

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ISLAM

Who is Muhammad?

Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was a native of Arabia and a Semite by race. He was born on April 20th, 571 AD, in the city of Mecca (historical accounts differ on the exact date). The year 571 is called the Year of the Elephant, later linked to a Surah (chapter) in the *Quran*, designating the Christian Ethiopian general Abraha's unsuccessful attempt to capture Mecca with war elephants upon learning of the desecration of Christian sites. Muslims believe that the defeat of Abraha in the same year of Muhammad's birth is a prophetic sign from Allah to Muhammad as the future conqueror of non-Muslim religions. Muhammad belonged to the Hashimite clan of the tribe of Quraysh, who controlled the Kaaba shrines that contained a number of polytheistic and pagan religions.

His father's name was Abed Allah, indicating that the term Allah was used in pre-Islamic paganism. Some argue that the term Allah is purely Arabic and has nothing to do with the biblical name Elohim. In any case, Muhammad was orphaned at an early age and was raised by his grandfather Abed Almutalib. At the death of Abed Almutalib, Muhammad came under the guardianship of uncle Abu Talib, the head of the Hashimite clan. He was breast-fed by a bedouin woman named Halima. In the Arabic culture boys, being more favored than girls, usually are suckled longer. Nevertheless, it was here among the bedouins where Muhammad learned the classical Arabic language, which proved to be an important factor in his later religious life. Muslims claim that Muhammad was illiterate and unable to compose an excellent Arabic book like the *Quran*; therefore the *Quran* must be an authentic revelation from Allah. A number of scholars such as Tisdall, Saal and Pfander efficiently dispute such a claim.

Muhammad was familiar to a large degree with other religious practices, including Christianity and Judaism. According to the Muslim historian, Hassan Ibrahim, he was exposed first hand to Christian teaching from a Syrian Nestorian monk during his many commercial travels to Syria. Moreover, according to *Harpers Dictionary of Religion*, in his quest for religious answers, Muhammad looked first to the religious traditions around him for the answers. Muhammad was not alone in his search for religious truth. Muslim tradition tells of at least three men who broke with polytheism and adopted some form of monotheism just before or during Muhammad's time. They are called *Hanifs* (true seekers of worshipping God, analogous to Bible's designation of 'God's feared') they were: 1. Waraka ibn Nawfal, Khadija's cousin, who converted to Christianity; 2. Ubaydallah ibn Jahsh, who converted to Islam after Muhammad's mission, but later became a Christian; 3. Uthman ibn al-Huwayrith, who went to the Byzantine court, became a Christian and received high office.

Muhammad's material success in this part of his life is attributed to his commercial association with the rich widow, Khadija, and his later marriage to her. It is not clear whether she or any in her family provided Muhammad with any religious instruction, but she was related to the Christian scholar, Waragah ibn Nawfal, who memorized large portions of the Bible. She did give Muhammad social standing and considerable personal support during his early religious experiences. She was the mother of all of Muhammad's children except Ibrahim. His three sons by her, died in infancy, as did Ibrahim. Muhammad's new social status enabled him to assume a central role in the rebuilding of the Kaaba, although later narrators have embellished the particulars of the story.

Muhammad exercised an annual ascetic withdrawal in cave Hira around Mecca. Not much is known exactly about his routine but it lasted for approximately a month each year. Muhammad claimed that he received the first revelation by angel Gabriel on Mt. Hira, a mountain near Mecca. Frightened by this encounter, Muhammad doubted this revelation, believing it was from Satan, and contemplated killing himself to avoid being thought insane (which his critics called him anyway). When he encountered visions of revelations, he experienced bodily changes evident to those around him. He was accused of seizures or epilepsy, and some went so far to suggest it was satanic. However, Muhammad came back to his wife Khadija and her Christian cousin Waraka ibn Nawfal, who encouraged him and persuaded him that it was a valid revelation from Allah, similar to that of Old and New Testament revelations.

He persuaded few to accept his new religion including his wife Khadija. However, his initial success was faced with opposition from the Meccan tribes who refrained from harming him for fear of embarking on a civil war, particularly Muhammad's Hashimite clan, who supported him more out of tribal loyalty than from conviction in his religious mission. After failing to recruit the Meccans to his religion, Muhammad moved to Medina and succeeded in uniting its various factions against the Meccans, and established the first Muslim Community (*umma*) and ruled it

strictly under the injunction of the Quran. In 630 AD Muhammad succeeded in conquering Mecca making it the center of his religion. Between 630 and 632 AD, he subjugated Arabia, thus turning it from a pre-Islamic multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society to an exclusive Islamic state.

Muhammad became ill and died in June of 632 and buried at Medina where his tomb becomes a major attraction for Muslims. Muhammad died without providing a successor. Later a series of successors called caliphs, carried on the task of ruling and expanding the Ummah, which was established by Muhammad in Medina. Today the term Ummah refers to Islam worldwide.

What does the term 'Islam' mean?

The word "Islam" has at least three shades of meaning. First, the term is derived from the Arabic verb "aslama." When a combatant surrenders his weapon in defeat, we use the term "aslama" indicating "he submits." Second, the general usage of the term refers the religion founded by Muhammad signifies the religion of submission or resignation-presumably to the will of Allah. Third, the noun form "Islam" refers to the total belief system introduced by Muhammad including the practices of the religion. The followers are known as 'Muslims' sometimes spelled 'Moslems.'

It is interesting that an increasing number of Muslims -particularly in the west, allege that the term 'Islam' is also derived from the root word for peace (salam). This is incorrect. Though similar in inflection, it does not agree with the etymological derivation as examined by the authoritative Arabic Al-Munjid dictionary's definition. The Arabic term "salema" means to be delivered or safeguarded (i.e. peace). However, the term "aslama" as mentioned above, is a military and combative designation meaning to embrace Islam by surrendering to the religion, as well to Allah's will. Thus, the root for the word peace "salam" is not found here.

What do Muslims believe?

Muslims "Iman" (belief) is normally divided into five categories:

First, Allah.

Second, Angels.

Third, *Quran* and previous revelations.

Fourth, Prophets.

Fifth, the Day of Judgment.

Let us look at each briefly:

Firstly, the belief in Allah as a supreme deity. There is a definite emphasis on the "Tawheed" (Oneness) of Allah, who has no partners. This reactionary emphasis germinated in the mind of Muhammad largely because of misconceptions about the pristine Christian teaching on the Trinity, as we mentioned earlier.

Secondly, the belief in Angels. Muslims believe that angels are created from light by Allah, and they are part of his invisible macrocosm to serve his purposes. There are other kinds of invisible creatures made of fire, called 'jinn' (Eng. Genie). They possess exceptional power. Some are good, others evil, and can influence human affairs.

PROBE

The biblical teaching about Angels goes further. The central role of angels in the New Testament is to advance the work of redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ. They participated in the three great salvation events: the incarnation (Matthew 1:20; Luke, 1:26); the death and resurrection (Matthew 28:2, Luke 24:4) ; and the culmination of the work of redemption (Revelations 8).

Thirdly, the belief in the *Quran* and previous revelations. These are divided into four categories: 1 - The books of Moses (Tawrat); 2- The 'Zabur' (book of Psalms); 3- The 'Injil' (Gospel); 4- the *Quran*, which Muslims claim to be the final and actual revelation from Allah. Muslims have charged both Christians and Jews with falsifying their scriptures and believe that the *Quran* has abrogated the previous revelations and replaced it.

PROBE

There are several reasons for Muslims claim about the alleged falsification of the Bible:

First, there is vexation among Muslims about the Jewish and Christians rejection of their prophet, since the Old and New testaments do not predict the coming of Muhammad. Muslim scholars reacted to such affirmation by attempting to find illusions or references to Muhammad in the Bible (more on that later).

Second, there are intellectual objections to the biblical affirmations. It goes something like this: we Muslims do not understand nor accept the Christian teaching on the Trinity or Jesus as the son of God; nor do we accept that God would allow Jesus to die such an appalling death on a cross.

Third, Muslims deduce that the usage of several versions of the Bible by the Christians today is a proof of its inaccuracy.

It suffices to say that not being able to understand the mysteries of God spoken of in the Bible is not grounds for rejecting it. It is like saying, I do not accept the Bible because I don't understand it and I don't like what I read. Our likes or dislikes are irrelevant. Because the Bible does not predict Muhammad and has some difficult teaching, we cannot say it must be corrupted and there must be a need for another book like the *Quran* to replace it. This logic is self-defeating.

Sad to say, because of such allegations and misconceptions, ingrained in the minds of Muslims throughout their history, many of them have dismissed or at least doubted the Gospel message. However, here are seven questions Muslims must address before they challenge the authenticity of the Bible:

1. How can it be that both Jews and Christians conspire to alter their sacred books with no one knowing about it?
2. Did they amass all the written Scriptures from all geographical locations in order to perpetrate such a forgery with no one single charge against them by any one except Muslims who came to the scene six hundred years later?
3. Can any Muslims produce one shred of evidence to show that the Bible has been altered?
4. Can any Muslims tell us when it was altered?
5. Can Muslim scholars tell us why both Christian and Jews determined to alter their most sacred Scriptures. What would they gain from such conduct by defying its command that prohibits them to do so? It is important in this connection to look at some of the biblical teaching on its authority and inerrancy of its content; and how it warns any one who attempts to alter it:

- "And the words of^d the LORD are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay," (Psalms 12:6);
- "Sanctify them by Your truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17); "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2 Timothy 3:16);
- "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:21);
- "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4:2);
- "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.";
- "Your word, O LORD, is it stands firm in the heavens" (Psalms 119:89); "Do not add to his words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar" (Proverbs 30:6);
- "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:7);
- "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18);
- "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (Matthew 24:35);

- "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." (Revelations 22:18);
- "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32);
- "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it..." (Joshua 1:8)

6. Does the *Quran* contradict itself when it authenticates the biblical infallibility from the following references?

- "We gave the children of Israel the Scripture and the Command and the Prophethood" (45:16);
- "We verily gave Moses the Scripture; so be not ye in doubt of his receiving it; and we appointed it guidance for the Children of Israel" 32:23);
- "We caused Jesus, son of Mary, confirming that which was revealed before Him, and we bestowed on Him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and a light, confirming which was revealed before it in the Torah, a guidance and admonition" (5:46).

7. Why does the *Quran* admonish Muslims who are in doubt to approach both Christians and Jews for assurance and guidance? Does the *Quran* ask Muslims to trust a Scripture that has been changed? We read: "And if thou art in doubt concerning that which We revealed unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture before thee" (10:94).

No one with a clear conscience can attest to the fact that the Bible has been changed. History provides no evidence, nor even the Muslim sacred book. Muslims must come to the Bible, read it, understand it, and see what it says about God, man and salvation.

Fourth, the belief in Prophets. Muslims believe that Allah has sent over 120,000 prophets for humankind across the millennia of history. This number is taken from a Hadith (saying) by Muhammad, but no one can identify them. However, some of these prophets include names from the Bible, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad who is called the "Seal of the Prophets."

PROBE

Several of the accounts found in the *Quran* about these major prophets parallel the biblical narratives. Nevertheless a cursory reading of the *Quran* reveals significant serious reconstruction and historical questions. Some of these will be discussed in the section: Questions about the *Quran*.

Fifth, belief in the Day of Judgment.

There are some similarities and discontinuities between Islam and Christianity about eschatology in general and the Day of Judgment in particular. The *Quran* emphasizes the idea of resurrection of the body and the final judgment where the wicked will be consigned to eternal hell fire, while the believers will receive their final reward in Paradise. The Day of Judgment will be preceded by great cosmic conflicts similar to those described in the Book of Revelation. The "Al-Dajjal" (Antichrist) will appear and will cause much devastation and moral corruption. Afterwards the "Mahdi" (guided one) will appear to bring justice and will bring wealth and peace. This "Mahdi," however, is believed to be Jesus Christ, who will descend (some say in Damascus, while others in Palestine) to kill the Antichrist and judge the non-Muslims.

