



## ***UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY***

A monthly forum on the third *Saturday* of each month from 6:30 to 7:30 P.M. following Evening Prayer at 6  
Most Forums are led by Canon Richard T. Nolan  
Saturday, January 20, 2007

*Tonight's Topic -*

**“ISLAM AS A SIBLING RELIGION: AN ORIENTATION TO THE BASIC BELIEFS OF ISLAM”**

*A Prayer To Be Said In Unison*

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who has committed to your Church the care and nurture of all the faithful; Enlighten with wisdom those who teach and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth, they may worship and serve you from generation to generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **► ISSUES OF TRANSLITERATION AND EMPATHETIC STUDY OF RELIGIONS**

**► *ISLAM: THE FINAL AND PRIMAL RELIGION*** (lecture Notes)  
by Dr. Willem A. Bijlefeld (Hartford Seminary)

#### **I. THE FINAL RELIGION**

**A. The descendants of Abraham were given prophethood and Scriptures by God.**

1. Moses was given the Law.
2. David was given the Psalms.
3. Jesus was given the Gospel.

**B. Jews and Christians were unique, set aside by God as the people of the Book and the Prophets.**

1. Jesus was one of the greatest prophets. He was the Son of Mary, the expected Messiah. The Glory of Christ and his Mother were defended against heretics and enemies by Mohammed. They were the two humans untouched by sin. Jesus (the Spirit and Word of God) was confirmed as prophet by his miracles and so honored in the *Qur'an*.

**C. However, one final Revelation of prophetic religion, in fulfillment of all that had preceded, was needed.**

1. Judaism, religion of the Law of Moses, offers God's Message of Justice ("an eye for an eye").
2. Christianity, religion of Jesus the Messiah, proclaims the love of God (Sermon on the Mount).
3. Islam, the "Final" religion, offers a counterbalance to the one-sidedness of both Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity.

**D. Mohammed, the "Seal of the Prophets," is the greatest of prophets. God reveals, via the Prophet and Apostle, the *Qur'an*, the correct embodiment of God's Message.**

1. God is the God of justice and love.
2. The "middle way" between Judaism and Christianity restores the unity of the children of Abraham and overcomes the exclusiveness of Judaism and Christianity. Jesus, the tribal prophet (to the "lost sheep of Israel") limits Christianity; Islam proclaims a practical synthesis of Judaism and Christianity for all humanity.
3. Islam overcomes the incompleteness and impracticality of Jesus' idealism. (The laws of a

society could hardly be implied from the "Sermon on the Mount.") The comprehensive unity of Islam is "practical enough to build a court case," and brings to fulfillment all that Judaism and Christianity anticipated. ("To be a Muslim means to be a better Christian.") Islam is "perfected Judaism" and "perfected Christianity."

## II. THE PRIMAL RELIGION

A. Islam is not younger than Christianity or Judaism.

1. Islam is the religion of Abraham.

2. Islam is the religion of Adam (of man's very nature).

B. Islam is the religion of the "Spoken Book," the *Qur'an*, and the religion of the "Created Book", nature.

C. Every person is born a Muslim.

1. Only the distortions of one's environment (parents, teachers, etc.) lead a person astray to become Christians, Jews, and unbelievers.

2. By nature, to be human, means to be Muslim.

## ANGLICAN COMMUNION NEWS SERVICE

También en español

ACNS 2716

SPECIAL

24 September 2001

### ► A CONCISE INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

by Richard T. Nolan

[ENS 2001-263] "Islam" is derived from the Arabic root *salaama* meaning peace, purity, submission and obedience. Islam stands for making peace by submitting to the will of God and obeying His law. Jews and Christians view Islam as the latest of the world's great religions. However, worldwide Muslims (sometimes written "Moslems") understand their universal religion as the "final religion" and the "primal religion."

