectual presents his “testimony of faith, a passionate appeal for a [traditionalist Muslim] worldview.”

“Can we, as Christians, understand Islam and respect its adherents without compromising our own beliefs?” wonders Kurt Werthmuller in his review article, *Questions Rooted in Faith and History* (p. 84). Rollin Armour’s *Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History* describes the long interaction between western Christians and the Muslim world. Gary Burge’s *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians* considers how, given the historic significance of the Middle East to our faith, we can approach the struggles of the region with a biblical and Christ-like perspective today. Both books remind us “that Christians historically have approached Muslims with willful ignorance and, sometimes, violence,” Werthmuller observes. “This checkered past should encourage us to be humble and compassionate in our current conversations with Muslims.” ❖

No God but God

BY A . CHRISTIAN VAN GORDER

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? The question is too simplistic. It is more helpful to ask, “What kind of God is revealed in Christianity and in Islam?” The traditions agree that God is one, but diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed. This fact, vital to Muslims, is an important starting point for dialogue.

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? This question became a political as well as a theological “hot potato” when President George W. Bush, during an Iftar meal with Muslim guests at the White House in 2003, opined that indeed they do worship the same God. His statement alarmed many American evangelical Christians.

Perhaps a better question is, Why do people from these two faith traditions tend to “talk past each other” when it comes to understanding the nature of God and how God is revealed in the world? Since the events of September 11 we have been inundated with a wide variety of interpretations of what Muslims believe about the nature of God. Without discussing all of these, we can try to understand better how to interact with Muslim friends and neighbors when discussing with them Christian perspectives on God’s nature.¹

Just as not all Christians agree about the nature of God, neither is Islamic theology a monolith. Indeed, over one billion people in sixty countries call themselves Muslims. Nevertheless, attending to the primary sources within orthodox Islam, the Qur’an and the Hadith, provides a surprising wealth of commonalities. The opportunity to interact with followers of the world’s second largest religion may be difficult but it will also be quite rewarding. Our prayer in this task echoes the cry of Moses in the Qur’an, “O Lord! Relieve my mind and ease my task for me; and loose

a knot from my tongue that they may understand my sayings" (Surah 20:25-28, Pickthall).²

STARTING WITH GOD'S NATURE

Unfortunately, theological conversations between Christians and Muslims must begin in the context of a frayed and hostile history. Muslims first encountered unorthodox versions of Christianity that worshiped in a foreign language.³ Further-

Polemical monologues are not effective interfaith communication. Our personal deportment should be consistent with the humility of Jesus, who is the divine revelation of openness and of the patient and sensitive exposition of truth.

more, many Christians have tried to communicate the Gospel without first understanding the Muslim concept of God and perception of Jesus, and this has led to confusion and frustration for both parties. Indeed, many Muslims have come to see Christianity as defiant of reason (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21-25), and

some respond to Christian overtures by attacking the Bible while Christians probe for differences between the Prophet Muhammad and Jesus.

Yet a number of fruitful starting points for a dynamic Christian theological interaction with Islam remain. Both traditions care deeply about worshipping God as Creator, Supreme Lord, and Final Judge of the creation, and they agree that God gives moral revelation and spiritual guidance through prophets and the community of faith.⁴ Common themes in their worship include receiving forgiveness from God, extending forgiveness to one another, and submitting all of our life to the One God. Specific biblical teachings regarding prayer, fasting, and the family are quite similar to the Qur'an. Beyond these points, Christianity and Islam share in those aspirations that are universal to the broader spiritual venture of humanity.

Our first priority as Christians should be to gain, as best we can, a "self-understanding" of Islam through familiarity with its foundational ideas and history. In order to do this, we must listen to and learn from Muslims. Sadly, this may be more difficult than ever, for the centuries-old practice of demonizing Islam is alive and well with the spotlight on notorious characters such as Osama bin-Laden, Saddam Hussein, Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi, and the Ayatollahs of Iran. While unflattering images—brash terrorists, suicidal fanatics, and a host of others—dominate American media-generated pasquinades of Islam, too few of us bother to nurture a deep and studied appreciation for Islamic art, music, literature, architecture, and ethics. There is no justification for this continued ignorance and defamation. Yet, given this legacy of distortion, falsification, and political

bias, it is easy to understand why many have no hope for meaningful Muslim-Christian dialogue. What is more perplexing, however, is why we do not work harder to overcome these blockades and seek greater clarity in our theological interactions.

Unless we clearly understand the Muslim concept of God, the result will be murky presentations of Christianity. Here is one example of how our inaccurate grasp of the Muslim view of God will impede meaningful communication. Despite our eagerness to declare to Muslims the promise of relational intimacy with God, we should realize that, at least among non-mystical strands of Islam, humanity's distance from God is seen as a positive force that both defines and maintains creation. I once had a conversation with a Muslim about intimacy with God only to hear him respond that he was grateful that God was distant and uninvolved with the sinful details of his daily life. For this man, "bridging the gap" between God and man was not only impossible, but it was also undesirable.

It is instructive to contrast my halting efforts with Paul's exposition on the nature of God to the people at the Areopagus, or "Mars Hill," in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). Paul began by affirming elements of truth that he saw in their views of God before he carefully moved to a clear presentation of how God's nature had been revealed in Hebrew history. Only after Paul articulated God's nature did he allude to Christ's resurrection as proof of divine authority (Acts 17:30-31).

Until Muslims are able to appreciate what Christians mean by "God," all other doctrinal issues will be secondary. Why should we expect Muslims to be able to articulate concepts such as the atonement or the Holy Spirit, if they cannot first comprehend the Christian revelation of God's nature?

SPEAKING WITH LOVE

Not only *what* we say about God, but *how* we say it is important. Polemical monologues are not effective interfaith communication. Our personal deportment should be consistent with the humility and patience of Jesus. Indeed, the incarnation of Christ among us is a divine revelation of openness and of the patient and sensitive exposition of truth.

Our task, which is to present the message of God with confidence and clarity, must be grounded in love. "Perfect love casts out fear," the writer of 1 John assures us, so when we speak in love among Muslim friends, we may express ourselves with confidence and without tension. Our language must be as clear as possible. "If your brother does not understand you," as the African proverb laments, "perhaps it is because you do not fully love him." We must be about the loving work of careful exposition.

The biblical revelation about the nature of God is a message that is "receivable" to Muslims if it is presented appropriately. After hearing an explanation of Christianity, one Muslim retorted, "Complexity is one thing, incoherence is another. Paradox is one thing, but nonsense is something

else.”⁵ Without apology, we should present our faith as filled with mystery—referring to the atonement Charles Wesley wrote, “The Immortal dies! Who can explore this strange design?” Yet, we should make the effort to articulate logically what these mysteries mean to us.

Our theological vocabulary will develop gradually as we craft new language in response to how Muslims comprehend the Gospel. Jesus can be

Sadly, many Muslims, sensing little humility or sympathy from Christians who rely on strident, time-worn, and dismissive arguments, conclude that Christians believe heretical ideas about God. As confident people of faith, however, we should talk to Muslims with an attitude of genuine respect.

our model for this. Thoroughly rooted in the world of his hearers, he spoke to farmers, fisherman, and zealots with appropriate vocabulary. That Jesus made the effort to speak to others with clarity says volumes about the nature of God and the Kingdom he was announcing.

We may be confident that contemporary engagement between Christians and Muslims can be equally

dynamic because God has used human language and experience in the Incarnation of Christ to reveal divine truth. Christian doctrine emerges over time within the church to answer tough questions that are raised. This process continues today as Muslims and Christians interact with each other. Christian theology is not just a science to codify orthodoxy; it is also a tool to explain afresh cherished ideas in new situations and in response to new questions.

LISTENING WITH HUMILITY

Sadly, many Muslims sense little humility or sympathy from Christians who rely on strident, time-worn, and dismissive arguments. This often leads Muslims to conclude that Christians believe heretical ideas about God’s nature. As confident people of faith, however, we should be able to talk to Muslims with an attitude of genuine respect.

Many Christians fear that genuine dialogue with Muslims inevitably leads to compromise and syncretism. Because Christianity teaches that Christ is divine, there can be no “negotiated compromise” in the process of dialogue, and our faith convictions cannot be replaced by a consensus distilled from various religions.

Yet our claims of truth should lead to a posture of humility and not arrogance. We should approach Muslims with the openness of the Apostle Peter, who not only readily presented a message to Cornelius, but also received truth from him in a spirit of teachableness (Acts 10:28-48). This en-

counter with Cornelius broadened Peter's vision of God's love (10:34-35). We grasp truth only partially and we never comprehensively own it. Consequently, what we hope to gain in dialogue is not simply polite *savoir faire*; we seek a present-tense revelation of God's holy presence. Focusing too much on diplomacy, in fact, can inhibit the potential for genuine insight, for we may be confident that, as we interact with Muslims, God will bring us to greater insight just as He used Cornelius to direct Peter into deeper dimensions of biblical truth. Through this posture of being willing to learn, we express our confidence in faith and we may engender a similar response of teachableness in others.

Once again the Apostle Paul set an example in Athens. Walking around the city, he became "greatly distressed" (*paraksuno*) to see it was brimming with idols. Yet he chose not to translate his disdain for their worship into condescending or castigating diatribe. Instead, Paul reasoned with patient exposition on the question of how God had revealed Himself in Christ (Acts 17:17). Paul's heart of passion spurred him on to the kind of dialogue (*dialegomai*) and reasoned care in which Christians should be involved.

Since Islam claims to be *al-din al-hanif*—the primordial religion of absolute truth, the final revelation, and the summary and synthesis of knowable truth⁶—why should Muslims engage in theological conversations with Christians? Toleration, not dialogue, may be the guiding principle for most Muslims in theological interaction with Christians. Indeed, many Muslims with whom I've interacted look askance at "dialogue" with Christians because they fear it is a subterfuge that conceals our ulterior and mainly evangelical motives. Yet Christians may remind Muslims that the Qur'an itself calls them to listen carefully to our message:

And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation) unless it be with those who inflict wrong: But say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which has come down to you: Our God and your God are One; and it is to Him that we bow" (Surah 29:46).

This sentiment is paralleled in Surah 10:95: "And if thou art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the scripture before thee."

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

Framing Muslim-Christian theological interaction with the question "Do we worship the same God?" is too simplistic. It is more helpful to ask, "What kind of God is revealed in Christianity and in Islam?" Though the traditions agree that God is one, they diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed.⁷ This fact is vital to Muslims and an important starting point for dialogue.

The basic distinction between Islam and Christianity is a difference in

the conception of God's relational nature. Christianity begins with "God is love" and thus participant. In Islam, the primary affirmation is that "God is One" and thus beyond the limitations of finite comprehension. Christianity calls individuals to enter into covenant relationship with God. Islam calls individuals to worshipfully assume a proper place of obedience before God's will and revelation. Both religions conclude that the other's view of God is decidedly anthropocentric.

Other discussions between Muslims and Christians will be mired in controversy until the fundamental question is addressed: "Who is God?" The way that Muslims view Jesus is predicated on how they view God. In Islam, God is the giver of guidance (*huda*) and inspiration (*wahy*); in Christianity, God gives Himself in incarnational revelation. The relationship that Christians have towards God is based on the revelation that God is "our Father." Expressed this way, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation may be viewed by Muslims not as a blasphemous absurdity but as the summation of God's Fatherhood.

At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks his disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15, parallels). Through Jesus we have come to know God as an active participant among humanity through divine love. The goal for the careful expositor is to present this conviction with such clarity that Muslims might understand how his disciples can respond, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (16:16).

CONCLUSION

In my interactions with Muslims over twenty years in more than twenty different nations I consistently have felt both their respect for and their interest in the person of Jesus Christ. Looking back on these experiences, I'm reminded of the story told in church history about St. Christopher's decision as a young man to find and worship "the strongest of Lords." At the end of his search, St. Christopher came to the conclusion that the infant child Jesus, born in obscurity and poverty in a disheveled animal manger, was actually the divine ruler of the world.⁸ God, by coming in the child Jesus, certainly does not do what Muslims would expect and defies their expectations about what God should be like.

The central theological message for Christians interacting with Muslims is not that "our God" is true and "your God" is not, but the biblical revelation that "God is love" and is actively seeking humanity to participate in a new covenant with God (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The revelation that "God is love" cannot be proven, but it can be easily discredited by strident advocacy. Our pride and prejudice do not facilitate an open reception to the Gospel. Before God could use Peter among the Gentiles, He had to root out the fisherman's arrogant bias (Acts 10:1-48). Jesus commissioned the disciples to go to "Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria," thereby confronting their ethnocentric resistance to working with people who were different

from themselves (Acts 1:7-8). God's Holy Spirit at Pentecost slashed dramatically through cultural and religious boundaries (Acts 2:5-11).

God, who is revealed in Christ, leads us to interact with Muslims in a way that echoes the first prayerful intercession in the Bible, the cry of our mutual father Abraham who pleaded, "O that Ishmael might live in your sight" (Genesis 17:18). May Muslims who interact with those of us who follow Jesus benefit from meeting us; may they gain a clearer understanding of the Father heart of our great and loving Creator God. There is no other God but God.

NOTES

1 Two books that can assist Christians in interactions with Muslims have become "classics": Bishop Stephen Neill's *The Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) and Bishop Kenneth Cragg's *The Call of the Minaret* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956; third edition, Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2000).

2 Cited from the translation by Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. Because the Qur'an was revealed by God in Arabic, Muslims stress that all "English Qur'ans" are merely translations and are not trustworthy.

3 Two of the largest groups of Christians in Arabia at the time of Muhammad were the Modalists and the Assyrian Church of the East. Both were beyond the pale of orthodoxy. The Modalists reduced the three persons of the Trinity to different "modes" of God's interaction with the world—as Father in creation, Son in redemption, and Spirit in sanctification. The Assyrian Church believed that Christ had dual natures that coexisted together. Christian services in the Arabian Peninsula at that time were held in Aramaic rather than Arabic, and Christians did not use an Arabic translation of the Bible.

4 Interestingly, Muslims believe it is Jesus who will return to earth on the final Day of Judgment.

5 Reported by Shabbir Akthar, *A Faith for All Seasons: Islam and the Challenge of the Modern World* (London: Loewellew Publishers, 1990), 178.

6 At the same time, the Qur'an emphasizes that "there is no compulsion in religion" (Surah 2:256; 109:6).

7 A. H. Mathias Zahniser's excellent but unpublished paper, "The Christian View of God's Unity," communicates these ideas for a Muslim context.

8 I recount the story of St. Christopher in the conclusion of my study, *No God but God: A Path to Muslim-Christian Dialogue on God's Nature* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2003).



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How Muslims See Us

BY DONALD WAGNER

Islamic revivalist movements are reshaping culture, politics, and personal ethics throughout the Muslim world from Morocco to Indonesia. Islamists are impatient with their regimes, their way of life, and the intrusion of western materialism and sexual promiscuity. Unfortunately, many have linked Christianity with the evils of the secular west.

When Jerry Falwell stated on *60 Minutes* in October, 2002, that the Prophet Mohammad was “a terrorist” and “a violent man of war,” Muslims from Egypt to Indonesia poured into the streets by the tens of thousands to express their outrage.¹ The President of Malaysia was forced to broadcast a national call for calm to prevent violence against churches and U.S. businesses. Falwell’s remarks followed a series of similar statements by Christian leaders—Franklin Graham, for example, called Islam a “very evil, wicked religion” and Pat Robertson echoed this view on the Christian Broadcasting Network, which is viewed throughout the Muslim world. The timing of these statements could not have been worse for the image of Christianity and of the United States in the Islamic world, given the unpopular war in Iraq and President George W. Bush’s initial description of the U.S. response to the attacks on the World Trade Towers as a “crusade.”

Despite the President’s corrections, these pronouncements stick in the hearts and minds of Muslims with serious ramifications for local Christians and missionaries in what some mission agencies are calling the “10/40 window.”² In this vast region between ten and forty degrees north of the Equator, and from Morocco and Tunisia in North Africa to Indonesia and the Philippines, a more conservative form of Islam has been reshaping cul-

ture, politics, and personal ethics. This is true especially in the Arab nations which are the focus of this article.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISLAMIC REVIVAL

Dr. John Esposito, Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, cautions against using “Islamic fundamentalism” to describe the diverse revival of Islam now underway. The term is pejorative and is usually applied to “those who are literalists and wish to return to and replicate the past,” he notes, though “few individuals and organizations in the Middle East fit such a stereotype.”³ (I will substitute the terms “Islamic revivalism” for the movement and “Islamists” for the individual adherents.) In fact, most Islamic revivalist movements are engaged in providing a more hopeful future, while at the same time calling Muslims back to a more conservative interpretation of the Qur’an and Shari’a, or Islamic law. They are returning to old traditions while embarking on radically new political initiatives.

Since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1281-1919), the Arab nations have suffered an extensive period of degradation, domination, and defeat. The humiliation continues to a degree, with successive defeats at the hands of various European powers, the United States, and Israel. Israel’s victories, with significant support from the United States in the wars of 1967, 1973, 1982 (Lebanon), and the Palestinian Intifadas (1987-1993 and 2000-present), have brought various Arab regimes and revolutionary movements to their knees. Perhaps more significantly, the Arabs have been unsuccessful in regaining control over their third most holy site, the Haram al-Sharif (the “Noble Sanctuary” which includes the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem.

During the period of colonial struggle since the mid-nineteenth century, many Arab states experimented with secular Pan-Arab Nationalism. Since the late 1960s under strong secular leaders such as Gamal Abdal Nasser (1918-1970) in Egypt and the Ba’athist (Renaissance) Parties in Syria under President Hafez al-Assad and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, this movement led to strong military governments but limited freedom for the people. Others experimented with Marxism, which had little success in the more theocentric Islamic culture of the region. Islamic monarchies have ruled the Gulf since the early nineteenth century, as in the case of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and to a degree in Jordan. Because these monarchies are in close alliance with the United States, they are targets for the Islamists.

