

Leader's Guide

to

Christianity And Islam

So much in common,
So far apart.

By Ronn Kerr

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Introduction

As the world is made smaller and smaller by modern communications our awareness of other cultures continues to grow. And, yet, members of the world's two largest religions — Christianity and Islam — remain surprisingly uninformed about one another. Even though we hear about Islam almost daily in the news media, the images are largely about terrorist minorities. At best, most Americans hold stereotypical images of Muslims as primitive, sensual, and violent people and Muslim stereotypes of Western Christians are not much better.

Christians and Muslims have been together on the earth for thirteen hundred years and, with the significant exception of a few major conflicts, we have coexisted in peace. However, there is little doubt that we are currently on a collision path. These two religions of peace represent well more than half of the world's people and both are continuing to grow. But, Christian-Islamic relations — or, at least, Western-Islamic relations — are growing

more and more tense every day as Islamic militancy grows on one side and military action grows on the other. Both sides are being fueled by ignorance and mistrust.

This study has been designed to look at both the ways in which Christianity and Islam are similar and the ways in which they are different. We have much in common, more in fact than any two of the world's major religions. Yet, there are distinct differences which need to be understood but which do not have to keep us or our governments in conflict.

This Leader's Guide is designed to provide the persons teaching the study with enough background information about Islam to lead weekly sessions. For obvious reasons, virtually all of the information in the Leader's Guide is about Islam even though the material in the Student Books is about both Christianity and Islam. It is assumed that the course leaders have access to the necessary information about Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity from other sources. In loose-leaf format, this guide can be

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separated into different sessions and handed out to various leaders well ahead of time.

? *Throughout each section, you will find bold face questions and discussion suggestions set off by the symbol at the left.*

Even though there are many quotations from the Quran included in this guide, you will find it helpful if you can locate a full copy in English. Because Muslims believe the Quran

cannot be published in any language other than Arabic, the language of Allah, and because the eloquent Arabic poetry of the Quran does not translate well in English, you will find a great deal of highly biased “interpretation” in most English language editions.

It is my prayer that you and your students will gain as much from reading and discussing Christianity and Islam as I have gained in preparing the study.

Ronn Kerr

Session One

The World's

Two Largest Religions

As a beginning point for this session, it would be helpful to you, as a class leader, and to the rest of the class to identify some of the attitudes, feelings, and knowledge about Islam that exist in the group at the beginning of this thirteen week study. Following is a list of questions and activities that can be used to stimulate general discussion about the relationship of Islam and Christianity.

? *Have the class members mention words that come into their minds when you say “Muslims,” or the “Quran,” or “Muhammad,” or “Shiites” or “al Qaeda,” or “Islamic Fundamentalist,” or “Islamic women,” or “Ramadan,” or “Taliban,” or “Jihad,” or “Holy War,” and make a list on a chalkboard or newsprint pad. Save this list and plan on doing the same thing at the end of this thirteen week study to see if any stereotypes have changed.*

? *Have the class list ten beliefs or practices that they believe Christians have in common and write these on a chalkboard or on newsprint sheets. Save them until the end of the thirteen-week study for review.*

? *If you have read the first chapter of the student book, you know that Islam is growing four times faster than Christianity. Why do you think this is so? What will be the impact of Islam becoming the world's largest religion?*

? *What do you think are the biggest differences between Islam and Christianity?*

? *What are the biggest differences between Muhammad and Jesus?*

? *What nationalities and ethnic groups do you most associate with Islam? What is the nationality of the largest number of Muslims?*

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- ?** *Are Muslims inherently more violent than Christians?*
- ?** *Have you ever read anything from the Quran?*
- ?** *The four holiest places in the world for Christians are probably Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Rome. What do you think are the four holiest places in the world for Muslims?*
- ?** *Do you know any Muslims and, if you do, have you ever discussed religion with them?*
- ?** *Why is there so much anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world?*
- ?** *When an Islamic terrorist blows himself up in a suicide bombing, is that a religious act? When an American soldier kills a hostile Iraqi, is that a religious act?*
- ?** *What do Muslims believe about Jesus?*
- ?** *What are the differences between a mosque and a church?*
- ?** *How do Muslims feel about Christians?*
- ?** *How many Muslims do you think there are in America? Compared to Methodists? Compared to Presbyterians? Compared to Catholics? Compared to Jews? Compared to Catholics? Compared to Baptists?*

Christianity and Islam Around the World

Statistics about members of religious communions are very unreliable so trends have to be understood more as generalities than absolutes. An often cited example of the inadequacies of religious reporting is that

Shintoists report 80% of the populations of Japan and Buddhists report 90% of the population of Japan as adherents to their faiths.

The reporting mechanisms of countries are fuzzy at best and the reports made by religions and denominations tend to be upwardly biased. For instance, think about how your own congregation reports its membership to your denomination. If you are close to the average, your membership figures are roughly three times larger than your average worship attendance and half of your members do not show up more than a few times a year. Still, all of your members are counted in denominational tallies. Some European countries count all persons as members of the state church unless they are "registered" in a specific denomination or as atheists even though less than ten percent of the population ever attends worship services.

- ?** *Does anyone in the group know how membership figures are reported in your denomination? How accurate are they in terms of actual participation?*

The same situation exists in Muslim countries. In many, everyone is counted as a Muslim unless they are registered as something else and in many of the countries that are counted as being 100% Muslim there isn't really any alternative. Another problem with religious statistics is that they tend to lag behind other kinds of statistics so that available figures are often a decade old.

Most of the statistics used in this leader's guide are from www.adherents.com, an interesting web site that provides statistical information about world religions. A few other sites operated by either Christians or Muslims also offer comparative statistics. An Internet search for world religion statistics will garner both lots of information and lots of confusion.

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In final analysis, however, even the confusion in the available data shows two concrete things. First, Christianity and Islam are the world's two largest religions and, second, Islam is growing faster than Christianity. In the last fifty years, Christianity has grown by 47% worldwide while Islam has grown 235% worldwide according to the statistics in standard almanacs. And, both religions are growing fastest in areas where they are not the majority.

? *Why do you think Islam is growing faster than Christianity? What does this trend mean for the future?*

Christianity is the majority religion in the countries of Europe and North, Central, and South America. Islam is a minority of 4% to 6% in most of the North American and European countries but it is virtually zero in Central and South America. In the last decade, Islam has grown faster in Europe, North America, and Australia than anywhere else in the world.

? *Islam has tended to thrive in poorer countries and yet it is virtually non-existent in Central and South America. Why do you think this is so?*

A general assumption by many Christians is that most Arabs are Muslims and most Muslims are Arabs. While it is true that most Arabs are Muslims, there are significant Christian and Jewish minorities in some Arab countries and Arab Christian populations run as high as 10-15% in some Arab countries. The second part of this assumption is far from true, however. Only about 20% of the world's Muslims are Arab and, in fact, of the ten countries with the largest Muslim populations, only Egypt is Arab. And, the significant recent growth of Islam in North America and Europe

is parallel with the ethnic distribution of Muslims worldwide.

The top ten largest national Muslim populations and the percentage of each country's total that is Muslim:

Indonesia	170,310,000
Pakistan	136,000,000
Bangladesh	106,050,000
India	103,000,000
Turkey	62,410,000
Iran	60,790,000
Egypt	53,730,000
Nigeria	47,720,000
China	37,108,000

(Religion figures from China are very difficult to obtain and most students of world religions believe the Muslim figures for China are closer to 120,000,000)

Fifteen countries in the world are virtually 100% Muslim and are indicated in the following alphabetical list of countries that have Muslim majorities.

Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Azerbaijan
Bahrain (100%)
Bangladesh
Brunei
Chechnia
Comoros (100%)
Dagestan
Djibouti
Egypt
Gambia
Gaza Strip
Guinea
Indonesia
Iran
Iraq
Jordan
Kuwait (100%)

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Kyrgyzstan	Belarus
Libya	Belgium
Malaysia	Belize
Mali	Bermuda
Maldives (100%)	Bolivia
Mauritania (100%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Mayotte (100%)	Brazil
Morocco (100%)	Bulgaria
Niger	Burundi
Oman (100%)	Canada
Pakistan	Cape Verde
Qatar (100%)	Central African Republic
Saudi Arabia (100%)	Chile
Senegal	Colombia
Somalia (100%)	Cook Islands
Sudan	Costa Rica
Syria	Croatia
Tajikistan	Cuba
Tatarstan	Cyprus
Tunisia (100%)	Czech Republic
Turkey	Denmark
Turkmenistan	Dominica
United Arab Emirates (100%)	Dominican Republic
Uzbekistan	East Timor
West Bank	Ecuador
Western Sahara (100%)	El Salvador
Yemen	Equatorial Guinea

Following is a list of countries with Christian majorities. Although none are listed as being 100% Christian, most South American and Central American countries are close to 100%.