As "final," Islam is God's final revelation of prophetic religion, in fulfillment of all that had preceded. Moses was given the Law; David was given the Psalms; Jesus was given the Gospel. Judaism offers God's message of justice, and Christianity proclaims the love of God. To Mohammed (570-632 A.D.; spelled in a variety of ways) the God of Abraham and Jesus revealed the *Qur'an* (Arabic for "recital," sometimes written *Koran*). The *Qur'an*, written in Arabic, is the Sacred Scripture of Islam, the perfection of all previous divine revelations, and is to be understood literally as the direct words of God. In this sense of scriptural literalism, all Muslims may be called "fundamentalists." However, when referring to the aggressive behaviors of a few, "militants" and "extremists" are better categories.

Muslims believe in all prophets of the Bible. The *Qur'an* itself mentions the Torah and the Gospel as scriptures revealed by God to Moses and Jesus. However, the *Qur'an* indicates that over time, changes were made to the actual biblical texts, because of commentary blended with the original text, as well as losses to the texts through transmission and other causes. For these reasons, Muslims cannot rely absolutely on the Torah and Gospels as sources of revelation, unless they confirm what is in the *Qur'an* or at least are in harmony with it.

As "Seal of the Prophets" and apostle of Allah (which means "the God" in Arabic), Mohammed is neither divine nor the focal point of Islam; therefore, the religion should not be called Mohammedanism. For the one billion or more Muslims (about six million in the United States), who are of many racial and ethnic backgrounds--Arabs being a minority--Islam is the middle way between Judaism and Christianity; it restores the unity of the children of Abraham and overcomes the limitations of Judaism and Christianity. Jesus, the prophet to "the lost sheep of Israel," limits Christianity; Judaism is similarly limited. Islam proclaims a practical synthesis of Judaism and Christianity for all humanity. Overcoming the incompleteness of the justice of Judaism and the idealistic love of Christianity, Islam brings to fulfillment all that Judaism and Christianity anticipated. For the Muslim believer, Islam is perfected Judaism and perfected Christianity.

As "primal," Islam is the authentic religion of Adam, of Abraham, and of human nature. Islam is not younger than Judaism and Christianity; it preceded both. Not only is it the religion of the "Spoken Book" (the *Qur'an*), it is as well the religion of the "Created Book" (the fabric of the universe itself). According to the Muslim faith, every person is born a Muslim, and distortions of one's environment lead a person astray to become a Christian, a Jew, or an unbeliever. To be human means to be Muslim.

## Beliefs

The doctrines underlying Islam include (1) belief in the God of Abraham, Jesus, and Mohammed; (2) belief in the *Qur'an*, which is verbally infallible. According to the account, the angel Gabriel appeared and revealed to Mohammed the contents of this sacred book over several years. (3) belief in the prophets of Allah, of whom Mohammed is the last and greatest and the one commissioned to deliver Allah's message to humanity. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus of Nazareth also are recognized prophets. Moreover, in the *Qur'an* Jesus is recognized as the Messiah, and Mary is highly respected. (4) Belief in an afterlife when all people will be judged for their deeds and brought to heaven or condemned to hell.

Islam also teaches that peace should be established in the human societies of this world. To participate with God in the establishment of peace, Muslims are called upon to be engaged in *jihad*, meaning "striving." The basic *jihad* is the struggle of the self, to speak about one's faith, to bring it in obedience to God, and to make sure that one is living a holy and righteous life. Another struggle is *jihad* as "holy war" fought only when the faith is being attacked or when Muslims are not allowed to practice their faith. Very few Muslims call for the "jihad of the sword" even in circumstances they believe to be wrongful.

The ummah, or Islamic community or state, is the vibrant avenue for the realization of God's Will and should serve as an example to the rest of the world. In Islamic social theory, the ummah is formed from the threefold consensus of its members: consensus of the mind, consensus of the heart, and consensus of arms. The ummah is formed from the consensus of minds in that all the members of the society share the same view of reality. It is formed from the consensus of hearts in that all members hold the same values. It is formed from the consensus of arms in that all members exert themselves to actualize their values. The *Qur'an* states plainly that the ummah is the preeminent of all human communities given to mankind by God.