Arabs, thus, have witnessed decades of failure in their political and economic systems. All models of political change have failed, whether secular Arab nationalism or alliances with a super power, the Soviet Union or the United States. The Arab people have fallen further behind the developed world in nearly every quality of life indicator: civil rights, median

income, education, social services, technology, participatory democracy, and personal and national security. Yet throughout the region Arabs and Muslims see the prosperity of the west on their television sets, computers, and movies. While their conservative personal mores despise the exaggerated materialism and sexual promiscuity transmitted to their region, the people yearn for a higher standard of living and the basic freedoms enjoyed by the west. They also despise how the United States and some European countries privilege Israel, often applying a double standard in human rights and international law in favor of Israel but hostile to Arabs.

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-1792) initiated a conservative Islamic reform movement in the Arabian Peninsula that would have even wider ramifications in the nineteenth century. Al-Wahab called Muslims to return to the original teachings of the Qu'ran and to interpret them much more strictly in relation to Islamic law, or Shari'a. Gradually his teachings spread across the mostly Sunni Islamic Middle East.

Within this social and religious context, as early as the late 1920s, conservative Muslim thinkers began to emerge with a new vision for the Arab nations, such as the Egyptian intellectuals Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) who gave prominence to the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamic revivalist movement in opposition to the Egyptian government. Qutb lived in the United States in the 1950s and four things troubled him: churches using secular entertainment schemes to draw larger numbers; rampant sexual immorality; racism toward African-Americans; and Israel receiving unconditional support by the U.S. government and in mainstream media.

Qutb attended church functions such as dances and secular film screenings that struck him as immoral, and he concluded the churches were becoming centers of entertainment and promiscuity. On sexual permissiveness, he recounted being deeply offended by a conversation with a female student he met at a seminar in Greeley, Colorado, who told him that "the issue of sexual relations is purely a biological matter. You complicate the matter by imposing the ethical element on it. The horse and mule, the bull and cow...do not think about this ethical matter...and, therefore, live a comfortable, simple, and easy life."⁴

Qutb also thought the United States was turning a blind eye to the injustices committed against the Palestinians. "The creation of Israel led to [Arab] disenchantment with the west; Qutb perceived that the West had betrayed the Arabs," writes Ahmad Moussalli in summarizing Qutb's views. "The British, for instance, defaulted on their promises of independence for the Arabs and had been attempting to stifle the spirit of the Egyptian people as well as the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood's fighting forces in Palestine. Also, the United States had betrayed the Arabs by siding in the United Nations with the Zionists on the question of Palestine, and by sponsoring and approving the creation of the Jewish state."⁵

Dismayed by secular American culture, Qutb prematurely terminated his Ph.D. studies in the United States, returned to Egypt, and embraced the extreme form of Islam practiced by al-Banna. His deep-felt resentment toward the United States and Israel coupled with the growing intrusion of secular culture in Egypt led him to take up the pen and sword in the cause of Islam, the only answer to the Godlessness of the west.

The radicalization of Sayid Qutb may be a dramatic case, but it is representative of the new wave of Islamic revivalism that has spread in small cells from Morocco to Indonesia as the region grows increasingly impatient with its regimes, its way of life, and the intrusion of western materialism and sexual promiscuity. For these “new Muslims,” Islam offers a complete worldview that encourages them to reform their personal lives and their political systems. Unfortunately, many have linked Christianity with the evils of the secular west.

DISTINGUISHING THE GOSPEL FROM EMPIRE

The Arab and Islamic worlds have witnessed a series of crises and military invasions that at times mixed Christian missions with western nationalist politics, usually at the expense of the Gospel. The Crusades (1099-1187) are the most tragic and lasting example as European Christians sought to restore Christianity to the Holy Land in a ruthless invasion of lands that were predominantly Muslim. Rarely discussed is the fact that thousands of Jews and Arab Christians also were massacred.

Roman Catholic missionaries brought European culture with their Christianity, sometimes but certainly not always in violent and arrogant forms, beginning with the Crusades and continuing into the nineteenth century. Protestant missions entered the Middle East during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often with intimate ties to western governments. This is not to discount the wonderful ac-

We must not discount the accomplishments of missionaries in spreading the Gospel and establishing educational and medical institutions; but all too often as they exported western political interests and culture into the Islamic world, the essence of the Gospel was compromised.

complishments of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in spreading the Gospel and establishing educational institutions and medical facilities, but all too often as missionaries exported western political interests and culture into the Islamic world, the essence of the Gospel was compromised.

More recently, U.S.-based mission agencies slowly but steadily are en-

gaging the Arab and Muslim worlds. After 9/11, a new and bolder blend of western Christian missions and televangelist broadcasting has been tied to the U.S. military presence in the Middle East. The evangelical mission rhetoric sometimes appears to converge with the neoconservative ideology of the George W. Bush administration: while neoconservatives such as Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, and prominent journalists

How can individuals, churches, and mission agencies approach the Middle East and Islamic world with greater sensitivity and awareness? Our commitment to Christ need not be compromised by greater sensitivity to our pluralistic world.

target Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, and Iran for “regime change,” evangelical mission agencies are targeting Muslim countries with aggressive strategies that rush into the region on the heels of war.

By adopting the 10/40 window as their target, evangelical missionary movements either inadvertently or intentionally are

embracing the strategy of the secular neoconservatives, notes Josh Anderson in a recent issue of *Sojourners Magazine*. Most Muslims, already hypersensitive to a thousand years of European and American intervention, feel they are being targeted by a new “Crusade,” led this time by the U.S. military and Christian evangelicals. Not only Muslims, but also indigenous Middle Eastern Christian pastors and denominational leaders have articulated this perspective. “With a portion of American Christians waving flags around a radical foreign policy and simultaneously sending missionaries to the nations, the danger of a ‘poisoned gospel’ is real indeed,” Andersen laments. “To ‘muddle maps’ in this way is to taint missionary efforts with the intrinsic violence and self-serving nature of the U.S. government’s foreign policy. For Christians committed to the expansion of the reign of God, efforts to keep the missions movement free from the national political agenda are crucial.”⁶

As a result of this linkage of U.S. foreign policy with evangelism, local Christians and missionaries are increasingly subject to violent reprisals. This is a relatively new phenomenon, but it exacerbates another serious problem that has been decades in the making: the indigenous Christian churches are slowly disappearing throughout the Islamic world and the Middle East in particular. British travel author William Dalrymple’s *From the Holy Mountain* paints a grim picture of the future of Christianity in these lands where the church took root. In Turkey very few Christians remain, especially in the eastern provinces where hundreds of thousands Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Christians once lived. Only a few elderly caretakers remain to care for empty monasteries and churches. The second worse case

is the Holy Land, where Palestinian Christians have declined from twenty percent of the population in 1900 to a meager one percent today. Indeed, the Christian presence in Jerusalem and the West Bank may be just one generation from extinction. However it is Israel's occupation and the endless violence, not militant Islam, which are causing Palestinian Christians to emigrate.

Columbia University's political historian Rashid Khalidi, while tracing the role of the United States in the Middle East, notes that Middle Easterners had a favorable view of the United States until recently:

...in the eyes of many in the region the United States has gradually changed in the past few decades. It went from being considered a benevolent, disinterested outsider to something quite different: a power with a massive presence in the Middle East, a broad range of interests there, and objectives not always compatible with those of the people of the region. While most Middle Easterners for the first century and a half of American involvement with the region shared this [positive] view, they do so no longer. It is in the context of this wide divergence between the two sides that the post-9/11 American interventions have taken place, with many Americans seeing not only the invasion of Afghanistan but also the much more fraught invasion of Iraq in these high minded terms, and people in the region generally taking a quite different view.⁸

Middle Easterners who once were fascinated with things American and maintained a keen desire to visit the United States are now becoming angry with U.S. policies. While many continue to separate the American people from what they interpret as unjust and militaristic imperial policies of the government, these boundaries are vanishing. In brief, the United States has replaced England and France as the hated colonial power, the occupying power that needs to be repelled from the region. While the United States proclaims a commitment to democracy and human rights, many Muslims and Arabs hear these pronouncements as empty phrases that are selectively applied, favoring Israel and targeting the Arab and Islamic world. Sadly, the image and witness of Christianity are perceived as associated with this imperialism, a fact all too often confirmed by the behavior and words of various evangelical missionaries.

MOVING TOWARD DIALOGUE

How can individuals, churches, and mission agencies approach the Middle East and Islamic world with greater sensitivity and awareness? Charles Kimball suggests that our commitment to Christ need not be compromised by greater sensitivity to our pluralistic world:

In my case, I am aware that being born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as opposed to Cairo or Banaras made a great deal of difference in the

formation of my world view and belief system. Unlike past centuries, however, it is increasingly difficult to slip back into a comfortable parochialism after such matters have surfaced. While the act of faith and the intentional decision to follow Christ transcend the accident of birth, we cannot escape the ever present reality of pluralism.⁹

He examines three paradigms that describe how Christians approach this increasingly pluralistic world: inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism. We can benefit by surveying all three as we consider how to position ourselves in relation to Islam.

The *inclusivist paradigm*, which is more common among Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and mainline Protestant Christians, holds to the efficacy of Jesus Christ for salvation but opens the door to God's wider grace. It counsels against our making a final judgment against people of other faiths. The Second Vatican Council adopted this view:

Those who through no fault of their own, do not know Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.¹⁰

Even if we conclude that this paradigm compromises the Gospel, we can benefit from the sensitivity it offers. So, for instance, Kenneth Cragg in his remarkable collection of Christian and Muslim prayers recommends that we set aside our judgments in the encounter with Islam while not surrendering our faith:

Only 'a part' of either community will be ready and willing participants. Only 'a part' of what they comprehend in faith and doctrine will be present. On both counts there will be no question of 'the whole.' In sharing they will be 'apart' from their full identity and—as is always true in praying—they will have 'come apart'—as Jesus often bade his disciples, into quiet, seeking, or, as the Qur'an puts it, 'desiring the face of God.'¹¹

In other words, when engaging in dialogue and personal relationships with Muslims, Cragg suggests that we set aside our judgments and differences in order to establish common ground and first establish trust. Debates and judgments can come later.

The *exclusivist paradigm*, a dominant view throughout church history and the one accepted by most evangelical Christians today, is based on the conviction that Jesus Christ provides the only means of salvation for humanity. Kimball notes that this view can allow for dialogue and greater sensitivity toward other religions. While Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and

Franklin Graham take an adversarial approach to Islam, others evangelicals like Brother Andrew present an attractive alternative. Brother Andrew has felt a burden for the Islamic world since his days of smuggling Bibles into the former Soviet Union and China, famously chronicled in *God's Smuggler*, but today he concentrates on supporting the church in the Islamic world. In every encounter—whether meeting with leaders of Hizbollah, the “Party of God,” in Lebanon, or Hamas, the “Islamic Resistance Movement,” in the Gaza Strip and West Bank—he is clear that it is the love of Jesus Christ that compels him to love the Muslim people. When possible, he leaves Gospel tracts and copies of the Bible with his dialogue partners, and lets them know he is praying for them. When Israel expelled over 400 Hamas leaders from Gaza and left them on a mountain in the middle of winter in 1993, Andrew brought them food, blankets, and Bibles, and endured severe criticism from many evangelical leaders for “befriending the enemy.” Over the years he has found remarkable openness and has earned a loving trust with these leaders to the extent that they have allowed him to share his message at Islamic universities and institutions. Very few, if any, evangelicals have reached the inner sanctums of the leading Islamists in the Arab and Islamic world as has Brother Andrew, who has not compromised his Christian witness but has reached out to Muslims with love, honesty, and compassion.

“I know you,” a Muslim student in the Gaza Strip greeted Andrew after he delivered a lecture at the Islamic University. Andrew didn’t recognize him, but the student continued, “I was at the lecture in the auditorium last year.”

“Then why are you smiling? I didn’t think you accepted what I said.”

“No, it was great!”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because you did not put us down. You left us in our dignity. That is why me and my friends admired you and what you said. We have never had the opportunity to hear about Christianity before.”¹²

The “open exclusivist” paradigm modeled by Brother Andrew is very attractive to me. I would encourage at the same time the “suspension of judgment” suggested by Kenneth Cragg and Charles Kimball while establishing initial trust with individual Muslims or in small study groups.

The *pluralist paradigm*, as interpreted by Kimball, differs from the other two, for it does not see Jesus Christ as the unique means of salvation. Plu-

When engaging in dialogue and personal relationships with Muslims, Cragg suggests that we set aside our judgments and differences in order to establish common ground and first establish trust. Debates and judgments can come later.

ralists like theologians John Hick and Hans Kung believe that all people, despite their differing (and even contradictory) religious beliefs and practices, are on a path to God or ultimate reality. This paradigm is generally not an option for evangelicals or for most Muslims.

STARTING WITH PRAYER

Whether we live in an urban area or in a smaller community with a university, we have opportunities for dialogue and deeper relationships with Muslims. We might pause to ask God to ground our conversations with an increased sensitivity to our Muslim sisters and brothers. A significant period of personal and collective prayer within our Christian communities, seeking a compassionate and humble spirit, can go a long way in preparation for dialogue that leads to understanding. Later, as we begin to establish trust within individual relationships or small groups, prayer may become an important dimension of our meetings. Participants may consider jointly praying through Kenneth Cragg's *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Spiritual Anthology*, a remarkable collection of prayers and theological reflections. Christian readers will find several Muslim prayers that echo the language of the Psalter:

Praise be to God, sovereign Lord, author of the universe, who raises the winds and orders the morning, worshipped in religion and the Lord of the worlds.... Praise be to God who hearkens unto me when I call upon him, covers my unworthiness when I have been rebellious and magnifies his grace upon me.... I will sing to his praise and make mention of him in thanksgiving.¹³

Though we may begin our journeys with Islam and the Middle East from differing points of vantage—with varying experiences, expectations, and interpretative “lens”—it is utterly essential that we place Jesus Christ at the center of our souls, and approach Islam and the complex political and religious dynamics of this region with a listening spirit, the compassion of Jesus, and the humility he recommended: “you all must be as children.” Fr. Anthony Bloom reminds us that the root for humility is the Latin *humus*, or the fertile topsoil that is more open and porous, thus facilitating growth and richness.¹⁴

We must have a humble attitude, a listening heart, and a contrite spirit as we encounter Muslims. At times the journey will be difficult and controversial. But we will discover rich growth in our own Christian faith as well as make new friends on the path of dialogue that seeks understanding.

NOTES

1 “Zion’s Christian Soldiers,” *60 Minutes* (October 6, 2002).

2 For an overview of the 10/40 window approach to Christian missions, see George Otis, Jr., ed., *Strongholds of the 10/40 Window: Intercessor’s Guide to the Least Evangelized Nations* (Seattle: YWAM Publishing, 1995). The 10/40 window includes about 90% of the

world's poorest nations. Within the Arab nations in this region, 38% of the population is under fourteen years of age. The overwhelming majority of these young people face bleak economic conditions, with unemployment rates in many areas being above 15%, or three times the world average.

3 John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

4 Quoted in Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Beirut, Lebanon: American University of Beirut Press, 1999), 29. Moussalli offers a sympathetic study of Qutb and his influence in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

5 *Ibid.*, 29-30.

6 Josh Andersen, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," *Sojourners* (February 2005), 32.

7 William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999).

8 Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2004), 35.

9 Charles Kimball, *Striving Together* (New York: Harper and Row, 1995), 87.

10 Austin Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1980), 367.

11 Kenneth Cragg, *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Anthology* (Oxford: One World Press, 1999), 2.

12 Brother Andrew and Al Janssen, *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2004), 219.

13 "Ramadan Prayers" quoted Cragg, *Common Prayer*, 2.

14 Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970), 11.



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Wise Foreign Relations

BY CHARLES STROHMER

Scripture invites us into the stories of the diplomats and foreign ministers of the ancient Middle East—men and women educated in the tradition of wisdom as a paradigm for conducting diplomacy. Is the Bible’s much neglected wisdom tradition a source of fresh possibilities in U.S. foreign policy vis à vis the Muslim world?

Reasons for the severe downward spiral in international relations between the United States and the Muslim world have become the subject of dinner table conversation, bitter public debate, and academic wrangling. I will not reiterate these. What I hope to accomplish here is to start a conversation, setting out some provisional ideas to show that the Bible’s much neglected wisdom tradition can be a source of fresh possibilities in U.S. foreign policy vis à vis the Muslim world. Such an approach would not only ease tensions but also, and more importantly, help promote just policies in this conflicted region of the world.

Initially, three objections may arise to this approach to foreign policy. First, the Bible is an ancient book, people say, so how can it have any contemporary relevance? Political science classes today, however, still include works like Plato’s *Republic*; and Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*—the oldest military treatise in the world (fifth century, B.C.)—is required reading at military academies such as West Point and Annapolis. Antiquity, therefore, is not anathema to modern learning.

It is also assumed that the Bible cannot gain any traction on the political road because it speaks only to an individual’s personal devotion and moral instruction. This reductionist view fails to appreciate the Bible’s multi-aspected wisdom for life, such as for education, aesthetics, communications, politics, and, we shall see, for foreign policy.

Finally, the Bible as a source of ideas for U.S. foreign policy might be thought to violate separation of church and state. This is another common misunderstanding. As we shall see, “the wisdom way” in foreign policy—as the Bible understands it and as it functions under God—does not arise from the church or from religion as institutions.

WHO WERE “THE WISE”?

When we hear the word “wisdom” in reference to Scripture, we usually think of the Book of Proverbs and its clever sayings. But we need to think outside the box. Although proverbs are integral to the Bible’s wisdom tradition, they are only a part, and not the part emphasized here. The wisdom tradition comprises a wealth of literature that invites us into the stories, intrigue, and policies surrounding the diplomats and foreign ministers of the ancient Middle East. Those international actors were educated in the tradition of wisdom as a paradigm for conducting diplomacy, negotiations, and mediation of international relations, treaties, and settlements.