Angola	Estonia
Anguilla	Finland
Antigua and Barbuda	France
Argentina	French Guiana
Armenia	French Polynesia
Aruba	Gabon
Australia	Georgia
Austria	Germany
Bahamas	Ghana
Barbados	Greece
	Greenland
	Guatemala
	Haiti
	Honduras
	Hungary

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Iceland
Ireland
Italy
Jamaica
Kenya
Kiribati
Latvia
Lesotho
Liechtenstein
Lithuania
Luxembourg
Macedonia
Malta
Marshall Islands
Martinique
Mexico
Micronesia, Federated States of
Monaco
Namibia
Nauru
Netherlands
Netherlands Antilles
New Zealand
Nicaragua
Niue
Norfolk Island
Norway
Palau
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Reunion
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent
Samoa

San Marino
Sao Tome and Principe
Serbia and Montenegro
Seychelles
Slovakia
Slovenia
Solomon Islands
South Africa
Spain
Swaziland
Sweden
Switzerland
Tonga
Trinidad and Tobago
Tuvalu
Uganda
Ukraine
United Kingdom
Uruguay
USA
Vanuatu
Vatican
Venezuela
Wallis and Futuna Islands

**Similarities of
Christianity and Islam**

Christianity and Islam, in contrast to such religions as Hinduism and Buddhism, are both monotheistic faiths that worship the God of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Both Christians and Muslims understand God to be the creator, sustainer, and Lord of the universe. We share a common belief in the oneness of God, in God's activity in the world throughout history, and in the interaction between God and human beings. We also share common beliefs in prophets, revelation, angels, and the presence of evil either as a force in the world or as a demonic being such as Satan.

Both Christians and Muslims stress moral responsibility of individuals and institutions

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and both believe that human beings are accountable to God for their actions. We both believe in eternal life and heaven.

In the same way that Christianity believes that God's revelation in Jesus supersedes the revelation of God in the Old Testament, Islam believes that God's revelation in the Quran supersedes the revelation of God in both the Old Testament and New Testament. However, the Quran contains considerable respect for the prophets of the Old and New Testaments and speaks often of Jesus and Mary. In fact, Mary is mentioned more often in the Quran than she is in the Bible.

Peace is a central theme in the teachings of both Christianity and Islam even though members of both faiths have led a variety of "Holy Wars" to spread or defend their interests.

Jesus and Muhammad Both Came in "The Fullness of Time"

The times into which both Jesus and Muhammad brought their new ideas about religion were primed for religious change. From a theological perspective, it is often argued by both Christians and Muslims that God chose a perfect moment in time for God's self revelation to humankind. Christians believe that God came as Jesus Christ when the time was ripe for religious change and Muslims believe that God dictated the Quran to Muhammad at a time when the conditions were perfect for its reception.

In fact, historians argue that the conditions in the world at both times were such that religious change was inevitable. They point to similar times in which the situation in the Roman Catholic Church at the end of the Renaissance left the world ripe for the Reformation to happen under the leadership of Martin Luther and John Calvin and that condi-

tions in the Church of England a few centuries later primed Great Britain for the Evangelical Revival of John and Charles Wesley.

In First Century Palestine, Judaism had settled into a stagnation in which salvation was largely understood to be the product of following a minutia of rules in everyday life that were only fully understood by a handful of scholars and priests. In addition, most of the rules were tied in one way or another to a sacrificial system in which average Jews were constantly having to go to religious authorities to purchase redemption through the sacrifice of animals, grain or other things of value. As the economic greed of the religious and political aristocracy became more and more entwined with the income potential of the sacrificial system, the higher meaning of "following God's law" began to be questioned by the people who were straining under the economic pressures. At the time that Jesus appeared on the scene, the population was primed for religious change.

In addition, when the new Christian faith began to spread across the Roman Empire, it encountered a religious malaise that was also ripe for change. The First and Second Century Roman Empire was a very religious place. People were actively caught up in seeking salvation, greater meaning in life, and moral guidance and many people belonged to several different pagan religions at the same time. Some of the classical pagan religions in the Mediterranean cities were genuine expressions attempting to help persons find salvation and meaning in life. However, others were nothing more than centers of entertainment with lavish festivals, temple prostitutes and worship activities that resembled banquets and drinking bouts more than religious ceremonies. In this environment, many people were searching for meaning, salvation, and moral principles that

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made sense to them and the new Christian movement filled that need.

? *Do you believe that God chose a specific moment in time that was most desirable for revelation or that Jesus could have come at any time and the result would have been the same?*

In Sixth Century Arabia, the conditions were also primed for religious revolution. Two great powers – the Christian Byzantine Empire and the Zoroastrian Sassanian Empire (Persian) — existed on either side of Arabia and were in constant war with one another. While both of these powers wanted to control the fertile areas of Southern Arabia (what is now Yemen), they largely ignored the rest of the peninsula because it was a region of harsh desert steppes inhabited by a wild race of fierce desert fighters. Neither the Greeks nor the Persians considered invading this desolate and dangerous region.

Because of this, Arabia was considered a “Godless” region and even though there were a few Christians and Jews sprinkled about, most of the culture was pagan. The Arabs of central Arabia were distrustful of the Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians that surrounded them even though there was an awareness that these religions and the empires to which they belonged were more sophisticated.

The Arabs were aware that they could never become an empire because both their rigid tribal loyalties and the harsh desert life with its shortages of food and water fostered extreme independence and constant warfare with one another. Living in a constantly precarious situation, the desert nomads lived in extremely close-knit groups that were in fierce competition with one another for scarce resources. Clan and tribal loyalty was dominant over everything else and, within the tribes, Arabs were fiercely

loyal to one another, protecting the weak and strong alike, and submitting absolute obedience to tribal leaders. However, beyond the tribes, there was no loyalty to anything and no sense of universal law or morality.

Tribal loyalty was, in reality, the religion of the nomadic Arabs of the Sixth Century. There was no sense of afterlife, no sense of personal destiny outside of the tribe, and no sense of general welfare beyond the limits of the tribe. Vendettas against other tribes were commonplace because tribal loyalty demanded that a violation of even the weakest member had to be avenged. This cycle of violence maintained a precarious balance of power but it also prohibited any form of general unity in the area.

The tribal system and harsh environment developed a savage ethic even within the tribes, especially toward women. They were little more than slaves with no legal rights. Men could marry as many women as they wanted and could dispose of them without fear of retaliation. Population was controlled through infanticide, particularly of female babies.

Still, the Arabic tribal system had developed some important values that later became incorporated into Islam. Within each tribe, the structure was egalitarian. Everyone was an equal member of the tribe and chiefs were chosen for their leadership skills rather than the inheritance rights of a privileged elite. Within the tribe, there was a strong commitment to brotherhood, benevolence, hospitality, and community.

The Arabs had little time or resources for conventional religion with worship sites and a formal priesthood. Poems and legends focused on the prowess of the tribe and its ancestral leaders rather than on the power of the gods. There was widespread belief in jinni (demons) and a class of quasi-religious kahin (medicine men) who survived off of superstitions and

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fears. Each tribe had its own tribal gods and shrines but they were based more on superstition than theology.

The Kaaba in Mecca came the closest to being a national religious shrine. It was beside the sacred spring of Zamzam and contained a large meteorite called the Black Stone. The Kaaba was officially dedicated to the god Allah but was surrounded by 360 effigies of gods, probably totems of the different tribes that used the shrine. Thousands of Arab pilgrims would go to the Kaaba every year to circumambulate the shrine seven times in a ritual whose original meaning had long been lost.

Allah was considered by the pagan Arabs to be the "High God." He was not the only god nor the sole object of worship but he clearly stood above the other gods. Allah was the giver of rain and, therefore, ensured the sustenance of life for the inhabitants of the desert. As the guarantor of oaths, Allah was regarded as crucial to the binding nature of agreements, both tribal and individual, that were sworn in his name. Allah was also viewed as the creator of the heavens and was the god one turned to when danger was immanent. However, no moral conclusions seem to have been attached to this power and persons who had been rescued from danger immediately offered thanksgiving to their local tribal totems instead of to

Allah.

The most powerful tribe in Arabia, the Quraysh, had settled into urban life in Mecca where they maintained the Kaaba and used it as a center of their mercantile activities. However, as the Quraysh became more powerful and more wealthy, their capitalism took on a religious fervor. Aggressive capitalism was different from their old tribal ethics because it fostered greed and individualism. The clans within the tribe became fiercely competitive and, instead of sharing their wealth as was the pattern under the old tribal ethic, individuals began building up personal fortunes, abusing the rights of orphans and widows, and ignoring the weaker members of their clans. The wealthier classes of the tribe got wealthier while the poorer classes got poorer and many were seeking a new spiritual and political solution.

Into this situation, Muhammad was born in the fullness of time.

? *Do you think God could have chosen two different places and two different times to self-revelation to the world?*

? *Do you think the God revealed in Jesus in the First Century and the God revealed in the Quran in the Seventh Century are one in the same?*

Session Two

Jesus and Muhammad, the Early Years

The years before Jesus and Muhammad were called into ministry were very different. Or, at least, the scanty information that we have about them shows some distinct differences. The stories about Jesus' birth are miraculous with a virgin, a star in the heavens, and angels appearing to shepherds in the fields. Muhammad's birth was uneventful. Jesus grew up in a home with his mother, father, and brothers and sisters. Muhammad was an orphan. Jesus never married and no record of any romantic interest exists. Muhammad married a woman who was fifteen years his elder and then had at least six children with her before she died. Both men were deeply religious and seem to have been very knowledgeable about the religions of their areas. Jesus was a carpenter and rabbi. Muhammad was a merchant and ardent follower of his tribal religion. Jesus never traveled further than 100 miles from his birthplace. Muhammad traveled extensively throughout the Middle East.

The Early Years of Jesus

The totality of what is known about Jesus before he appeared as a 30-year-old adult is covered in the first two chapters of the Gospel According to Matthew and the first two chapters of the Gospel According to Luke. This material – the Christmas Story — is well known to most Christians but it would be worth reviewing it in the classroom before examining the materials about Muhammad.