## Practices

The "Five Pillars of Islam" (obligations or duties) are 1) the confession of faith: "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his messenger"; 2) prayer five times a day; 3) sharing of wealth or almsgiving, practiced in a variety of ways; 4) fasting for reflection and self-discipline during the month of Ramadan; and 5) pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in one's lifetime, if possible.

Although there are no clergy as such, a clerical class of religious scholars and local religious leaders evolved. Muslims are called to prayer five times each day, and on Friday it is preferred that the noon prayer be said in a mosque (a place of gathering).

## Shi'ites and Sunnis

After Mohammed died, a division arose over succession to the Prophet. This resulted in the emergence of the Sunnis--now constituting about 90 percent of all Muslims--who consider themselves the orthodox branch of Islam. The other group, the Shi'ites, who primarily live in Iran, also consider themselves as authentic Muslims. Sunnis and Shi'ites differ on the issue of succession and in some of their interpretations of the Shari'ah (the straight path), a comprehensive code of morality and religious duties based on the *Qur'an* and the Hadith (traditions of the prophet's words and deeds).

Characteristics of Shi'ite Islam include a tradition of honorable martyrdom and, in times of crisis, the need to employ strong action, including holy war. According to Shi'ite beliefs, the government of a nation should be a

theocracy--a government ruled by God through the Imam (a special spiritual leader). As with any group, Shi'ites include moderates and extremists.

## Contemporary Islamic Issues

Issues facing Muslims on a global basis are of a practical nature and have to do with Muslim society. Philosophical and theological concerns continue to be of secondary importance, for the faith has already been delivered in final form. However, there is conflict between traditionalists and modernists.

Traditionalists are committed to the original beliefs and practices of Islam, including faithfulness to a literal understanding of Qur'anic law and its applications to contemporary life. Modernists believe that the principles, goals, and fundamental purposes of religious law are unchanging, but the specific forms in which the eternal truths are expressed must change constantly in the face of changing human circumstances.

Muslim leaders are divided over national loyalties. As a result of colonialism, the Muslim world has broken into many nation states. Some leaders approve of this development, but others fear that the unifying spirit of Islam is betrayed by political nationalism. Although it has had no centralized authority for centuries, Islam has retained a remarkable spirit of unity. With the emerging variety of political structures in the Muslim world, however, some believers-- probably a minority--would prefer a more centralized leadership for religious unity. Others believe that God alone should rule without any earthly mediating authority.

*For their insights on file I am especially grateful to my former Hartford Seminary colleagues, now retired, Drs. Willem A. Bijlefeld and Marston Speight; and to Dr. Ingrid Mattson, professor of Islamic Studies, Hartford Seminary.*

*[The Rev. Dr. Richard T. Nolan is an Episcopal priest and an adjunct professor of philosophy at Palm Beach Community College. This article was originally written for The Net, the newspaper of the Episcopal Diocese of Southeast Florida]*

---

### ► ISLAM – from *Living Issues In Philosophy* (Titus, Smith, and Nolan)

Jews and Christians view Islam as the latest of the world religions; they often call this heritage *Mohammadanism*. From a Muslim standpoint, this view is a distortion. Adherents of Islam understand their religion as the “final religion” and the “primal religion.” As “final,” Islam is God’s final revelation of prophetic religion, in fulfillment of all that had preceded. Moses was given the Law; David was given the Psalms; Jesus was given the Gospel. Judaism offers God’s message of justice, and Christianity proclaims the love of God. To Mohammed (570–632 C.E.)

*God revealed the Qur’an.* As the “Seal of the Prophets,” the apostle of Allah (which means “the God” in Arabic), Mohammed is not the focal point of Islam; hence, the religion should not be called by his name. For Muslims, Islam—which means “submission to God”—is the middle way between Judaism and Christianity; it restores the unity of the children of Abraham and overcomes the exclusiveness of Judaism and Christianity. Jesus, the prophet to “the lost sheep of Israel,” limits Christianity; Judaism is similarly limited.