PROBE

To interject some critical discontinuities between Islam and Christianity concerning the Day of Judgment is important for our discussion. The basis on which people are judged in Islam in the final day is anchored in personal merit. In the day of reckoning, evil and good deeds of persons are placed on a scale. The greater override the lesser and determine the person's "kismet" (fate), either in eternal heaven or eternal hell.

In his clash with the Pharisees, Jesus, however, warned against trying to gain merits by self-righteousness. In comparison, the Pharisees, who were the orthodox core of Judaism, laid excessive emphasis on external piety. Their adherence to the meticulous details of the letter of the law and their reverence for tradition became the basis for morality, spirituality and final salvation. Jesus, however, insisted that "For out of the heart come evil thoughts" (Matt. 15:19). The final judgment is based upon the fact that the holy and just God must punish sin; therefore, sinners must face the penalty. For those who trusted in Christ, the sinless Son of God who took upon Himself the

penalty due us are saved from God's judgment. Therefore, the final judgment is determined on the basis of the person's relationship to Jesus Christ. God is just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:21-26). Thus, the ground on which God judges the person is by faith alone in Christ alone.

Another discontinuity with the Muslim concept of paradise is found in the fact that paradise in Islam is described in sensual and physical terms. The *Quran* is replete with descriptive details about pleasures awaiting the believers in Paradise. This include beautiful virgin women, fruit, drink and meat, heart's desires, dishes and goblets of gold, and wine (*Quran* chapters 37; 56; 74; 83).

In contrast, the Bible speaks of heaven as the eternal abode of the Triune God. It is a holy place and the perfect experience of God's people enjoying full fellowship with Him and seeing Him face to face (Rev. 22:4). It is a place of utter beauty prepared for those who love God, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (I Cor. 2:9); It is a place of holiness, love, joy and eternal praises and service to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Is. 35:8; I Cor. 13:13; Heb. 12:2; Rev. 22:3).

What are the Religious Duties Required by Muslims?

The religious obligations are five. They are identified as "Arkan" (pillars or foundations):

1. "Shihadah" (Profession). "There is no god except Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."
2. "Salat" (prayer). Regular practice of five daily prayers.
3. "Zakat" Charitable giving.
4. "Hajj" (Pilgrimage) to Mecca.
5. "Sawm" (fasting) during the month of Ramadan according to Muslim calendar.

PROBE

Antithetically, the central and most distinctive aspect of the Gospel is that salvation comes through Christ Jesus, who offers His own life as substitute for the guilty. His death made eternal life possible. The guilt of those who trust in Him is removed, and they are adopted into God's family as "heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ," (Rom 8:17). Not so in Islam. Islam is a religion of law and acts to its very core. The five duties become the road of Muslim salvation. Orthodox Muslims structure their lives around them according to a series of dos and don'ts by rigidly revering and adhering to the traditions and the law. The Pharisees are very much analogous to Muslims. They were captivated by the tyranny of a legalistic commitment. They were convinced that the ceremonial law and the tradition of the elders were meritorious and the only way to righteousness. Jesus called them blind (Matthew 23). Because of their infused man-made morality that had conditioned their hearts, their misinformed conscience excused their actions even in harassing and plotting to kill the Lord. If they were sincere, they were sincerely wrong. Their moral dilemma, which they did not recognize, was that instead of allowing their guilt to drive them to God, they rebelled against Him. Paul, after being dramatically delivered from the encumbrance of legalism, recognized that works righteousness is a denial of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. His letter to the Galatians warns against the danger of the Judaizers' teaching, which is based on legalism. In responding to such teaching, the Apostle Paul insisted that a man is justified only through faith on the basis of Christ's finished work (2:1-10). His message aroused a vehement opposition. Paul called his opponent's teaching (which they claimed to be superior to the Gospel of Jesus) "turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all" (Gal. 1:6-7).

What is the *Quran*?

The *Quran* is the sacred book of Islam. *Quran* is an Arabic name which means "reading or recitation." It contains what Muhammad claims to be the final disclosure of Allah's revelation given audibly and verbatim in the Arabic language via the angel Gabriel. Muhammad claims to have begun receiving these revelations when he was forty years of age continually over a period of twenty three years till his death in 632AD. Muhammad was a contemplative man, often retreating to a cave on mount Hira near Mecca. While in a state of trance he heard a voice commanding him to read, notwithstanding the fact that he was illiterate. However, Muslims claim Muhammad's being miraculously enabled to read and recite is an authentication of the revelation and his prophethood. Moreover, Muslims believe that Muhammad had nothing to do with the actual composition of the *Quran*; he was only an instrument or mere conduit through which Gabriel transmitted to him a revelation from Allah in the original Arabic language. The *Quran* is believed to be inscribed in heaven on tablets which are eternally preserved. Other names are given to the *Quran*, including, Al-Furkan, meaning demarcates between right and wrong; Al-Huda, guidance.

What does the *Quran* Contain?

The *Quran* is roughly smaller than the New Testament. It contains 114 Suras (chapters), revealed to Muhammad over twenty years. Contrary to the Bible, the *Quran* is not arranged logically or chronologically nor by theme or genre. The Suras are arranged after the death of Muhammad according to its length including a variety of themes, such as the oneness of Allah, his wrath if he is not heeded, stories analogous to the Old and New Testament narratives, laws and regulations about a variety of religious and social life.

PROBE

As we mentioned earlier, the overwhelming majority of the Quranic accounts, including creation, prophets, and elements of faith, have their antecedents in the Bible and rabbinic traditions. However, a cursory reading of the *Quran* reveals significant reconstruction of some of these accounts. Not only does the *Quran* incorporate most of its content from the Bible, but it acknowledges its authority by recognizing the “Turat” (first five books of Moses); the “Zabur” (book of Psalms) and the “Injil” The Gospel of Jesus).

Questions about the *Quran*

I appreciate the fact that the majority of Muslims are sincere about protecting the *Quran*, believing it to be the inerrant revelation from Allah. However, as I read the *Quran*, and gleaned from other scholar’s-both Muslims and none-Muslims analysis of it, I found that there are a number of critical inquires which demand forthright answers by Muslim scholars. Here are recapitulations of some of these questions:

How can both the *Quran* and Allah be eternal?

Muslims hold that the Arabic *Quran* is the exact replica of a prototype of eternally preserved tablets in heaven. These tablets however, were communicated verbatim to the prophet Muhammad (*Quran* 43:3; 85:21-22; 56:76-77).

The view that the *Quran* is divine and is the very words of Allah has produced a controversy among Muslim scholars. The Muslim scholar Faruky explains:

“... the controversy that raged under Ma'mun [Abbasid Caliph who reigned from 813-833], when he appointed Ibn Abu Daud as chief justice. That jurist belonged to the Mutazilah school, which held the *Quran* to be the created word of God because it feared that the contrary (namely that the *Quran* is the eternal word of God) would compromise the divine unity. Ibn Abu Daud used his position to promote his view, and he was opposed by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal who led a popular resistance against the Mutazilah position. The opposing populace correctly perceived that to declare the *Quran* created is to subject it to space and time and all the conditioning of history, to divest it of its holiness and thus to liberate the Muslim consciousness from its determining power and normativeness. The upshot was the downfall of the Mutazilah School and repudiation of its doctrine. The *Quran* emerged victorious, and the masses accepted it as uncreated not only in its meaning or content but also in its form, in the Arabic words in which it is composed” (Ismail, Faruky 1986. Cultural Atlas of Islam. NY: MacMillan Publishing p. 105).

Perhaps the dispute was settled, but the dilemma is not. Certain questions must be asked:

- **How can we allege that two eternalities exist together-one is material in nature (i.e. *Quran* written on tablets 85:21-22), and the other is spiritual (i.e. Allah)?**
- **How can we account for such dualism? How can a material object exist coeternally with Allah without being created by him?**
- **Does this mean that the *Quran* exists independently without being contingent upon Allah? If this is the case, then we must conclude that Islam teaches that matter is eternal.**
- **Can we conclude then that Islam is congruent, or at least in part, with the Greek ideas or the theory of evolution that matter is the basic stuff or raw material from which every thing else is composed?**
- **Why can Islam allow these two eternalities to exist side by side while opposing the biblical teaching of the eternal tri-unity or tripersonal God who is one, existing in three Persons-Father, Son and Holy Spirit equal in essence and glory? Is not this Triunity much more cogent than the two eternalities?**

These questions, and others demand answers and will continue to hound the Muslim claims about the *Quran*.

Who are the Caliphs?

The “Caliph” is the title for the main leader of the Muslim community. It literally means to leave behind a successor or viceregent. The title is given to the successor of Muhammad who is vested with absolute authority of the laws of the Quran and Sunnah. The first four Caliphs are called the companions of the prophet. After Muhammad’s death, Abu Bakr (632-634), the first to accept Islam, was elected as the first Caliph. After two years he was succeeded by Umar (634-644). Umar succeeded in spreading Islam in most of the Middle East, including Arabia, Iraq, Persia, Syria, Persia and Egypt. Umar was replaced by Uthman (644-656), who governed for some twelve years during the peak of the Islamic expansion into Armenia, Cyprus and north Africa. With the death of the prophet and several key reciters during the battles, the Caliph Uthman greatly feared the loss of the original text –or, as some believe, what was left of the oral tradition. Uthman commissioned a group under the leadership of Zayed Ben Thabit to produce an official written text.

A series of uprisings began during Uthman’s rule, and a new period of schisms and civil wars started with his murder. He was succeeded by Ali (656-661), who was the cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad. He became the fourth and last of what is called “Al-khulafa al-Rashidoon” (the Rightly Guided Caliphs). Ali inherited the political and religious implications of Uthman’s murder. After a series of civil rebellions, Ali was killed with a poisoned sword by a member of the Kharijite sect (dissenters), which had seceded from Ali’s ranks.

What areas did Muslims conquer?

Following the example of Muhammad and the Quranic injunctions, Muslim armies continued to conquer and subjugate subjects in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The East Roman Empire, called the Byzantine, was plagued with constant political, social, and religious strife. It came under relentless attack by the invading Muslim armies in the year 636 A.D., and the Christian church has never recovered. Within a century, the Islamic armies had subjugated Saudi Arabia, the entire Middle East, Central Asia, and large parts of India.

The Muslim forces continued their advance into North Africa and Spain. In 711 A.D., under the leadership of Tariq Ben Ziad, 7000 Berbers and 300 Arabs crossed the Straits of Gibraltar into Spain. Soon after, Mousa Ben Nusayer, Arab governor of North Africa, crossed with 10,000 Arabs and 8000 Berbers. While the forces of the Spanish king were distracted by a rebellion in the north, the Muslim army swiftly conquered Spain and Portugal.

After their success in Spain, they invaded France hoping to capture all of southern Europe and Constantinople, which they failed to conquer during their invasion earlier from the east. The Caliphs of Damascus hoped to control the whole Mediterranean Sea and make it an Arab lake. Muslim armies advanced in France and were 125 miles from Paris when they were defeated at the Battle of Tours in the year 732 A.D. by European forces led by Charles Martel. One of the most critical battles in history, the victory at Tours would determine the future faith of Europe.

However, Muslim armies from the east tried again to control all of Europe later. The Turks, under Muhammad II, conquered Constantinople in 1453 and made it an Ottoman capital. Under Sulayman (the Magnificent), much of the Balkan Peninsula, Hungary, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria came under Ottoman control. By 1685 they had reached Vienna, where, once again, the Western forces defeated the advancing Ottoman Muslim armies.

What is the Jihad and how did Muhammad spread Islam?

Muhammad was a man who was consumed by a deep sense of “dawah,” which means in an Islamic context “to propagate the faith by calling people to embrace Islam.” His unquenchable zeal for spreading Islam has left a lasting influence upon his followers.