Of the many characteristics of wisdom literature, three indicate why it can function as a biblical paradigm for foreign policy.¹ It is connected with public affairs, especially with people in authority, such as in law, commerce, and statecraft; it has close associations with the non-Jewish world; and it focuses on conditions that are universal to the entire human family, which places the literature at the service of humanity as a whole, *before* any distinctions are made between believers and those who would not consider themselves believers. In other words, as Nietzsche might have said, it is for people who are human, all too human. Or as the writer of Ecclesiastes did say when summing up the concern of wisdom literature: this is “the whole duty of everyone” (12:13). Literally: this is [for] all mankind; or: this is [for] humanity as a whole.

The great historic difficulty surrounding foreign relations, of course, is how to arrange and sustain geopolitical alignments and agreements among nations that frequently press their conflicting national interests and values against each other. A geopolitical way of “getting along” is necessary, a paradigm for the give-and-take of matters of state and foreign policy as these are lived out in the sometimes contentious, sometimes cataclysmic, and sometimes peaceable and prosperous relations between nations. In the biblical world, the wisdom tradition provided that way.

Like all ancient nations, Israel, once it became a *nation*, had to develop its own wisdom paradigm for conducting international relations. That paradigm arose amid, and was partly drawn from, the reputed wisdom traditions of the time, such as were well-established in Egypt, Persia, Babylon, and elsewhere in the region.² Within Israel’s wisdom tradition, two of the more prominent classes of men and women were the *hakâmîm* and the *sôperîm*. *Hakâmîm* is from the Hebrew root *hkm*, for “wise” or “wisdom”; and occasionally the term “the wise” appears as shorthand for a list of

hakâmîm, often in political and geopolitical contexts.

Within the broad class called *hakâmîm* were high-ranking government officials—cabinet ministers, policy makers, foreign ministers, secretaries of state, diplomats, and suchlike—who specialized in matters of state and international relations. Functioning alongside were the *sôperîm*, a class that traditionally included political secretaries and professional writers called scribes. In the Old Testament the word often refers to a prominent leader's master scribe, or to a master secretary like Baruch (Jeremiah 36), or to a royal scribe or secretary (2 Samuel 20:25; 1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 18:37).³ Included among the *sôperîm*, therefore, were ancient Israel's professional political writers, without whom, as with the *hakâmîm*, the nation would not have been able to function in matters of state and international relations. For example, when referring to Israel's political reorganization under David and Solomon, within the context of international negotiations and the council of kings, William McKane writes that the *sôperîm*, or scribes:

had to master foreign languages for the purposes of diplomacy, and that in doing so [they] acquired a knowledge of foreign literatures and assisted in their dissemination.... [In both] Egypt and Babylonia wisdom is located in the circle of a high establishment which plays an important role in the political and cultural life of the time and...these "scribes" have to be distinguished from mere writers. This seems to me to put the matter in the right perspective and it may not be going too far to say...that these men, although primarily statesmen and administrators, were "born middlemen in the international exchange of literature."⁴

Israel's *hakâmîm* and *sôperîm*, as well as the wise of surrounding nations, were therefore indispensable for running governments, fostering international relations, and advising rulers. Examples abound. When the Egyptian ruler makes Joseph prime minister, he acknowledges before all of his officials that they will never find anyone as wise (Genesis 41:33, 39). In an ominous crisis, a later Pharaoh summons *hakâmîm* along with sorcerers and magicians in hopes of thwarting a clear and present danger from a foreign power—represented by the miracle-working of Moses and Aaron (Exodus 7:11; cf. Isaiah 19:11-12). In the delicate matter of a legal decision that will decide Queen Vashti's fate, King Xerxes of Persia sends for the *hakâmîm* to advise him (Esther 1:13). Even some kings themselves were notable for having characteristics of the *hakâmîm*. David, for one, was praised for having "wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God," and Solomon was known for his "wise and discerning" heart (2 Samuel 14:20; 1 Kings 3:12; see also Proverbs 20:26 in contrast to Ecclesiastes 4:13).

McKane writes that there is "a particular mental climate which is congenial to these *sôperîm* and *hakâmîm*; there are well-defined intellectual

attitudes which they cherish in connection with the maintenance of high professional standards.”⁵ Women, too, are numbered among them. Second Samuel 14 describes a “wise woman” from Tekoa, whom Joab (David’s commander-in-chief) summoned to act out a dramatic scene before the king, which resulted in a later political decision by Absalom that had grave consequences for the government. Second Samuel 20 describes a “wise woman” in the besieged town of Abel Beth Maacah who successfully negotiated with Joab to prevent his army division from destroying her town. It is probable that both women were among a class of professional political negotiators, for only someone with the high level of diplomacy required in each crisis would have been chosen. Also, the remark that the woman went “in her wisdom” (2 Samuel 20:22, κῑν) is a kind of technical expression which “indicates that she was a recognized leader with professional standing, perhaps like the ‘wise women’ who were found in the Canaanite court, according to the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:29).”⁶

THE DIPLOMAT’S APPROACH

Foreign policy workers are tasked with developing geopolitical common ground on which to frame policies that are as just and good for all sides as possible. This can be extremely difficult, for there is no central government in international politics; the parties often come to the table, as the Middle Eastern conflict today witnesses, terribly alienated and without any trust in each other, and they may seek to remain that way. I agree with Middle East negotiator Rabbi Marc Gopin that perhaps the greatest obstacle to be overcome in the region is “the ubiquitous human psychology of othering, the need to distinguish and exclude.”⁷

Because they often must work within such a group psychology in hopes of reaching agreements, actors in international diplomacy—whether cabinet officials, ambassadors, or foreign ministers—need a style of approach and communication that is quite different from preaching, teaching, apologetics, or polemics. Their style must suit their function; like the carefully tuned strings of a classical instrument, tone and tradition must agree. (Imagine the disastrous outcomes if diplomats from different nations met in crises to vent polemics or to engage in religious apologetics.)

Foreign policy requires its professionals to exercise great tact and sensitivity in dealing with others. Take international negotiators as but one case in point. They must demonstrate a professionalism that submerges their

The greatest obstacle to be overcome when framing policies that are as just and good for all sides as possible, is “the ubiquitous human psychology of othering, the need to distinguish and exclude.”

own ideologies to the good of the negotiating parties. They must show themselves evenhanded, gaining the confidence of all sides, while helping the parties see reality as it is and adjust to it. They must help negotiations to reach midpoints that both sides can accept, often by challenging what seasoned Middle East negotiator Dennis Ross calls their “comfortable myths.” And they must be able to show empathy for the suffering and needs of the parties, helping each side “get” the other’s grievances. In short, the wise must be diplomatic.

We can see this general stance of the wise in Daniel’s long and distinguished political career. Even when he is battling severe persecution from his counterparts, Daniel seeks what is good for all—even for those political advisors called astrologers! In all cases Daniel seeks peaceful resolution to contradictory situations and predicaments. In this sense, the wise may be likened more to dialecticians than to apologists or polemicists. They have an esprit de corps that includes a clear respect of the “other,” even when the topics are very pointed, as the common phrase “O King, live forever” and similar phrases in the book indicate. This respectful form of address, used by the Chaldean advisors and the queen (Daniel 2:4, 3:9, 24; and 6:6), is embraced by Daniel and other Jewish officials (6:21 and 3:16-18).

Daniel’s performance is inspiring for Christians working in foreign affairs, for he is a believer serving in a pagan government through several different administrations, sometimes under the severest personal ordeals. Yet he remains faithful to Yahweh both in his personal religious convictions and in matters of policy even when ungodly compromise or expediency would have saved him from terrible personal grief. Yahweh vindicates Daniel’s faithfulness by giving him great favor in each administration.

Further, besides having its own style of communication, the wisdom tradition within foreign policy has a family resemblance much closer to philosophy than to theology. In fact, one meaning of “philosophy” is “love of wisdom” (in Greek, *philos* means love and *sophia* is wisdom). I don’t want to push this distinction between philosophy and theology into a dichotomy or to imply that neither discipline influences the other. But this needs to be understood: when confronted with foreign policy problems and international negotiations, wisdom in its diplomatic role and theology in its dogmatic role would have quite different starting points and destinations.

Whereas wisdom, according to Scripture, seeks to discover and build on mutual ground “for all mankind,” theology falls within the purview of a particular religious community and usually unites only those who believe its dogmas. Indeed, some theological views may even factionalize believers within a tradition, as well as make enemies among people of different religions. This is significant in the context of the Middle East, as it highlights the great category mistake made by the theology of Christian Zionism.⁸

I know that this conclusion will be strongly resisted in some quarters

because Christian Zionism seeks a huge influence upon U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, and because its promoters' hopes and fears about America are tied up with those of modern day Israel and America's attitude toward it. Nevertheless, Christian Zionism is out of step with the biblical wisdom tradition that functions as a paradigm for foreign policy and international relations.⁹

The wisdom way would not hurt Israel, and it would raise the legitimate claims of the Palestinians to equal footing with those of Israel. This would be a great boost to the peace process because the Palestinians see Christian Zionism as seeking to crush them through U.S. foreign policy.

Also, moderate and progressive Islamic reformers would be receptive to the wisdom way, for it corresponds in part with the Islamic tradition of *ijtihad*, which is popularly translated "independent thinking" or "critical reasoning." *Ijtihad* as a way of reasoning and negotiating became marginalized within Islam during the twentieth century, but it is now being revived by Muslim reformers as a key to solving knotty problems faced by Muslim societies when interacting with the West. *Ijtihad*—because it is not limited to a fundamentalist (or as most commentators prefer to say, a political Islamic) reading of the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the Shari'a—can be an able negotiating partner in the Middle East with the wisdom way.¹⁰

The Bible's wisdom tradition has a mutuality with what the Qur'an calls *bani Adam*, or "the children of Adam," which the progressive Islamic scholar Omid Safi interprets as "the totality of humanity" (recall Ecclesiastes 12:13, above).¹¹ This is significant because it is Muslim reformers, not the political Islamists, who seek rapprochement and dialogue with Western nations and with whom those nations will find ways ahead. There is much uncharted common ground here, and Safi is typical of desires within the rising Muslim reform movement when he writes:

For progressive Muslims, a fundamental part of our struggle (*jihad*) to exorcise our inner demons and bring about justice in the world at large is to engage in a progressive and critical interpretation of Islam (*ijtihad*). An essential part of the progressive *ijtihad* is to account for and challenge the great impoverishment of thought and spirit brought forth by Muslim literalists-exclusivists.¹²

THE WISDOM WAY IN ACTION

Here is one illustration of how the wisdom way might inform U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East. A central tenet of negotiations in any final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians is the formula "land for peace," which became a principle of UN Security resolution 242, in November, 1967, after the Six Day War: Israel would relinquish control of territories it had occupied in that war in return for recognition by the Arab world. In 1978, this principle was successfully used as the basis of

Israel's peace treaty with Egypt, and today it plays an essential role in the dismantling of Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank. Foreign policy advisors seeking insight from Scripture in this matter have horizons available to them through Ezekiel's vision of a new holy land, which carries a provision in the spirit of jubilee.

Applying a principle that resident aliens and native Israelites should be treated alike, Ezekiel says Israel may allot land to "the aliens who have settled among you and who have children. You are to consider them as native-born Israelites; along with you they are to be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the alien settles, there you are to give him his inheritance," declares the Sovereign LORD" (Ezekiel 47:22-23, NIV¹³; cf. Isaiah 14:1; Leviticus 19:33-34; 24:22).¹⁴ The significant phrase "consider them as native-born Israelites" indicates that those receiving land do not have to meet a qualification of first being an Israelite. The dual reference to their history and progeny—"who have settled among you and who have children"—clarifies and strengthens the thought of settlements held well into the future by "foreigners," even as it precludes land-grabbing by non-Israelites seeking a temporary home or wanting to manipulate the housing market. So it reinforces the notion of *permanent* settlements.

Now this principle of treating Israelites and resident aliens alike, as established by Yahweh, is a gesture of common grace, which brings us full circle to the common ground principle within the wisdom tradition. With creative thinking from today's *hakâmîm* and *sôperîm*, might not this redemptive principle guide the development of just policy in land issues such as the right of return of Palestinian refugees, the sovereignty of Jerusalem, and the borders of a two-state solution? Indeed, a significant meaning of grace, as I understand it from the Hebrew word *chên*, is "moving people to places of well-being."¹⁵ Would not the outworking of this principle in "land for peace" issues be an authentic gesture of grace to the Palestinians and have a redemptive effect on the psychology of exclusionary "othering"?

CONCLUSION

Much remains to be discovered as we search the biblical wisdom tradition for insight to craft morally just U.S. foreign policy goals and decisions concerning the Middle East today. The death of Yasser Arafat and landslide election victory of the moderate Mahmoud Abbas (aka Abu Mazen) as Palestinian President have opened an unexplored landscape of possibilities for peace between Israel and the Palestinians, but the situation remains explosive. President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair pledge earnest and renewed efforts to move the "road map for peace" along, as do Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas. Egypt and Jordan, which have peace treaties with Israel, are weighing in with strong support, but militants from Iran or Syria may try to re-ignite the violence. Who knows what will happen? Nevertheless, this is a time for cautious optimism.

The stakes are high and “the wise” are needed to influence the outcome. Today’s *hakâmîm* and *sôperîm* face great challenges, but their efforts are just; if they succeed, the fruit will be peaceable, the future brighter.

NOTES

1 These ideas are developed in John Peck and Charles Strohmer, *Uncommon Sense: God’s Wisdom for Our Complex and Changing World* (London: S.P.C.K., 2001), 31-45.

2 See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986); Leo G. Perdue, et al., eds., *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993); and William McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1965).

3 Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, volume 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 1289.

4 *Prophets and Wise Men*, 43-44.

5 *Ibid.*, 46

6 Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 492.

7 Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 58.

8 Christian Zionism holds that the modern nation of Israel has a divine right to all of the land promised to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. A maximalist interpretation insists that this geography extends from Egypt to Iraq (following a literal application of Genesis 15:18, which describes boundaries from the Nile to the Euphrates). A minimalist version includes the Gaza strip, the West Bank, and Jordan.

9 For instance, Christian Zionism is out of step with agreed upon international foreign policy in the region, including Israel’s peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the American and British goal of creating a Palestinian state, and the Sharon government’s dismantling of settlements in Gaza.

10 “Hadith” refers to a narrative about the habits and religious practice of the Prophet Muhammad. “Shari’a” is the name for a consensus system of law and guidance derived from the Qur’an that emerged among Islamic legal scholars in the eighth and ninth centuries.

11 Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2004), 12.

12 *Ibid.*, 8.

13 Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

14 I wish to thank Calvin Seerveld for pointing me to Ezekiel 47:21-23 in this context.

15 See my *Explaining the Grace of God* (Tonbridge, United Kingdom: Sovereign World, Ltd., 1993), 10-12.

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Peace and Justice in the Qur'an

BY MUSTANSIR MIR

In submitting to God, says the Qur'an, we opt for peace over against war and heed the divine command to act with justice in conversation, in business transactions, and in treating others. How similar are Islamic notions of peace and justice to their Christian counterparts?

Both “peace” and “justice” are among the key terms of the Qur'an. The Arabic word *Islam*, which occurs frequently in the Qur'an and which gives the religion its name, has two meanings, “surrender” and “peace.” The two meanings are interrelated. The first represents human acknowledgment that the right attitude to adopt toward God is that of making submission to Him rather than that of waging war against Him. The second meaning represents the promise of peace made by God: those who submit to God will enjoy peace in their individual and collective lives, in this world and in the next. The Qur'an speaks of Abraham as the exemplary “submitter”: “When your Lord said to him, ‘Submit,’ he said, ‘I submit to the Lord of the universe’” (2:131; my translation, here and throughout), and the same—Abrahamic—attitude is demanded of the believers (6:71). In submitting to God, human beings consciously perform an act that the universe as a whole is unconsciously performing: “To Him submit all those who are in the heavens and the earth” (3:83). The main word in the Islamic greeting, *as-salamu 'alaykum*, “peace be upon you,” is from the same root that *Islam* is from, and not only is this greeting to be given to others in this world (6:54; 24:27, 61), it also will be the greeting of the people of paradise (10:10; 16:32; 13:24); in fact, one of the names of paradise is “abode of peace” (10:25). In war, if the enemy “inclines toward peace” (*silm*), then the Muslims, too, must “incline toward it” (8:61). One of the names of God is *Salam*, “peace” (59:23). God is, that is to say, the source of all peace: He is our refuge against calamity and He shields us from danger.

Two Arabic words for justice, *'adl* and *qist*, also occur in a number of verses in the Qur'an: "God commands you to be just" (16:90) is a general command, and so are "Uphold justice" (4:135) and "Be just, for it is closer to piety" (5:8). Specific commands derive from the general one: "When you speak, be just, even in a matter involving a relative of yours" (6:152); "I have been commanded," Muhammad is made to say, "to decide matters justly between you" (42:15), and the same command is given to the believers at large (4:58). A man who has more than one wife must treat them "justly" (4:3); society must treat orphans "justly" (4:127); and, in selling something, one must give full measure—"justly" (6:152). Many verses affirm justice by negating its antithesis, *zulm* (injustice, wrongdoing); for example, "God is not unjust in the least" (3:182), "God does not like the unjust" (3:57), and "God will not guide the unjust" (2:258).

The variety of contexts of the above-cited verses indicates that both peace and justice occupy an important position in Islamic ethics. Peace is not merely the content of a conventional greeting uttered in a social setting, but also the highly desirable goal in a situation of war. In submitting to God, we opt for peace over against war and, at the same time, align our action with that of the universe, expecting to enjoy, in human life, the analogues of the peace and harmony that reign in nature because of nature's submission to God. The ultimate objective of human beings is to be in the state of peace that characterizes the blissful life of paradise. Similarly, justice is not an abstract concept but a practical desideratum: to be just in talk, in business transactions, and in treating others is required of the believers because these acts ought to flow from belief truly and sincerely held.