- ?** *Why do you think the New Testament records so little about the first thirty years of Jesus' life?*
- ?** *Do you understand the Christmas Story to be completely historical or do some parts of it seem to be legendary? Which parts?*
- ?** *How do you think Muslims view the idea of Gabriel visiting Mary, the "Star in the East," the angels and the shepherds, and the coming of the Magi?*

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The Early Years of Muhammad

We do not know much more about the earliest years of Muhammad's life than we do about the earliest years of Jesus' life. There are no "miracle" stories about Muhammad's birth. He was born into the Hashim clan, a sub unit of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca around 570. The Hashim clan had once been an important and powerful part of the Quraysh but had declined in power and prestige over the years.

Muhammad's father, Abdullah, died before Muhammad's mother, Amina, gave birth to the Prophet and the mother and infant son were left in poverty. Amina was so poor that a Bedouin family, Al-Harith and Halima, agreed to take the infant Muhammad so that Halima could suckle him. Islamic legend tells that Al-Harith and Halima's poor flocks prospered greatly while they cared for the infant Muhammad. Later, when Halima thought that Muhammad had had a stroke, she returned him to his mother in Mecca where he lived until she died five years later.

The orphaned Muhammad went to live in the house of his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, where Muhammad quickly became his favorite. Abd al-Muttalib was old and crippled and he often had his sons carry him to the Kaaba where he could lie in the shade of the shrine and contemplate. While he was there, he liked to have Muhammad with him.

Muhammad's grandfather died after only two years, again leaving the Prophet an orphan. Muhammad moved in with his uncle Abu Talib who had just become the chief of the Hashim clan. Even though Abu Talib's economic situation had greatly declined he was still a respected man in Mecca and he treated Muhammad with kindness.

Abu Talib began taking the young Muhammad with him on his caravan trading journeys. One of the stories from the Hadith

(*Islamic Scripture about Muhammad*) tells of an event that happened on a trip to Syria that is similar to the stories of the 12-year-old Jesus in the Jerusalem Temple (*Luke 2.41-51*) and of the young David being discovered by Samuel in Bethlehem (*Samuel 16.4-13*). As the Quraysh caravan approached Basra, a monk named Bahira, who usually ignored the caravans, rushed out of his cell to greet them and invite them to have a meal with him. He said that he had seen a bright cloud hanging over the caravan and was convinced that the long-awaited Prophet must be in the caravan.

Because Muhammad was the youngest, he was left to care for the animals and watch the merchandise while the others responded to Bahira's invitation. During the meal, the monk continually studied the other men and boys but none of them fit the descriptions of the coming Prophet he had found in his books so he asked if there was anyone else with them. They brought Muhammad in and, after the meal, the monk asked Muhammad to swear by the local gods that he would answer the monk's questions truthfully and Muhammad said he would swear only by Allah. The monk questioned Muhammad about his life and examined his body where he discovered a "mark of the Prophet." The monk told Abu Talib to "Take your nephew back to his country and guard him carefully...a great future lies before this nephew of yours so take him home quickly." (*Hadith: The Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq*)

However, until Muhammad was about 25 years old, there was little evidence that he would be anything but a successful merchant. He had earned the nickname Al-Amin, (the reliable one) because he had developed the unique ability to inspire confidence in others. Physical descriptions of him say that he was a handsome young man with curly hair and beard and a strong body of average height.

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Many of the references to him as a young man discuss his “glowing expression,” his serious nature, and his charitable character. He was forthright and honest as a businessman and always gave full attention to whatever he was doing. It is written that he always faced people directly, shook hands vigorously, and was decisive and fair in business dealings.

He was trained in the military arts by his uncles and is said to have been a skilled archer and a competent swordsman and wrestler even though he was not a big man. After his uncle became a banker, Muhammad became an independent merchant leading caravans to Syria and Iraq where he encountered Christians and Jews.

? *What impact do you think these early contacts with Christians and Jews may have had on Muhammad?*

However, because of his status as an orphan, Muhammad was held back. His lowly position made it difficult for him to find a wife even though he enjoyed the company of women and wanted their affection. He was even turned down as a husband for one of Abu Talib's daughters because of his lowly status.

About 595, however, Muhammad's company was hired by the widow Khadija bint Khuwaylid to take some of her merchandise to Syria. Even though Khadija had been married twice and had borne a number of children, she came from the powerful Asad clan and had been able to make a good living as a merchant. One of her employees, Maysara, accompanied Muhammad on the trip and reported back to her about a series of strange events that took place. He heard a monk proclaim Muhammad as “the expected Prophet” and, later, he saw two angels shading Muhammad from the sun.

When Maysara reported these stories to Khadija, she consulted her cousin Waraqa ibn Naufal, a Christian, who told her, “If this is

true, Khadija, truly Muhammad is the Prophet of this people!” (*Hadith: The Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq*)

? *It is clear that the Arab people, like the Jews of Jesus' time, expected God to send them a Prophet, a savior of some kind. What do you think these expectations did for the acceptance or non-acceptance of both Jesus and Muhammad?*

Khadija was impressed by Muhammad's warm personal qualities, his business acumen, and her cousin's assessment of his religious importance. She needed a husband and proposed to Muhammad. “I like you because of our relationship,” Khadija told him, “Your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness, your good character and your truthfulness.” (*Hadith: The Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq*) Islamic tradition holds that Khadija was 40 and Muhammad 25 at the time of their marriage but, because they went on to have at least six children, most scholars presume she was younger.

Khadija was a remarkable woman who was determined, noble and intelligent. She provided considerable emotional and spiritual counsel to Muhammad in the early years of his adult life and they had a very happy, monogamous marriage. Muhammad's great love for Khadija often infuriated the wives he acquired after her death because he constantly praised her to them and held her up as a standard of womanhood. There is no record of Muhammad having another wife, concubine or sexual liaison while he was married to Khadija even though all were standard for Arab men of the time.

? *Reflect on how Muhammad's marriage to Khadija might have changed him and prepared him for God's revelation?*

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? *One of the perplexing things for scholars about the early life of Jesus is why he was not married at the age of 30, something that was totally unheard of for a First Century rabbi. Why do you think there is no reference to either a wife or any romance in Jesus' life in the New Testament?*

Even though Muhammad and Khadija's combined business skills brought in a reasonable income, they lived austere because Muhammad contributed a large portion of their income to the poor. But, despite the austerity, the household seems to have been a happy one. They had at least six children. Two sons died in infancy but four daughters — Zaynab, Ruqayyah, Umm Kulthum, and Fatimah — lived to be leaders in the young Islamic community. Muhammad loved children, especially his daughters, and played with them often and showed them frequent affection.

Even though Muhammad did not have surviving sons, his generosity brought two foster sons into the family. Khadija had given Muhammad a young slave boy, Azyd ibn Harith, as a gift on their wedding day and Muhammad became so attached to the boy that he virtually raised him as his son. Later, when the boy's parents came to Mecca with money to ransom him, Azyd begged to stay with Muhammad. Soon after, Muhammad gave Azyd his freedom and brought him into the family as a foster son.

? *Even though Muhammad treated his slave as a son, freed him early, and adopted him, it is clear that he owned at least this one slave and slave ownership was common in early Islam. How do you feel about this?*

Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib, whom Muhammad had lived with as a boy, fell into

serious financial trouble and could not support his children so Muhammad took Abu's Talib's five year old son, Ali, into his own home. Because of his own memories of being an orphan, Muhammad treated his foster sons with great love and both prospered under his care and later became important leaders in the early Muslim community. Ali, in fact, became the fourth Caliph of Islam, the first Imam of the Shiite movement, and the most widely revered Islamic leader after Muhammad.

Another story about Muhammad shows that he had already become a wise and respected leader in Mecca well before the revelation of the Quran and the beginnings of the Islamic community. In 605, when Muhammad was about 35 years old, the Quraysh tribe had decided to rebuild the Kaaba because several stones had become loose and it needed a new roof. However, any physical work on the great shrine was fraught with problems because of its importance and its sacred nature. So, all of the clans of the Quraysh tribe participated in the rebuilding, each working on a specified section. When it came time to put the sacred Black Stone back, however, there was considerable turmoil because each clan wanted the honor. They turned to Muhammad whose wisdom was already well known. He suggested that the Black Stone be placed on a cloth large enough for a representative of each clan to hold it in a different place. Then, the representatives were able to jointly lift the Black Stone into place so that all the clans could claim participation in the great event. (*Hadith: The Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq*)

? *Stories like Muhammad's wisdom about placing the Black Stone, the 12-year-old Jesus in the Temple, Solomon's wisdom about cutting a child in half to prove which woman was his mother, the boy Muhammad being discovered by the*

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seer when he traveled, in the caravan to Basra, George Washington and the cherry tree, and Abraham Lincoln walking a great distance to return a penny all have a mythical quality about them in that the truth they tell about the person is more important than the historical quality of the story. Is it important to you whether or not these are historical stories or myths?

When Muhammad was about 40 years old, he began to spend more and more time in spiritual solitude. He would go on day-long retreats to pray and worship Allah and he began to have dreams that were filled with promise and hope for his people. During this period, he intensified his almsgiving and dis-

tribution of food to the poor. He was frustrated by the abandonment of traditional values in the Quraysh tribe and was especially concerned about the treatment of the poor, widows, orphans and weaker members of the tribe by the wealthier members. He viewed the greed and rampant capitalism of the tribe to be a violation of God's laws and sought answers through intense prayer and devotion to Allah.

On the 17th of Ramadan, 610, in a cave on a mountain near Mecca, Muhammad met his God and began a process that would radically change his world.

