
Understanding and Reaching Our Muslim Neighbours

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1. Introduction

- The change in attitudes and questions about Islam since 9/11
- Moving from *fear* to *compassion* in our response to Islam
- The need for Christians to get a passion for understanding and reaching Muslims.

2. Understanding Islam: It All Begins With Muhammad

- The cultural context into which Muhammad was born and Islam began:
 - A world of empires
 - Religiously very diverse
 - An oral culture
- Muhammad's birth and early life
 - Asceticism
 - First appearance of Gabriel in AD610
 - 23 year prophetic career, ultimately producing the Qur'an (edited together after his death)
- Two distinct phases to Muhammad's career:
 - Mecca (AD610-622)
 - Threefold message: monotheism, social justice and warning of hell
 - Opposition grows
 - The emigration (*hijra*) in AD622 to Medina
 - Medina (AD610-630+)
 - Muhammad makes the transition from prophet to statesman
 - The beginnings of jihad or holy war
 - Military interactions with the Meccans
 - Muhammad conquers Mecca in 630AD.
 - Brings the remaining Arab clans in the region under his control

- Dies in AD632
- The importance of history
 - The Qur'an is deeply bound up with Muhammad's life
 - Emulation of Muhammad is a key religious duty
- Themes in the life of Muhammad that resonate down to today
 - Islamic supersessionism in relation to other religions
 - Muhammad demonstrably moved from a model of non-confrontation in his Meccan ministry to a willingness to use force to impose his ideas in the later part of his ministry
 - Muhammad's blending of religion and politics into an all encompassing system¹

3. Understanding Islam: Core Beliefs

- Don't assume that when Muslims speak of "faith", "scripture", "revelation", or "sin" that they mean the same thing as we do
- Belief often comes second (a close second) to practice (the five pillars):
 - Christianity consists of simple practices but complex beliefs, whereas Islam consists of complex practices but simple beliefs.
- Introduction to worldview

*A worldview (or a vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling in it ... It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.*²
- Key worldview questions
 - Is there a God and if so, what is he like?
 - What does it mean to be human?
 - What's the problem? (What's wrong with the world?)
 - What's the solution?
- On every one of these core questions, Islam and Christianity are utterly different
- Five core beliefs of Islam
 - God

¹ Canadian scholar Andrew Rippin remarks that the three crucial elements of Islamic identity from its beginnings in the seventh century have always been theology, law, and ritual blended together into a mixture; see Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 3d Ed (London: Routledge, 2005) 257.

² See also: James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th Edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004)

- Utterly one
- Qur'an places the emphasis on Allah's power

*Say: He is Allah, the One and Only;
Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;
He begetteth not, nor is He begotten;
And there is none like unto Him.
Q. 112*

- Transcendent: distant, removed, no personal relationship possible
- Master/slave relationship with human beings
- Angels
 - A core part of the Islamic belief system
 - Perform many major roles (e.g. bringing revelation)
 - Their function is related to Allah's transcendence
- Scripture
 - How Allah reveals his will
 - Every prophet brought a book
 - The Qur'an mentions some of the previous scriptures (Torah, Psalms, Gospel)
 - In Islamic thought, "scripture" only consists of first-person divine speech
 - The Qur'an reveals Allah's will and commands; never his character or himself
- Prophets
 - All are considered sinless by (most) Muslims
 - A line of prophethood from Adam, the first, to Muhammad, the last.
 - The Qur'an refers to many biblical prophets, often Arabizing their names
 - Every prophet brought essentially the same message
- The Last Day
 - At the end of time, Allah will wrap up history and all will face judgement
 - Fear of hell is a major part of much of Muslim life and practice
 - The lack of hope found in Islam

4. The Challenge of Islam to the West

- Faith and politics
 - Islam makes no division between them

- Most western politicians have forgotten theology as a category
- Deep Muslim suspicions of the west
- Muslim desires to see “Islam triumphant” whether through politics or radicalism
 - *“Muslims of all kinds agree that Islam is a “totalist” worldview that governs all of life”*
— Professor Andrew Rippin

5. Muslim Challenges to Christianity

- Islam often takes a highly polemic approach to Christianity
- Christians who wish to engage with Islam need to know their apologetics well
- Three key areas of polemical attack
 - The Bible
 - The Trinity
 - Christian history (e.g. the Crusades or colonialism)

6. A Christian Response

- Move beyond fear (fear of Muslims *or* fear of causing offence).
- The need to befriend and get to know Muslims.
- The need for the church to rediscover her voice and her confidence.

The Incarnation reverses the traffic pattern of all other religions: it is not how we, by morality or enlightenment or some other means, mount the ladder to heaven, but God who comes to us in our weakness and unworthiness.³

7. Further Reading

- **Bannister, Andy & Walker, Tanya, *Islam in Context: Opening the Door to Understanding* (RZIM Canada, 2013). You can download the PDF version free here: <http://bit.ly/IslamInContext>**
- Edwards, James R., *Is Jesus The Only Savior?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005
- Riddell, Peter G., *Christians and Muslims: Pressures and Potential in a Post-911 World*. Leicester: IVP, 2004.
- Rippin, Andrew, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 3d Ed. London: Routledge, 2005.
- Sire, James, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th Edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004

³ James R. Edwards, *Is Jesus The Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 229.