Islam proclaims a practical synthesis of Judaism and Christianity for all humanity. Overcoming the incompleteness of the justice of Judaism and the idealistic love of Christianity, Islam brings to fulfillment all that Judaism and Christianity anticipated. For the Muslim believer, Islam is perfected Judaism and perfected Christianity.

As “primal,” Islam is the real religion of Adam, of Abraham, of human nature. Islam is not younger than Judaism and Christianity; it preceded both. Not only is it the religion of the “Spoken Book” (the Qur’an), it is as well the religion of the “Created Book,” the fabric of the universe itself. According to the Muslim faith,

every person is born a Muslim, and distortions of his or her environment lead a person astray to become a Christian, a Jew, or an unbeliever. To be human means to be Muslim.

**Beliefs.** The doctrines underlying the outlook of Islam, and those accepted by orthodox Muslims, usually are stated as follows:

(1) *Belief in one absolute and transcendent God.* Allah is the omnipotent ruler of the universe and his will is supreme. He has decreed the processes of nature and he judges, punishes, and rewards all. Because all stand constantly in the presence of Allah, there is no need of mediators in the form of priests, sacraments, and churches.

(2) *Belief in angels.* There are good angels, who may intercede for humanity, and there is an evil angel.

(3) *Belief in the Qur'an,* which is inspired and verbally infallible. According to the account, the angel Gabriel appeared and revealed to Mohammed the contents of this sacred book.

(4) *Belief in the Prophets of Allah, of whom Mohammed is the last and the greatest* and the one commissioned to deliver Allah's message to humanity. Abraham, Moses, and Jesus of Nazareth also are recognized prophets.

(5) *Belief in a time of judgment* when all people will be judged for their deeds. There is a heaven and a hell, but eventually all Muslims will be saved.

Islam also teaches that peace should be established in the human societies of this world. To participate with Allah in the establishment of peace, Muslims are called upon to be engaged in *jihad*, meaning in Arabic "striving" or "struggle." The basic *jihad* is the struggle of the self, to bring it in obedience to God, to make sure that one is living a holy and righteous life. A lesser struggle is *jihad* as "holy war," fought only when the faith is being attacked or when Muslims are not allowed to practice their faith.

The *ummah*, or Islamic community or state, is the dynamic vehicle for the realization of God's Will and should serve as an example to the rest of the world.

*Shi'ites and Sunnis.* After Mohammed died, the leadership role was assumed by four of his closest companions, the last of whom was Ali. At this point, a division arose within Islam over the succession. One group, the Sunnis—now constituting about 90 percent of all Muslims—consider themselves the orthodox branch of Islam. The other group, the Shi'ites, who primarily live in Iran, also consider themselves as authentic Muslims. Sunnis and Shi'ites differ on the issue of succession and in some of their interpretations of the Shari'ah, a comprehensive code of morality and religious duties.

Characteristics of Shi'ite Islam are (1) infallibility of the "hidden" Imam, true successor of Mohammed; the hidden Imam is expected to return someday; (2) leadership by ayatollahs, who are believed to be representatives of the Imam; (3) tradition of honorable martyrdom memorializing the murder of Ali's son Hussein in the seventh century; and (4) in times of crisis the need to employ strong action, including holy war. According to Shi'ite beliefs, the government of a nation is a theocracy—a government ruled by God acting through the Imam.

*Islamic Issues.* Issues facing Muslims on a global basis are of a practical nature and have to do with Muslim society. Philosophical—theological concerns continue to be of secondary importance, for the faith has already been delivered in final form. However, the effect of Western colonial domination during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on many regions of the Muslim world has led to conflict between traditionalists and modernists.

Traditionalists are committed to the original beliefs and practices of Islam, including faithfulness to a literal understanding of Qur'anic law and its applications to contemporary life. Modernists believe that the principles, goals, and fundamental purposes of religious law are unchanging, but the specific forms in which the eternal truths are expressed must change constantly in the face of changing human circumstances. The traditionalists' vision of life's possibilities has been so rooted in the past that they have not developed a Muslim framework for many modern technological developments; in contrast, modernists attempt to accommodate recent developments within a Muslim spirit, also faithful to the Qur'an's unchanging truths.

