

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH- Red Bud, Illinois

Adult Bible Class "Islam: A Religion of Peace or a Life of Fear?" (Session Three)

Some recent history: 1960s- Arab-Israeli conflicts such as the Six-Day war in 1967; 1972- Palestinian killing of Israeli athletes at the Summer Olympics in Munich, Germany; 1973- The Arab Oil Embargo (and the end of 25 cents a gallon gas); November 1979 to January 1981- American hostages held in our embassy in Tehran, Iran; 1983- Attack on Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon; 1990 and 1991 Iraq invades Kuwait and Operation Desert Storm; 1993- First attack on World Trade Center (bombs in garage); 1998 – American embassy bombings in East Africa; September 11, 2001- Terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon under the direction of Osama bin Laden, followed by our invasion of Afghanistan; 2003- American invasion of Iraq; 2014 to the present- ISIS (Islamic State in Syria) or ISOL (Islamic State of the Levant) controls large portions of Syria and Iraq.

When did you first become aware of Islam? Where did you first encounter Muslims?

“The majority of Americans have had little personal contact with Muslims. The exceptions are those in business or government or students at many universities. The likelihood of encountering Muslim neighbors, however, is increasing – in stores, on the street, and while traveling. It is obvious that Christians and Muslims are apt to have less misunderstanding of each other if they can develop personal friendships” (Philip Lochhaas, How To Respond to Islam, CPH, 1981, page 9).

It has been almost 35 years since that was written. What do we think of these words today?

A. History: Muhammad's Early Preaching

In the year AD 610 Muhammad was meditating in a cave in Hira near his home in Mecca. He claims that he received “the call.” He heard a voice telling him, “Read!” He responded, “I cannot read.” The third time this happened, he asked, “What can I read?” The answer was the beginning of the revelations that became the Koran (*Quran*). Islamic tradition says that this was the angel Gabriel (*Jibril*) summoning Muhammad to be Allah's messenger. Muhammad thought that genies (demons) were playing tricks on him. His wife Khadija accepted this revelation, told him that he was a prophet, and became his first and most loyal convert. He, however, becomes depressed and suicidal. Muslim tradition applies Deuteronomy 18:18 to the coming of Muhammad.

In contrast to the idolatry of his fellow Arabs, Muhammad began to teach a strict monotheism, devoted to the deity Allah. For three years, he shared his messages in private with people close to him. When he finally went public he faced fierce opposition, much of which came from the wealthy Umayyah clan. This was another branch of his own tribe, the Quraysh. In AD 615 Muhammad sent most of his followers—83 of them—to the largely Christian country of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) for refuge.

In AD 620 Muhammad's wife Khadija died. As long as she had been alive, he took no other wives. Two months after her death, he married a second time. By the end of his life, Muhammad had married 12 women. “As long as he remained in Mecca, he (Muhammad) responded to his enemies peacefully and with restraint. He never responded militantly” (Ernst Hahn, “Jihad in Islam: Is Islam Peaceful or Militant? And an Initial Christian Response,” Issues in Christian Education, Fall 2004, page 20).

B. Numbers and Growth

“Islamization begins when there are sufficient Muslims in a country to agitate for their religious privileges... From 5% on, they exercise an inordinate influence in proportion to their percentage of the population. For example, they will push for the introduction of *halel* (clean by Islamic standards) food, thereby securing food preparation jobs for Muslims. They will increase pressure on supermarket chains to feature *halal* on their shelves— long with threats for failure to comply” (Peter Hammond, Slavery, Terrorism and Islam: The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat).

In 1970 there were 100,000 Muslims in the USA. 1981 there were 720 million Muslims in the world, one-sixth of the population, with two million Muslims in the USA. In 1990 there were over 800 million Muslims, nearly one-fifth of the world's population. There were four million Muslims in the USA that year. In 1995 there were one billion Muslims in the world with about five million of them living in the USA. In 2001 there were 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, still one-fifth of the world's population with six million living in the USA worshipping in 1,200 mosques.

C. Sources

The *Shariah*- Both the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* form the basis of Islam's holy law and the perfect manifestation of God's will and guidance for humanity. For Muslims, this is where God and people meet. "It is God's law versus all other human codes of law; God's law, regulating all aspects of life and allowing for no separation of sacred and secular; God's law, offering solutions for all the world's problems" (Ernst Hahn, How to Respond to Muslims, CPH, 1995, pages 13-14). In Muslim majority countries, Shariah is the law of the land. In predominantly Muslim neighborhoods of non-Muslim countries, Shariah is the defacto law. When Muslims feel confident about their influence in an area, they demand to be governed by Shariah law, not civil law.

D. Teaching

Almsgiving (*Zakat*, "purification")- Two and a half percent (1/40th) of all that a person owns must be given to the needy (poor, debtors or slaves) each year. The Muslim gets to pick where he sees the most direct need. In some Muslim countries, the *zakat* is a required tax that applies only to Muslims. If anybody refuses to pay it and denies its obligatory character they have committed apostasy and may be put to death.

E. Divisions (Sunnis, Shi'ites, and others)

Sufis- These people come from both Sunnis and Shi'ites. They are the mystical branch of Islam. They appeared early on in the history of Islam. Sufism grew where Buddhism had once been very strong and its distinctive features are far more Buddhist than Muslim. Sufis strive for ecstatic union with God and the dissolving of individuality. They do not consider the Koran to be superior to other sacred writings. "Sufis try to attain direct encounter with God. The whirling dervishes (Persian word for "poor" or "beggar") of Turkey are Sufis who repeat the name of God as they dance, spinning around as reflections of the motions of the heavenly spheres" (Roland Cap Ehlke, Speaking the Truth in Love to Muslims, CPH, 2004, page 44).

Is there an element of the Christian Church that tries to experience God apart from physical means?

F. Correspondence and Contrasts Between Islam and Christianity

"Christianity and Islam are missionary faiths. Neither can with integrity surrender its missionary activity nor its commitment to proclaim its message. There is no possible compromise between these faiths—nor should any be sought" (Lochhaas, op. cit. page 10). Roland Ehlke makes this point: "When comparing Islam and Christianity, there are four possibilities: 1) Both are right.

When it comes to the three great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christian, Islam—there are a number of similarities that lead many to calculate that they all worship the same God. All three religions sprang up in Middle Eastern soil. All three are religions of revelation, each believing that God has revealed himself through written Scripture. All speak of the many of the same personages, as Christianity refers back to the Old Testament and the Qur'an makes references to the Old and New Testaments... Ultimately, saying that both are right is no different from saying that both are wrong. Instead of taking earnestly the claims of either religion, that way of thinking tries to create its own new reality—namely, that sincere belief in something somehow makes it true. (Ehlke, op. cit. pages 122-123)

G. Christian Witness to Muslims (Focus on Jesus!)

1 Peter 3:15 But in your _____ set apart Christ as _____. Always be prepared to give the _____ for the hope that you have. But do this with _____ and respect.

Caring: Countless numbers of Muslims in Asia and Africa have found blessing through health, education and community welfare projects run by Christian aid groups and funded by the contributions of Christian people. This follows the pattern of Jesus Himself, who in His ministry healed the sick along with His teaching of God's kingdom. However, no good deed goes unpunished. Just a month before the 9/11 attacks, the Taliban government in Afghanistan protested that "some organizations under the guise of helping poor Afghans are preaching Christianity" and arrested two dozen aid workers. Yet these complaints come from wealthy Muslims who overlook the plight of the poor and disabled in their own countries.