Among the many uses of the term “dawah” in the Quran, perhaps the most potent and far-reaching implication is its use in connection with the external mission of Islamic propagation, that is the concept of Jihad (Quran 8:74,75 9:44). From the beginning, “dawah” has been associated with military conquest, the justification for which is laid down in the Quranic prescriptions: (2:69; 2:190; 2:217; 2:256; 3:103; 8:39; 8:61-62; 25:52; 61:9). Thus, the importance of the propagation of Islam has been ingrained since its beginning in the consciousness of Muslims. Resulting from its connection with the divine imperative in the Quran, it was inspired by the actions of the prophet and stirred by his call for “jihad fe sabeel Allah” (struggle in the path of Allah). The idea of martyrdom (shihadah)

and the use of the sword as well as the word were therefore not a matter of choice but part and parcel of the way of life for devout Muslims. The Hadith tells us that Muhammad's own soul yearned for martyrdom for the cause of Islam. Abu Hurairah, a companion of the prophet and respected traditionalist said:

I heard the prophet say: "I would not remain behind an army that fights in the way of Allah. . . . I love that I should be killed in the way of Allah then brought to life, then killed again, then brought to life, then killed again." (Ali 1977, 261-62)

Another explicit reference to the idea of armed struggle points to the way in which Muhammad's thoughts and commands continued to be the normative standard at least in the early period of Islam. It is reported in the traditions of Muhammad by Ibn Umar:

I have been commanded that I should fight these people [non-Muslims] till they bear witness that there is no god but Allah and keep up the prayer and pay Zakat. When they do this, their blood and their property shall be safe with me except as Islam requires, and their reckoning is with Allah. (Ali 1977, 265)

It would be difficult for a Muslim scholar to reconcile the idea of Jihad with the Quranic command, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Surah 2:190). Today, the idea of Jihad as pertaining to the physical struggle against the enemies of Islam is an acceptable norm among the increasing number of fundamentalists who are actively calling for the "return to usuliyah" (back to the roots). For more on this see the question: "What is modern day Islamic fundamentalism and how does it influence Muslims?"

Who are the People of the Book?

The *Quran* refers to both Jews and Christians as "Ahl-al-kitab" (the people of the book). The testimony of the *Quran* itself points to the significant role that Judaism and Christianity played in the formation of Islam. From the Quran's own record we read:

Surely, we sent down the Torah full of guidance and light (Surah 5:45). We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps, fulfilling that which was revealed before him in the Torah, and we gave him the Gospel which is guidance and light, fulfilling that which was revealed before it in the Torah, and a guidance and admonition for the righteous. (Surah 5:47)

The incongruity is that the *Quran* clearly testifies to the validity and authority of both the Torah and the Gospel, while at the same time it charges both the Jews and the Christians of corrupting their own Scriptures, thus invalidating them (*Quran* 2:75,101; 3:70,78,187; 4:46). It suffices to say here that Muslim scholars have not provided any proof to justify this claim.

What is the Kaaba?

The Kaaba is the center of the Muslim world and the most sacred pilgrimage shrine called "Haram". It is rather a small windowless cube-shaped structure located in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. It is about 12 meters long, 10 meters wide, and 15 meters high. It was built to enclose the "al-Hajar al-Aswad" (Black Stone), the most venerated object in Islam. Probably of meteoric origin, the stone is traditionally believed to have been given to Adam on his fall from paradise. The stone was originally white but has become black by absorbing the sins of the thousands of pilgrims who have kissed and touched it. Some questions Muslims extreme veneration of the stone. Muslim, however, try to explain that the Black Stone is not worshipped and not considered holy in itself. Muslims believe that the Kaaba is built directly under the throne of Allah. I am not sure how this belief can be defensible knowing that the earth shaped as a globe, and its center can be at any point. Moreover, the earth is constantly at motion tilting around its own axis and orbiting the Sun.

The Black Stone is set in gold and attached on the eastern corner of Kaaba. Muslim legends says that Kaaba was erected by Adam; and according to the Quran it was rebuild later by Abraham after the Flood (2:127-128).

The Kaaba becomes the prayer direction (Ar. qiblah) toward which Muslims around the world bow in prayer to Allah. The Kaaba and all the city of Mecca is sacred territory reserved only for Muslims; all other people are forbidden to enter. The pilgrimage (Ar. hajj) to Mecca, is one of the basic tenets of Islam.

The circling of the Kaaba is called "tawaf." This performance includes seven circuits performed around Kaaba. Each circuit is called a "Shawt;" seven "Shawts" make one "Tawaf." This circumambulate must be performed by all Pilgrims according to specific rules including the kissing of the black Stone.

Why do Muslims visit Mecca?

The Quran demands of every able Muslim to make the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) at least once in a lifetime. In Surah 3:97 we read: "Wherein are plain memorials; the place where Abraham stood up to pray; and whosoever entereth it is safe. And Pilgrimage to the house is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither," This duty is considered part of the Five Pillars of Islam. Unlike the Gospel, these Pillars, including the Hajj, provide all the necessary works in order to secure salvation. The Hajj consists basically of the following beliefs and rituals:

1- From the above mentioned Quranic verse, Muslims traditionally trace this ritual back to Abraham. They maintain that Abraham brought his son Ishmael in order to sacrifice him to Allah rebuild Al-Kaaba (Quran 3:127). Muhammad reclaimed this shrine from pagans and converted it to a Muslim site that becomes the most sacred place on Earth for Muslims.

What does the Bible Say? "God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!... Take your son your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering." (Gen. 22:1-2).

2. The pilgrimage to Mecca is performed once a year, during the last Islamic lunar calendar. It is considered the highest personal religious achievement. Some Muslims consider it as a form of personal rebirth whereby one can devote himself unequivocally to Allah and the religion of Islam.

What does the Bible Say? In John chapter four, the Samaritan woman told Jesus: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." After all, this mountain, Gerizim, had a significant role in the tradition of the Samaritan. Here Abraham prepared the sacrifice of Isaac, and in their Scripture Gerizim is the mountain on which the altar was erected. Nonetheless, Jesus' answer was unmistakable:

Believe me woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshiper will worship the Father in Spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in Spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24).

3- The Hajj commences by the performance of the ritual of outward physical purification followed by wearing of a white garment.

What does the Bible Say? Though it is not wise to judge the motive of individual Muslims engaging in acts of worship, but we need to see what Jesus has to say. Jesus gave a stern warning to the Pharisees who were meticulous about the minute details of outward acts of worship and purification:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean (Matt 23:25).

4- After achieving the state of cleanliness, the pilgrims are ready to enter Mecca and begin what is called the "Umra" (secondary Hajj). This initiatory ritual involves "tawaf" circumambulating the Kaaba.

What does the Bible Say? The idea of true cleanliness and perfection of the heart corresponds with the idea of clearing the conscience from guilt associated with outward piety instead of genuine righteousness from the heart of worshiper. In Hebrews 10:22 we read: "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience." Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews maintains that guilt cannot be expunged by the performance of good works or obedience to the law:

... gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order. (Heb. 9:9-10).

5- Closely connected with "Umra" is the ritual of running between the two hills surrounding al-Kaaba recalling the despairing Abraham's wife Hagar in search for water. The pilgrims travel to the two mountains, "Marwah" and "Safa" near Mecca where Muslims believe that Hagar searched for water at this location as she left her son Ishmael and hastened between the two mountains in a desperate hunt for water. When she returned to her child, the angel Gabriel appeared and led her to a spring of water called the well of "Zamzam". In similar fashion, Muslim pilgrims run between the two mountains. Then they visit the Zamzam well, where many purchase from this precious water to take home.

What does the Bible Say? The book of Genesis says that Hagar was with Ishmael in Beersheba south of Palestine and both lived in Paran-modern day Sinai in Egypt (Gen 21:14,21).

6. The main pilgrimage begins by the critical ritual of "Wuquf" (Standing) with extreme seriousness. The obligation of standing before Allah in a position of prayer takes place in the barren plain of Arafat about fifteen Miles from Mecca. Any improper performance of this standing invalidates the entire pilgrimage. People have a tendency to do something in order to earn the sanction of the conscience, and we often condemn ourselves when we fall short. The Book of Hebrews gives concrete teaching that we can never satisfy the demand of conscience through self-expiation (Heb. 9:9-10).

7. On the road back to Mecca, pilgrims find a pebbles for tossing at three pillars-located nearby area, symbolizing stoning of the devil while chanting "God is great."

8. The ritual sacrificing of animals follows. This ceremony commemorates Abrahah's sacrifice of a ram to Allah instead of Ishmael. The title given to Ishmael is 'Abu-al-fida' (father of the ransom). It reflects the traditional Islamic belief that it was Ishmael who was to be sacrificed, not Isaac, contrary to the Biblical narrative. Nonetheless, all pilgrims are required to offer an animal sacrifice. Both acts of sacrifice and the subsequent feast last for three days and coincides with the same celebration by Muslims world-wide. This feast is called the "Greater Feast" while the other feast at the end of the fasting of Ram,adan is called "the Lesse Feast."

What does the Bible Say?

In the introduction to his commentary, The Epistle to the Hebrews, F. F. Bruce points out:

The Aaronic priests offered up sacrifices repeatedly, and our author pays particular attention to the annual sin-offering presented on the nation's behalf by the high priest on the day of atonement. But the animal sacrifice could not meet the real need of men and women. A sin-stained conscience is a barrier to communion with God, and the cleansing of the conscience could not be effected by such sacrifice as the levitical cultus provided. But Christ exercises His priestly ministry on the basis of a real and efficacious sacrifice—"the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26). The nature of this sacrifice our author finds expressed in the language of Ps. 40:6-8, where someone who knows the uselessness of animal sacrifices dedicated his life to God for the obedient accomplishment of His will (Bruce 1964, 54).

Again, the Book of Hebrews gives concrete teaching that we can never satisfy the demand of conscience through self-expiation. It can be accomplished only through the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, which provides the ground for justification.

9. Following the sacrifice, the pilgrims often shave their heads signifying the completion of the the Hajj and return to Al-Kaaba for another "tawaf" circumambulation and stonning of the devil.

10- As the pilgrims return home they leave with the satisfaction of gaining merits with Allah. Furthermore, they acquire a new religious and social status culminating by the title "Hajji" for a male and "Hajjiah" for a female. They are treated as ideal Muslims worthy of respect and honor.

What is "Dar al-Islam" and Dar al-Harb?

According to Islamic traditions, the globe is divided into two domains: "Dar al-Islam" (abode/House of Islam) and "Dar al-Harb (Abode/House of War). Dar al-Islam is an Arabic term means more precisely, those territories controlled by the Islamic religion where the Shariah (Islamic Law) prevails. Non-Muslims may live there,

nonetheless, they are considered as part of the domain of war (some times called “Dar al-Kufr” (Domain of Unbelief/infidels) Historically the domain/house of war is understood by orthodox Muslims as the foreign world which has not yet come under the majority rule of Islam. Nonetheless, the more militant and fundamentalist Muslims reject all non-Muslim ethos. They appeal to the Quran for inscribing Islamic universal values even if it takes military actions against Dar al-Harb.

How about Abraham?

"All the children of Abraham deserve peace." Thus spake U.S. President George W. Bush in a pronouncement on the White House lawn earlier this year. His biblical reference highlighted one core element of the agonizing and tragic dilemma that has stymied Middle East peacemakers: Arabs and Jews both claim Abraham as their ancestor.

Both Arabs and Jews claimed Abraham as their forefather. The Torah says ‘Abraham is ours; he is our father’ the father of Isaac and Jacob maintain the Jews. They emphasize what they see as divine given entitlement including land and national identity through Abraham. Abraham for the Jewish people is the most revered patriarch, and they are reluctant to share him with others. Raphael Patai says:

“One of the most tenacious popular beliefs transmitted from generation to generation of Jews is that of Abrahamic descent... this popular Jewish belief has become a psychological fact holding the Jews together. The image of “Abraham our Father” has been focal in Jewish consciousness throughout history.” (*The Jewish Mind* 1977)

Moreover, Jews claim that God promised Abraham and his descendants a land from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18).