? *Have the class summarize the most significant differences between the early years of Jesus and the early years of Muhammad?*

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Session Three

Jesus and Muhammad, the Ministry Years

For a quick summary of the events of Jesus' early ministry leading up to his final journey to Jerusalem, go to the following Scriptures:

The Baptism of Jesus: Matthew 3.13-17; Mark 1.9-11; Luke 3.21-22; John 1.29-34.

The temptation of Jesus, the beginning of the ministry in Galilee, and the call of the fishermen: Matthew 4.1-22; Mark 1.12-20; Luke 4.1-15, 5.1-11; John 4.43-46.

The marriage at Cana: John 2.1-11.

Jesus' preaching at Nazareth: Matthew 13.53-58; Mark 6.1-6; Luke 4.16-30.

The call of Levi: Matthew 9.9-13; Mark 2.13-17; Luke 5.27-32.

Healing the demoniac: Matthew 8.28-34; Mark 5.1-20; Luke 8.26-39.

Feeding the 5,000: Matthew 14.13-21;

Mark 6.32-44; Luke 9.10-17; John 6.1-15.

Peter's confession and Jesus' prediction of his Passion: Matthew 16.13-28; Mark 8.27-9.1; Luke 9.18-27

The Transfiguration: Matthew 17.1-13, Mark 9.2-13, Luke 9.28-36.

We normally think of Jesus' ministry beginning with his dramatic baptism by John with the miraculous voice of God from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!" Many Christians believe that Jesus was chosen by God in some special way at his baptism while others see this event as the formal launch of the ministry for which Jesus had been selected before he was ever born.

? *Do you believe Jesus was chosen by God in some way at his baptism, that Jesus existed from the beginning of time as part of God, or that God chose to become a human being through Mary?*

Muhammad Is Chosen

Muhammad's first encounter with God, however, was clearly a moment in which he was specifically chosen to become the Prophet, the special Messenger of God.

As was noted in the last session, when Muhammad was about 40 years old, he began to spend more and more time in spiritual solitude. He would go on day-long retreats to pray and worship Allah and he began to have dreams that were filled with promise and hope for his people. During this period, he intensified his almsgiving and distribution of food to the poor. He was frustrated by the abandonment of traditional values in the Quraysh tribe and was especially concerned about the treatment of the poor, widows, orphans and weaker members of the tribe by the wealthier members. He viewed the greed and rampant capitalism of the tribe to be a violation of God's laws and sought answers through intense prayer and devotion to Allah.

Then, on the 17th of Ramadan, 610, in a cave near the summit of Mount Hira just outside of Mecca, Muhammad fell into a trance during his devotional activity. While in the trance, the angel Gabriel came to him and ordered him to "recite!"

"I am not a reciter." He insisted. He thought the angel believed he was one of the kahins (soothsayers, medicine men) that he considered to be disreputable. But the angel squeezed him again and again until he felt like he was suffocating and then he responded, repeating these words, the first of the Quran to be given to him:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. Recite! In the Name of your Lord, Who has created.***
- 2. Has created man from a clot.***

3. Recite! And your Lord is the Most Generous.

4. Who has taught by the pen,

5. Has taught man that which he knew not,

6. Nay! Verily, man does transgress all bounds.

7. Because he considers himself self-sufficient.

8. Surely! Unto your Lord is the return.

9. Have you seen him who prevents,

10. A slave when he prays?

11. Tell me, if he is on the guidance?

12. Or enjoins piety?

13. Tell me if he denies, and turns away?

14. Knows he not that Allah does see?

15. Nay! If he ceases not, we will catch him by the forelock,

16. A lying, sinful forelock!

17. Then, let him call upon his council,

18. We will call the guards of Hell!

19. Nay! Do not obey him. Fall prostrate and draw near to Allah! (Quran 96.1-19)

This was the first of hundreds of trances and visions that Muhammad would have over the next twenty years and, in each one, Gabriel would place another portion of the Quran in his memory. Muhammad was illiterate as were most of the people of his era so he had to memorize each segment and then recite it to others who also memorized it until it could eventually be written down.

? The fact that Muhammad was illiterate is one of the key arguments of Muslims that the Quran is the actual words of God. How do you react to this?

Many have said that the Quran can only be fully appreciated in Arabic and when heard aloud. The Arabic poetry of the Quran, the material Muhammad was ordered to memorize and recite, is some of the most powerful writ-

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ing in the world. Even though it loses considerably in translation, in Arabic it is considered to be some of the most beautiful poetry ever and many have been converted to Islam simply through the power of the Quran's poetry.

Muhammad came out of the trance in a state of terror and revulsion. He thought that he had, against his will, become a kahin (soothsayer, medicine man) and had been possessed by a jinn (demon). It filled him with despair and thoughts of suicide. When he left the cave, he climbed to the summit of the mountain to throw himself to his death. But, at the top of the mountain, he had another vision of Gabriel:

When I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, "O Muhammad! You are the apostle of God and I am Gabriel." I raised my head towards heaven to see who was speaking, and I saw Gabriel in the form of a man with his feet astride the horizon. I stood gazing at him, moving neither backward nor forward; then I began to turn my face away from him, but no matter where I looked, I saw him as before. (Hadith: The Life of Muhammad by Ibn Ishaq)

After the angel disappeared, Muhammad realized he had encountered the total awesomeness of God. This angel was neither the cute girlish angels we encounter on Valentine's Day cards nor the beautiful trumpeting angels of our Christmas decorations. This was the kind of encounter that Christian mystics have called the "awesome mystery of God" and Jewish mystics have identified as the "terrifying otherness of God." It left Muhammad deathly afraid but feeling irresistibly compelled and guided by a powerful force wholly outside himself.

Unlike the Old Testament prophets who had similar encounters with God, Muhammad had

no established religion to help him interpret what had happened. He returned home and threw himself trembling into Khadija's arms. She held him for a long, long time, comforting him and easing his terrible fear. Virtually all of the writings about this time in Muhammad's life point to his great dependence on Khadija even though, at the time, the idea of a great man being emotionally dependent on a woman was in radical conflict with Arab culture. In addition to comforting him, Khadija became his spiritual counselor and assured him that he had not become a kahin and was not possessed by a jinn.

? *Given what you now know about Muhammad's experience, how do you feel about it? How does it compare to Biblical stories such as Isaiah's call to ministry, Jeremiah's call to ministry, Jesus' baptism, Abraham's encounter with God, Moses' encounter with God on Mt. Sinai, etc.?*

For further assurance that Muhammad's experience was genuine, they went to Khadija's cousin Waraqa, a Christian who was learned in the Scriptures, to hear his response. Waraqa cried out, "Holy, Holy!" He excitedly told them that if everything they had shared with him was true that he was positive that Muhammad had been visited by the same great expression of God that had come to Moses and that Muhammad was surely the Prophet of the Arab people.

Muhammad did not believe he had discovered something new. Instead, he believed that God had chosen him as a vessel, a prophet, a messenger, through whom God would gradually reveal Himself directly to the Arab people. Muhammad didn't believe he was forming a new world religion. He simply believed that he had been chosen to bring religious truth to

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the Arabs, to bring clarity to the religion that had always been there. He believed that Moses had been trusted with the truth for the Jews, Jesus had brought the truth to the Christians, and he had been selected to bring the truth to the Arabs. Muhammad believed it was all the same revelation of God unfolded at different times and in different places by different messengers.

? *Do you believe the revelations to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad are revelations from the same God? Why or why not? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they the same?*

? *Can God have delivered a different self revelation to different people in different generations? How do we know that the revelation of God in Christ is the best of these revelations?*

During the first few years, the revelations to the Arab people delivered through Muhammad are mostly warnings, encouraging the people to turn from idols to God, relating that there is a resurrection and judgment time when those who obey will be blessed and those who refuse will burn in the great fire. Note the warnings in the following:

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. O you enveloped in garments!*
- 2. Arise and warn!*
- 3. And magnify your Lord!*
- 4. And your garments purify!*
- 5. And keep away from idols!*
- 6. And give not a thing in order to have more.*
- 7. And be patient for the sake of your Lord!*
- 8. Then, when the Trumpet is sounded;*
- 9. Truly, that Day will be a Hard Day.*

- 10. Far from easy for the disbelievers.*
- 11. Leave Me alone with whom I created,*
- 12. And granted him resources in abundance,*
- 13. And children to be by his side,*
- 14. And made life smooth and comfortable for him!*
- 15. After all that he desires – that I should give more.*
- 16. Nay! Verily, he has been stubborn and opposing Our signs.*
- 17. I shall oblige him to face a severe torment!*
- 18. Verily, he thought and plotted;*
- 18. So let him be cursed! How he plotted!*
- 20. And once more let him be cursed, how he plotted! (Quran 74.1-20)*

For two years after his first revelation, Muhammad was quiet about his experience. The revelations continued to come but he confided only in Khadija and Waraqa. All three of them, however, became more and more convinced that the revelations were from God and, in 612, Muhammad felt empowered to preach the new ideas that God had given him. He gradually pulled together a small community of believers in Mecca. Muhammad's young cousin Ali who had grown up in Muhammad's household and who would eventually become one of the most important leaders of Islam was one of his first converts. Muhammad's good friend Abu Bakr and a young merchant Uthman ibn Affan, both of whom became important leaders after the death of Muhammad, were also early believers. Many of the first members of the Islamic community were from the poorer clans who were unhappy about the way they were being treated by the wealthier clans in Mecca.