Muslim leaders are divided over national loyalties. As a result of colonialism, the Muslim world has broken into many nation states. Some leaders applaud this development, but others fear that the unifying spirit of Islam is betrayed by political nationalism. Although it has had no centralized authority for centuries, Islam

has retained a remarkable spirit of unity; with the emerging variety of political structures in the Muslim world, however, some believers—probably a minority—would prefer a more centralized leadership for religious unity. Others believe that God alone should rule without any earthly mediating authority.

Other questions for the Muslim world include: Is the ancient traditional way of life the only authentic Islamic life? To what extent, if any, can tradition accommodate the modern world? Should the Qur'an be restudied according to principles of modern historical and literary research, or would that call into question basic divine revelation as understood for centuries?

### ► *CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FACING THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY*

by R. Marston Speight, Ph.D.

All of the crucial issues with which Muslims are wrestling worldwide are of a practical nature. There is little interest in metaphysical speculation. In fact, the enterprise of pure theology has always been of secondary importance in Islam. Belief in God as practiced in that religion primarily involves loyalty to a worldwide community of fellow believers and adherence to a way of life which is prescribed in great detail both by the Qur'an and by the authoritative traditions of the faith. Given this practical bent of Islam, it is no surprise that the burning concerns of this age have to do with Muslim society: its identity, its cohesion and its progress. In outlining rapidly the most important of these concerns I shall run the risk of distorting them by being too brief. These remarks will give some idea, however, of the tensions produced by the religio-social ferment of the present time.

Vast areas of the Muslim world endured many years of Western colonial domination during the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. During that period the pre-modern, traditional patterns of life in family, education, business, agriculture, etc., continued to be integrated and given significance by the all-encompassing religious insight of Islamic faith. Alongside these traditional ways of living the technological, modernizing processes were inaugurated by the colonialists. For a long time the two completely different social and ideological forces continued in parallel expression, without mutually affecting each other. Today, after independence, the Muslim nations feel keenly the conflict between the ways of modernity and the ways of tradition. This conflict is not just an opposition between conservatism and progressivism. Nearly everyone has seen the desperate need for modernizing life for the sake of the economic, social and political betterment of the populations. But in most cases the western educated technocrats, the agents of modernization, have been so absorbed in feeding, healing, educating and industrializing that they have not been able to provide adequate Islamic philosophical underpinning for their effort. A theory of modern development within the framework of divine revelation is largely lacking. This situation causes acute tension which expresses itself in many ways.

Some modernizers feel that religion is a hindrance to development. They are not against it, but they feel that it should occupy a private place in society, much as it does in Western, secular countries. Others, just as concerned for modernity, affirm that Islam is the only religion that can adequately cope with the social, ethical, political and economic crises of rapid development. They insist on Islam's being a public philosophy.

One of the realities inherited from colonialism is the breakup of the Muslim world into nation states. Many feel that this is for the good and they seek to inspire the people to act according to a sense of national loyalty, so that they might get ahead in the modern world. Many other Muslim leaders feel that nationalism is a dangerous betrayal of the universal, unifying spirit of Islam, and they push for a worldwide sense of the community of faith. They sense, correctly, that a modern nation state exists over against other nation states, so inevitably it tends toward isolation and division. From divine revelation the destiny of Islam is clear to Muslims, but the identity and destiny of the modern nation state are not entirely clear, even if the state is Islamic. Some ask, "Do its identity and destiny coincide with those of Islam?" If so, then why affirm a national particularity? If not, then the believing people are plunged into confusion.