Jews were not the only people who maintained to be the true descendants of Abraham. Muslims also maintain that Ibrahim (Abraham) is the first ‘Hanif’ (monotheist Muslim). Moreover, he is the father of Ismail (Ishmael), the progenitor of the Arab race including the prophet Muhammad. Muslims also came to heighten their claim as descendants from the Patriarch. The Quran incorporates several events in the life of Abraham similar to those found in the Bible. Nevertheless, a number of narratives are added in the Quran , such as Abraham's travel to Mecca with his son Ishmael and building the Kaaba (Quran 2: 125-127); quarrels with idol worshipers (Quran 21:51-57); argues with his father (Azar) against idolatry (Quran 6:74). It is important to keep in mind that Muhammad's skillful borrowing-in the process of the formation of Islam, from previous traditions later became the heart and soul of the new faith. It is striking however, that Muhammad's appeal to previous revelation (i.e., Torah; Psalms and Injil (Gospel), was ignored or rejected when he understood them to be incompatible with the accounts found in the Quran. Anyway, Abraham is called Hanif (i.e. monotheist Muslim). The Quran reads: “And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then you will be rightly guided. Say: Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters” (2:135).

Nonetheless, any claim of Abraham’s ownership must be qualified, says the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a strong propensity among Jews and Muslims to interpret their Abrahamic connection in religious, political and racial terms.

It is apparent that Both Jews and Muslims have laid claim to Abraham. These claims including both conflicts and points of harmony.

Where did the confusion about the Trinity in Islam come from?

Muhammad’s charge against pre-Islamic religious groups contributed to his misconception of the Christian idea of the Trinity and Christ’s being called the Son of God. We read in the Quran: “They surely disbelieve who say: Lo Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the one God” (5:73). Another verse says: “And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son... Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him” (2:116). In fact Muhammad’s charge was not directed against orthodox Christianity, but against some heretical groups existing in Arabia prior to Islam. Muhammad had to deal with the Jews and the Christians, including the Nestorians, the Jacobites, the Copts, the Melkites and others. It is unfortunate that such an arrant misunderstanding of the authentic Christianity continues to plague the mind and conscience of Muslims around the world as they are taught from early childhood.

Among the most important pre-Islamic deities were the al-Manat; al-Lat and the al-Uzza. These three are also mentioned in the *Quran* and referred to as "the daughters of Allah."

The al-Manat was an ancient Semite goddess. The etymological derivation is perhaps connected with the Aramaic *m'nata* (portion or lot). The Arabic word "Manaya", came to mean "fate" and was associated with the concept of death. She was a prominent goddess among the many deities, and a popular sanctuary was erected for her near Mecca.

Al-Lat was another venerated Arabian goddess. Most philologists derive the name from the form (al-ilahat), which means "the deities." Her sanctuary was located at the valley of Wadiji near the town of Taif in Arabia.

Al-Uzza is the third goddess in the pre-Islamic Arab pantheon. She was principally an important idol associated with the tribe of Khatafan, but later her worship spread over to the main tribes including the tribe of Quraysh (the tribe of Muhammad). The historical significance of al-Uzza and the exact meaning of the name is uncertain among the Arabs. However, it has been suggested by some that Uzza should be identified with the Queen of the Heavens (cf. Jer. 7:18).

Recognizing the deep attachment of the Arabian tribes to their deities caused Muhammad to compromise. Afraid of causing opposition to his message and division among the tribes, he went so far as to recognize the pre-Islamic pagan trinity (al-Lat, al-Uzza, and al-Manat) as mediators with Allah. This reinforced the prevalent idea that the members of this trinity were, in fact, the "daughters of Allah." However, Muhammad later retracted this position.

Thus in *Quran* 3:9 we read, "What think ye, then, of al-Lat and al-Uzza, Manat, the third idol besides?" In connection with this verse, Thomas Hughes, in his dictionary of Islam, relates the following interesting discussion between Muhammad, the idol worshipers, Satan, and Gabriel. Al-Tabari, a famed Arab historian and scholar born AD 839 relates that,

... on a certain day, the chief men of Mecca, discussed the affairs of the city, when the prophet [Muhammad] appeared, and seating himself by them in a friendly manner, began to recite the 53rd chapter of the *Quran*; and when he had reached the verse: "What think ye then of al-Lat, and al-Uzza and Manat, the third idol besides?" the devil suggested words of reconciliation and compromise with idolatry, namely, "these are exalted females and verily their intercession is to be hoped for." These words, however, which were received by the idolaters with great delight, were afterwards disavowed by the prophet, for Gabriel revealed to him the true reading, namely, "What think ye then of al-Lat, and al-Uzza and Manat, the third idol besides? Shall ye have male progeny and make God female? This, then, was an unjust partition! Verily, these are mere names which ye and your fathers have given them."

One can argue persuasively that Muhammad was perplexed about the difference between tritheism of pre-Islam and the true concept of the Trinity. Muhammad's charge was directed first of all against the polytheism of pre-Islam. Later, however, his charge against pre-Islamic religious groups contributed to Muhammad's misconception of the Christian idea of the Trinity and Christ's being called the Son of God. We read in the *Quran*: "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the one God" (5:73). Another verse says: "And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son. . . . Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him" (2:116). In fact Muhammad's charge was not directed against orthodox Christianity, but against some heretical Christian groups existing in Arabia prior to Islam. Muhammad had to deal with the Jews and the Christians including the Nestorians, the Jacobites, the Copts, the Melkites and others. It is unfortunate that such an arrant misunderstanding of the authentic Christianity continues to plague the mind and conscience of Muslims around the world as they are taught from early childhood.

What about the crusades?

The crusade wars undertaken between 11th and 13th Centuries were a complex drama in the history of the church and its relation with Islam. Historians tell us that, although the Crusaders had economic and political reasons for fighting, the primary reason by which the church justifies the wars of the Crusades was religious. The immediate threat by Muslims was felt at home by the Western Church several centuries prior to the crusades, when the Muslim armies invaded Spain in 711 and endangered the very existence of the Church in western Europe. The Fatimid in Egypt, as we mentioned above, ruled the Holy Land during the brutal reign of Al-Hakim, the neurotic Caliph of Egypt who destroyed the Church of the Nativity and curtailed the freedom of worship for the Christians in the Holy Land. While other Caliphs were relatively more tolerant, Al-Hakim now threatened the very life of Middle Eastern Christianity, which traces its roots to the Christ of Bethlehem and the Early Apostolic Church.

The first Crusades (1095-99) accomplished their goal by recapturing Jerusalem. However, by the end of the second Crusade (1147-49 A.D.), the celebrated Muslim general Saladin embarked on a jihad that managed to recapture Jerusalem. In 1187 A.D., a Third Crusade was led by King Richard of England. The Christians won some battles, but Saladin was able to cling to Jerusalem. Finally, both sides negotiated a truce that allowed the Muslims control the Holy Lands, but Christians were free to visit their shrines.

What were the results of the Crusades?

The goal of the crusading wars was mainly religious—to free the Holy land, to restore freedom of worship, and to provide a safe environment for pilgrimages to the Christian sites. Moreover, the Popes hoped also to extinguish all dissensions and divisions in Christendom, East and West. However, with the defeat of the Crusaders after 200 years of wars, this goal was not achieved.

How should we think about the Crusades today?

The term “Crusades” is widely used, abused, and misunderstood today. When President Bush used the term “Crusades,” pointing to the moral duty to fight the evil of terrorism, he was criticized by both the media here and several Muslim nations. They alleged that such a usage evokes in the minds of Muslims negative memories associated historically with the term. Osama bin Laden declared war against the “Jews and the Crusaders;” Campus Crusade for Christ uses the same term as they endeavor to spread the Good News—the message of God’s Grace around the world. Furthermore, the legacy of the Crusades still lingers in the minds of Muslims, as they mistakenly associate it with the core message of the Gospel. Some today are calling Christians to apologize for the wars of the Crusades. How to make sense of all of this?

Here are some questions for your considerations:

1. Are the Crusades a justified Christian holy war based on biblical principles or an enterprise intimately connected with that of the popes?
2. Are the Crusades justifiable based on the idea of defense of the Christian ideal, plus the freedom and protection of Christians from persecution?
3. Are the harshness and devastation characteristic of the Crusades justified ?
4. Are Muslims correct by equating the Crusades with their holy war (Jihad)?
5. Did the Church gain by the Crusades?
6. Did the Crusades have a permanent negative effect upon Muslims?

Stephen Neill, perhaps the greatest modern day church historian, gives us criteria by which we can encounter the issue of the Crusades:

We have already spoken of the tension between the *dar-ul-Islam*, the world of Islam, and the Christian west, which has been one of the dominant factors in world history for a thousand years. There have been faults on both sides, and these we can leave for the judgment of God. What is essential that we should understand the dark shadow which has been cast everywhere on the Muslim mind by the wanton aggressiveness of the west. Like the Jew, the Muslim may forget his own faults in the contemplation of ours; we may leave him to this occupation, and welcome only the service that he has rendered in calling our attention to our own. Memories are long in the east. To us the Crusades are very ancient history; to the Muslim they are as though they had happened yesterday. (1984. *Crises of Belief*. London, Hodder and Stoughton, P.75).

How did Muslims react to Western Colonialism?

At the end of the Ottoman empire after WWI, most of the Arab and Muslim lands fell in the hands of Western powers, mostly French and British. The bulk of the Arab states resented the Ottomans-though they were Muslims rulers - for their ruthlessness, stagnation and lack of innovation. Suddenly, they found themselves under other occupying colonial Western powers that shared very little, if any, of their values and way of life, and they could not do anything about it. This further subjugation of Muslims, fueled their frustration and antagonism, though the colonial powers have contributed to the advancement in learning and industry.

Additionally, the introduction of Western style schools, vigorous Christian mission activities and proselytizing, publications of Christian literature which questioned the credibility of Islam, have augmented Muslim antipathy toward the West.

Furthermore, while Muslims understood that the battle with the new Western colonialism is fundamentally a battle of values, they also saw colonialism as an imperialistic political and economical undertaking.

Arabs during the colonial period resisted vehemently the attempts of the colonialists to replace Arabic--the language of their holy book--with the English or French language. Islam and the Arabic language are two major foundations maintaining a strong sense of Arab nationalism. They are considered as two inseparable aspects of one thing.

In short, losing the once advanced civilization, particularly in the Middle Ages, at the hands of the colonialists, has contributed to Muslim estrangement toward Western powers and antipathy to Christianity-which is associated inaccurately with these powers. Such an attitude becomes a fixation and prelude to the resurgence of modern day Islamic fundamentalism.

What is modern day Islamic fundamentalism and how does it influence Muslims?

The Oxford Dictionary succinctly defines fundamentalism as a: "Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets... opposed to liberalism and modernism." Such a definition might apply to the Christian fundamental movement in our modern day because it is basically characterized by religious motives. Nonetheless, Islamic fundamentalism is far more complex, for it enshrines a number of religious themes and socio-political discontents, as we shall see in the following historical brief sketch.

Perhaps the first vanguard of Islamic fundamentalism, and still the most influential today, was Jamal Al-Din Al Afghani (1838-1897). His call for the Pan-Islamic unity against the imperial conquest of the West, particularly after the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1882, became very popular among Muslims. He infused religious Islamic themes in his political activism, appealing to the growing resentment against foreign domination. He also called for overthrow of rulers who are submissive to foreign power.

Another influential fundamentalist is Hasan Al-Banna (1906-1949). He was influenced by Al Afghani's thought. However, he founded a new movement in Egypt, still in operation today, named: "The Society of Muslim Brethren", it became the first modern strict and militant fundamentalist movement. They engaged in a series of assassinations including non-Muslims and Judges, plus an attempt on the life of Egypt's president, Jamal Abdul Nasser. Al-Banna himself was killed, and Abdul Nasser suppressed the Society of Muslim Brethren ruthlessly. They continued, however, to operate in Egypt and other countries in the Middle East.

Another extremist and combative leader in Egypt was Sayyed Qutb. After the death of Al-Banna, he assumed the leadership role and succeeded in inspiring Islamic Jihad organizations by revitalizing anti western sentiments.