Muhammad's preaching was simple. He emphasized the oneness of God and spoke against the multitude of pagan idols. He called people to live lives of reverence for God, tol-

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erance of others, and benevolence toward those in need. He preached against building personal fortunes and called people to share their wealth and create a society where the weak and vulnerable were treated with respect. He promised an afterlife in paradise for those who followed God's law and warned of horrible punishment on Judgment Day for those who abused God's law.

? *Do you see any differences between the way in which Jesus and Muhammad gathered their first followers together? Are there important differences in their preaching?*

Some of the revelations Muhammad received from Gabriel were for all of society, some were specifically for the Quraysh tribe and some were against individuals. Abu Lahab in the following passage was an uncle of the Prophet who opposed the new Islamic community. The phrase, "carries wood" was an Arabic jargon phrase for "slanders."

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. Perish the two hands of Abu Lahab, and perish he!*
- 2. His wealth and his children will not benefit him!*
- 3. He will be burnt in a Fire of blazing flames!*
- 4. And his wife too, who carries wood,*
- 5. In her neck is a twisted rope. (Quran 111.1-5)*

During this early period of Muhammad's ministry, many of the poems of the Quran have much the same quality as the Psalms of the Old Testament. Even though some were severe warnings against apostasy, many were filled with joy and excitement about the meaningful

life available through the worship of Allah. Note the upbeat tone of this one.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. By the forenoon,*
- 2. And by the night when it is still;*
- 3. Your Lord has neither forsaken you nor hated you.*
- 4. And indeed the Hereafter is better for you than the present.*
- 5. And verily, your Lord will give you all so that you shall be well-pleased.*
- 6. Did He not find you an orphan and gave you a refuge?*
- 7. And He found you unaware and guided you?*
- 8. And He found you poor, and made you rich?*
- 9. Therefore, treat not the orphan with oppression,*
- 10. And repulse not the beggar;*
- 11. And proclaim the Grace of your Lord. (Quran 93.1-11)*

Even though later suras of the Quran are more harsh about the Quraysh tribe, in the beginning the revelations were very positive toward the tribe and Muhammad was convinced that he had been called as a Messenger specifically to the Quraysh. Note the positive tone of this Sura:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. It is a great Grace and Protection from Allah for the taming of the Quraysh,*
- 2. Allah causes the Quraysh caravans to set forth safe in winter and in summer,*
- 3. So let them worship Allah the Lord of the Kaaba,*
- 4. Who has fed them against hunger and made them safe from fear. (Quran 106.1-4)*

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After about five years, the new community (called “Islam” meaning “surrender”) gathering around Muhammad had grown enough that it began to threaten the power structure of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca. Muhammad’s followers accepted the call to submit their entire being to Allah and His demand that human beings behave to one another with justice, equity, and compassion. They practiced ritual prayer three times a day (later changed to five times a day) that included submissive prostrations to symbolize that they were laying aside their pride and selfishness in obedience to God. The action was abhorrent to the proud and independent Arabs of the Seventh Century who refused to prostrate themselves even before the rulers of their time. The Muslims were also required to give a significant portion of their income to the poor in alms and to fast during the entire month of Ramadan to remind themselves of the priva-

tions of the poor. Social justice was the dominant theme of the new Islamic community and it threatened the rampant capitalism of the Quraysh tribal leaders.

The teachings of both Jesus and Muhammad soon came into conflict with the established power structures of their times. The next session covers the radically different ways in which the two most important religious leaders in history responded to the hostility that developed toward them.

? *Have the class summarize what they now know about the ministries of Jesus and Muhammad. How did they compare? How were they different?*

? *Why do you think that Jesus and Muhammad, judged by many historians to be the two most important persons in human history, had such an impact on the world?*

Session Four

Jesus and Muhammad, The Conflicts

For a quick summary of the events of Jesus' conflict with authorities and his final Passion, go to the following Scriptures:

The death of John the Baptist: Matthew 14.3-12; Mark 6.17-29.

Jesus' predictions of his Passion: Matthew 16.21-23, 17.22-23, 20.17-19; Mark 8.31-33, 9.30-32, 10.32-34; Luke 9.22, 9.43-45, 18.31-34; John 6.67-71.

Jesus' preaching against the Scribes, Pharisees, and Herod: Matthew 15.1-9, 23.1-39; Mark 7.1-7; Luke 11.37-54, 13.31-33, John 10.31-38.

Jesus hiding from Jewish authorities: John 7.10-13, 10.39-42, 11.54-57.

Jewish authorities plotting against Jesus: Matthew 26.3-5; Mark 11.18, 14.1-2; Luke 19.47-48, 22.1-2; John 11.45-53.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem

and the cleansing of the Temple area: Matthew 21.1-17; Mark 11.1-19; Luke 19.28-48.

Jesus' Passion: Matthew 26.1-28.20; Mark 14.1-16.8; Luke 22.1-24.53; John 13.1-38, 18.1-21.25.

Jesus' conflict with the established authorities in Palestine led to his arrest by Temple police and Roman soldiers, his trial and conviction by the high priests and Sanhedrin, his execution by the Roman government, and his ultimate resurrection. Jesus' response to hostility was to avoid it as long as possible and then to submit passively so that God could turn the entire situation from horrible defeat to glorious victory.

? *What are some of the common reactions to change that you have witnessed in your community, church or family? What would your reaction be if someone came to your church and said that most of what you do*

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in worship is all wrong and needs to be radically changed?

? *Do you understand the focus of Jesus' hostilities to be the Roman government of occupied Palestine, the Jewish religious authorities, or the Jewish aristocracy?*

? *What about Jesus or his teachings stirred up the establishment enough to want him killed?*

? *Who do you believe was responsible for the death of Jesus?*

Muhammad's Response to Conflict

Muhammad's response to hostility was very different from Jesus' response. Living in the middle of one of the world's most violent societies, Muhammad responded to violence with violence, believing that his cause was just and righteous.

In Mecca, Muhammad's emphasis on rigid monotheism, building an egalitarian society, the Last Judgment, and a unified society soon brought him into serious conflict with the authorities of the Quraysh tribe that controlled the city.

Monotheism. The first thing that threatened the Quraysh tribe was Muhammad's radical monotheism. When Muhammad demanded that the people of Mecca worship Allah alone and abandon the worship of other gods, he was asking them to adopt an entirely new religious attitude that many of his fellow tribesmen were not ready to accept. Accepting monotheism was more than an intellectual change. The commitment to the tribal gods was deeply ensconced in the psyche of every individual and it linked them to the sacred traditions of their ancestors. Many believed that the very survival of their society depended on perpetu-

ating the faith of their ancestors even when they believed their religion to be inferior to that of the Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews they encountered in their business dealings.

The concept that there was only one God was an innovation in a world that was suspicious of anything new, of anything that severed them from their historic traditions. Even Muhammad was greatly offended when he was accused of being an innovator because the attachment to tradition was so strong. Muhammad strongly believed that the Quran was merely "putting them back on the straight path" from which they had wandered over the years. However, telling the Quraysh tribe that their historic gods weren't as powerful or important as Allah was acceptable but telling them that their minor gods didn't exist was a threat to everything in which they believed.

Finally, it is important to understand that the Kaaba in Mecca was the most important religious shrine in Arabia and it attracted thousands of pilgrims every year. It was dedicated to the "High God" Allah but was also surrounded by statues of 360 gods each dedicated to a different Arabian tribe. When pilgrims came to Mecca to see and circumambulate the Kaaba, they also visited the shops, restaurants, inns, and taverns of Meccan merchants.

Egalitarian Society. The second part of Muhammad's message that troubled the Quraysh was his emphasis on an egalitarian society. Modern scholars argue as to whether Muhammad was a socialist just as they do about Jesus. Muhammad never condemned capitalism itself, but he frequently attacked its abuses. He never discouraged the acquisition of personal wealth, but he demanded that most of it be distributed to others. He never advocated a radical "selling everything and giving the money to the poor," as Jesus did, but he demanded a significant portion of everyone's

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income be given to those in need. Almsgiving was established as one of the pillars of Islamic life very early and it certainly threatened the rabid capitalism that had developed in Mecca. Muhammad preached that all people had a responsibility to look after orphans, widows, the handicapped and the poor and that ostentatious wealth was a sin. Living frugally was an important sign of being a dedicated Muslim and benevolent treatment of all people at all levels of society was a hallmark of an Islamic “just society.”

Muhammad himself always lived a simple and frugal life, even when he became the most powerful leader in Arabia. He hated luxury, ate modestly, never had more than one set of clothes, and refused to wear anything except the coarse clothing of the common people. When he received booty or gifts from tribal leaders, he gave it away to the poor and he preached, like Jesus, that the poor would enter the kingdom of heaven before the rich. The earliest converts to Islam were from the poorer classes in Arab society and, throughout history, the faith has been more attractive to the “common people” than to the aristocracy. Muhammad argued that a decent society that was obedient to God’s will would always cultivate an egalitarian way of life and this was especially threatening to the rich and powerful of Mecca.

Last Judgment. The third focus of Muhammad’s preaching that angered the upper classes of the Quraysh was his emphasis on the Last Judgment. He emphasized that individual responsibility and piety would be rewarded and selfishness, greed, and abuse of others would ultimately be punished by Allah. He warned that on Judgment Day, the wealth and power of the Quraysh would be of no value because each individual would be judged on his or her own merits. Persons would be

asked on the Last Day whether or not they had used their wealth to live ostentatiously or whether they had used it to help the disadvantaged. The idea that there would be a general resurrection some day was abhorrent to the Quraysh tribal leaders who believed that there was nothing beyond death and that the only way to happiness was through the acquisition of as much wealth and power as possible during this lifetime.