A corollary to the above is the dispersion of Muslims outside the areas of their majority status, an inevitable result of rapid communication and development on a worldwide scale. Tension here has to do with the different perceptions of what it means to live as Muslims in a minority position, under an alien (that is, non-Muslim) government. In the past the general interpretation of Islam has been that it can only be fully expressed when it has both territorial base of its own and the opportunity to wield political power. So, minority groups of Muslims are having to work out in their own, often conflicting, ways how to express their faith in

their situations. There are differing perceptions of what it means to be accepted by the predominant society of their country. Others feel that in an atmosphere of pluralistic freedom Muslims can be on an equal footing with other religious bodies.

In noting that minority groups work out their ideology and practice for themselves, we take account of another source of tension in the community worldwide. It has to do with the question of authority. Historically there has never been a centralized authority in Islam. No individual or council has ever ruled in matters of doctrine and practice, that is, since the first few decades of Islamic history. In spite of this radical lack of centralized religious authority, the worldwide community of Islam has maintained a remarkable degree of unity. However, today, with the alarming inroads of secularism, the threat of individualistic approaches to religion, the political conflicts between Islamic nations, and the general atmosphere of ideological and religious pluralism, some Muslims desire a centralized authority for their religion. Various international councils have been formed, conferences held and books written, tending toward that end. Others, probably the majority, still feel that the principle of responsibility to God alone, which renders unnecessary any earthly mediating authority, is one of the chief glories of Islam, and that it should never be touched.

Finally, the general source of tension in Islam at present, encompassing all that has been described above, is the felt need to reinterpret that religion in terms of the modern world. This need is perceived at different levels and for different reasons. Some of these are as follows:

1. Islam is not occupying the place of political, economic and cultural supremacy in the world that it once did.
2. There is a neglect of religious practice in some places.
3. Islamic education has lost its central place in the lives of the masses.
4. The widespread dispersion of Muslim populations has resulted in much disorientation.
5. Islamic law no longer provides the sole basis for life in Muslim societies. In the interest of modernity alien systems of law have usurped its place.

There is a ferment of debate throughout the world as to what is the best way to go about reinterpreting the religion. Without being all-inclusive, we can describe four different approaches, which are probably the most important. It should be noted that one of these positions envisages a reformation of basic Islamic doctrine. That which is in question is the way of life, the philosophy and prescriptions for social ethics, government, worship and economics.

1. Many appeal to the ancient tradition as the only authentically Islamic goal. These advocate a straightforward and literal return to the practices of the early Muslim community during the life of Muhammad and for a quarter of a century thereafter.

2. Others regard the ancient tradition as normative as well, but they affirm that a part of that tradition is the responsibility to adapt, by rational processes, its localized and time-bound content, so as to conform to the conditions of the present age. Proponents of this method accuse the first of being obscurantist.

3. Many practical minded thinkers encourage the establishment of modern social, legal and economic institutions so that they can function without concern as to whether they agree with Islamic theory or not. They think that sooner or later the practical effectiveness of these patterns will insure their acceptance by Muslims and that an adaptation of them to Islamic principles will finally take place. Opponents of this procedure fear that to ignore Islamic norms at the outset in the interest of rapid practical modernization will lead to the displacement of Islam.

4. Perhaps the most profound and far-reaching proposal is that the Qur'an be systematically restudied according to the principles of modern historical research, that the chronology of its revelations be taken seriously and that the sociological background of its content be thoroughly investigated. Those who disapprove of this enterprise fear that it will involve a calling into question of the basic Islamic doctrine of divine revelation.

These cursory remarks suffice to indicate that the Islamic world of one billion believers is the scene of intensive discussion and reflection. Its wide-ranging efforts to be faithful to the call of God as they hear it is one of the remarkable aspects of life today in the community of nations.

## ► INFORMATION SHEET ON ISLAM

Notes for the press prepared by:

Dr. David A. Kerr, former Director Duncan Black Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford Seminary, 77 Sherman Street, Hartford, CT 06105 9/27/90

### 1) WHAT'S THE CORRECT NAME FOR THIS RELIGION?

**ISLAM** - it's an Arabic word which means **PEACE (SALAM)**, like the Hebrew word **SHALOM**: literally it means - **MAKING PEACE** by submitting to the will of God which is the source of **PEACE**.