Violence at tourist attractions in Egypt in recent years is an example of the fundamentalist hostility to Westerners, while at the same time an attempt to destabilize what they maintain as a secular government.

Another well known Fundamentalist who was the first successful revolutionary is Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989). He emphasized revolution to overthrow secular Islamic governments. His seizure of the US embassy in Teheran and capture of American hostages was an indication of his deep resentment to Western values. He understood that the conflict with the West, led by America, is more than political. It is rather religious and cultural based on the idea that the Western powers represent the real enemies of Islam.

After the 1967 Six Days War, a shameful defeat of Arabs at the hands of Israel, Islamic fundamentalism flourished. They turned defeat into their advantage. They were able to move the masses by appealing to their history and deciphering their frustration. Fundamentalists contended that the Arabs had lost the war because they had lost their faith in Islam. The real reason was secularism and departure from the true Islam that characterizes most Arab regimes.

Fundamentalists are ardent in their emphasis that the Allah of Islam is the Allah of absolute power. The very makeup of Islam is power. They assert that the reason Islam has lost its glory and power is because they have lost their religious bearings. They insist that the only way of survival is return to a system of beliefs based on the Islamic Shariah' (law) as taught in the *Quran* and implemented by Muhammad. For them, Islam supplies the only answer. Recapturing the lost power and sense of history, necessitates true "Jihad" based on total religious commitment and sacrifice, including martyrdom.

In short, Islamic fundamentalism, which is nourished by appealing to the religious and socio-political sentiments among Muslims, will remain a threat and continue to surge forth unless real democratic reforms are established in the Arab and Muslim World, the Arab-Israeli conflict is resolved, and perhaps Islam is rethought in a new course, as some Islamic thinkers are trying to do.

What is Wahabbism?

Al-Wahhabiyyah (Ar. for Wahhabism) is an unyielding Islamic persuasion and revivalist movement began in Arabia by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1792). He called for a strict interpretation of Islamic theology and practice calling the community to return to Islam as practiced by Muhammad a thousand years earlier. When opposed by certain tribes, he allied himself with the modern founder of Arabia, the tribal chief Muhammad Ibn Saud. Both declared the Jihad to purify the land from the infidels and unislamic practices. By the death of Abd al-Wahhab in 1792 Wahhabis grew to be the dominant power in Arabia and continues today in the hands of the Saudi clan. While Wahhabism is not the dominant sect in the world-wide Islam, nevertheless it exercises immense power in the world. Saudi Arabia has more than one quarter of the world's oil reserves. The oil industry not only dominates the local economy, but unfortunately, influences the world economy and foreign policy- making of other countries.

As adherent to the Wahhabi fundamentalist strict sect, Arabia leads the Open Doors World Watch List as the world's worst country for persecuting Christians and abusing religious liberty. Saudis makes no secret for such policies. On March 10, 2003, the Defense Minister Prince Sultan of Saudi Arabia announced publically that Saudis Won't Allow Churches on Its Land. The Associated Press Network reported:

Saudi Arabia, as the birthplace of Islam, will not allow churches to be built on its land, according to Defense Minister Prince Sultan. Islam is the only accepted religion in Saudi Arabia, home to the faith's holiest shrines in Mecca and Medina. "This country was the launch pad for the prophecy and the message, and nothing can contradict this, even if we lose our necks" (AP March 10, 2003).

Moreover, according to the US State Department's 2000 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, we read:

Freedom of Religion does not exist [in Saudi Arabia]. Islam is the official religion, and all citizens must be Muslims. The Government prohibits the public practice of other religions. Private worship by non-Muslims is permitted. The Government has declared the Islamic holy book the Koran, and the Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad, to be the country's Constitution. The Government bases its legitimacy on governance according to the precepts of a rigorously conservative form of Islam. Neither the Government nor society in general accepts the concept of separation of religion and state. Conversion by a Muslim to

another religion is considered apostasy. Public apostasy is a crime under Shariah (Islamic law) and punishable by death. Islamic practice generally is limited to that of the Wahabi order ... Apostasy is a capital offence under the Sharia Islamic law, as when a Muslim converts to another religion. (U.S. Department of State Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999).

Nothing has changed today. According to a number of human right organizations, the persecutions, imprisonments and deportations of any suspected practicing Christian is practiced constantly.

Among the modern day extreme Wahabbi followers who hold a grotesque interpretations of religious values are Ben Laden and the late Taliban who were originally not Wahabbis, but later embraced Wahhabism.

How did Arabs react to the birth of the State of Israel?

In 1917 Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952), Zionist leader and first president of Israel (1948-1952), was able to procure from the British government, what is known as “Balfour declaration.” It included a pro Zionist statement for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. After World War I the “League of Nations ratified the declaration and in 1922 appointed Britain to rule in Palestine. Thousands of Jews began immigrating to Palestine particularly from Germany escaping persecution.

The U.N. General assembly in 1947, passed the partition plan of Palestine, creating a Jewish and a Palestinian homeland. The religious Jewish leaders vehemently objected to the partition, hoping to rule all Palestine, and later engaged in a series of militant activities against the British and Arabs, while Arabs in Palestine stepped-up violence against Jews.

On May 14, 1948, however, the interim government of Israel announced the birth of the State of Israel. Arab nations remained staunchly opposed to the declaration. The Land of Milk and Honey became the land of militancy and hostilities. On May 15, 1948, five Arab armies entered Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war began. The Arab armies were composed of nearly 80,000 men. Israel, however, mobilized a greater number of well-trained fighters. The invading Arab armies failed, and Israel gained more territories. After its victory, Israel expected the Arabs to concede and accept its independence. This did not happen till 1979 when President Anwar Sadat of Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel. Syria opposed Sadat’s visit on the grounds that any lasting peace with Israel should be comprehensive, including all concerned parties. While time proved that this was a wise assessment, nevertheless Sadat was eager to travel to Israel, leaving other countries in a state of war with neighboring nemeses.

While Sadat become very popular in the international community, he was opposed in the Arab world for a variety of reasons. However, his bold and courageous stand led to his death when a group of extremists Muslim brotherhood assassinated him in 1981.

How people are converted in Islam?

The Muslim’s “Shihadah” (confession)says: “There is no Allah except one Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” If a person believes such a statement and vocalizes it before two Muslim witnesses, he automatically becomes a Muslim.

PROBE

Conversion, nonetheless, as expounded in the Word of God is entirely incongruous with the Muslim belief. It is imperative, however, to emphasize the biblical teaching in this connection.

It is inaccurate to say that conversion according to the Gospel is a change of affiliation from one religion to another, as many of our Muslim friends are led to believe. Conversion, according the Word of God, is a profound and wonderful divine intervention in the life of a sinful man, when God enables him to turn away from wickedness and the dominion of Satan to His marvelous light. Sin is the moral corruption that entered the world as a result of the disobedience of our representatives in the garden, namely Adam and Eve. Sin, therefore, is not, as the Muslim assumes, a weakness or lapse or mistake. It is the condition of alienation from the holy God. The Bible speaks of sin as “lawlessness” (1 John 3). Moreover, we need to differentiate between the original sin, which Islam denies, and actual sin, which we commit by virtue of being born in a state of falseness. The Bible maintains that sin and guilt, seen in the light of the fall, cannot be expunged by the performance of good works or obedience to the law, or by believing in a creed or dogma. There must also be an ultimate standard by which we measure all ethical and moral behavior (Rom. 3:10-20; Tit. 3:5-7; Heb. 9:9).

We cannot speak of conversion without speaking of salvation, redemption and sanctification. The Bible says: “all have sinned, whether Jew or gentile Muslim or Christian. Therefore all need salvation from sin (Romans 1:18-3-18). This salvation, nonetheless, comes only through the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is the end result of what He has done. Whereas, we sin against the Holy God.

Two imperatives must take place, as far as the person is concerned, prior to true conversion: faith and repentance. Three elements of saving faith lead to true conversion. First, the intellectual. The mind is open to the truth of God’s word. Second, the emotional. The heart is gripped through the truth by the working of God the Holy Spirit . Third, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ in a steadfast obedience. Likewise, there are three elements of true repentance, in some way parallel to the elements of the saving faith. First, the intellectual - when we acknowledge our state of sin. Second, the emotional. It is the genuine sorrow for our sin. Third, the inner motivation of the will to turn from sin and ask for forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, any religious preoccupation with rituals will never absolve a person’s sin. “Zeal without knowledge” is nothing more than an attempt to suppress the nagging guilt feelings by resorting to endless acts of self-righteousness which, as we shall see later, “were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper” (Heb.9:9), as the case is in Islam.

Who are the Sunni ?

A Sunni is a member of the larger Muslim sect that encompasses approximately ninety percent of the Middle Eastern Arab Muslims. They claim that they represent the orthodox Islam. The Arabic word Sunnah means “path,” “way,” “custom” or “law.” The Sunni acknowledge the first four Caliphs, the successors of Muhammad. While Sunni do not believe that the caliphs acquired Muhammad’s prophetic position, but they extended his political and spiritual authority. The Sunni, however, are the majority in Islam. Their Islamic beliefs and practices are based on the *Quran* and the traditions rather than devotion to the Imams, as is the case in Shiah Islam.

What is the Shariah?

The Shariah (path, track or passageway) is the Islamic law derived from four sources: (1) the *Quran*, (2) the Sunnah, (3) the Qiyas (analogy or measurements of past traditions and their application for modern cases), and (4) the consensus (the agreement of the prophets' companions on various points not settled earlier, producing a consensus for the community). It is described by the well-known Islamic scholar Schacht as an “all-embracing body of religious duties, the totality of Allah's commands that regulate the life of every Muslim in all aspects; it comprises on an equal footing ordinances regarding worship and ritual, as well as political and legal rules” (1993,9). While the Shariah is practiced only by some Islamic nations, the majority balance their Islamic laws with secular codes. Such practice, however, has energized a new movement of Islamic radical fundamentalism calling for the return to “al-Usoliat” (fundamental-tenants of Islam) as we shall discuss in more detail later. More on this under the question: What is The Sacred Law?

Who are the Shiah?

The Shiah (sect of Islam) is also called the partisans of Ali (son-in-law and cousin of the prophet Muhammad). The Shiah recognizes Ali as the only leader of the Islamic community and rejects the first three (Caliphs), giving the descendants of Ali great reverence and authority and considering them the only legitimate leaders in Islam. The majority of Shiah live in Iran and Iraq. There are other pockets in Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. In contrast to the Sunni, the Shiah sect developed their own corpus of law and a system of theology. The Shiah has split into different divisions. The Twelvers are those who recognize twelve Imams while the Fivers recognize only five Imams. The Ismailis is another division also called the Seveners. They believe that a seventh Imam will emerge some time in the future to establish a new order.

What is Hadith?

A Hadith is a tradition traced to the speeches and conversations of the prophet of Islam, containing a variety of subjects on most aspects of life.

Believing that Muhammad was incapable of doing wrong, his followers scrupulously recorded his sayings and followed them to the letter. During his lifetime, his sayings and actions were considered a living example and normative standard for all “al-Momonin” (believers). The Hadith, however, was not written down until after Muhammad died. It was not until the third century after Muhammad’s death that an effort was made to write it down. Among the traditionalists whose collections of the Sunnah have become authoritative is al-Bukhari (A.D.

870). The Sunnah-as mentioned above, is basically deduced from the Hadith or the sayings of Muhammad and became second only to the Quran-the Muslims holy book. Here we have to add two points. First, There is no way of knowing which are the authentic hadiths. Muslims developed a science of hadith criticism in order to classify the sound (Sahih) from the Weak (dhaif). This resulted in the production of six major collections that were all later accepted by Sunni Muslims. The most significant is of al-Bukhari (d.870). Second, in addition to the six collections of hadith, the Shiah produced the saying of their imams (Muslim leaders descendants of the fourth caliph Ali) and made them authoritative collections normative for all aspects of life.

What is the influence of the Hadiths and tradition upon the followers of Islam?