Without forgetting the conclusion reached thus far—namely, that both "peace" and "justice" are used in the Qur'an in fairly broad senses—I will now use these terms in more restricted senses in order to focus on three issues pertaining to our subject.

PEACE AND WAR

Pre-Islamic Arabian custom held four months sacred because of their association with the institution of annual pilgrimage to the sanctuary of the Ka'bah in Mecca. During these months, all fighting was forbidden, and this enabled people to engage in vigorous economic activity in a state of peace and security. After Muhammad and his followers had emigrated from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622 and a virtual state of war had come to exist between the Muslims of Medina and the Quraysh, who made up the idolatrous oligarchy of Mecca, the question arose as to how the Muslims should respond to any Meccan attempts to start a war during the four sacred months. Qur'an 2:217 sets forth a principled response:

They [believers] ask you about the sacred months, about fighting during them. Say, "Fighting during them is a great sin. But blocking access to the path of God—and denying Him—and blocking access

to the Sacred Mosque and expelling its residents from it is a greater sin in the eyes of God; and persecution is worse than killing.

In other words, the Meccans' acts of keeping Muslims from performing the pilgrimage and expelling them from Mecca, the house of the Ka'bah, constitutes persecution, which is a far greater sin than that of killing. So, while

Justice is the gateway to peace in the Qur'an. Having said that, one must emphasize that justice remains the gateway; it does not become the destination. For all its importance, justice is instrumental in character; peace is the objective.

Muslims must make every attempt to avoid fighting during the sacred months, they are allowed to fight if war is imposed upon them by the enemy during those months, for, as 2:194 puts it, "Sacred months are in lieu of sacred months, and, for every breached sanctity, there shall be retaliation." Thus, while the Qur'an attaches great value

to peace, it does not privilege it absolutely. "Sacred months are in lieu of sacred months" lays down the principle of parity—or, we may say, justice—and peace at the expense of justice is not acceptable to the Qur'an. Justice is the gateway to peace. Having said that, one must emphasize that justice remains the gateway; it does not become the destination. For all its importance, justice is instrumental in character; peace is the objective. Seen in this light, peace emerges as a more fundamental value than justice.

A review of the initial period of Islamic history confirms this interpretation. The common misconception that the religion of Islam celebrates war and violence is easily corrected when it is recalled that, after the Muslims' emigration to Medina, it was the Meccans who repeatedly came all the way to Medina to attack the Muslims, and that it was only eight years later, in 630, that the Muslims went and conquered Mecca—in a bloodless overthrow of Meccan power that resulted in an eventual integration of the Arabs of various tribal origins under the banner of Islam.

Nevertheless, our discussion so far does lead us to conclude that pacifism, which signifies a philosophical opposition to war, is hardly grist to Islam's mill. In Christian history, pacifist views have been dominant in certain periods (as in the pre-Constantine era) or have represented significant strands of thought (as in the modern period). In Islam, both the pronouncements of the Qur'an and the practice of Muhammad rule out pacifism in principle. The Qur'an unequivocally permits the believers to take up arms against oppression and against imposition of war (22:39, besides the verses cited above), and Muhammad organized and led military campaigns. In the case of Christianity, too, early pacifism was, after Constan-

tine, effectively replaced by just-war theory. The Islamic view of war is not identical with Christian just-war theory, but the permissibility of war under that theory at least furnishes grounds for an interchange of ideas between Muslims and Christians.

Our treatment of the Qur'anic view of war and peace will not be complete without a comment on those verses of the Islamic scripture which have been seen as encouraging militancy against the followers of other religions and have received much publicity in recent years. But a close and contextualized study of those verses will show that none of them calls for the indiscriminate slaughter of "infidels." Consider the command given in one of the "incendiary" verses: "And kill them wherever you find them" (2:191). But this is a command not to initiate hostilities but to fight back. Reading the complete verse will make it clear that it permits Muslims to retaliate against those—the idolaters of Mecca—who had imposed fighting upon them and who had expelled them from their homes. The immediately preceding verse makes the same point. Here are the two verses (191-192) in their entirety:

And fight, in the way of God, against those who fight against you, but do not commit any excesses; God does not love those who commit excesses. And, kill them wherever you find them and expel them from where they expelled you. And persecution is worse than killing. And do not fight against them in the vicinity of the Sacred Mosque until they should fight against you. If they fight against you, then kill them; this is the punishment of the disbelievers.

And, concluding the discussion in the same passage, verse 193 says: "If they desist [from fighting], no action shall be taken except against the wrongdoers." Placed in its proper context, 2:191—or, for that matter, any other Qur'anic verse, not even 9:5—cannot be cited as evidence that Islam is an inherently warmongering religion, any more than the sword verse from the New Testament (Luke 22:36) can be cited to argue a similar conclusion about Christianity. If Muslims believe that the Qur'an wants them to kill all non-Muslims, then, historically, they have been remiss in carrying out the Qur'anic injunction, for they never undertook to exterminate the large non-Muslim populations who lived—and actually prospered—under their control for centuries.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Some of the earliest revelations of the Qur'an address issues of social justice. The Meccan society, into which Islam was born, was marked by social inequalities and economic disparities. On the one hand was the tribe of Quraysh, made affluent and powerful by a successful commercial enterprise and through the custodianship of the Ka'bah. On the other hand were the downtrodden—the slaves who were at the mercy of their masters, the

orphans and widows whose rights were trampled, not infrequently by their own rich relatives, and the poor and destitute who had no charitable institution to turn to for help or support. Keeping this background in mind gives point to verses like the following:

Nay, you do not honor the orphan. And you do not exhort one another to feed the destitute. And you avidly gobble up [others'] inheritance. And you have exceedingly great love of wealth (89:17-20).

So, he [the typical affluent, amoral, and callous Meccan] has not taken the steep incline! And how would you know what the steep incline is? It is the freeing of slaves or the feeding, on a day of hunger, of an orphan who is a relative, or of a destitute man rolling in the dust (90:11-16).

This early criticism of a wealthy but heartless minority is complemented in the Qur'an by later statements detailing negative and positive measures to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth in society. These measures include proscription of hoarding (9:34; 104:1-2), usury (2:275-276, 277-279), and bribery (2:188); mandated distribution of bequeathed property among heirs (4:11); and institution of *zakah*, or the welfare due (2:43 *passim*)—a major objective of these and other measures being to ensure adequate circulation of wealth in society (59:7).

Notably, the Qur'an grounds its social and economic injunctions in a religious outlook. For example, the call to give financial assistance to the poor is based on the view that since both rich and poor people are creatures of God, the rich must share the bounty they have received from God with those who lack resources or are less fortunate.

The Islamic teaching about social justice has interesting parallels with Christian liberation theology. In fact, the suggestion has been made that the latter represents a direct or indirect influence of Islam. Be that as it may, many Christians and Muslims today would seem to share the confidence in the human ability to improve the world and, more than that, to feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to the world's betterment. A melioristic platform can furnish both an intellectual basis and a spiritual motivation for joint Christian-Muslim action.

HOW DIFFERENT ARE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN VIEWS?

So far, we have considered peace and justice in specific contexts—peace in relation to war, and justice in the sense of social justice. We will now ask whether the Islamic notions of peace and justice are fundamentally different from their Christian counterparts.

Central to Christian discussions of peace is the doctrine of reconciliation. The Latin-based word "reconciliation" signifies bringing humanity back into fellowship with God. It assumes a prior state of estrangement:

the primordial state of peace and harmony, which Adam and Eve enjoyed during their stay in the garden of Eden, was ruptured on account of their commission of sin, and the rupture can only be mended through the sacrificial death of Jesus, who, in the words of John Milton, will “restore us,” regaining for us “the blissful seat” of paradise. Islam, which does not accept the notion of original sin and, hence, does not feel the need for a savior to deliver humankind from the bondage of sin, does not attach to reconciliation the kind of significance it has in Christianity.

But if, in regard to reconciliation, the structures of Christian and Islamic religious thought differ, a similar, if not identical, dynamic underlies those structures. Developing certain Qur'anic observations on the relationship between God and human beings and exploiting the semantic potential of certain Qur'anic terms, Muslim mystics, or Sufis, speak of separation (*firaq*) and union (*wisal*), meaning that human beings, while they are in a state of separation from God in this world, wish this state to come to an end and long to unite—or rather, reunite—with God. The thirteenth-century Muslim poet Rumi uses the medium of story to get the point across. In one of his stories, the prophet Moses comes upon a peasant who addresses God in his simple, loving way, saying that if he chanced to meet God, he would serve Him nice food, put Him at His ease, and take good care of Him. On hearing this, Moses, who represents the Law, becomes furious. He upbraids the peasant, telling him that he must be an insolent fool to address God in those terms. The poor peasant is terrified and feels deeply guilty. At this, God chides Moses in these words: “I sent you to bring My people close to me; I did not send you to put distance between Me and My people.” In Sufi poetry of several Islamic languages, the human soul is compared to the wave that

has become separated from its source, the ocean (that is, God), but pines to return to that source, the urge to return being powered by love. A word of caution is necessary at this point: while the notions of separation from God and reunion with Him are part of the-stock-in-trade of

Sufism—and explain, in part, the fascination Sufism has for many Christians—the idea of a radical original break between God and human beings is not present even in Sufism.

In the Hebrew Bible, a key word for justice translates as “righteousness.” The God of Israel is just in that He is righteous. The moral connotations of “righteousness” should warn us against interpreting the Jewish

The Qur'anic call to give financial assistance to the poor is based on the view that since both rich and poor people are creatures of God, the rich must share the bounty they have received from God with the less fortunate.

concept of justice in purely legalistic terms. To a Jewish mind, moreover, the concept is not exclusive of the notion of divine mercy. In Christian thought, the notion of divine righteousness comes to include the crucial component of grace, or, perhaps, righteousness itself is consequent upon grace, which, then, would become the larger or higher category. If so, Qur'an 6:12, in which the divine judgment of the Last Day is spoken of as a derivative of divine mercy, would suggest intriguing possibilities of comparison between the Islamic and Christian views of the relationship between grace (or mercy) and righteousness. Once again, however, any exercise in comparison must respect and guard the integrity of the views compared. From an Islamic viewpoint, any attempt to make the suggested comparison must pay due regard to the claims or demands of the Law. Also, the Christian notion of the redemptive role of Jesus would be considered problematic in an Islamic discussion of the subject.

CONCLUSION

The Christian (and, of course, Jewish) concept of *imitatio Dei* finds its counterpart in the Islamic concept of *takhallaqu bi-akhlaqi Allah* ("Take on the qualities of God"). Muslims, no less than Christians, believe that the relations between human beings ought to reflect, or be modeled on, the relations between God and man. Holding this view in common, the followers of the two religions have, as bearers of an ethical vision with a direct and immediate reference to society, both a similar and a joint responsibility—namely, that of translating their ethical vision into concrete social action.

But the task of translating theory into practice is not to be conceived in mechanical terms. It is not simply a question of Christians studying their sources on their own and Muslims studying theirs on their own and then of both sitting down across the table as academics comparing notes over freshly brewed coffee. It is a question of reflecting, within the context of a changed and changing world and in recognition of the potential of outlooks other than one's own, on the vocation of the religious person, on the common destiny of humankind, and on the possibility of taking concerted action not only to solve present-day problems but also to bring into existence a newly configured future.



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Building of Mystery

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

The Dome of the Rock is one of the most famous shrines of any religion in the world. It stands on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which has long been a sacred place for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. On the Mount was located the Temple built by Solomon (1 Kings 6) and later destroyed by the Babylonian army (Psalm 79), as well as the Second Temple constructed after the Exile (Ezra 6) and refurbished during Jesus' day before it was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70.

Before Muhammad received his revelation in 624 that the believers should direct their prayers toward the Ka'bah in Mecca, the first *qibla* (or, direction for prayer) for Muslims was toward Jerusalem. Muslim interest in the city is strengthened by the belief that the Temple Mount—or as Muslims call it, *Al-Haram As-Sharif*, “the Noble Sanctuary”—is the “farthest place of prayer” from which Muhammad made a miraculous night journey to heaven, as described in Surah 17 of the Qur'an.

The Muslim armies found the Temple Mount in ruins when they conquered Jerusalem in 638, for the city had been a battleground for years between the Byzantine and Persian empires. Arculf, a Christian pilgrim who visited the city several decades later, noted that only a small mosque had been built among the ruins. The rebuilding of the Temple Mount began in earnest during the peaceful reign of the caliph Abd al-Malik (A.D. 685-706). The Dome of the Rock was constructed over a rocky outcropping that had been variously identified as the place of Adam's burial, Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Jacob's dream of the ladder reaching to heaven, Muhammad's night journey, and the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Solomon. There is a small cave located in the rock.¹

Some scholars claim that the Dome of the Rock is the first work of Islamic architecture. The purpose of the building remains a mystery, for it is not a mosque (though Muslims consider the entire precinct of the Noble Sanctuary a place of prayer) and the inscriptions in the building make no reference to Muhammad's night journey. Some scholars believe the Dome of the Rock was built to refute the tenets of Christianity and announce the Islamic presence in the city of Jerusalem.²

Its unknown architect must have been very familiar with the wonderful Byzantine mosaics found throughout Syria and Palestine. These mosaics

were created by placing tesserae, which are small pieces of cut glass or stone, closely together in mortar so as to unite in a pattern that can be seen as the light reflects from them. On the lower part of the building—an octagonal platform with four entrances—the exterior mosaics have been replaced several times, but its basic structure and the internal mosaics remain unchanged through thirteen centuries. The central space, sixty-five feet tall, is covered by a wooden dome sheathed with lead and then plated with gold.

Though much of the building's decoration is Byzantine in style, there are no representational scenes as were common in Byzantine art. It is often incorrectly stated that figures were banned from Islam, but the truth is more complex. The Qur'an contains very few narratives from which to devise painted scenes, and Muslims believe that God is unique and cannot be represented. Because they had little scriptural narrative for inspiration and were not able to make a visual representation of God, Islamic artists chose to move what had been decorative elements in secondary locations of Christian art to the main area of their compositions.

Much is unknown today about whether the shapes, patterns, and decorative motifs in Islamic buildings symbolized concepts from the faith or conveyed messages to the believers. Nevertheless, Muslim architects established characteristic building styles that were distinctive and recognizable, even though they were influenced by early works of Christian art.

NOTES

1 Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 23-33.

2 *Ibid.*, 30.

This photo is available in
the print version of *Christianity and Islam*.

Built over a rocky outcropping variously identified as the place of Adam's burial, Abraham's sacrifice of his son, Jacob's dream of the ladder reaching to heaven, Muhammad's night journey, and the Holy of Holies of the Temple of Solomon, the Dome of the Rock is one of the most famous shrines in the world.

The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, c. 685- 692. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY.

This photo is available
in the print version of
Christianity and Islam.

With its Christian narrative motifs, a canteen made in the Muslim world in the thirteenth century reminds us how cultures can learn from one another new techniques, conceptions of beauty, and even interpretations of shared religious narratives.

Canteen. Syria, mid-thirteenth century. Brass, diameter 14 ½". Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.: Purchase, F1941.10.

Shared Stories in Metal

BY HEIDI J. HORNICK

The Madonna and Child Enthroned is the surprising central image on this beautiful canteen produced in the Muslim world during the thirteenth century.[†] Constructed from seven brass sections soldered together, the canteen weighs eleven pounds empty and sixty-six pounds full of water. Though it is far from portable, it is functional. A conical socket on the flat back allows the piece to be placed atop a post and turned by the handles until its contents, filtered through the strainer in the mouth, pour out.

Though the shape of the canteen originates from pre-Islamic times, its distinctive style and decoration confirm that it was made in the thirteenth century in Syria. Its Mosul style of metalwork—named for the northern Iraqi city that was a leading center for metal production and home to a large Christian population living under Muslim rule—is well known. Indeed, the names of some twenty Syrian craftsmen in this era bear the epithet *al-mawsili* (from Mosul), probably because they were trained in master-apprentice workshops in that city. Mosul craftsmen invented the technique of spinning a disc of metal against a chuck (or form) rotating at high speed on a spinning lathe, a method that greatly reduced manufacturing time. They also developed a manner of exterior decoration, seen in this piece, which requires inlaying a brass surface with silver and a black organic material.

Christian as well as Muslim patrons appreciated the Mosul style and decoration. Yet, the large number of Christian scenes in this piece is unusual. The hammered brass relief depicts the Madonna and Child Enthroned in the central medallion. Three scenes from the life of Christ surround the medallion: the Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple from the infancy narratives, and Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. The figures are characteristically medieval: they are flattened and somewhat elongated to conform to the shape in which they are placed, and the most important one is placed in the center of each figural area. The middle band contains an inscription which is illegible, for the letters have been transformed into revelers. It reminds us of a medieval manuscript illumination which gets so ornate, organic, and even figural, that the text following it is difficult to read. Probably this inscription is a message of good wishes. The underside

depicts a series of twenty-five pointed arches, each with a haloed figure, including an angel, a warrior saint, and a praying figure. Nine horsemen parade in a counterclockwise direction in the central ring.

This object is one of seventeen pieces, collected in museums today, of similar metalwork that features Christian narratives. A few of these are inscribed to Muslim rulers. Was this canteen created for a local Christian in Syria or Iraq or for a Muslim patron interested in the Christian stories? The canteen's superior quality and excellent preservation—it was discovered in 1845 in the collection of an Italian prince—suggest that it was created for the crusader nobility who settled in Syria and Palestine after the First Crusade in 1095-1099. The nouveau-riche Crusaders, competing with the wealth of the Muslim courts, commissioned objects like this as exotic souvenirs of the Holy Land. By 1262 many of the Mosul craftsmen had migrated east to territories controlled by Muslim slave soldiers, the Mamluks, where there were interspersed Crusader states that often housed visiting pilgrims.

This is a fine example of how works of art can allow cultures to learn from one another new techniques, conceptions of beauty, and even interpretations of shared religious narratives. The canteen was not maintained in such fine condition without considerable care; surely its artistry was appreciated by both Muslims and Christians in the Islamic world beginning from the thirteenth century.