Islamic Unity. A fourth area of concern for the Quraysh tribal leaders was that Muhammad preached about the unity of the Islamic community as being more important than tribal or clan or even family unity. With similarities to the preaching of Jesus, Muhammad called for loyalty to God, to himself, and to the community of believers to supersede all other loyalties. For centuries, the tribal structures of Arabia had been the sole source of authority, power, and government. Loyalty, obedience, and civil protection within the tribes was absolute but there was total lawlessness in dealing with persons from other tribes. Constant warfare, vendettas, and raids on other tribes was so much a way of life that the concept of brotherhood extending beyond tribal boundaries was unheard of. The levels of trust of persons and institutions in other tribes was so low that any attempt to unite them was intensely resisted.

? *What about Muhammad’s preaching do you think most threatened the power structure of Mecca?*

? *Do you believe that Jesus and Muhammad were socialists? What do you think each would feel about modern society?*

? *Christians also believe in a Judgment Day but with the exception of the most conservative churches, it is not emphasized much. Why do you think this is so?*

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During what many call “The Second Meccan Period” – when hostility was building against Muhammad and the Islamic community – the Quranic revelations became longer with more discussion, more doctrine and some Biblical material about Noah, Mary, Joseph, and Abraham. The suras from this period place more emphasis on the miraculous and sacred nature of the Quran and on the importance of the Islamic community. Note the implications about who is “in” and who is “out” as well as the references to the Old Testament characters of Adam and Noah in this sura from the last years in Mecca:

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. Successful indeed are the believers.*
- 2. Those who offer their prayers with all solemnity and full submissiveness.*
- 3. And those who turn away from all that Allah has forbidden.*
- 4. And those who give the required alms.*
- 5. And those who guard their chastity*
- 6. Except from their wives or the slaves that their right hands possess, for then they are free from blame;*
- 7. But whoever seeks beyond that, then those are the transgressors;*
- 8. Those who are faithfully true to their trusts and to their covenants;*
- 9. And those who strictly do their prayers*
- 10. These are indeed the inheritors.*
- 11. Who shall inherit Paradise. They shall dwell therein forever.*
- 12. And indeed We created Adam out of an extract of clay.*
- 13. Thereafter We made him as the offspring of Adam...*
- 15. After that, surely, you will die.*
- 16. Then, surely, you will be resurrected on the Day of Resurrection.*

17. And indeed We have created above you seven heavens, and We are never unaware of the creation...

23. And indeed We sent Noah to his people, and he said: “O my people! Worship Allah! You have no other God but Him. Will you not then be afraid of Him?” (Quran 23.1-13, 15-17, 23)

As the Meccan opposition grew, they first went in a deputation to Muhammad’s uncle Abu Talib to lay their complaints before him. They accused Muhammad of cursing their gods, insulting their ancient religion, mocking their way of life, being a charlatan, accusing their forefathers of errors, and preaching fairy tales about eternal life and heaven. They complained that Muhammad’s attack on the minor gods of the Kaaba was damaging their economic interests. They asked Abu Talib to either stop Muhammad from preaching or to stand aside and allow them to attack him. Abu Talib refused and, as head of the respected Hashim clan, his commitment to Muhammad provided protection from other members of the Quraysh tribe.

Then, the opposition leaders offered Muhammad inducements of wealth, power and prestige to turn from his preaching but Muhammad refused. Then, when they demanded that he show them miracles to prove the truth of his message, Muhammad told them, “My Lord is exalted but I am only a mortal, a messenger.”

When nothing else worked, the tribal leaders imposed a boycott on the Muslim group of about 70 families. No member of the Quraysh was allowed to marry or trade with them and no one was allowed to sell or give them food. The boycott lasted two years during which Muhammad’s beloved wife, Khadija, died and many of the families were ruined financially.

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Some slaves that had converted to Islam were tied up and left to burn in the sun.

Even though this was a dark period for Muhammad and the new Islamic community, in the midst of the worst turmoil, the Prophet had his greatest mystical experience. One night, after reciting the Quran at the Kaaba, Muhammad went to sleep in a nearby portico where he was visited by Gabriel. The Prophet was lifted on a heavenly steed called Buruq and flown miraculously through the night to Jerusalem. This "Night Journey" is mentioned in the first verse of Sura 17:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

1. Glorified and exalted is Allah above all evil who took Muhammad for a journey by night from the mosque at Mecca to the farthest mosque in Jerusalem, the neighborhood whereof We have blessed, in order that We might show him of Our signs. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer! (Quran 17.1)

From Jerusalem, Muhammad climbed through the seven heavens to the Throne of God. In the First Heaven, he met with Adam. Then he met with Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses and Abraham in the remaining six heavens until he came face to face with Allah.

The ban on the Islamic community was finally lifted by the leaders of the Quraysh. However, shortly after, Muhammad's uncle and protector, Abu Talib, died and Muhammad's hostile uncle, Abu Lahab, became the new chief of the Hashim clan. (See the Sura against Abu Lahab in Session Three). Muhammad was an orphan with no family to avenge attacks on him. Under tribal law, the only protection against being attacked was the certainty of a vendetta by the victim's family or protector. Both Muhammad and his small

congregation of followers were in imminent danger.

? *When Jesus encountered conflict, his followers mostly abandoned him in fear of reprisals against themselves but when Muhammad encountered conflict, his followers stood solidly with him. What do you think caused this difference?*

? *Discuss the situation of a group of approximately 70 people in the midst of several thousand people whose leaders are hostile to you and in a society in which there are no legal protections, no police forces, no courts, and no military other than those controlled by the leaders of the majority.*

The Hijra (Immigration)

Given the sense of crises within the small Islamic community at this time, it is not surprising that Muhammad responded with interest to a delegation of tribal chiefs from Yathrib that came to visit him during the Hajj of 620. Yathrib (later renamed "Medina" which means "The Prophet's City") was a small agricultural community approximately 250 miles north of Mecca. A few tribes – some Jewish tribes but mostly Arab tribes – had abandoned the nomadic way of life and settled in the town. Because of their feuding past, the tribes were having trouble living in peace in the close quarters of an urban community. They had heard of Muhammad and his new Islamic ethic and thought he could help them learn to live together as a single community.

The chiefs in the delegation were already familiar with the concept of monotheism because three of the larger tribes of Yathrib were Jews. The next year, the chiefs converted to Islam after meeting again with Muhammad

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and, as part of their conversion, they pledged they would not fight with other Muslims and would defend all Muslims from common enemies. In 622, after an assassination attempt on Muhammad by the Meccan leaders, the entire Muslim community of Mecca decided to move to Yathrib.

At this same time, Muhammad had been longing for a female presence in his life since the death of Khadija and he needed someone to run his household. So, he married the 30 year old widow, Sawdah, from the Amir clan. Then, Alisha, the six year old daughter of Muhammad's closest friend Abu Bakr, was formally betrothed to Muhammad.

The move to Medina, called the Hijra which means "The Immigration," was a historic event of such import that it is considered by Muslims to be the beginning of the true Islamic society. The year of the Hijra, 622, is Year One of the Islamic calendar. It was an unprecedented move. The Muslims of Mecca were not just moving to another town, they were leaving the Quraysh, the tribe of their ancestors, and moving to become part of a new tribe. The sacred bonds of blood that were the basis for all Arabian societal structure had been severed. The pledge of the tribal leaders of Medina to protect and aid the Muslims and the promise of the Muslims to protect the people of Medina was a radical departure from Arab custom.

In Medina, unity came slowly. Muhammad's first task was to build a mosque, a rough building that expressed the austerity of the Islamic ideal. It had a stone that showed worshippers the direction to Jerusalem to which they faced while reciting their prayers and a pulpit from which Muhammad recited the Quran and preached. In addition, the mosque had a courtyard where the people met to discuss all of the issues of importance to the community: reli-

gious, military, sexual, economic, social, etc. Muhammad and his wives lived in small buildings on the edge of the courtyard.

There were four distinct groups in Medina that had to relate to one another: the immigrants from Mecca, the Arabs of Medina that had converted to Islam, the Arabs of Medina that remained pagan, and the Jews. Muhammad's task was to arbitrate disputes and bring some semblance of stability to the town. He negotiated a series of pacts that formed everyone into a single "Ummah" or community. The pagans and Jews were allowed to retain their own faith but the entire town was declared to be a sacred enclave. In effect, Muhammad created a "super tribe" made up of a variety of people held together in a single society – something totally unheard of in Arab culture before. Ultimately, everyone agreed to submit all disputes to Allah and His Prophet and Muhammad assumed the role of chieftain of the entire community.

During this period, the revelations from God continued but took on a new tone. Muhammad was now a prince as well as a preacher and Islam was now a political force as well as a faith. The new revelations called Muslims to fight to protect themselves against those who wronged them and treated them badly. The Muslims were urged to stand against unbelievers (those who did not believe in the one God of the Muslims, Christians, and Jews) and against hypocrites (those who pretended to be believers but whose actions showed them to be the opposite). This meant Holy War with outside forces such as the Quraysh that wanted to destroy the new community and internal forces in Medina that were trying to sabotage the new movement.

? *Westerners have often been critical of Muhammad for being more of a political leader than a religious leader, for having*

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multiple wives, and for using military force against those who threatened the Islamic community. How do you feel about these issues?