After the *Quran*, the Hadith became the most influential factor in shaping the ethical, social, political, liturgical, religious, and legal systems of Muslims, particularly the Sunni sect. Our intention here is to avoid judging the motive or the sincerity of this mode of such behavioral control, for it is inevitable that in any educational process--secular or religious--certain values and attitudes will be infused. For this reason, however, education must be guided by the right moral principles. Otherwise, any wrong mode of indoctrination from the early stages of childhood has the potential for forcing the mind to change its orientation and ultimately captivating the conscience in a way that leaves little room for correct belief or value.

Muhammad gave an absolute and concrete meaning to every detail for the ritual of worship and religious practice. The bulk of the followers' personal and corporate piety in their ritualistic acts of worship and daily life were fashioned after his example. His customary ceremonies continue to be observed by his followers without any modifications or change. For example, his followers observe the ritual of prayer in its content, time, and manner of performance exactly as it was practiced and prescribed by the prophet. The *Quran* reinforces the importance of this habitual practice (2:110; 11:114; 17:78-79). Thus, both the symbols and the contents become deeply embedded in the consciousness, and therefore in the conscience, of every worshiper.

How does this contrast to the Gospel?

Islam is a religion, but a religion of law to its very core, encompassing all facets of spiritual and temporal matters of the "ummah" (community). Thus, the "iman" (faith) of Islam is more than creeds and doctrine. For a devout Muslim particularly of the Sunni sect, faith primarily means the ordering of their lives according to a conscious imitation of the actions of their Muslim prophet Muhammad. Certainly, this strong law orientation makes Islam appealing to the natural man, who thinks that he can gain worthiness through self-effort and his own goodness. Pascal made a keen observation in this connection, "*Muhamet a pris la voie de ressir humainement, Jesus Christ celle de perir humainement*" (Muhammad chose the way of human success, Jesus Christ that of human defeat). Conformity and intense bondage to the law as a means for salvation has left a deep impression on the religious psyche of most Muslims, particularly the Sunni. Moreover, this impression has been produced by concrete acts of religious symbolisms that have colored their religion and social ethics, as will be seen in the following discussions. Jesus confronted the legalism of the Judaizers and the Pharisees for missing the real intent of the law by being enslaved to its letter. They were entangled in the snare of works-righteousness, which becomes the foundation of their faith. Such an orientation which fails to be motivated by love and spurns the grace of God becomes a tragic religiosity consumed by a destructive zeal which is not based on knowledge (Galatians 1:13; Romans 10:1). Only grace, which is the unique aspect of the Gospel, can fulfill the demands of the law and emancipate the believer to live not according to the flesh, but by the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:1-4).

Is the Allah of Islam the same as the God of the Bible? From what has been said in the preceding discussion, it is clear that Islam is indeed a modified mixture of Judaism and Christianity. Moreover, in its main belief, Islam is very much a "Theocentric"-more accurately "Allahcentric" religion. It is undeniable fact that Muslims are very much sincere in worshiping one Allah with emphatic emphasis on his oneness. However, their perception of the nature of Allah is much different-and in my judgment far removed from the Christian understanding as we shall see in the ensuing discussion.

The term 'Allah' referring to the God of the Bible was popularized among Middle Eastern Christians via the excellent 'Van Dyck' translation of the Arabic Bible completed in 1864 by able Bible scholars and experts in philology and linguistic sciences. The same term is used also in the *Quran*. Nonetheless, both terms are loaded with different theological meanings, as we shall see in the ensuing discussion.

In the Arabic and Islamic usage, the term 'Allah' is a contraction of 'al' (the) and 'ilah' (god), which is a common term in pre-Islamic pagans' Pantheon. Muslim scholars today try to connect the term Allah with the biblical name for God "Elohim," while others argue that the term is purely Arabic. In any case, Muhammad undoubtedly was a

revisionist who took the pre-Islamic name Allah and loaded it with new meaning, borrowed from pre-Islamic ideas, the Old and New Testaments, thus introducing Allah as a “high god.” The testimony of the *Quran* itself leaves no doubt that the worship of ‘al-ilah’ was an integral part of the worship system of pre-Islamic Pantheon (*Quran* 29:65; 31:31; 26:61-63). The ninety-nine traditional Islamic names for Allah are attributes of Allah, most of which can be found in the Bible, except for a number of crucial omissions and additions.

To what extent does Allah of Islam correspond to the God of the Bible?

The ancient Arabian tribes were familiar with the concept of “high god.” Muhammad, was a reformer who took the same concept and loaded it with new meaning borrowed from Pre-Islamic ideas, Old and New Testaments, and thus introducing Allah as a “high god,” similar at least in part to the God of the Jews and Christians. Perhaps this was one of his strengths, being able to unite all the tribes around the worship of the one god.

In order to deduce the Muslim concept of Allah in contrast with the Bible, we need to look at their holy book. The *Quran* introduces Allah in a number of ways contrary with the biblical teaching; also raise questions about his nature and moral character. The following are representative:

1) Allah is absolute unity and never triune. One finds a number of references in the *Quran* such as: “Your Allah is one Allah” (2:163). Islam is strictly and radically a monotheistic religion. Muslim “Shehada”(witness), known as the first pillar in Islamic creed, reads: “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle.” The doctrine of “al-Tawhid” (the oneness) is considered the core and kernel of Islamic theology and worldview and the basis for morality. Muslims claim to be the only true unitarians. This emphatic emphasis on the oneness of Allah is embedded very deeply in the religion and the subconscious of most Muslims, and often reflected in art, architecture, and calligraphy. Furthermore, the *Quran* seems to deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: “So believe in Allah and his messenger, and say not Three.” (4:171). Though a number of Christian apologists argue that Muhammad was attacking the pagan polytheists of his day, nevertheless, Muslims still deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

2) Allah “the best of the ‘makereen’ (schemers). In *Quran* 3:54 we read: “And they (dis believers) schemed, and Allah schemed and Allah is the best of schemers.” The Arabic scholarly al-Munjid dictionary correctly defines the Arabic word ‘makereen’ as “deceivers.” Moreover, the *Quran* in 8:30, Allah is also called the best deceiver, or cunning. In 4:90 Allah beguiles people; in 14:4 “Allah misleadeth whom he will and whom he will he guideth.” I have not seen a cogent Muslim explanation to these troubling pronouncements.

This leads us to another related theme connected with the nature of Allah, namely predestination or fatalism. The Bible speaks consistently of God’s sovereignty and his plan of predestination, but never in fatalistic terms. Most Christians assert the fact that the sovereignty of God does not destroy the free will of man. For example, the Larger Catechism states: “God from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures... God hath endued the will of man with natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good or evil” (Eph. 1:11; Jam. 1:13; Acts 11:23; Matth. 17:12; Jam. 1:14; Duet. 30:19). Not so in Islam, where we shall discover that all events and the will of man are predetermined in such a way that all human efforts are irrelevant. While an increasing number of Muslim scholars today are attempting to show this doctrine in a better light, nevertheless, they cannot escape the fact that conception of fate (kada, kismet and qader) is embedded deep in the Muslim theology, which finds its root in the absolute and unconditional surrender to Allah’s decrees. A reading of the *Quran* shows the following proclamations:

3) Everything determined by the Will of Allah: The *Quran* declares, “Nor can a soul die except by God's leave, the term being fixed as by writing” (*Quran* 3.145). “And with Him are the keys of the unseen treasures--none knows them but He; and He knows what is in the land and the sea, and there falls not a leaf but He knows it, nor a grain in the darkness of the earth, nor anything green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear book. (*Quran* 6:59). Say: For myself I have no power to benefit, nor power to hurt, save that which Allah willeth” (*Quran* 7:188); Say: ‘Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us...’ (*Quran* 9:51).

4) Allah Predestines the Fate of Every Soul. We read: “The guiding of them is not thy duty, but Allah guideth whom He will” (*Quran* 2:272); “Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allah's; and whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it; then He will forgive whom He pleases and chastise whom He pleases, and Allah has power over all things” (*Quran* 2:284) “Do you not know that Allah-- His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; He chastises whom He pleases; and forgives whom He pleases and Allah has power over all things... (*Quran* 5:40-41)

5) Allah causes people to err and some people are made for hell. The following words of the *Quran* advance the notion that Allah is the author of error: “Do you wish to guide him whom Allah has caused to err? And whomsoever Allah causes to err, you shall by no means find a way for him.” (*Quran* 4:88); “Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the one who follows the right way; and whomsoever He causes to err, these are the losers. Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell.” (*Quran* 7:178-179). ; My counsel will not profit you if I were minded to advise you, if Allah’s will is to keep you astray...(*Quran* 11:34);“And the Word of thy Lord hath been fulfilled: Verily I shall fill hell with the jinn and mankind together” (*Quran* 11:117-119).

6) Allah leads people astray. The following Quranic pronouncements shows the enigmatic character of Allah: “Allah leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever he will” (*Quran* 14:4); “... Such is Allah’s guidance, wherewith He guideth whom He will. And him whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no guide” (*Quran* 39:23); “And whom Allah guides, there is none that can lead him astray; is not Allah Mighty, the Lord of retribution? ... if Allah desire to afflict me with harm, be the removers of His harm, or if Allah desire to show me mercy, be the withholders of His mercy? (*Quran* 39:37-38); “He whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no protecting friend after Him. He whom Allah sendeth astray, for him there is no road” (*Quran* 42:44, 46);

7) Allah Predetermines human Wills: When we read the following verses in the context of the above characteristics of Allah, we ascertain the fact that the human will is predetermined and fixed by fate, leading to the resignation to one’s future kismet with a sense of its unalterability: “Let any who will, keep it in remembrance! But none will keep it in remembrance except as Allah wills. He is the fount of fear” (*Quran* 74:55-56). “This is an admonition: Whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord. But ye will not, except as Allah wills” (*Quran* 76:29-30); “Unto whomsoever of you willeth to walk straight. And ye will not, unless (it be) that Allah willeth, the Lord of Creation” (*Quran* 81:28-29)

What does the Hadith (sayings of Muhammad) say about Predestination/fatalism?

Presuming that Muhammad is Allah’s consummate prophet, his followers scrupulously recorded his sayings and followed them to the letter. His sayings and actions were considered a living Sunnah and normative standard for all believers-particularly the Sunnite sect of Islam. The following are representative from his sayings about human free will and predestination quoted from the two collections of Muhammad sayings, recognized by the majority of the Muslim world, namely Sahih Muslim and Al-Bukhari: Vol. 8 No. 399 of Hadith we read the words of Mohammad: "Adam and Moses argued with each other. Moses said to Adam, 'O Adam! You are our father who disappointed us and turned us out of Paradise.' Then Adam said to him 'Do you blame me for action which Allah had written in my fate forty years before my creation..." Another Hadith says: “Hudhaifa b. Usaid reported directly from Allah's Messenger that he said: When the drop of (semen) remains in the womb for forty or fifty (days) or forty nights, the angel comes and says: My Lord, will he be good or evil? And both these things would be written. Then the angel says: My Lord, would he be male or female? And both these things are written. And his deeds and actions, his death, his livelihood; these are also recorded. Then his document of destiny is rolled and there is no, addition to and subtraction from it” (Book 033, Number 6392).

“Ali reported that one day Allah’s Messenger, was sitting with a wood in his hand and he was scratching the ground. He raised his head and said: There is not one amongst you who has not been allotted his seat in Paradise or Hell. They said: Allah’s Messenger. then, why should we perform good deeds, why not depend upon our destiny? Thereupon he said. No, do perform good deeds, for everyone is facilitated in that for which he has been created” (Book 033, Number 6400).