NOTE

My interpretation of the canteen follows Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islamic Arts* (New York: Phaidon, 1997), 275-276.



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Hear the Prophet Speak of Water

BY TERRY W. YORK

Hear the prophet speak of water
that will wipe away all thirst.
Yet, he asks a cup of water
from a woman often cursed.

Sir, you're talking to a woman
and to one who's not a Jew.
You are right, I have no husband;
and should not be seen with you.

Sir, you are a Jewish prophet.
May I ask one thing of you?
Tell me, please, where I must worship
for my worship to be true.

Not this mountain, nor that city;
not in ignorance, nor hate,
not in triumph, nor oppression,
not behind a guarded gate;

Worship God in truth and spirit,
this is worship our God seeks.
I am he, our God's messiah,
Living Water, Word that speaks.

Hear the Prophet Speak of Water

TERRY W. YORK

G. DAVID BOLIN

1. Hear the pro - phet
2. Sir, you're talk - ing
3. Sir, you are a
4. Not this moun - tain,
5. Wor - ship God in

speak of wa - ter that will wipe a -
 to a wo - man and to one who's
 Jew - ish pro - phet. May I ask one
 nor that ci - ty; not in ig - no -
 truth and spir - it, this is wor - ship

way all thirst. Yet, he asks a
 not a Jew. You are right, I
 thing of you? Tell me, please, where
 rance, nor hate, not in tri - umph,
 our God seeks. I am he, our

cup of wa - ter from a wo - man
 have no hus - band; and should not be
 I must wor - ship for my wor - ship
 nor op - press - ion, not be - hind a
 God's mes - si - ah, Liv - ing Wa - ter,

oft - en cursed.
 seen with you.
 to be true.
 guard - ed gate;
 Word that

speaks.

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a repeating eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. There are three systems of music. The first system contains the main vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The second system includes a first ending (1.2.3.4.) for the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system includes a second ending (5.) for the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

Worship Service

BY KAREN THOMAS SMITH

This service of worship is an invitation to faithful encounter, sharing, and dialogue between Christians and Muslims. Before God we may be open about our differences and disagreements, and honest about our similarities and agreements.

Prelude:

“Sonate Fugue No. 4 in C minor for Harpsichord/Piano”
*Setrak Setrakian (2003)*¹

The Blessing: Genesis 17:1-6; 22:17-18

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

*Call to Worship:*²

Leader: Peace be unto you. Salaam ualeikoum.

People: Ualeikoum salaam. And unto you, peace.

Hear the words of the Lord:

“Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?”

**Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it."**

"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God."

"And so if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably
with all."

"For it is to peace that God has called you."

**"Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual
upbuilding."**

May it not be hidden from our eyes.

May the God of peace be with us all.

**And may the God of peace be praised among all the children of
Abraham,**

**and by all the nations which through Abraham are blessed!
Alleluia! Alhumdullilah!**

Hymn:

"The God of Abraham Praise" (verses 1, 4, 6, and 10)

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love;
Jehovah, great I AM, by earth and heaven confessed:
we bow and bless the sacred Name for ever blessed.

The great I AM has sworn; we on this oath depend:
we shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heaven ascend.
We shall behold God's face; we shall God's power adore,
and sing the wonders of God's grace forevermore.

The goodly land we see, with peace and plenty blessed:
a land of sacred liberty and endless rest;
there milk and honey flow, and oil and wine abound,
and trees of life forever grow, with mercy crowned.

The God who reigns on high, the great archangels sing,
and "Holy, holy, holy," cry, "Almighty King!
Who was and is the same, and evermore shall be:
Jehovah, Father, great I AM, we worship thee."

*From THE YIGDAL of Daniel den Judah (c. 1400),
paraphrased by Thomas Olivers (1775), alt.*

Tune: LEONI

*Prayer of Praise*³

O God, you are God, besides whom there is no God: the Knower of the unseen and the seen; you are the Beneficent, the Merciful. You are God besides whom there is no god: the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness. Yours is the glory.

You are God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. Yours are the most excellent names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares your glory. You are the Almighty, the All-wise.

As heaven and earth declare your glory, come to us, O God, and teach us to glorify your name. Amen.

Scripture Reading with Sung Response: Psalm 139

(Congregation sings "Be Thou My Vision"⁴)

**Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.**

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

**Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.**

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

**Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.**

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.

**Be Thou my battle Shield, Sword for the fight;
be Thou my Dignity, Thou my Delight;
Thou my soul's Shelter, Thou my high Tower:
raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.**

O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

**High King of heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.**

*Prayer of Repentance:*⁵

Lord, there are many such
dwelling in narrow resentments,
embittered by wrongs that others have inflicted,
confined to harsh enmities,
imprisoned in spirit by despair at evil deeds,
drained of hope and bereft of peace,
left to great hatred in this world.
Have mercy, good Lord, upon all these
whose world, through human malice,
despairs of human kindness.
Judge and turn their oppressors.
Release again, for the fearful,
the springs of trust and goodness.
Give them liberty of heart,
the liberty of those who leave room
for the judgment of God.
Enlarge our hearts, O God,
that we may do battle against evil
and bear the sorrows of the weary,
and seek and serve thy will.
Great art thou, O Lord,
there is none that is a match for thee. Amen.
O Lord, enlarge my heart (Surah 20:26).

Readings from the Three Abrahamic Faiths

From Jewish Scripture: Exodus 18:1-27

From a translation of the Qur'an: Surah 5:82b-85

You will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe to be those who say: We are Christians; this is because there

are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly. And when they hear what has been revealed to the apostle you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize; they say: "Our Lord! we believe, so write us down with the witnesses of truth. And what reason have we that we should not believe in Allah and in the truth that has come to us, while we earnestly desire that our Lord should cause us to enter with the good people?"

Therefore Allah rewarded them on account of what they said, with gardens in which rivers flow to abide in them; and this is the reward of those who do good to others.

From the Gospel: John 4:19-24

Hymn:

"Hear the Prophet Speak of Water"

Terry York

Tune: TIRUPATI

(text and tune pp. 50-51 of this volume)

Sermon:

"God Is Greater"

Hymn:

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" (verses 1, 11, 5, and 8)

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice
which is more than liberty.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own.
And we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

For the love of God is broader
than the measure of one's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,
we could take him at his word,
And our lives would be more loving
in the likeness of the Lord.

Frederick W. Faber (1854)

Tune: WELLESLEY

Prayers of the People:

O God, our God, there is no God but you alone, so we are surely yours. And we desire to come to your house where we do surely belong.

Mohammed proclaimed that your light is lit in houses of worship where your name is remembered and your praises sung (Surah 24:36). And while you are one God, Al Wahid, to you belong all the beautiful names so that whatever is in heaven and on earth shall sing your praises (Surah 59:24).

So as we make bold to address you, we seek your light and we call you by your many names. Hear us now as we lift to you our prayers of praise and gratitude:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Mighty, Al-Qadir, we praise you for your strength that comes to us in our weakness.

God the Provider, Ar Razzaq, we are grateful for your care in times of trouble and difficulty.

God the Most bounteous, Al Akram, we rejoice in the bounty you have shared with us that has sustained us and your world from age to age and in our day.

Let the people say: **Amen.**

You have said through Isaiah,

“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 6:7).

Yet, Jesus told us plainly that we have made your house a den of thieves, and he took a whip and brought to light the violence that was there, usurping prayer.

God who Sees, Al Basir, help us to see our complicity in injustice and lead us to repentance. Hear us now as we ask your forgiveness for the ways we have allowed corruption, abuse, unfairness, and other evils to become acceptable in our sight, even in our institutions of worship and care-giving:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Forgiving, Al-Ghafur, be for us as you have been, the one who can set us on the path that is straight (Surah 1:5).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

When you saved him from his enemies, David said to you, O God:

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my savior; you save me from violence” (2 Samuel 22: 1-3).

And yet, O God, so many are not saved from violence, evil, and injustice. Have regard for your covenant, for lands that are torn by hatred and destruction, including our own land. So many do not find refuge in your house, in your fortress. How long, O Lord, shall they go mourning?

Hear us as we pray for those places in our world that are haunted by oppression and violence and other devastating evils:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Secure One, Al Mumin, extend the walls of your fortress of refuge to cover these lands stricken by terror that your light, God of Light, An Nur, may drive out the darkness therein.

Grant that the words of Isaiah may be true,

“Violence shall no more be heard in your land,
devastation or destruction within your borders;
you shall call your walls Salvation,
and your gates Praise” (Isaiah 60:18).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Your servant Job prayed to you in despair, O God:

“Even when I cry out, ‘Violence!’ I am not answered;
I call aloud, but there is no justice.

You have walled up my way so that I cannot pass” (Job 19:7-8b).

For victims of violence and injustice, O God, walls do not protect but entrap, they are not a refuge but a prison.

Hear us now as we pray for those we know who have suffered evils of all kinds, who suffer still from their wounds, and who long for security and salvation:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God the Great One, El Kabir, you are great in your healing. For all whose bodies, minds, and souls have been ravaged and are in need of healing, fulfill the promise of blessing spoken by Tobit, "Acknowledge the Lord, for he is good, and bless the King of the ages, so that his tent may be rebuilt in you in joy. May he cheer all those within you who are captives, and love all those within you who are distressed, to all generations forever" (Tobit 13:10).

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Through Mohammed we have heard the hope that you, O God, may yet place affection between us and those whom we now consider our enemies. For you are all-powerful and forgiving, ever merciful (Surah 60:7).

Help us to hold out hope for reconciliation in this torn world. Teach us again, as Jesus taught us, to pray for enemies and bless those who curse us, so that prayer may be turned into peace and cursing transformed into blessing for all of us, your people, and for our posterity.

Hear us now as we speak to you our hopes for reconciliation and transformation:

(The congregation prays silently.)

God, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the First, Al-Awwal, and the Last, Al Akhir. May we find our ending as our beginning in your peace, God of peace, As-Salam, and may we dwell in your house of peace forever and ever.

Let the people say: **Amen.**

Offering:

(An offering is received to support a joint ministry between Christian and Muslim communities.)

Hymn of Offering:

"O God of Earth and Altar" (verses 1 and 2)

O God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry,
our earthly rulers falter, our people drift and die;
the walls of gold entomb us, the swords of scorn divide,
take not thy thunder from us, but take away our pride.

From all that terror teaches, from lies of tongue and pen,
 from all the easy speeches that comfort cruel men,
 from sale and profanation of honor, and the sword,
 from sleep and from damnation, deliver us, good Lord!

G. K. Chesterton (1906)

Suggested Tunes: LLANGLOFFAN or PASSION CHORALE

*Benediction.*⁶

And now let us go forth in peace.
 May our way be resolute
 and our purpose firm in your good counsel.
 May we be granted, O Lord,
 the benefit of gratefulness for your grace,
 the beauty that belongs with your worship.
 And may we be given pure and reverent hearts, uprightness of
 character,
 tongues that speak right, and deeds that are worthy,
 O Lord God. Amen.

NOTES

1 Available from SibeliusMusic online at www.sibeliusmusic.com.

2 Based on Psalm 34:12, 14; Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; 1 Corinthians 7:15b; and Romans 14:19.

3 With phrases from Surah 59:1, 22-24 in the translation by M. H. Shakir of *The Holy Qur'an* (available online at www.hti.umich.edu/k/koran/index.html). Because the Qur'an was revealed by God in Arabic, Muslims stress that all "English Qur'ans" are merely translations and are not trustworthy. The Shakir translation is used throughout this service.

4 Stanzas reordered from an ancient Irish text versed by Eleanor Hull, 1912, altered; Tune: SLANE.

5 Kenneth Cragg, *Common Prayer: A Muslim-Christian Spiritual Anthology*, (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 73. Used by permission.

6 Adapted from a passage by *Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali* (1058-1128) translated by Kenneth Cragg in *Common Prayer*, 80.

God Is Greater

BY KAREN THOMAS SMITH

At the heart of Jethro's visit to Moses is a divine mystery: Israel's unique covenant with God is blessed at its birth by a priest who is outside that covenant. This is a mystery we should ponder as we, who partake of the new covenant in Christ Jesus, encounter the descendants of Jethro and his fellow Arabs outside that covenant.

Exodus 18:1-27

The visit by Jethro, the priest of Midian, to his son-in-law Moses on the mountain of God, is a biblical story that invites us into encounter and relationship with Muslims. Recall that years earlier, after Moses had killed the taskmaster and was forced to abandon his home in Egypt, he had found refuge and work in Jethro's household and married his daughter Zipporah (Exodus 2:15-22). Jethro and his family were Arabs living in the land of Midian—ancestors of contemporary Arab Muslims and, according to Scripture, descendants of Abraham and his third wife Keturah. The Midianites descend from the children whom Abraham sent away from Isaac to the east (Genesis 25:1-6).

It is while he was shepherding Jethro's flocks in Midian that Moses first encountered the Lord in a burning bush on Mount Horeb, "the mountain of God" (Exodus 3:1-6). Obeying the call of God to deliver the children of Israel, Moses had left his new home in Midian to return to Egypt.

Jethro's visit is a homecoming for the family, for Jethro returns Moses' wife and two sons who had had been sent away from Egypt (18:2-3). We can sense the genuine respect and tenderness of the men's greeting, even though their customs are alien to us, as "Moses went out to meet his father-in-law; he bowed down and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent" (18:7).

After hearing Moses' testimony of the marvelous events in Egypt, Jethro rejoices in Israel's deliverance and confesses, "Now I know Yahweh is greater than all gods" (18:11a). Jethro speaks, almost verbatim, the call to faith and prayer that Muslims repeat daily: *Allahu Akbar!* God is greater!

Then something amazing occurs. Jethro, this child of Abraham and priest of the alien Midianite faith, offers the burnt offering to Yahweh. Even Aaron, who is not yet a consecrated priest, comes "with all the elders of Israel" to partake of the sacrifice from Jethro's hands and gratefully receive his blessing (18:12). Jethro goes on to instruct Moses in matters of governance, thereby shaping the future of the people of Israel through his wisdom.

IN SCANDAL AND MYSTERY

Each year in the Jewish lectionary the story of Jethro's visit is read—together with the accounts of God's giving the Decalogue and establishing the covenant with Israel in chapters 19 and 20—in a pivotal reading called *Sedra Yitro*, or the "scroll of Jethro." For many Jews, this is a scandalous pairing of events, because Jethro, after acclaiming Yahweh's greatness, worshipping the Holy One who is "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," and instructing Moses in leadership, does not stay for the culminating event—the initiation of the covenant between God and the people.¹ The account of his visit, in other words, is not a "conversion" story. Jethro remains outside the covenant. This wise man from the east offers his gift of blessing, but then returns to his own country by another way, never again to be seen within the biblical horizon.

At the heart of Jethro's visit is a divine and, therefore, wonderfully baffling mystery: the salvation received as a gift through Israel's unique covenant with God is blessed at its birth by a priest who is outside that covenant. It is a mystery we do well to ponder in this age when we, who partake of the new covenant in Christ Jesus, encounter more and more the descendants of Jethro and his fellow Arabs outside that covenant. Must our encounters with the descendants of Abraham who are outside the covenants of God with Israel and in Christ lead to a "clash of civilizations," as many pundits insist, or may they open us to God's blessing in rich ways we have yet to imagine?

IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

As we turn a few pages of the Story, more than a millennium of years pass after these events at Mount Horeb (Sinai) to when Jesus encounters the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). She too stands in a faith tradition with marked resemblance to Islam, and she meets Jesus, the Gospel reminds us, with noonday thirst at the well of "our ancestor Jacob" and at the foot of another mountain of God's blessing, Mount Gerizim.²

In their disjointed conversation about faith, Jesus refuses to be trapped into well-worn arguments. Instead, he startles her with radical words:

“The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him” (4:21b, 23).

Jesus invited the Samaritan woman, and today he invites us, into the mystery of saving faith. We must bear the tension of living in the ambiguous domain of spirit and truth, where even those of alien faith may speak to us of the God who has poured himself out in saving love in Jesus Christ. Even where God has done this unique thing in Christ, we can expect others who do not share our faith to visit us and bless us even as we witness to them of the saving acts of God. And we may all wonder at the mystery of the God who is greater than our imagining. *Allahu Akbar*. Amen.

NOTES

1 Bernard Coysaud made this point in a Bible study on Exodus 18 delivered at the Synod of the Eglise Evangelique au Maroc, November 13, 2004.

2 God instructed Joshua to renew the covenant with the people on Mount Gerizim after they entered the land of promise (Joshua 8:30-35), and the mountain was remembered as the mountain of blessing (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27:12).



KAREN THOMAS SMITH

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Reading Locke on the Tigris

BY J. MARK LONG

In a remote city in war-torn Iraq, surprises abound. The trilingual conversation—in Kurdish, Arabic, and English—branches from natural law to constitutions, from Aquinas to Chomsky. And a simple invitation to prayer breaks through stereotypes. For this American professor, Dohuk becomes the place that “let me back in.”

I remember the scene with striking clarity, of thirty Kurdish professors in the mountain city of Dohuk talking at once, excitedly and passionately. As part of a team of twenty-two Baylor professors sent to northern Iraq in December, 2003, I listened intently to their discussion. The clatter of three languages—Kurdish, Arabic, and English—filled the university classroom. The lights occasionally blinked out because of unstable power grids, yet their trilingual conversation flowed unabated.

U.S. forces had just captured Saddam Hussein, and for this group of law and political science professors, it was their 1776, their day of liberation. They became particularly engaged during our workshop on John Locke’s ideas and the American founding.

Inevitably, powerfully, the talk among my Kurdish interlocutors turned to the year 1787 and to developing a national constitution that might “secure the blessings of liberty to themselves and their posterity.” As my new colleagues shared insights about natural law, intellectual property rights, limited government, and the political writings of Thomas Aquinas, their intellectual élan was hardly what I expected among a people once described as having “no friends but the mountains.” But in this place that had long ago bequeathed the western world its first literary narrative (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*) and law code (*The Code of Hammurabi*), and later translated the Greek and Latin classics that fueled the European Renaissance, the teacher

became a student. In many ways I was unprepared for what I would see and learn.