**MUSLIM** - another Arabic word which means the person who submits to God in order to have peace; **MUSLIMA** if you're a woman.

So **ISLAM** is the name of the religion: **MUSLIM/MUSLIMA** is the name of the follower of the religion.

Muslims don't like their religions to be called **MUHAMMEDANISM** as often happens in the west. It suggests that they worship Muhammad (which they don't) rather than God (which they do).

### 2) WHERE AND WHEN DID ISLAM BEGIN?

It began historically in **ARABIA** (modern Saudi Arabia), in the towns of **MECCA** and **MEDINA** (near the west coast inland from the Red Sea).

This was where **MUHAMMAD** lived (570-632 CE) and where he preached his message of Islam which he - and all Muslims - believed was revealed by God. Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last and the greatest **PROPHET** of God.

The revelation is recorded in the **QUR'AN**, the Holy Scripture of Muslims. It's another Arabic word which means "Recital": Muslims believe that it was composed by God and recited by Muhammad.

Arabic is the language of Arabia. So the Qur'an was recited in Arabic, and because Muslims believe that it contains God's words, they regard Arabic as their sacred language.

### 3) ARE ALL MUSLIMS ARABS?

Definitely not!

There are about 1 billion Muslims in the world, making Islam the second largest of the world religions.

There are about 150 million Arabs, and not all of them are Muslims. So while Islam began among the Arabs, the Arabs are a minority among Muslims who include peoples from many other parts of the world.

### 4) WHEN DID ISLAM SPREAD TO SO MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD?

It began soon after Muhammad died in 632 CE (7<sup>th</sup> century).

7<sup>th</sup> century: Other parts of the **MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, PERSIA; AFGHANISTAN**

8<sup>th</sup> century: **SPAIN (until 1492); CENTRAL ASIA**

10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> : **TURKEY; AFRICA (south of the Sahara); INDIA including modern PAKISTAN and BANGLADESH; MALAYSIA and INDONESIA**

14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> : **CHINA; PHILIPPINES; EASTERN EUROPE**

20<sup>th</sup> century: **WESTERN EUROPE and NORTH AMERICA**

Today Muslims are found in most parts of the world; they belong to many different races and nationalities; they speak many different languages. *Most generalizations about who Muslims are, what they think, what they do are likely to be wrong!*

## 5) WHAT DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE?

The Qur'an tells Muslims that they must believe in 5 things:

- i) **ALLAH** - the Arabic word for God, meaning simply “the one to be worshiped and obeyed” (like ELOHIM in Hebrew); the Qur'an gives many Names of God, the most common being **MERCIFUL** and **MERCY-GIVING**;
- ii) **ANGELS** - God's servants in heaven; **GABRIEL** is the Angel of Revelation who, Muslims believe, “recited” the Qur'an to Muhammad;
- iii) **SCRIPTURES** - the **QUR'AN**, but also scriptures which were revealed before it, especially the **TORAH** and the **GOSPEL**;
- iv) **PROPHETS** - **MUHAMMAD** “**THE SEAL OF THE PROPHETS**” – but also the prophets who came before him, especially **ABRAHAM**, **MOSES**, and **JESUS**;
- v) **AFTERLIFE** - Paradise (the Garden) and Hell (the Fire) where human beings will go after the **LAST DAY** of **JUDGEMENT**.

## 6) HOW DO MUSLIMS WORSHIP GOD?

The Qur'an sets out the basic duties of worship, and Muhammad shows Muslims how to put them into practice. Accordingly Islamic worship divides into 2 parts:

### A) The Pillars

- i) **TESTIMONY** – “I bear witness that there is no God but God (**ALLAH**); I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger/Prophet of God.”
- ii) **PRAYER** - 5 times a day
- iii) **CHARITY** - giving alms (2.5% of your wealth)
- iv) **FASTING** - during the month of **RAMADAN**
- v) **PILGRIMAGE** - in **MECCA** in the month of Pilgrimage

### B) The Law (SHARI'AH)

A system of laws, based on the Qur'an and Muhammad's example, but extended by legal reasoning to cover all aspects of individual and social life.