“Abu al-Aswad reported that 'Imran b Husain asked him: What is your view, what the people do today in the world, and strive for, is it something decreed for them or preordained for them or will their fate in the Hereafter be determined by the fact that their Prophets brought them teaching which they did not act upon? I said: Of course, it is something that is predetermined for them and preordained for them. He (further) said: Then, would it not be an injustice (to punish them)? I felt greatly disturbed because of that, and said: Everything is created by Allah and lies in His Power. He would not be questioned as to what He does, but they would be questioned; thereupon he said to me: May Allah have mercy upon you, I did not mean to ask you but for testing your intelligence. Two men of the tribe of Muzaina came to Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) and said: Allah’s Messenger, what is your opinion that the people do in the world and strive for, is something decreed for them; something preordained for them and will their fate in the Hereafter be determined by the fact that their Prophets brought them teachings which they did not act upon. And thus they became deserving of punishment? Thereupon, he said: Of course, it happens as it is decreed by Destiny and preordained for them, (Book 033, Number 6406).

“I said, “O Allah's Apostle! Why should a doer (people) try to do good deeds?”” The Prophet said, “Everybody will find easy to do such deeds as will lead him to his destined place for which he has been created.” (Sahih Al-Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 641).

“Aisha, the mother of the believers, said that Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) was called to lead the funeral prayer of a child of the Ansar. I said: Allah's Messenger, there is happiness for this child who is a bird from the birds of Paradise for it committed no sin nor has he reached the age when one can commit sin. He said: Aisha, per adventure, it may be otherwise, because God created for Paradise those who are fit for it while they were yet in their father's loins and created for Hell those who are to go to Hell. He created them for Hell while they were yet in their father’s loins (Sahih Muslim, Book 033, Number 6436).

The famed Islamic theologian, al-Ghazali summarizes it well: “No injustice can be conceived on the part of Allah. It is in his power to pour down torrents upon mankind and if he were to do it, his justice would not be arraigned. There is nothing he can be tied to, to perform, nor can any injustice be supposed of him, nor can he be under obligation to any person whatever.”

What does the Biblical Revelation say about God?

Fairness calls for the acknowledgment that the majority of Muslims have a high view of their absolute deity-Allah. The term ‘Allahu Akbar’ or ‘al-takbir’ (Allah is most great), which is uttered frequently by Muslims in the routine daily prayers and other occasions, coupled with their recitation of some of the most excellent names for Allah including his mercy and benevolence, is a reflection of their devotion to him. The problem arrives when we come to encounter Allah in different light as we have seen above described in capricious terms. I will leave the answer to Muslim scholars to reconcile the lack of harmony in these conflicting accounts. In the mean time, let us gaze at the God of the Bible as He has revealed Himself by tracing some of His perfections throughout the Scripture, particularly those that are relevant to our discussion in connection with the Allah of Islam.

The God of the Bible is distinctive and great in at least two ways: First, **He is absolute and totally other than His creation.** Second, **God is personal, imminent and approachable.**

God is absolute and totally other than His creation. God is totally other in a number of attributes, which according to L. Berkhof are incommunicable (not shared by any human being). These include the following: 1) “Self-existent.” God is totally independent from any causation. 2) “Unchanging.” God’s perfection is unalterable; His perfection cannot increase nor decrease, for He does not need any improvement nor subject to any deterioration. He is infinitely unchangeable. 3) “Eternal and Infinite.” He exists from all eternity; the first cause of every thing that exists; unlimited by time and space. 4) “the Unity of God.” There is only but one Divine God. He is not composed of different parts or essences, but one in essence in His state of blessed triunity. Other attributes setting Him apart from creation include: 5) “Spirit and invisible.” God is not composed of matter, and does not possess physical nature, nor can He be confined by the span of time and matter. 6) “Creator.” while distinct from all creation, He is the creator of everything that exists. 7) “All-knowing.” The nature of His knowledge is perfect; nothing in the past, the present and the future escapes His perfect awareness. “All-powerful” Yet, His power is conformed to His infinite goodness, never employed capriciously. 7) “Sovereign.” There is no limit to his absolute authority over the universe and humanity. Nevertheless, His sovereignty is the ground for the believer’s confidence, for His sovereignty is an extension of all His perfections including His goodness and righteousness. “Greatness” “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.” (Deut. 10:17).

God is personal, imminent and approachable. He graciously shared certain attributes with man in a limited measure. To these God’s perfect moral attributes now we shall turn, keeping in mind how they contrast to Allah as described in specific passages in the *Quran* and Hadith as discussed previously:

A) The God of the Bible is Holy. While the term “holy” is mentioned only once in the *Quran* in connection with Allah, the Bible, attributes holiness to God more than ninety two-times. At the center of God’s perfections revealed in the bible is His holiness. It is the essence of His moral character. He is alone holy and all righteousness; morality finds its origin in Him. God is always consistent with His moral purity. “... His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He” (Deut. 32:4); “His way is perfect” (Ps. 18:30); His “eyes are too pure to look on evil; cannot tolerate wrong” (Hab. 1:13). Consequently, sin and iniquity are foreign to Him and provoke His holy indignation.

B) The God of the Bible is trustworthy and faithful. He never leads anyone astray nor entices any to do wrong: "The Lord is abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exo. 34:6); "All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for who keeps the demands of His covenant" (Ps. 25:10); "God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1Cor. 10:13); "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Ps. 9:10).

C) The God of the Bible is truthful. One of the disturbing descriptions of Allah in the Quran—at least for me—was this verse: "... and Allah schemed and Allah is the best of schemers" (3:54). On the other hand, one of the most encouraging attributes for God in the Bible is His truthfulness. He can never be misleading, whimsical or arbitrary, but is always consistent and faithful to all His promises. "You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed." (Josh 23:14); God, "... does not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man, that He should change His mind" (1 Sam. 15:29); "for the word of the Lord is right and true; He is faithful in all He does" (Ps. 33:4); "... God is truthful" (John 3:33).

D) The God of the Bible is loving and good. The distinct biblical teaching on love finds its justification in the character of God. While this emphasis is practically absent in Islam, it is built intrinsically into the very nature of the biblical God. The Bible says: "God is love" (1 John 4:8). As far as I know, the Greek term "agape" used in the Bible in connection with the unconditional love of God is an exclusively Christian concept; it is not established clearly in other religions, including Islam. Nothing in us attracted God to love us. As fallen, sinful and rebellious people nothing lovable and worthy is found in us. God's supreme example of this kind of love was expressed on the Cross, entirely by His grace.

God is good. The Word of God says: "O Lord... You are good, and what you do is good, "How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you" (Ps. 31:19; Ps. 119: 68). It is plain that God, unlike man, He has goodness inherent in Himself, for He is eternally good. Unlike other deities, the God of the Bible is never vindictive and unpredictable, but always good and just. His justice is consistent with His holiness, mercy, compassion, graciousness, wisdom, longsuffering and patience.

Not so in Islam. Islam teaches that man is essentially good. Such a high view of man's goodness, based on the denial of original sin, is also found in the early Christian heresy of Pelagianism. Both Islam and Pelagius downplay original sin, transmitted to all human beings as a result of Adam's fall. Thus man is capable of earning salvation on his own by utilizing certain guidance from Allah and observance of specific rules and rituals.

E) The God of the Bible is the God of grace. The basis for God's Love is His nature and His grace manifested in history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Bible says: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). God's grace reverberates throughout the Bible. In Exodus 34:6 we read: "The LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." The New Testament echoes the grace of God in these words: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus at the heart of the Gospel is God's redemptive grace. It is undeserved grace: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18).

In Islam, however, grace ('Nemah') is not understood in a redemptive sense; rather, it is connected with common grace, benefiting all mankind and connected with the idea of bounty and material blessing and benevolence. It is true that the idea of common grace is found in the Bible - God cares, sustains his creation and restrains human society from destroying itself by evil: "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45). Nonetheless, this grace is not sufficient for salvation. It is God's special grace through His redemptive work in Christ by which we are redeemed. God's grace is always sufficient and efficient; nothing can frustrate its purpose of saving all those who embrace the savior.

F) The God of the Bible is knowable. Muslims do not hesitate to assert that Allah is absolute incomprehensible unity, which cannot be described by any human language, or by human perception (*Quran* 42:11; 6:103). Furthermore, the multiple names for Allah, according to Muslims, are not meant to describe Allah's essence, but to show that there is no simplistic notion of Allah. All human languages, categories and conventions cannot delineate his nature. The phrase "Allah Akbar" (Allah is great), which summons Muslims for prayer, is meant to remind the believers of his absolute transcendence. Allah made his will known on the pages of the *Quran*, and to a certain extent by the creation, but he remains hidden, inaccessible in a personal way.

The Bible, however, describes God in a distinctive way. We are told that God is a personal Being and has created man in His own image; it seems most reasonable to believe that He would have communion and fellowship with the beings which He had created. This affirmation is echoed in numerous passages in the Scripture:

1) God made himself known to us: "Then the man [Adam] and his wife [Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the Garden." (Gen 3:8); "The Lord said to Abram . "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1); "... I know you by name" (Exod. 33:17); "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart..." (Jer. 1:5); "But now that you know God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles?" (Gal. 4:9).

2) God is known by His miraculous works: "Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation by testing, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" (Duet. 4:34); "Come and see the works of the LORD,... Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted in the Earth" (Ps. 46:8;10); "Come and see what God has done, how awesome His works on man's behalf! He turned the sea into dry land, they passed through the waters on foot-come, let us rejoice in Him" (Ps. 66:5-6).

3) God is known by His creation: "O LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1); "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of His hand. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." (Ps. 19:1-2); "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them"; "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom. 1:21).

4) God is knowable by His written Scripture: "all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness," (2Tim 3:16); "the Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7); "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." (2Pet. 1:19-21).

5) The God of the Bible is made known in Christ: Conceivably, the heart of the Gospel is outlined in one verse: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). There are three main reasons why Christ came in the flesh:

a) He came to show us the Father: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9); "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27); "Jesus answered... "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). It is plain that Jesus claimed that in Him alone God is perfectly revealed. The Shorter Catechism asks the question: "What is God? Answer: "God is a spirit, whose being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable." This definition is now personified in Jesus Christ. Such a manifestation and full revelation of the Father in Jesus Christ would at once set all abstract conceptions about God at rest, making the Gospel the only viable and clear disclosure of God to man.

b) To reconcile us to God: Reconciliation presupposes enmity. Genesis 3 demonstrates the dawn of fear and guilt and alienation from God because of man's rebellion against the Holy God. When Adam and Eve sinned, they realized their shame and guilt and hid from God, experiencing objective guilt, which can be removed only by God's own initiative. While the biblical account asserts that Adam's sin of disobedience resulted in the total

depravity of human nature and carried with it far reaching consequences, it also provides the remedy. The Gospel says of Christ: "He is the image of the invisible God... and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:15, 20). This change of attitude from hostility to harmony is the central doctrine of redemptive history where Christ took upon Himself the penalty which we deserve in order to assuage the holy justice of God and restore our broken relationship with Him. Hence, we are released from a state of sin and fear to grace and freedom; for "... God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

As far as the Gospel is concerned, nothing in all religious practices-no matter how intense, passionate and sincere they are - can remove man's guilt and bring him to right relationship with his creator. Samuel Zwemer described the Islamic religious practices as "barren formalism." The majority of Muslims see that their salvation rests upon the total obedience to the sacred law and engagement in meticulous performance of religious duties. Such conviction results in definite inner crises which, according to Hebrews 9:9, will never clear the conscience. Legalism contradicts the heart of the Christian message of reconciliation, which can only come through faith in Jesus Christ.

An increasing number of adherents to Islam find themselves troubled by tradition and are moving away from legalism to a more mystical and personal way of worship. The Sufi sect is very fascinating and worthy of much study. It evolved to become a new "Tarikah" (way) within Islam that moved away from blind obedience to tradition to a more personal relationship with God by stressing certain themes. Some of their major ideas overlap with some biblical and Christian themes. Among these are the inward search for God; the love of God; the immediacy of God (in contrast with his absolute transcendence in traditional Islam); grace (not necessarily the same Christian understanding of grace); humility; love for one's neighbor; personal communion with God in the form of chanting, dancing, and repetition of certain liturgical formulas.

c) He came to destroy the works of the Devil. The Word of God clearly says: "Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:7-8). Certainly, the devil has succeeded in separating man from his fellowship with God in the garden of Eden. However, as we have seen above, the reconciling work of Christ has defeated the devil's schemes and work. Hope, forgiveness, cleansing from sin, fellowship with God become possible in Christ. The promise of crushing the devil's head in Genesis 3:15 is now fulfilled through Christ's victory on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus Christ now achieves what man's religions were unable to accomplish. "Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so He condemned sin in sinful man" (Rom 8:1-3).