HOW I WAS SURPRISED

"Excuse me," a graduate student quietly asked in perfect English. "Thank you for coming. But I must ask you for a favor. I am doing my thesis on Noam Chomsky and there is a 1995 essay of his that I haven't been able to secure. Can you help me?"

How often I have felt "right" about my faith only by convincing others they were "wrong" in theirs. How often I have done apologetics but forgotten to give grace, to declare through my life as well as my words the gospel of our Lord.

A female professor of English joined our conversation: "You can't imagine what Chomsky has done to us. His ideas on transformational grammar have upended all our thinking."

Another surprise occurred as I walked with a law professor from another

Kurdish university. He paused as we came to a small classroom. "It is time for the zhuhr prayer," he told me, "and this is where I pray." I replied that I would wait outside the room. "No," he insisted, "please join me." "But I am a Christian," I reminded him. "That's fine. I would like you to pray with me nonetheless." And he quickly sent for another prayer rug.

Chomsky and transformational grammar! How many of my students at Baylor, I wonder, are reading Chomsky and having their ideas upended? And an invitation, offered in friendship and without coercion, to pray with a Muslim—this hardly comports with the stereotype many of us as Americans hold of those who practice Islam.

AND "LET BACK IN"

C. S. Lewis once wrote that the reason we "do literature" is that it "lets us out." Literature can move us beyond our otherwise narrow borders and show us a world we hardly dare to imagine. But then, Lewis continued, literature "lets us back in." We return from our reading with a new perspective on ourselves, and the resulting self-encounter can be extraordinary indeed.

Iraqi Kurdistan had a similar effect on me.

Of the many times I have traveled to the Middle East, this was my "literary" trip. I found the Kurds to be a people experienced in self-government, a people thoroughly educated, and a people hospitable even in their poverty. Indeed, they know full well what the brutalities of the Saddam regime have cost them in human capital and social development and real flourishing. Many of the faculty whom I met had been refugees, but now—

in a post-Saddam Iraq—they had returned to reclaim their lives. Going to Iraqi Kurdistan “let me out.” I saw a place I had not imagined existed.

But this remote corner of Iraq also “let me back in” by showing me the limits of my knowledge and reminding me of my tendency to carry stereotypes. And it said something to me about my faith. How often I have felt “right” about my faith only by convincing others they were “wrong” in theirs. How often I have done apologetics but forgotten to give grace, to declare through my life as well as my words the gospel of our Lord.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I am squarely situated in the historic creeds of the Christian faith. Yet when I think of conversations with Kurdish professors about Madison and Jefferson and Aquinas, or when I recall a Muslim’s gracious invitation to pray, I am compelled to consider how much it is I have to learn. As Augustine reminds us in *On Christian Doctrine*, “Every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is His Lord’s.”

I know that ultimately Christians and Muslims will not—indeed, cannot—resolve all differences of doctrine, just as American and Iraqi professors will certainly differ in their reading of Locke’s *The Second Treatise of Government*. But I learned in Iraq that it is possible for us to converse with charity. I saw the possibility of living as a worshipper of God who is fully revealed in Jesus Christ, while building friendships with and serving others in real humility, and learning from them in the process.

I journeyed to a remote, mountainous region of a war-torn country half a world away in order to read Locke on the Tigris. What I really read was an unwritten text—a place that “let me back in.”



J. MARK LONG

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Reading Together

BY KRISTEN LINDBECK

While many books can tell us the facts “about” Judaism and Islam, we can learn some deep truths “from” these Abrahamic traditions by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning, a still developing movement that offers a fresh form of interfaith dialogue and scripture study. In SR, we may broach even the hard issues among these faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.

While teaching a course on world religions at a church-related college last year, I asked my students what they knew about Islam before reading the textbook. One reported that some Muslims were terrorists. “Did you know anything else about Islam?” I asked. Nearly all of them shook their heads, some looking slightly sheepish. As the semester continued, my students were fascinated to learn about the clear historical and theological connections among Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, connections never discussed in the mainstream American media.

My first experience of Scriptural Reasoning (SR) in the late 1990s was a bit like that of my students. Of course I already knew that Islam is a rich monotheist tradition with historical ties to Judaism and Christianity. I was taken by surprise, however, by Islam’s reverence for Jesus as a prophet and the many Biblical stories that appear in the Qur’an. Even more, I was fascinated by what Islam had to teach me, not in matters of doctrine, but in philosophy and worldview. Islam provided a new lens through which to see God—not only as omnipotent Creator and Judge, but also as the Merciful Fount of Mercy, and the Friend who is nearer than my heartbeat. Islam’s view of humanity has also enriched my own: though “Islam” means “submission” and emphasizes our role as servants of God, it also stresses

that we are God's "vice-regents" on earth, the noble stewards of creation.

While many books on Islam could tell me the facts *about* the religion, I've learned some deep truths *from* Islam by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning, a still developing movement that offers a fresh form of interfaith dialogue and a new—and renewed—kind of scripture study. Scriptural Reasoning hopes to be a redeeming force in this world. In my experience, it already is such a force in a modest way, and has the potential to do more.

A DIFFERENT DIALOGUE IN THE COMMUNITY

Community-based interfaith dialogue often involves "making nice" — instructing one another in the basic elements of the faiths involved, stressing commonalities, and agreeing how wonderful it is that we share basic moral values. This kind of dialogue is valuable, indeed essential, as a beginning. Particularly in the wake of 9/11 and our war in Iraq, Christians need to know Islam is not defined by terrorism and violence, and Muslims need to know Christianity is not defined by self-righteous crusade. Both Christians and Muslims perennially need reminding that Judaism is not a static and legalistic faith, but one of dynamic thinking and inspiring ideals.

Yet this kind of dialogue is self-limiting. While it is crucial for us to see the human face of people of other faiths and to understand that they share most ethical values and many religious concepts, this only takes a few hour-long meetings. The next step might be intensive study of another faith, but this takes more time than is available to most working religious leaders, teachers, mothers, doctors, and business people. After all, we want to study our own traditions too!

Furthermore, the kind of dialogue that looks only for commonalities leaves the important and often painful questions among faiths entirely unaddressed. Many Christians wonder if Muslims are saved, or are certain that they are not. Muslims are often taught that the doctrine of the Trinity is a polytheist corruption of the true faith of the prophet Jesus. Other questions—about sexual ethics, the role of faith in politics, and the place of religion in businesses or schools—have created divisions within faiths as well as among them. Do we trust the people from other faith communities enough to frankly discuss such issues in their presence? Usually not.

How can Scriptural Reasoning address these issues? In SR people of the three Abrahamic traditions read scripture together, which enables them to deepen their understanding of other faiths in focused, manageable study sessions. The encounter with scripture also ensures that participants are looking together at something beyond personal opinion, and thus can avoid platitude and superficiality. Even more important, in SR people begin and end dialogue with a prayer, which reminds participants that in the presence of revealed scripture we are also in the presence of the Revealer. An awareness of God's presence—perhaps I dare say simply "God's presence"—leaves us open to unexpected gifts of light.

Though we have not witnessed any “Paul on the road to Damascus” type of religious experiences in Scriptural Reasoning, I and others often remark on the surprising intellectual and spiritual insights we gain from the process, sometimes from others and sometimes from our own unexpected words. After participants in SR have experienced on-going trust for weeks or months, they can broach even the hard issues between and within their faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.

A DIFFERENT DIALOGUE IN THE ACADEMY

Academic interfaith dialogue has the benefits of increasing knowledge of and respect for other faiths, but it also has its own limitations, which Scriptural Reasoning is well-fitted to address. Basit Koshul, a Muslim philosopher, expresses these limitations well. I met him when we were graduate students in one of the first Scriptural Reasoning groups. The group, which met at Drew University, a Methodist school, was started by Peter Ochs, a Jewish philosopher who is one of the founders of Scriptural Reasoning. At first Koshul was reluctant to participate in Scriptural Reasoning, despite an invitation from Peter Ochs, his teacher. At one point in his intellectual development, he had consciously avoided interfaith forums. “Past experience,” writes Koshul, “taught me that most forums were basically ‘interfaith-less’ forums where agnostic Muslims, Christians, and Jews met to basically confirm each others’ agnosticism.” However, when he joined the SR group, he says:

It was not long before I discovered, to my elation, that this particular “interfaith” forum was unlike any other that I had known. The unique character of this forum was due to the three fundamental presuppositions on which it was based: (1) each of the three traditions confidently asserts its claims to uniqueness, as well as universality; (2) at the same time it does not view this claim as being an obstacle to genuine dialogue; because (3) this dialogue is centered on the Revealed Text.¹

In other words, the same emphasis on scripture and its Revealer that works for community-centered Scriptural Reasoning works for academic SR too. Instead of promoting an intellectualized version of “making nice,” SR fosters an environment in which participants can present the power and beauty of their own faiths without apology, and without proselytizing or fear of being accused of proselytizing. Participants in SR may or may not seek to spread their faiths outside of its context, but SR is fundamentally about listening as much as asserting one’s own truth. Each faith community “confidently asserts its claims to uniqueness,” then listens to others and to the Revealer behind the Bible and the Qur’an.

In an SR study group at the 2004 American Academy of Religion meeting, several participants tried to define SR and arrived at the following

ideas: Scriptural Reasoning exists in the “between” –between faiths and between faith and the university; SR is a way of loving God continually with people of other faiths; SR is a way of continually giving and receiving hospitality. Furthermore, SR means risking embarrassment, or provoking anger in the other, or exposing an intimate place in one’s faith.² Most of the scholars doing SR are professional theologians and philosophers of religion, but in SR they are willing to put themselves on the line as believers in ways that theologians and philosophers usually avoid.

THE VALUE OF THREE-WAY CONVERSATION

Scriptural Reasoning can foster a unique intellectual and spiritual intimacy because it is a conversation among three Abrahamic traditions; it is not limited to just two faiths, and is not open to all world religions. Just as an understanding friend can inject necessary perspective into a difference of opinion between spouses or siblings, the presence of a third faith adds perspective and opens up the dialogue among traditions that share a long and often tragic history. These three faiths inform one another in overlapping ways: Christianity and Islam are proselytizing majority religions; Judaism and Islam are strongly parallel in their understanding of God’s Oneness; Christianity and Judaism have longer experience with the challenges of modern society, modern science, and the separation of church and state.³

Scriptural Reasoning can include more of the full spectrum of each faith, from liberal to conservative, than usually occurs in general interfaith conversations. To engage in

SR, one need only believe that Muslims, Christians, and Jews worship the same God. Some participants in SR are universalistic in their understanding of God’s work in the world, and some are not. Scriptural Reasoning accepts that it is natural and often appropriate for each faith to understand the others in its own terms: for many Muslims to

understand the Jewish and Christian revelations as precursors to the revelation of Islam; for many Christians to understand all salvation, even that of non-Christians, as mediated by Christ; and for many Jews to understand Christianity and Islam as worship of the God of Israel by the nations of the world. Participants in SR need not give up a belief that their faith among the three has the truest understanding of God’s will; all that is required is

Just as an understanding friend can inject necessary perspective into a difference of opinion between spouses or siblings, a third Abrahamic faith adds perspective and opens up the dialogue among traditions that share a long and often tragic history.

openness to the idea that God cannot be limited by human understandings of truth. This is the more inclusive end of the traditional range of belief in Islam and Judaism, and is also held by many Christians today. The question of whether God speaks in traditions which have no personal God (like much of Buddhism) or many personal gods (like much of Hinduism) is more difficult and divisive for the Abrahamic traditions.

How does Scriptural Reasoning work? While there is no simple recipe, the three things that seem crucial for SR are keeping the focus on scripture, engaging in small-group discussion, and providing time for spontaneous exploration.

Christianity, Judaism, and Islam speak related religious languages. They all tell of a personal God who creates, reveals, and saves, and traditionally teach the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and God's coming kingdom on earth. In speaking of the ethical meaning of a passage, for example, they can all draw on the Biblical and Qur'anic ethics of com-

mandment, sin, repentance, and gracious Divine forgiveness. The language of creation in the Divine image, and of the fall, is also common to the three faiths, though often understood quite differently. They do not agree on all points, but they share a basis on which to begin discussion.

EXPLORING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

So, exactly *how* does Scriptural Reasoning work? Is there an easily definable technique that opens the way to fruitful dialogue? While there is no simple recipe, three things that seem crucial for SR are keeping the focus on scripture, engaging in small-group discussion, and providing time for spontaneous exploration.

In the academic SR group at Drew University, for instance, one person took responsibility for introducing a focal passage of scripture by explaining its context and traditional interpretation within a particular faith, especially if it was from the Qur'an. We divided into groups of four to eight people to discuss the passage, and then came back together for a wider discussion. Michael Cartwright describes a community-centered group he and others founded at the University of Indianapolis: they recruited fifteen members (five from each of the three faith communities), decided on scriptural texts, and discussed them together.⁴ In the scholarly American Academy of Religion annual meeting, members of the three faiths present written papers which we discuss in large and small group settings. Later the authors post their papers on the web site of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning and ask for written responses.

Scriptural Reasoning groups operate with some shared postulates about scripture. The most important of these is that because scripture is revealed by an Eternal God, it is open-ended. God is still speaking to us in the text. On this account, the traditional, “doctrinally correct” readings of scripture are not the last word, but rather a jumping-off point. Furthermore, one gift that SR can bring to the study of scripture is recognition that there is a fascinating diversity of interpretation, even within the doctrinal orthodoxy of one faith. Augustine, with his fondness for allegory, did not read scripture like Calvin; and neither of them read scripture just like a twentieth-century conservative or twentieth-century liberal church member. The mystic poet Rumi did not read like the great Arab philosophers, and neither read the Qur’an just like modern Muslims, whether liberals or conservatives. In a comparable way, SR treats historical theories about the original meaning of the text as a starting point, not as the last word about the “real meaning.” This all becomes even more complicated in an interfaith context. The Qur’an, for example, asserts that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary as a miracle of God, and yet adamantly denies that he is God’s Son.⁵

Yet Scriptural Reasoning is not relativistic; participants explore and listen to scripture, ask questions of others, and look within themselves and their own faiths. Imagine with me a community-based SR discussion on the Qur’anic passage in question. A Christian participant might remark how surprising it is that Muslims believe in the Virgin Birth while so many Christians do not. Another participant, Jewish or Christian, might ask the Muslim presenter why Muhammad, the final prophet in Islam, has no special birth story, while Jesus does. Muslims in the group would propose their best understandings, which might be traditional or newly constructed in the context of their knowledge of their faith, or both. A Jewish participant might then remark that the Muslim view of Jesus as a prophet is similar to that of many liberal Jews today, and unlike the traditional Jewish view, which is far more negative. Then a Muslim might return to the question of why so many Christians doubt the Virgin Birth, as it is clearly stated in the Gospels. Christians would attempt to answer. At this point the group might return to a closer reading of the passage; move on to a discussion of competing views of revelation and the truth of scripture in Christianity; or continue with a comparison of the Annunciation scenes in Luke and the Qur’an. Finally, they would end with a prayer, and each person would go home with a renewed understanding of his or her faith as unique, and yet connected to the other Abrahamic faiths by agreements, disagreements, and shared questions.

THE PROMISE OF SCRIPTURAL REASONING

Peter Ochs sees Scriptural Reasoning as a redemptive practice that can help to heal the suffering of the modern world, especially the distress caused by the empty conflict between rationalist intellectuals and a large

number of believers.⁶ The rationalist Enlightenment, Ochs says, rightly rejected Renaissance witch burnings, Protestant wars of religion, and Catholic inquisitions. America's founding fathers, who were heirs of the Enlightenment, rightly proposed the separation of church and state. Yet their nineteenth- and twentieth-century followers encouraged the more debatable separation of religion from politics and they harmfully demoted faith to a purely private matter, divorced from public ethics, education, social justice, and economics. This rupture has created suffering—and thereby challenged rationalism's claims to truth. Scriptural Reasoning reminds us that scripture inspired much of the best thinking behind the Enlightenment (remember "All men are created equal"?). Furthermore, scripture contains rules for thinking that can repair the emptiness of a society built on rationalism, individualism, and materialism. SR is a way of listening to scripture which puts God's will back into biblical scholarship and philosophy, and eventually, ideally, back into the public discourse of society in an open-minded, open-ended way.

Scriptural Reasoning poses a similar challenge to believers when we criticize modern society for "taking away our belief in truth." Is our belief so nebulous it can be swept away by contradiction, or so rigid it can be fractured by challenge? In fact, our religious speech-making often is merely a reaction to the anti-religiousness of much of the world's establishment, not a thoughtful response to the world's suffering. Sadly, both liberal and conservative believers tend to look to scripture for the kind of truth that scores points, rather than the kind of truth that changes lives. SR holds that scriptural truths are dynamic and life-giving, paradoxical and difficult, like the truths of Jesus' parables.⁷ They are not upheld by carving the Ten Commandments in stone and setting them in a court house. They are upheld by humbly and intelligently exploring the meanings within the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Five Pillars of Islam, writing them in our hearts, as it were, and being shaped in our actions by them.

CONCLUSION

Isra Yazicioglu, a young Turkish graduate student with a pleasant face and warm smile—she wears a headscarf and a long coat, so she appears distinctively Muslim—relates to me a beautiful example of Scriptural Reasoning that occurred when she and William Young, a Christian professor, led a SR workshop in Boston on Martin Luther King Day, 2004.

Ms. Yazicioglu believes SR is grounded in two "reasonable hopes." One is that whoever ordered this world and created us in it will speak to us through clear channels. In other words, it is reasonable to expect that whoever is speaking to us through creation will also address us in a more direct way through revelation. The second reasonable hope is that the Divine address will not overwhelm us, but will speak to our human condition and not contradict human reason and experience. These hopes—which are

neither dogmatic convictions that shun reason *nor* dogmatic rejections of even the possibility of Divine speech—are the basis of Scriptural Reasoning.