? *What examples in Christianity do we have of political leaders that have been deeply religious. In what ways did the religion of these persons guide their actions as political leaders?*

One of Muhammad's greatest disappointments in Medina was that the Jews who responded warmly to him at first eventually turned against him. He was convinced that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam could live together in peace as brothers because they all worshipped the same God and were all "People of the Book." The Jews, however, were unable to accept him as a true prophet and as he solidified the Arabs into a single community the Jews felt threatened. In 624, as hostility from the Jews increased, Muhammad had the people in the Muslim congregation begin facing Mecca instead of Jerusalem during their prayers.

As the Muslim community in Medina expanded, they quickly outgrew the agricultural resources of the area and they decided to turn to ghazu (raids) that were a common means of support for many Arabian tribes. They began attacking caravans of other clans for booty and livestock. They were explicitly forbidden to attack caravans of either the members of the Islamic community or of the small number of tribes and clans that had begun to align themselves with them. In addition, they tried to avoid physically harming any of the people from whom they took booty so as not to set off vendettas. The caravans of the wealthy Quraysh tribe of Mecca became their most common target and, for a while, they had some success. Then, in 624, when

Muhammad was leading a raid against a large Meccan caravan, the Meccans dispatched a large army to drive the raiders back. The Muslims were vastly outnumbered but, through the military expertise of Muhammad, they defeated the Quraysh army.

This victory got the attention of many smaller tribes that began to see the Muslim community as an important force in Arabia. But, it also galvanized the large Meccan Quraysh tribe who launched a ceaseless war against the Muslims with the express purpose of exterminating them. For three years, the Muslims were severely damaged in a series of major battles but, in 627, a Muslim army of roughly 3,000 soldiers defended their city from an attack by a 10,000-man army of the Quraysh and their new allies, the Jewish Qurayzah tribe of Medina. The Muslims under Muhammad's leadership had built a trench around Medina as a fortification against the Meccan cavalry so this battle is remembered as the Battle of the Trench. Again, because of the military prowess of Muhammad, the Meccan army was routed even though they outnumbered the Muslims three to one.

The Muslims felt especially betrayed by their Medinan neighbors, the Jewish Qurayzah tribe, that had sided with the Meccans against them and after the battle victory they killed all 700 of the Jewish men and sold their wives and children into slavery. Although this was a decidedly harsh act even by Seventh Century Arabian standards, it was understood as an action against traitors, not against Jews. Jews continued to live in Medina and, until modern times, anti-Jewish and anti-Christian hatred was largely non-existent in the Muslim world. There are certainly anti-Jewish passages in the Quran but they were specifically aimed at the three Jewish tribes of Medina that turned against the Muslims, not against Jews in general.

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Because the Quran teaches that war is so terrible that Muslims must do everything possible to bring hostilities quickly to a peaceful end, Muhammad used their victory at the Battle of the Trench as the beginning of a peace offensive. In 628, Muhammad announced that he was going to make the Hajj to Mecca and asked for volunteers to accompany him. Even though pilgrims on the Hajj were forbidden to carry weapons and would be traveling into the center of the Quraysh tribal power, more than a thousand Muslims joined him. As the Muslims approached the city, their peaceful demonstration pressured the Quraysh to sign a peace treaty with them and the event was a major turning point for the Islamic community. Soon, a growing multitude of Arab tribes aligned themselves with the Muslims in Mecca. Many of these alignments were purely political and military in nature but they also resulted in thousands of legitimate converts to Islam.

In 630, the Quraysh violated the peace treaty by attacking one of the small tribes aligned with the Muslims and Muhammad led an army of more than 10,000 men to the gates of Mecca. Faced with this show of overwhelming force the Quraysh surrendered the city without a drop of blood being shed. Muhammad's Muslims entered the city, destroyed all the pagan idols around the Kaaba, turned the Hajj into a purely Islamic pilgrimage dedicated to Allah, and enlisted the members of the Quraysh into the Muslim alliance. Like others that allied themselves with the Muslims, the

Quraysh were not required to become Muslims but, eventually, most of them did.

In 632, Muhammad died peacefully in the arms of his favorite wife Alisha, just ten years after the immigration to Medina. Virtually all of the tribes of Arabia had joined the Muslim community and submitted to Islamic law either as allies or as converts to Islam. The bloody cycle of warfare that had plagued Arabia for centuries was stopped and the Islamic community was on its way to becoming the largest empire under one government in the history of the world.

? *In the group, discuss the concept of "cultural religion" in which people join a particular religion because of cultural pressures. Does this happen in Christianity as well as Islam? What kinds of pressures can push a person to become a Muslim or a Christian in the modern world?*

? *How do you feel about military resistance being a formal part of religion?*

? *Why do you think the Islamic community spread so fast under Muhammad's leadership?*

NEXT SESSION..

In preparation for the next session, encourage the group to read Chapter Five: Apostles and Caliphs in their student books and the following material from the Acts of the Apostles before the next session: Acts 1.6-8, 2.1-47, 4.32-37, 6.1-7, 8.1-40, 9.1-31, 10.1-48, 13.1-5, and 15.1-41.

Session Five

Apostles and Caliphs

For a quick summary of the events of the early expansion of Christianity, review the Acts of the Apostles with particular attention to the following:

The promise of the Holy Spirit: Acts 1.6-8.

The coming of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2.1-47.

The organization of the Jerusalem Church: Acts 4.32-37, 6.1-7.

The persecution of the Jerusalem Church: Acts 8.1-8.

The outreach of Peter and John to the Samaritans: Acts 8.9-25.

The outreach of Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch: Acts 8.26-40.

Paul's conversion: Acts 9.1-31.

The outreach of Peter to the Gentiles in Caesarea: Acts 10.1-48.

Paul, Barnabas and Mark commissioned as missionaries: Acts 13.1-5.

The Council of Jerusalem: Acts 15.1-35.

Paul and Silas leave on one missionary journey while Barnabas and Mark leave on another: Acts 15.36-41.

When Jesus died, he had only a small number of dedicated followers and they were in despair over his disastrous arrest, trial, conviction and execution. But, soon, they were encouraged by his resurrection and empowered by the Holy Spirit. With renewed energy, the fledgling community of believers was resurrected and they literally set out in all directions preaching the Good News about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The missionary enterprise was successful and, by the end of the first century, there were small Christian churches in virtually every city of the Roman Empire.

In the beginning, this early Christian com-

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munity had no Scriptures other than the Old Testament, no form of worship other than that of the Jewish Synagogue, no structure other than the Apostles in the Jerusalem mother church, and no doctrine except the remembered teachings of Jesus. It took three centuries for all of these things to come together so that Christianity could be adopted by Emperor Constantine as the established religion of the Roman Empire. From then on, Christianity continued to expand until, today, it is the largest of the world's religions.

? *Why do you think it took three centuries for Christianity to become the established religion of the Roman Empire but took only about 50 years for Islam to expand the same amount?*

? *Some historians have argued that the story of Jesus' resurrection was the primary reasons for the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire. How do you feel about this?*

In contrast, when Muhammad died, the Islamic community already encompassed all of the Arabian peninsula and some areas beyond it. They already had the complete Quran, a set pattern of worship practices, and many people who had been close to the Prophet and had been a part of virtually all decisions made during the last decade when the Islamic community took shape.

They had only one real problem and it turned out to be a very serious one. They had not decided in advance on how to choose someone to continue in Muhammad's leadership position. They were confident that they had the actual words of God in the Quran and that, because they believed Muhammad had been the perfect follower of Allah, they had a pattern for everything else in the record of his

life and rulings on various issues.

Some members of the community believed that each tribe should elect its own religious and political leader but those closest to Muhammad, especially Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab argued that the whole Muslim community should remain together under one leader as it had while Muhammad was alive. This thinking prevailed but there was considerable division over the issue of whether the community should select the person best qualified regardless of his prior relationship to Muhammad or whether the new Caliph should be one of Muhammad's blood relatives. The tradition of blood ties in Arabia was strong and many believed that Muhammad's young cousin Ali, who had grown up in Muhammad's household, had inherited something of the Prophet's special qualities.

? *In what ways do you think that either Jesus or Muhammad prepared their followers to continue after their deaths?*

Abu Bakr

To Westerners accustomed to the rigid separation of church and state, the elections of the early Caliphs appear to be more secular than sacred. But, in fact, the most important qualities that the leaders were looking for were religious qualities: rigid piety with regard to the religious duties, knowledge of the Quran, understanding of Muhammad's views on issues, and a simple lifestyle that embodied the Islamic ethic. The first Caliphs were more like the Apostles of Jesus than like Middle Eastern potentates. Still, however, they were leaders over a vast, rapidly growing empire and their leadership included sacred and secular, economic and military. They were, at the same time, priests, theologians, preachers, generals, politicians, judges, and emperors.

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In the first election after the death of Muhammad, the Islamic leaders elected his closest associate, Abu Bakr, to be the first Caliph. Abu Bakr was chosen over Muhammad's cousin Ali because Ali was believed to be too young and inexperienced even though his piety and religious knowledge was without question. However, the factions that believed the leadership should have stayed in the hands of a blood relative of the Prophet remained unhappy.