For example: it tells Muslims how to put the pillars of worship into practice, how to organize their family life (marriage, divorce, upbringing of children, inheritance), relations between the sexes, how to eat (dietary laws), how to deal with money and commercial affairs, how to organize political life.

The fundamental principle of the Law is **JUSTICE**.

On this principle the Law instructs Muslims about what is **PERMITTED** (**HALLAL**) and what is **PROHIBITED** (**HARAM**).

On the basis of these two aspects of worship, Muslims believe that Islam is a total way of life, not just a set of religious doctrines and rituals for one day of the week (*N.B.*: Friday is the Muslim equivalent to the Jewish Sabbath, or the Christian Sunday).

## 7) WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUNNI AND SHI'I MUSLIMS?

**SUNNIS** (often in English Sunnites) make up about 90% of the world Muslim community. They believe all that has been set out above, and try to put it into practice through the principle of **CONSENSUS** - *i.e.*, Muslims should try find agreement among themselves about matters of religion, by studying the Qur'an together and following the example of the Prophet Muhammad.

**SHI'Is** (often in English Shi'ites) - a relatively small minority of Muslims, mainly living in Iran and Lebanon, also believe in everything we've said so far. But they also believe one thing which Sunnis do not: they

believe that Muhammad appointed his close relative, a man called ALI, to be the spiritual leader of the Muslim community after his death in 632 CE. Shi'is call Ali and his descendants their IMAMs, and believe that they continue to have a religious authority which is greater than the consensus of ordinary believers. The AYATOLLAHs in Shi'i Iran are believed to be representatives of the Imam.

This is a very important difference within Islam, somewhat like the difference between Protestants and Catholics in Christianity.

#### 8) WHAT IS JIHAD ALL ABOUT?

It's another Arabic word, meaning STRIVING.

Islam teaches Muslims that they must "strive" or work hard to make their religion real in their lives and in their societies. This should be done by JIHAD on 4 levels:

**JIHAD of the TONGUE:** speaking about their faith;

**JIHAD of the HAND:** putting their faith into action by good works;

**JIHAD of the HEART:** making their faith real as a spiritual force in their lives;

**JIHAD of the SWORD:** defending their faith when they fear it to be under attack.

#### 9) WHY IS ISLAM A RELIGION OF VIOLENCE?

It isn't! This is one of the generalizations which we should be careful of avoid.

There are some Muslims today - a small minority - who want to use the JIHAD of the SWORD as a means of Islamic revolution against what they see as the evils of the modern world, especially western materialism and secularism which they relate to western political and economic power.

Iran mounted such a revolution in the late 1970s against the former Shah who many regarded as a puppet of the U.S. Revolutionary Islam has won many followers in other parts of the Middle East where Arabs find themselves in political conflict with the west, particularly in Israel.

This creates many problems - hostages, terrorism, -etc.

But it is still incorrect to say that all Muslims are terrorists, or to think that all Muslims are revolutionaries who are ready to give religious justification for violence.

#### 10) HOW MANY MUSLIMS ARE THERE IN THE UNITED STATES?

About 5 million (in the 1990s).

Most Muslims in the US have come here by immigration since the 1950s. They have settled here, most have taken US citizenship, and their children are born in this country. Mostly they are professional people (doctors, lawyers, business-people) and they want to live in this-country like any other religious community.

About one third of the Muslims in the U.S. are African-Americans, people who have converted to Islam partly in search of their roots (Islam is one of the main religions in West Africa), partly because Christianity has for so long been identified with white people.

---

For additional information, please visit "World Religions" and "All Handouts" in [www.philosophy-religion.org/](http://www.philosophy-religion.org/) ; <http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/answers.htm#Beliefs> ; <http://godlas.myweb.uga.edu/> .