She notes that Martin Luther King was a scriptural reasoner in his famous letter from the Birmingham Jail. *He looked to scripture for guidance*, for his insistence on non-violence came from his faithfulness to the message of the gospels. Even though the circumstances were not improving as he hoped, he did not give way to violence. Yet *he was reasoning with the scripture*, for he was reasonably expecting it to speak to his circumstances. He was justifiably expecting that the scriptures could neither endorse racism nor call him to be indifferent to injustice.

I find it hard to imagine a better witness than Ms. Yazicioglu's words. They witness to Christian and to Muslim truths, to King's lasting message, and to the potential for Scriptural Reasoning to bring people together in the truth.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Church, synagogue, and mosque communities will find helpful suggestions about designing scriptural study groups at the Children of Abraham Institute (CHAI) website, www.people.virginia.edu/~pwo3v/chai/pages/communityintro.html. Many will enjoy the welcoming give-and-take within the Journal of Scriptural Reasoning at etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/.

NOTES

1 Basit Koshul, "The Semiotics of *Ayah*: An Introduction to Qur'anic Scriptural Reasoning," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 2:1 (May, 2002). Available online at etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr (accessed February 7, 2005).

2 Among the people I paraphrase are David Ford (Cambridge University), Kevin Hughes (Villanova University), and Steven Kepnes (Colgate University).

3 The last point is made by Koshul, "The Semiotics of *Ayah*."

4 Michael Cartwright, "Gathering at the Table for Scripture Study: A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue about Jonah Texts," (February 15, 2003). Available online at www.people.virginia.edu/~pwo3v/chai/pages/cartwright.htm (accessed February 7, 2005).

5 Surah 19, "Mary." Available online in three parallel English translations at www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/quran/019.qmt.html (accessed February 8, 2005).

6 Peter Ochs, "The Rules of Scriptural Reasoning," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, 2:1 (May 2002).

7 Ibid.



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Beyond the Veil

BY EVELYNE A. REISACHER

While for many non-Muslims the veil has become the characteristic symbol of modesty in Islam, the reality is more complex. Modesty is at home in our own faith journey, and by reflecting on this virtue beyond the veil, we may discover a fruitful new avenue for dialogue with Muslims.

Even though for many non-Muslims the veil has become the characteristic symbol of modesty in Islam, the reality is more complex. In some places across the Muslim world women wear the veil but in other countries they do not. While Muslims may defend the veil or reject it, very few would argue against modesty. Modesty seems to be a much deeper value and the veil is only the tip of the iceberg.

As we explore the practice of modesty in Islam we immediately recognize a virtue that is at home in our own faith journey. Both Christianity and Islam have wrestled with this issue and come up with varying practices within their own context. By reviewing key Muslim texts to understand various facets of modesty throughout the Muslim world, we may discover new avenues for dialogue between Muslims and Christians on this issue.

THE CHARACTER OF ISLAM IS MODESTY

In a chapter on good manners (*al-Adab*), the traditionist Bukhari in the ninth century quotes the tradition that “The Prophet passed by a man who was admonishing his brother regarding [modesty] and was saying, ‘You are very shy, and I am afraid that might harm you.’” The prophet Muhammad replied: “Leave him, for modesty is (a part) of Faith.”¹ The eighth-century traditionist Malik includes a similar reference in his hadith collection, *Muwatta*, when he quotes the Prophet Muhammad saying, “Every

religion has an innate character. The character of Islam is modesty” (Muwatta, book 47, number 47.2.9).

In both passages, the Arabic term rendered by modesty is “haya.” This word is sometimes translated modesty, bashfulness, shyness, or shameful-ness. It has a positive meaning in Islam.

Other religious texts give us some insight into what “haya” means. The Qur’an says that when Moses came to the country of Madyan, one daughter of Shuaib “walked bashfully” toward him (Surah 28:23-28).² She is sometimes held up as an example of good manners for Muslim women to follow. In Bukhari it is said that the prophet was shy or more modest than a veiled virgin girl (book 8, chapter 77, section 6119).

The virtue of modesty informs the way Muslims dress, but also how they view life more generally, especially the relations between men and women. To take just one example, in the context of worship modesty requires that women wear a veil when they pray and that men dress properly. The Prophet Muhammad said: “Allah does not accept the prayer of a woman who has reached puberty unless she wears a veil” (Abu Dawud, book 2, number 0641). The Hadith indicate that in early Islam women were praying in rows behind men so that the latter would not see them in an indecent posture when they were bowing for prayer. This custom developed later into the practice of men and women praying separately in the mosque.

In Surah 24:30-31—often called the “modesty verses” because they talk about chastity, modesty in male and female interactions, and the female dress code—both men and women are asked to “guard their modesty.”³ This expression—literally “guarding or watching over one’s private parts”—means limiting sexual relations only to marriage.

Many practices of modest dress in Islam, which will be discussed below, are intended to create a private space for love and to protect marriage. Thus translators use “guard their modesty” to refer to a husband and wife’s chastity. The expression appears in several Qur’anic lists of the pivotal practices of Muslim believers who will be rewarded by God. For example, “guarding one’s modesty” is listed along with praying humbly, avoiding vain talk, and exercising deeds of charity (Surah 23:1-5), and with surrendering to Allah, speaking the truth, persevering in righteousness, being humble, giving alms, and fasting (Surah 33:35).

“Lowering the gaze” is another expression associated with sexual modesty. “Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them” (Surah 24:30). Women are also asked to “lower the gaze and guard their modesty” (Surah 24:31). The prophet Muhammad encouraged young people to get married because it helps “lower the gaze and guard the modesty” (Bukhari, book 7, chapter 62, section 4), and he warned believers, who would sit along the path in discussion with one another, to keep the eye

downward (Muslim, chapter 4, book 24, number 5293).⁴ In some parts of the Muslim world, men observe this practice literally and avoid gazing into women's eyes. In other places, believers interpret the expression more generally as a call to sexual purity.

The power of the gaze in enticing sexual attraction is acknowledged in most cultures. A well-known story of King David reminds us of its power: one night from the roof of his palace he saw Bathsheba bathing and he entered into an adulterous relationship with her (2 Samuel 11:2 ff.). "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart," Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, and "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away" (Matthew 5:28-29a). And in Isaiah 3:16, God rebukes women for "glancing wantonly with their eyes" (or, as the New International Version translates the expression, "flirting with their eyes").

VEILS AND COVERINGS FOR WOMEN

The "modesty verses" include further requirements for women: "they should not display their *zeena* except what appears thereof" and they should not strike their feet "in order to draw attention to their hidden *zeena*" (Surah 24:31, italics added).

The word "zeena" has been interpreted in different ways over the years. For instance, one English translation of the Qur'an says "natural beauty and artificial ornament," but others translate "zeena" as the face, hands, or feet, which allows women to uncover these parts of their body and even more. "Zeena" also has been understood as beauty, make-up, jewelry, dress, and so on. This helps to explain why Muslim women wear various sorts of covering—it depends on the interpretation given of these key texts and a few others.

According to Surah 24:31, women may show their zeena to only a limited number of males, essentially close relatives and a few others who are outside the possibility of marriage. This explains why Muslim women dress differently at home rather than outside the house, where veiling is a rule. In regards to elderly women with no hope of marriage, they also must be modest and not make a wanton display of their zeena, but they can lay aside their outer garment (Surah 24:60).

This verse continues by saying women "should draw their veils over their bosoms." The kind of veil described here, a *khimar*, covers the chest and the neck. Some interpreters have suggested that pre-Islamic women did not cover the bosom, and it was considered immodest for Muslims to behave like that.

The amount of a woman's body that should be covered has been debated over the years. Today different styles of veil are worn, and some Muslims even say the true "veil" should not be an item of apparel, but an inner attitude of modesty. Thus one religious leader, discerning a specific

guideline about veiling, teaches that “The Qur’an only says that a woman must cover her head in a way that all hair is concealed,” while another commentator, Amina Wadud, writes, “The principle of modesty is important—not the veiling and seclusion which were manifestations particular to that context. These were culturally and economically determined demonstrations of modesty.”⁵ Both want to honor God, yet they interpret the texts differently.

Furthermore, different hadith may be used to support one practice over the other. Muslims who favor veiling may appeal to the tradition where the prophet Muhammad said “When a girl reaches the menstrual age, it is not proper that anything should remain exposed except this and this. He pointed to the face and hands” (Abu Dawud, book 32, number 4092). Those who are against veiling may appeal to other passages that show women did not wear the veil in early Islam or throughout Muslim history.

The Qur’an also instructs the wives and daughters of the prophet Muhammad, as well as female believers, that “They should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And God is Oft-Forgiving, most Merciful” (Surah 33:59). Here the “outer garment” is called *jilbab*, not *khimar*.

According to Muslim traditionists, God revealed this verse on the occasion that Umar bin Al-Khattab, who later became the second caliph, observed one of the Prophet’s wives at night “answering the call of nature” and told the prophet Muhammad to let his wives be veiled (Bukhari, book 8, chapter 6240, section 179). This passage suggests there was insecurity in the land and women were in danger of being molested, and that the veil was a symbol of being a respectable woman. Muslim women who advocate veiling and modest dress today often echo all of these themes.

Lest we dismiss as quaint these contemporary Muslim women’s effort to explore and appropriately adopt the practices of early believers, let’s not forget that a parallel conversation occurs in the Christian tradition about adornment and beauty. Wives in the early church were taught that “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold

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jewelry and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is a great worth in God's sight," and were encouraged to adopt Sarah as their model, for "this is the way the holy women in the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful" (1 Peter 3:3-5a, NIV).⁶ Christians also struggle with how the Apostle Paul's request applies to their daily life: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:9-10, NIV). Like Christian women, Muslim women may turn to religious texts in order to better understand the virtues that characterize them as believers.

SECLUSION BEHIND THE SCREEN

The extreme case of covering for the sake of modesty is seclusion, the rule that a woman generally should stay in her house, but be covered if she must go outside. "Stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of ignorance," a Qur'anic verse says to the Prophet's wives, and then it directs others "When you ask for anything ye want, ask them [the wives of the Prophet] from before a screen [*hijab*]" (Surah 33:33, 53). Bukhari reports that the latter verse was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad as he hung a screen for privacy after his wedding guests had left his home (book 7, chapter 65, number 375).

The setting up of a screen is found in other contexts. For instance, in describing how Mary separated herself from her family in order to receive the angel's visit announcing the birth of Jesus, the Qur'anic passage says, "Mary placed a screen [*hijab*] from them and we sent to her our angel and he appeared as a man" (Surah 19:17).

Muslim religious texts also refer to *satr*—"concealment" or "coveredness"—a concept related to the privacy curtain (*sitr*) used in open apartments. Indeed, the rules for how and when a stranger enters a house in the early Muslim community stem from the fear of surprising someone who is not properly dressed.

Throughout the history of Islam there have been lively conversations about how to apply these passages. Some interpret the verses above, directed to the wives of the Prophet at the end of his life, as requirements for all female believers, and this leads to women's seclusion from the public sphere. Other believers encourage women's limited access to the public sphere in order for them to care for children and manage households. As women's roles change due to new economic demands, Muslims continue to reflect on these Qur'anic texts.

NAKEDNESS, SHAME, AND PURITY

Though the Qur'an prescribes women's dress more than men's, the Hadith offer detailed descriptions of how men should dress. Muhammad ordered men to cover their private parts (*awra*) with a garment when sit-

ting and gave further advice on dress code (Bukhari, book 8, chapter 42). Traditionally Muslims understand that the minimum covering required for men is from his navel to his knees.

The primary reasons for covering *awra*—which refers specifically to the genitals, and more generally to parts of the body that elicit sexual stimulation when they are viewed—are to avoid shame and prevent sexual corruption both in the person who is uncovered and others who observe. Muslims continue to debate the extent of the covering, of course, because what elicits sexual stimulation varies according to the context.

Likewise, the Bible contains rules concerning nakedness (Leviticus 18 and 20:10-21) and stories that warn about their violation. Ham is cursed for shamefully observing his father Noah's nakedness, while Shem and Japhet are blessed for covering their drunken father without taking advantage of him (Genesis 9:18-27). In the prophetic writings, flaunting their own nakedness is a powerful metaphor for the political and spiritual wantonness of the people of God, and intentionally exposing other nations' nakedness is a symbol for cruelly humiliating them (e.g., Ezekiel 23:17-21; Habakkuk 2:15-17). Indeed Ezekiel, struggling for language to show that God will permit the destruction of Jerusalem, shockingly describes God as stripping the idolatrous nation of Judah and exposing her nakedness to the invading Babylonians (16:36-37).⁷

Fortunately, a beautiful and contrary image—of God covering the people's nakedness like a lover tenderly protecting the beloved—is also in Ezekiel's repertoire (16:8), and this is the image that the writer of Revelation borrows to describe

God's gracious call for repentance to the wandering church of Laodicea (3:18-19). This loving response by God to human sin, of course, is the highlight of the first story of the Bible and the Qur'anic expansions of the account of Adam and Eve.

"They both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them," according to one Qur'anic passage, and "they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden" (Surah 20:121). After the first couple's sinful disobedience, says another passage, their shame "became manifest to them" (Surah 7:22).

The Qur'an says that raiment "came down" from God to "cover the shame" and "to be an adornment to them" (7:26). In the Bible, "The LORD

Though the Qur'an prescribes women's dress more than men's, the Hadith offer detailed descriptions of how men should dress. The primary reasons for covering "awra," or nakedness, are to avoid shame and prevent sexual corruption.

God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21).

The Qur’an warns that the same thing can happen to the children of Adam: “Let not Satan seduce you, in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment to expose their shame for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them” (Surah 7:27).

Modesty is not primarily about the veil, but about purity, marriage, male-female relations in the society, and our relationship to God. To understand Islam, we need to be sensitive to the core values of modesty as well as to how these translate into dress practices.

CONCLUSION

Modesty is an important part of Islam, and our discussion suggests it can open many avenues for exchange between Christians and Muslims. Modesty defines our dress-code, shapes interactions between men and women, and influences the way we see our bodies. On all

these themes, we may explore commonalities and differences.

We may explore with Muslim friends the variety of dress codes in their communities, and discuss the limits to what Christians should wear. For example, missionaries who encountered societies in the past where nakedness was not a moral issue sometimes believed they needed to impose clothing requirements. Currently we are debating in our churches the immodest presentation of the body in popular culture.

We may explore with Muslim friends how we should read and apply Scripture. What is universal in our dress codes and how we understand the virtue of modesty, and what is culturally specific? I remember a conversation with a Muslim woman who was wearing the veil. She told me that were she to discard her veil, she would be very afraid of displeasing not her husband, or father, or any man—but of displeasing God.

How should modesty be integrated into our codes of law? Every society makes some rules about what parts of the body should be covered when in public. Walking naked in the street, for example, is not permitted in the United States. Some Muslim countries require veiling for women when they are in public. To what degree should law codes be based on specific interpretations of religious texts which then become standard for the whole population?

Many conversations between Muslims and Christians stop after they disagree about the veil. However, we have seen that modesty is not primarily about the veil, but about purity, marriage, male-female relations in the society, and our relationship to God. If we want to understand Islam, we

need to be sensitive to the core values of modesty as well as to how these translate into dress practices.

Islam reminds us that modesty is more than a dress code; it is a way of life. Wearing the veil does not require having modest attitudes. Indeed, some women may wear the veil because they have to do it, yet their thoughts, relationships, and the way they dress under the veil may not be pleasing to God. Even when covered from head to toe, we may do shameful actions. That makes it even more important to reflect with Muslims on modesty beyond the veil.

NOTES

1 Bukhari, book 8, chapter 73, section 139 (further citations from this and other collections of Hadith will be in the text). A traditionist (Muhaddith) is an honored scholar of the Hadith, which are stories about the sayings and religious practices of the prophet Muhammad. The nine-volume *Sahih Al-Bukhari* is the most respected collection of the Hadith. For English translations of the hadith referenced in this article, see www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah.

2 For the most part, I rely on Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an. Three English translations by Yusuf Ali, Pickthal, and Shakir, may be searched and compared online at www.al-islam.org/quran.

3 Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 92.

4 "In order for you not to stare at women," explains the translator of the English text.

5 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 10. Reinhold Loeffler quotes the first religious leader in *Islam in Practice: Religious Beliefs in a Persian Village* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 27.

6 Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

7 Ezekiel's violent description is an expansion of Hosea 2:3, an earlier pronouncement against the northern kingdom of Israel concerning its destruction by Assyria.



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Questions Rooted in Faith and History

BY KURT J. WERTHMULLER

Can we, as Christians, understand Islam and respect its adherents without compromising our own beliefs? Considering the historic significance of the Middle East to our faith, how can we approach the region's struggles with a biblical and Christ-like perspective? The two books reviewed here are solid stepping-off points for wrestling with questions rooted in faith and history.

Visit your local bookstore and you will discover a bewildering array of titles on the history of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian relations. The publishing market for such books continues to mushroom, particularly since the events of September 11, 2001, but also as struggles between Israel and Palestine persist. It is increasingly difficult to choose among these resources which vary widely in quality and accuracy. Compounding our confusion are the many dissenting voices of glib 'analysts' who offer media commentary as real, disturbing, and complex events unfold in the region.

How can we understand the historical context of today's Middle East and of the Muslim worldview? We should be prepared to learn that the people of the Middle East are tremendously diverse culturally, economically, and theologically. Though Islam is the predominant religion in the region, Islam is not just the Middle East, or vice versa. Indeed, the majority of the world's Muslims live in Southeast Asia, and much of the Middle East retains Christian communities of tremendous antiquity.