The *Quran* seems to describe Christ in divergent terms. Some, however, substantiate the biblical narratives. For example, the *Quran* refers to Christ as: The "Messiah" (3:45); His virgin birth (3:47); Advocate to God (3: 45). Another important designation of Jesus is "Word" (cf. John 1:1). In Surah 3:45 translated literally it is, "O Mary! God giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus." George Sale translates this verse more literally from the original Arabic: "O Mary! God sendeth thee good tidings, that thou shalt bear the Word, proceeding from Himself; his name shall be Christ Jesus" (Sale, George 1734). The "Word, proceeding from Himself" seems to be correlative to John's affirmation of Christ's eternality being incarnated as Jesus the Messiah. Martin Luther says at this point: "just as a man has a word in his heart, so also God in His eternal majestic and Deity has a thought, a word in his own heart, with himself. This word, which God the Father has, is so entirely one with Him, so that there is nothing in God which does not also belong to the Word, so that when we see the Word we see God." John illustrates a great theological truth. Jesus belongs to a timeless eternity. As Augustine says, "He is in the beginning which has no beginning."

6) The God of the Bible is approachable. In answering the above stated question, Is God knowable in other religions?, we concluded that the concept of god varies from one religion to another. For some, the supreme deity remains hidden, austere, inflexible and capricious; for others, he is an abstract void that cannot be known, still for some he is always silent, vague and impersonal.

In contrast, the Bible sketches for us a beautiful picture of God being knowable and accessible in a personal manner. Moses asks the rhetorical question: "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near whenever we pray to Him?" (Duet. 4:7); "The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all

who call on Him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him; He hears their cry and saves them.” (Ps. 145:18); “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8); “But when you pray, go to your room, close the door and pray to your father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret will reward you” (Matt. 6:6); “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:1-2); “Come near to God and He will come near to you” (Jam. 4:8).

7) God is known experientially by fellowship with Him through Christ. “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (John 1:17-18); “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

What do the Quran and Hadith says about Woman’s position in Islam?

The Bible describes man and women as equal in the eyes of the Lord. The first chapter of the Bible declares both as being created in the image of God. Jointly they were given the mission of being fruitful and having dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:27-28). In marriage both become one flesh, an expression of union, fidelity and. (Gen. 2:23-24). The Decalogue give honor to both father and mother (Exod. 20:12). Contrary to the ethos of his day the Lord Jesus Christ, gave women place of honor. The Scripture tells us that in Christ there is no difference between male and female (Gal 3:28). While the role of spiritual leadership was given to the husbands, but they are commanded: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25). In contrast with all other faiths past and present, there is no doubt that the Bible portrays women as equal companion to man, though have different role.

In contrast, the Oxford Encyclopedia of Modern Islamic World argues that the position of women in early Islam was improved in comparison with pre-Islamic period, nonetheless, it admits that women are given less status than men: “Quranic verses do assign women’s testimony half the value of men’s; permit men to unilaterally divorce their wives; deny women custody rights over their children after they reach a certain age; permit polygamy; and favor men over women respecting inheritance.” (OEMIW, Vol. 4 p.323).

It must be kept in mind that conflicts between traditional and fundamentalist Muslims on one hand and reformists on the other are continuing today. The traditional majority is still hold on unyielding literal interpretation of the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith concerning the position and role of women, while the reformists are taking more liberal definition. Below are representative teaching about women in the Quran and the Hadith (Sayings of the prophet Muhammad) taken from the Muhammad Pickthall’s translation:

- **Concerning women’s rights the Quran says:** "And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree over them..." (Surah 2:228); "To the male a portion equal to that of two females..." (Quran Surah 4:11).
- **The testimony of two women equals the witness of one man:** "And get two witnesses out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women such as ye choose, for witness" (Quran 2:282).
- **Husbands are permitted to scourge their wives:** "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, as to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, Admonish them, refuse to share their beds, scourge them..." (Quran 4:34)
- **Polygamy is allowed in Islam:** "...Marry of the women who seem good to you, two, or three, or four; and if you fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one..." (Quran 4:3). Muhammad was allowed to marry unlimited wives according to the Quran 33:50).
- **Women objects of pleasure?** "Your women are a tilth (a field to be ploughed) for you, so go to your tilth as you will..." (Quran 2:223)
 - **A husband may divorce his wife for any reason he seems fit, however, he must repeat verbally his intention to his wife twice or three times for the divorce to be lawful (Quran 2:229-230).**

Very essential for Muslims understanding of the position and role of women are the sayings of Muhammad. The following maxims about women are narrated by Sahih A l-Bukhari. Al-Bukhari (810-870AD) was the greatest traditionalist in Islam who accumulated the Hadith of Muhammad which has been called the most authoritative

book after the *Quran* called *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. He collected over 600,000 Hadith, but was reduced to about 7,275. I shall not read into it, but certainly these unusual teachings call for adequate explanation by Muslim scholars:

- Mohammed asked some women, "Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half that of a man?" The women said, "yes," he said, "This is because of the deficiency of the woman's mind. " (Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 3:826) - Mohammed said, "I was shown the Hell-fire and that the majority of its dwellers are women. " Vol. 1:28, 301; Vol. 2:161; (Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 7:124).

- Mohammed said, " Bad omen is in the woman, the house and the horse." (Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 7:30).

- "Narrated Aisha that the prophet married her when she was six years old and he consummated his marriage when she was nine years old" (Sahih Al-Bukhari Vol. 7:64).

What is the role of the Mosque in the Islamic Society?

The place and the role of the mosque also contribute to the development and conditioning of the individuals in Muslim society. We hinted earlier that the integration of worship with social and political life was characteristic of the early Islamic community. The first worship center in Islam was the mosque of Muhammad at Medina. The important place given to this sacred site is supplied by the Quran's commanding all Muslims to turn their eyes and hearts towards it. "And from whatever place thou comest forth turn thy face toward the sacred Mosque" (2:150). Moreover, the third caliph, Uthman, said, "I heard the messenger of Allah say: whoever builds a mosque desiring thereby Allah's pleasure, Allah builds for him the like of it in paradise (Ali 1977, 71).

In addition to its historical and important religious role, the Islam has paid special care to the social and intellectual significance of the mosque as a place from which the message of Islam emerges. In a recent film by the Smithsonian World titled *Islam*, the narrator made a perceptive remark in describing the significance of the architecturally flat design of the mosque in contrast to the towering church sanctuary. The word "Mosque" means a place of prostration; that is what Muslims do. They hug the earth—they are earthbound, their concern is focused on the here and now. The horizontal design of the mosque is indicative of this earthly concern. This is a very different idea architecturally from the upward reach of the cathedral. This is important to understand, for Islam is a religion that seeks to establish its rule here on earth rather than wait for the eschaton. The mosque and the marketplace are always together.

Furthermore, from the beginning of Muhammad's mission he used the mosque as a place for religious indoctrination. His pedagogy was based on the absolute authority of the Quran and the Tradition. Later generations followed Muhammad's model by establishing the Sunni "Madrasah" (place of teaching)—as we mentioned earlier, which is connected closely with the mosque. Among these schools is the renowned Al-Azhar in Egypt, which continues to be the voice of the Muslim conscience and the seat of religious learning throughout the Muslim world. Al-Azhar is considered the supreme theological Islamic school. Its "ulama" (scholars) played an important role in determining religious and ethical norms for the Sunni community. The ulamas' "Fatwas" (legal religious decrees) are often considered binding upon the community. These decrees include matters such as drinking of wine, usury, theft, adultery, apostasy, and women's right to vote.

How are Muslims instructed in the Mosque?

The Friday "khutbah" (sermon in the mosque) delivered by the imam (leader) is usually crafted carefully and charged with strong emotional appeal to Islamic principles. The sermon, however, often addresses the current political and social issues facing the Muslim community locally and globally. Among the recurring themes in the Friday sermons are the legacy of Muhammad, the supremacy of Islamic ethics in comparison with those of the West, the national political and Palestinian problems, appeals to the past glory of Islamic civilization, and passionate calls for the rebuilding of the Islamic empire.

Being aware of the power and authority that the mosque exerts upon the masses, it is not unusual for the heads of state in our day to try to win the approval of the imams. Therefore, occasional appearances in mosques are customary practice for the heads of states in the Middle East.

What is The (Shariah) Sacred Law?

Ellis Nelson, a noted writer and speaker on the issue of conscience, describes Protestantism after its break with the Roman Catholic church as a "religion of conscience." It turned the responsibility for the Christian life back to the individual (Nelson 1978). By comparison, if Protestantism is a religion of conscience, Islam can be called a

religion of law. As we observed earlier, Islam is both religion and law, encompassing all facets of spiritual and temporal matters of the “ummah” (community). From the early stages of its development, two main sources of authorities were adopted: the Quran and the Sunnah of the prophet who served as God's spokesman, thereby performing the triple function of administrator, judge, and executive.

As time progressed and Muslims found that the Quran and the Sunnah were no longer sufficient to address all the contemporary issues relating to the life of the community, two more authorities were introduced. The first is “ijma” (consensus). It is based on the collective opinions of the “fuqaha” (jurists), and the “ulama” (the learned). This branch was developed soon after the death of Muhammad, and continues to be a guiding principle for the application of the Shariah.

The second is “al-qiyas” (analogical reasoning or deduction). These four sources (Quran, Sunnah, consensus, analogical reasoning) became the canonical pillars on which the sacred “Shariah law” stood.

How does the Arabic Language contribute to the national identity?

Most philologists agree that language constitutes a bond and fosters a sense of affinity among people who speak the same tongue. While this is true of the Arab Muslims, it goes one step further. Stephen Neill rightly says that Arabic is “one of the great bonds of unity in the Islamic world” (1961, 45). Raphael Patai asserts that there is a pervading consciousness of being one nation, irrespective of the number of political units into which this one nation is broken up. He attributes this consciousness to the Arabic language. There can be no doubt that the Arabic language is the most potent factor in both the creation and the maintenance of the Arab nation, Arab unity, Arab brotherhood. In the non-Arabic speaking world, as we have seen, there are several groups of countries in which one and the same language is spoken. However, only in the case of Arabic is the language the factor that defines and determines membership in the national aggregate. (Cf. 1983, 42,43)

This “membership in the national aggregate” is determined basically, by the Islamic worldview and the Arabic language. Islam and the Arabic language are the two axioms that determine the concept of Ummah (nation) as advanced by the Quran. These two axioms are considered by the majority of Arab Muslims to be two inseparable aspects of one thing. For instance, Arabs during the colonial period resisted vehemently the attempts of the colonialists to replace Arabic--the language of their holy book--with the English or French language. Although the Arab World was divided into several nations during the colonial period and still is the same today, each however, has developed a national consciousness, possesses a cultural cohesiveness expressed in a common language. The famed Arab philologist Al-Tha'alibi (d. 1038) said:

Whoever loves the prophet loves the Arabs, and whoever loves the Arabs loves the Arabic language in which the best of books was revealed. Whomsoever God has guided to Islam . . . believes that Muhammad is the best of prophets . . . that the Arabs are the best of people... and that Arabic is the best of languages. (Patai 1983,44)

Is it true that Muslims are more resistant to the Gospel than others?

The Bible says that all people are born resisting the things of God. We have seen earlier that the apostle Paul says in Romans 1-2 that while God's knowledge is clearly seen in nature and in man's conscience, man suppresses this knowledge in unrighteousness. The point Paul makes is that man's dilemma results from his corrupted nature and original sin in which he was born. This deviation from truth is a result of deviation from true faith. However, as we have discussed previously, certain cultural and religious themes in the Islamic society makes the presentation of the Gospel more challenging.