Furthermore, the *histories* of the region's many communities are very

diverse, though this is often ignored in the West. An infamous downside of the 'Orientalist' tradition, which until the late 1970s was the scholarly face of our engagement with the region, is the tendency of Western scholars to portray Islam and the Middle East as synonymous, as a monolithic civilization that is stagnant in its backwardness and thoroughly defined by a static faith with its glory days in the distant past. Sadly, much of what we continue to find in our bookstores and media outlets maintains this Eurocentric and profoundly inaccurate approach.

As Christians we must approach the study of the Middle East and Islam with an additional set of faith-based questions. Since its inception, Islam in part has been defined in historical and theological terms vis-à-vis Christianity, and thus the faiths are inextricably connected. How did our Christian predecessors, and today how should we approach Islam as a faith in relation to Christianity? Can we fully understand Islam and respect its adherents without compromising our own beliefs? Considering the rich historic significance of the Middle East to our faith, how can we best approach the region's struggles with a biblical and Christ-like perspective? All of these questions are both ancient and timely; we have much guidance in our tradition, but they remain complex and unresolved. Thankfully, a growing body of Christian literature challenges us to look beyond the commonly assumed and simplistic answers. The two books reviewed here are ones that I can recommend as solid stepping-off points for wrestling with these questions rooted in both faith and history.

REVIEWING A CHECKERED PAST

Rollin Armour's *Islam, Christianity, and the West: A Troubled History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002; 197 pp., \$25.00) sets out to describe the *longue durée* of interaction between Western Christians and the Muslim world, from the origins of Islam to the present. Armour, a Professor Emeritus at Mercer University, focuses on Christian responses—theological, philosophical, political, and military—to the successive forms of Islam. These forms include Islam's fast and broad early conquests, successive dynasties through the Middle Ages, and response to recent challenges to its authority by Western colonialism, modern Zionism, and twentieth-century East/West relations. At its heart, *Islam, Christianity, and the West* is a historical survey of Christian attitudes toward Islam. After nicely touching on the context of a period and place, Armour discusses the main approaches of that era's Christian thinkers and leaders. He is clearly most interested in the Western Christian interaction, and it is in this that he is most effective.

"What were Christians to make of a religion that at one and the same time affirmed and denied basic Christian tenets?" (p. 2). Armour answers by illuminating an impressive sampling of historical trends in Islam and Christianity, which are ripe for comparison—such as early Islamic conceptions of *jihad* (pp. 31-32) and later Christian parallels in the Crusades (pp.

67-68). Armour's message is clear: "Christians failed in their attempts to understand and interpret Islam—unless one considers writing to confirm one's misinformation and prejudice as success" (p. 2). He describes a full spectrum of such prejudices, from the description of Muslims by the medieval "Song of Roland" as bloodthirsty worshipers of three pagan deities (whereas Islam really teaches *staunch* monotheism), to Martin Luther's labeling the advancing Ottoman Turks as demonic servants and an apocalyptic omen (they actually provided remarkable stability to the Middle East and plenty of trade to Western Europe). Armour also includes the few historical exceptions of Christians who at least attempted to approach Islam and Muslims with less antagonism and more understanding, such as Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas. His choice of examples nicely demonstrates the often antagonistic interactions (with a few notable exceptions) between Christianity and Islam.

However, I have two criticisms of Armour's approach. By focusing on the Western Christian perspective, he too often avoids the Islamic 'side' of the discussion. Muslims certainly have pondered Christians and the West over the centuries. A number of Arab-Muslim intellectuals, for example, visited Europe in the mid- to late-nineteenth century for education and training, and returned home with a transformed vision for the future of Islam and firsthand perspectives on the West, both critical and complimentary.¹ Secondly, Armour bases almost all of his exposition on a limited number of secondary sources, such as Bernard Lewis' *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years* and Karen Armstrong's *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*. Though such surveys are necessary for reference, there is also a wealth of primary sources that would have strengthened this study. When, for example, he refers to a Muslim writer by the name of Usamah who was disgusted by the barbaric behavior of the Christian Franks, Armour references Karen Armstrong's history of Jerusalem (p. 74). Yet a fabulous English translation of Usamah Ibn-Munqidh's original writings is available.² A greater inclusion of the historical Muslim perspective, preferably from original sources, would have added a rich dimension to Armour's study.

Despite these limitations, *Islam, Christianity, and the West* is a useful and timely work. We need to be reminded that Christians historically have approached Muslims with willful ignorance and, sometimes, violence. Since understanding our own checkered past can encourage us to be humble and compassionate in our current conversations with Muslims, Armour's contribution in this regard is particularly welcome.

UNDERSTANDING A CURRENT CONFLICT

Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told About Israel and the Palestinians (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2003, 286 pp., \$23.00) is a markedly different book from *Islam, Christianity, and the West*. While

Armour provides a sweeping survey of Muslim and Christian relations, Gary M. Burge, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, focuses in this volume on the specific context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Burge presses a single question: how should we measure the human cost and historical reality of this tragic conflict from a biblical, Christ-like perspective? His answer is found in this important and illuminating book that is soundly researched, carefully written, and genuinely accessible. Loosely arranged by chronological themes, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?* ranges over discussions of the historical origins of the land of Israel, the ancient communities of Palestine, and the present-day state of affairs in the region.

In his sound biblical interpretation, Burge stresses two central points. First, when the land of Palestine was promised to Abraham's descendants, it was in a *conditional* covenant that connected God's promises to Israel's commitment to justice and obedience (p. 72). Second, it is important to incorporate the New Testament witness in our interpretation of promises regarding the land. "We cannot read the Old Testament and talk about its application today as if the New Testament had never been written," writes Burge (p. 167). He does not mean that the New Testament should replace the Old, but rather argues that Christ, as the fulfillment of biblical promises of salvation, is an *embodiment* of the Promised Land (p. 175).

Burge carefully notes that the Jewish people remain a divinely blessed community with a special place in history, but reiterates that this binds them closer to faithfulness rather than releasing them from accountability. Some critics accuse him of writing an imbalanced book from the "Palestinian side," but a closer look reveals that Burge studies a substantial number of Israeli sources—for example, the work of Israeli historians such as Avi Shlaim and Benny Morris, and the autobiography of Golda Meir. He also acknowledges the many Israelis who have been troubled and prompted to public action by their nation's treatment of Palestinians, referring to the former as the 'prophets' of modern Israel who are calling their people to a higher moral standard (p. 105).

Burge consistently and refreshingly ties each biblical theme to current-day events. He continually reminds us that this is not merely an academic exercise, for our historical and theological interpretations have significant consequences in the present. He prefaces a discussion of the Old Testament

We need to be reminded that Christians historically have approached Muslims with willful ignorance and, sometimes, violence. This checkered past should encourage us to be humble and compassionate in our current conversations with Muslims.

prophets' concern for justice, for example, with a carefully researched account of a deadly West Bank clash between Jewish settlers and Palestinian villagers in April 1988. He employs a broad spectrum of Israeli, Palestinian, and foreign press reports, as well as personal interviews, in order to be as accurate and objective as possible (pp. 94-98).

One of the most meaningful portions of the book describes the diminishing Christian community of Israel and the Occupied Territories. An entire chapter simply provides brief biographies of several Christian leaders. This may seem out of place in what is otherwise a step-by-step, thematic analysis of the conflict, but it reveals something sorely lacking in both Christian and secular analyses—individual faces and names of Christian people whose entire lives have been shaped by the conflict. Their stories are filled with challenge and steeped in faithfulness. And they are all the more bittersweet in light of the easy manner in which some evangelical organizations working in Jerusalem and 'green line' Israel dismiss any hint of authentic Christian faith among the Palestinians (p. 195).

Whose Land? Whose Promise? is a sensitively argued, historically grounded, and biblically sound analysis, which is only strengthened by Burge's interweaving historical and biblical exposition with deeply personal relationships and his own struggles. Though it is an accessible introduction to the complex layers of the conflict, it contains sufficient depth to enrich the perspective of even seasoned scholars for whom 'U.N. Resolution 242' is a familiar a part of their vocabulary. I only hope that this book's provocative title does not ward off many who could be genuinely educated, and indeed changed, by reading it with an open heart and mind.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Albert Hourani's excellent book, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962; reprinted, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

2 Phillip K. Hitti, trans., *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman & Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usâmah Ibn-Munqidh* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).



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First Steps in Understanding

BY DALE F. WALKER

With very different approaches—an imaginative conversation among Muslim friends, a scholar’s survey of Islam’s development in the contemporary world, and a distinguished Muslim intellectual’s treatment of the faith—the three books reviewed here enlighten the uninitiated into the ways of Islam.

In the last several years, and for obvious political reasons, there has been a burgeoning interest in Islam. A good number of books have been written that aim to enlighten the uninitiated into the ways and meaning of the Muslim faith. The three books reviewed here range in emphasis from providing the basics, to giving a more intellectual treatment of the faith, to offering a systematic treatment of Islam’s development in the context of an ever-changing modern world. They are books I have found to be very helpful.

John Esposito is director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, and has written and edited many books on Islam. In *Islam: The Straight Path*, third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 286pp., \$31.95), he gives us a general introduction to Islam, providing what is probably the most widely used university text on this subject. The book has the added advantage that its presentation seems to be acceptable to many Muslims. Esposito dispels the common notion that Islam is always the same in every place. “Monotheistic has not meant monolithic,” he notes, for the “unity of Islam, from its early formation to contemporary developments, has encompassed a diversity of interpretations and expressions of faith” (p. 252).

The coverage of Esposito’s book tends to be encyclopedic; he has something to say about everything. I find it valuable as a reference work; many

names and movements that one might want to look up are represented somewhere in this book. The writing is not pedantic, though with such wide coverage, a lot of detail has to be omitted. The attentive reader will learn from this book, and be able to add detail from further reading.

Esposito begins with the origins of Islam—including the role of Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the basic beliefs found there—extremely compressed into a chapter of thirty-one pages. This is foundational, since "Muslims today, as in the past, continue to affirm that the Qur'an is the literal word of God, the Creator's immutable guidelines for an otherwise transient world" (p. 31). There follows a chapter on Muslim history, largely political, which will be the most difficult chapter for the uninitiated to follow. Next he turns to belief and practice, with discussion of theological movements, Islamic law and its development in the tradition, the "five pillars" of religious practice (profession of faith, worship/prayer, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage), then family law and custom. Further topics in this chapter are Sufism, the mystic path, and some attention to Shi'ite history and practices.

A chapter is given to modern interpretations of Islam, discussed more extensively than in many introductory books. Included here are various forms of revivalism and modernism, and the interplay between them. The longest and most detailed chapter of the book deals with questions of religion and politics in contemporary Islam. Esposito discusses aspects of the resurgence of Islam since 1950, and details developments in Egypt, Libya, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. This part of the book, of course, is the most dated, and needs to be supplemented from other sources, not only for the more recent history of these areas, but for developments in other important nations of the Muslim world. Indonesia, for instance, with the largest Muslim population of any country, is not mentioned at all. There are further sections on Islam and the West, African-American Islam, and questions of Islamic identity in areas where Muslims are a minority.

A final chapter deals with possibilities of change, modernization, legal reform, and women's rights, against the backdrop of struggles among traditionalists, modern secular movements, and revivalism throughout the Muslim world. Esposito's sympathies are clear: "A new alternative exists today.... It is modern educated but Islamically oriented, committed to the transformation of state and society through nonviolent means from the bottom up" (pp. 249-250).

Esposito's book is weighted definitely towards contemporary expressions of Islam. But these are elaborated very much in terms of their historical development, and we see clearly how present-day struggles are grounded in Islamic origins.

Sayyid Hossein Nasr is an Iranian Muslim who has lived in the United States since 1979. He was trained in science, but has been a prolific writer and thinker in philosophy and theology. As a leading figure in the intellec-

tual world today, he speaks for what he calls the “traditionalist” view of Islam.

Despite its subtitle, Nasr’s book *Islam: Religion, History, and Civilization* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003; 198 pp., \$12.95) is not really about Islamic history and civilization. The main chapters show Islam as religion. Islam is presented as the purest form of religion, fulfilling the longing for meaning planted in the human heart. The foundations of the faith are the Qur’an, “the verbatim Word of God revealed to the Prophet” (p. 37), together with the ancillary Qur’anic sciences and commentaries, the Prophet, “the perfect man par excellence and the beloved of God, whom the Qur’an calls an excellent model to emulate” (p. 46), and the Hadith, which “deals with nearly every human question, from details of legal significance to the most exalted moral and spiritual teachings” (p. 56).

Nasr discusses the doctrines of Islam concerning God, prophecy and revelation, the angelic world, the human state, man and woman, the cosmos, and eschatology, and then describes the Shari’a (the Divine Law) and Sufism (the spiritual path). The next chapter covers the practices, ethics, and institutions of Islam: the five pillars, jihad as spiritual vigilance, plus specific Shi’ite practices of mourning the martyrdom of Ali and pilgrimage to the tombs of the Imams. Islamic ethics are touched on in terms of family, social structure, and economics. Political institutions are historically the Caliphate, or leadership of the Islamic community, and the authority of the Ulama, the religious scholars.

A thumbnail sketch of Islamic history comes next, summarizing the main lines of Muslim history in Western Asia as well as the development of Islam in other parts of the world. But Nasr is more interested in the schools of thought in Islam, discussing the development of kalam (or, Islamic scholastic theology), metaphysics and gnosis, and philosophy and theosophy. This chapter tends to be encyclopedic, not much more than a bare listing of names and movements which will mean little to people who are not already well-read

in these areas. In the closing chapter, Nasr tries to situate his own “traditionalist” position, which he claims as the majority position in Islam, over against modernism and fundamentalism, both of which, he says, “in certain lands have caused traditional Islamic life to wither, but have been unable to create any significant theological worldview that could challenge the traditional one” (p. 174).

Rather than a general introduction to Islam, Nasr gives us a testimony of faith, a passionate appeal for a particular religiocentric worldview. We find ourselves in a totally different world.

It is obvious that Nasr's book is not a general introduction to Islam in the sense that Esposito's is. Instead, Nasr gives us a testimony of faith, a passionate appeal for a particular religiocentric worldview. We find ourselves in a totally different world. Its closest parallels might be the theological disputations of the seventeenth-century west before the impact of the modern world set in, or the worldview concerns in a very traditional Bible college that is pretty much oblivious to the secularized world around it.

This critique should not be taken as negative. Nasr's world is very coherent, even appealing, and he writes about it in very interesting ways. His voice is important, and his book should be read as an *apologia* for what may very well be majority views among reflective Muslims. Nasr does talk about change, mentioning some types of reform in Christianity and Judaism, but adds: "Islam, however, has not undergone, nor is it likely to undergo in any appreciable degree, the same kinds of transformation either juridically or theologically" (p. 173). I am not so sure that even traditionalist Islam can remain aloof from the secularizing modern world.

Roland E. Miller, who is not nearly as well known as the other two authors, is a Canadian who lived in India for many years, has written widely on Islam, and been a leader in promoting Muslim-Christian dialogue. His *Muslim Friends: Their Faith and Feeling: An Introduction to Islam* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1995; 429 pp., \$20.99) includes generous use of quotation, especially from the sources.

Miller, like Nasr, focuses on the religious aspects of Islam. He summarizes Islamic history, but makes little mention of the political dimensions and worldwide manifestations of Islam today. For that we have to go back to Esposito. Instead, Miller concentrates on contemporary belief and practice, giving much more detail than the other two books. Especially valuable is his discussion of the yearly festivals and the rites of passage.

Though an outsider, Miller writes as much as possible from the insider point of view, narrating the faith through the eyes of "Abdulla and Amina," typical Muslim friends in India. Every religious expression "has a double dimension—the bare fact itself, and what it means for the believer," Miller explains. "On the human level it is friendship that provides the most ready access to the realm of personal meaning. It is to friends that we ordinarily express our deepest feelings, our hopes and fears, our inner faith" (pp. 14-15). Thus Miller tries to share the experiences and feelings that these friends would normally have. For example, in discussing belief in God, he begins with narrating how the "Reality of God" impacts the lives of his friends, using this as the springboard to discuss the Muslim affirmations about God, the Divine Names and attributes.

This narrative device works very well, for in effect it puts the emphasis on Islamic practice by ordinary people, rather than on the scholarly analysis of a belief system. In introducing a short overview of Islamic history,

Miller shows that while his friends “do not know the intricacies of the Muslim story, they do know the names of some of its main characters, they resonate to some of its events, and they glory in the high points of its cultural splendor” (p. 331).

Miller reports the differing views among Muslims. In discussing the concept of jihad, for instance, he writes about Qur’anic teachings, classical interpretations, contemporary views—moderate and radical, and the internal Muslim debates over this issue. We gain a sense of the ferment within Islam today. Miller, however, always comes back to the personal. He summarizes the hopes and fears which he sees in his friends: “Abdulla and Amina are doing their best as they concentrate on and engage in the daily struggles of life. Their attempt is to find in the here and now a portion of the peace that comes from surrendering to God... [confident that] God does not only invite to the House of Peace, but He also gives guidance on the path that will lead to it” (pp. 392-393).

Since coming across Miller’s book, I have assigned it as the first reading in classes on Islam. Students like it very much, and it provides a good foundation for further study. I would recommend starting with Miller, then reading Nasr to get a Muslim intellectual’s views of the same material. Finally Esposito should be added, giving background to the contemporary political issues so important in our world today.



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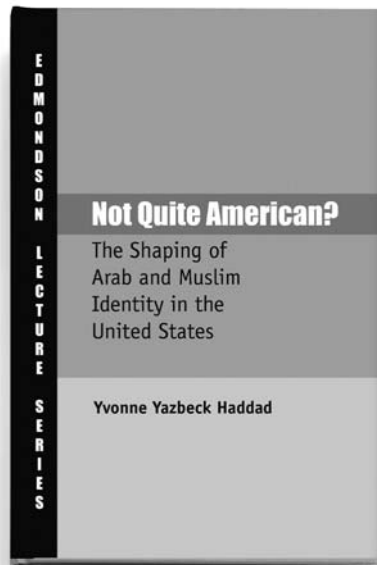
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