Abu Bakr reigned for only two years (632-634) but it was a critical time in the transition from the charismatic and unquestioned leadership of Muhammad to that of elected leaders. His primary challenge was to keep the Islamic community together. A few of the tribes that had aligned themselves with the Muslims wanted to break away. They had little interest in Islam and had originally joined the alliance for political and security reasons. They believed that their pacts had been with Muhammad as an individual rather than with the Islamic community and some were already uncomfortable with the new peacefulness that had spread across Arabia. Some longed for the "manly" days of raiding parties and vendettas. Furthermore, with Muhammad gone, they chaffed at having to pay the alms that Abu Bakr continued to collect and which they understood as a tax to support the central government.

Islam, however, had impacted even these tribes so much that they chose to add a religious dimension to their break from the majority community. Most of the breakaway chiefs identified themselves as Prophets, like Muhammad had been, producing Quranic-type revelations and emphasizing that they were Islamic even though they no longer wanted to be a part of the larger community. What had happened in Arabia under the brief ten-year

rule of Muhammad was so life-changing that things would never again be the same.

Abu Bakr decided that these breakaway tribes had to be brought back into the fold or the overriding concept of Islamic unity would be destroyed. The breakaway acts were called apostasy and the hostilities that followed are known in Islamic history as The Apostasy Wars. These wars were not bloodless but they were also far from being bloodbaths. Abu Bakr acted swiftly, decisively, and benevolently. First, he brought together a large force and moved on the smaller breakaway tribes that surrendered without much conflict and joined the larger force. Then, they moved on the larger outlying groups in Yemen, Oman, and Iraq. In most cases, all that was necessary was for the Islamic community to take a bold stand to maintain unity and the breakaway groups came back into the fold. There were no reprisals against the breakaway groups once they came back and tribunals were set up to listen to their grievances.

? *How do you feel about the way in which Abu Bakr reunited the Muslims after Muhammad's death?*

? *How do you think this period of Islam under the leadership of Abu Bakr compares to the early years of Christianity as the established religion of the Roman Empire?*

In two years, Abu Bakr had reunited the Arab peninsula and, again, brought peace to the Arab world. However, an important change took place during these two years that would impact the future of Islam. For all practical purposes, Arabia became a nation state for the first time in its history with all of its peoples united under one central government. Also, even though Arabia had a long military histo-

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ry, it had been mostly a history of raiding parties from individual tribes. During the two years of Abu Bakr's reign, the Apostasy Wars turned dozens of tribal forces into a large standing army under central authority and this would have a tremendous impact on the future of Islamic expansion over the next several years.

On his deathbed, Abu Bakr selected another of Muhammad's closest allies, Umar ibn al-Khattab, to be the Second Caliph.

? *Clearly, the first four Caliphs in Islam parallel the Apostles in Christianity in that they were the primary vehicles for expanding the new religion and establishing its structure. What are the primary similarities and differences in the way in which they approached this?*

Umar ibn al-Khattab

The leaders of Islam quickly endorsed Abu Bakr's choice of Umar to succeed him. Umar ruled for ten years (634-644) and presided over the one of the fastest and largest expansions of an empire in world history. At the death of Abu Bakr, Islam was a united community in Arabia and pushing against the borders of the Christian Byzantine Empire in the north and the Sasanian Persian Empire in the East.

The first thrust of Umar's reign was against the Byzantine areas of Palestine and Syria where many Arab-speaking people lived. Methodically, one village after another was brought under the authority of the Islamic community until the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius assembled a massive army in Turkey and marched against the Muslims in Syria. However, the Byzantine forces were decimated by the Muslim armies in the Yarmuk Valley east of the Sea of Galilee in 636. Shortly thereafter, the Islamic army conquered the rest of

Syria and Palestine, northern Iraq, Armenia, Eastern Turkey, and Egypt.

At the same time, the Sasanian armies attacked the Muslims in the East. In a decisive battle at Kadisiya in southern Iraq, the Sasanians were decisively broken and soon, the Muslims occupied all of what is now Iraq, half of what is now Iran and parts of the northern areas that are now Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In just a few years, the Islamic Empire had expanded from Western Egypt to Eastern Iran and from Yemen to Armenia.

Under Umar's leadership, the Muslims continued to develop as a religious movement even though the military advances are the most obvious activities of the period. Like Abu Bakr, Umar was a deeply religious man who was priest, preacher and theologian as well as general and emperor. As the Muslims grew more and more religious, their wars of conquest took on the quality of jihad or militant struggle to combat evil and spread Muhammad's message of monotheism and righteousness far and wide.

While pagans in the conquered lands were frequently coerced into becoming Muslims, the Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were allowed to continue their religious beliefs and practices because they were already monotheistic "Peoples of the Book." A system of jizyah (poll tax) was established through which the dhimmis (Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Sikhs) paid for military protection and recognized the sovereignty of Islam while being allowed to practice their own religions and govern their own communities.

In most cases, these religious minorities found substantially greater tolerance under the Muslims than they had under either the Christian Byzantines or the Sasanian Persians. In fact, under Umar's leadership, the Muslims

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that moved into new areas were not allowed to move into the conquered cities. Instead, the Muslims built new “garrison towns” with mosques and housing for the Islamic soldiers. Life in these garrisons towns was decidedly religious, frugal, and puritan. For the most part, even though Islam had now expanded into non-Arab areas of the Middle East, it was still essentially an Arab religion.

In November, 644, Umar was stabbed in the mosque in Medina by a Persian prisoner-of-war. The leadership of Islam elected Uthman ibn Affan, another close associate of Muhammad's, to be the third Caliph.

? *While Abu Bakr's military operations were aimed at holding the existing Muslim community together, Umar's were clearly aimed at expanding the Islamic territory. Are there significant differences between these two approaches?*

? *Umar's establishment of the poll tax for non-Muslims which allowed them to continue their religious practices was considered a highly benevolent act in the Seventh Century. How do you feel about this procedure? Is it different from modern families that have children in religious schools having to pay taxes to support public schools?*

? *When Roman armies conquered the northern European tribes, they required them to become Christian but when the Muslims conquered the Christians and Persians, they allowed them to live alone in their communities but required them to pay a tax. Is one or the other of these procedures more benevolent?*

Uthman ibn Affan

Uthman's reign (644-656) was more tumultuous

than the reigns of either Abu Bakr or Umar. During the first six years, the expansion of the Islamic Empire continued much as it had under Umar. Most of the expansion was in the East where the Sasanian Empire virtually ceased to exist under the onslaught of the Islamic invasions. The Islamic lands expanded East into what is currently Afghanistan, Pakistan and India and northeast into the Central Asian Republics and Russia. In the northwest, there was little movement by either the Muslims or the Byzantine Christians but Islam spread across most of North Africa.

However, Uthman was not as well liked as Abu Bakr and Umar and dissension arose in the Islamic Community. Some of the dissension was political, some of it was due to changing ideas within the Islamic Community, and some of it was because Uthman was simply a weaker character than his predecessors. Uthman began to act more and more like a traditional Eastern potentate by appointing members of his own clan, the Umayyads, to most of the important government posts. Gradually, the malcontents looked more and more to Muhammad's cousin, Ali ibn Talib, who many believed should have been the First Caliph after Muhammad's death.

In 656, a group of Arab soldiers returning to Medina stirred up an uprising, killed Uthman, and installed Ali as the Fourth Caliph. Even though the reign of Ali was only five years long, it was one of the most tumultuous periods in Islamic history with civil wars, splinter groups, and the split between Sunni and Shiite Muslims that continues to be a hostile separation to this day.

? *In preparation for the next session, reflect on the divisions within Christianity. How many different denominations do you think there are? How good are the relationships between*

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the most conservative and the most liberal? How hostile were the original schisms that divided the church between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism and between Protestants and Roman Catholicism?

? *Why are people in peaceful religions*

such as Christianity and Islam so quick to go to war with other members of their own faith?

? *What events or conditions could bring about a united Christianity or a united Islam in the world and what would be the impact of such unity?*

Session Six

Schisms and Denominations

Most Christians are somewhat familiar with the three major divisions of Christianity – Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism – but few are aware of the details of these separations or how hostile the separations were. Any good world history text or history of Christianity text will provide plenty of material about the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy in the Eleventh Century and the Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century. Another good source is www.Wikipedia.org, a free on-line encyclopedia site. Simply go there and search for the “Great Schism” and the “Protestant Reformation.”

In the modern world, we tend to think of most Christian denominations (with the exception of a few radical fundamentalists) as being reasonably tolerant of one another. However, this was not always true. In fact, both the Great Schism of the Eleventh Century and the Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth

Century resulted in considerable violence spread over several decades.

Even though Islam has not splintered into as many denominations as Christianity over the centuries, the divisions have been even more hostile. The first and most severe splintering was the division between the Sunni and Shiite Muslims that literally began on the day of Muhammad's death and resulted in civil war just 25 years later.

Sunnis and Shiites

When the handful of Islamic leaders gathered to elect a successor to Muhammad, some believed that the new Caliph should be a blood relative of the Prophet because they believed some of the special “holiness” qualities of Muhammad could be passed on through another member of his family. Muhammad had no surviving sons so the logical choice of those who wanted a blood relative was Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's cousin who had grown up in the Prophet's household virtually as one of

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his children.

But the majority voted for Abu Bakr, largely because of Ali's youth and inexperience, and even though Abu Bakr and his successor Umar were revered for their faithful leadership, a minority continued to believe that they were not legitimate Caliphs because they were not related to Muhammad. The third Caliph, Uthman, however, was a weaker leader, less frugal in his lifestyle, and less effective in his religious leadership. So, during his reign, the numbers of those who believed he was not a legitimate Caliph grew substantially. These malcontents, called Shiites (Party of Ali), gradually became more and more vocal believing that Ali had been unfairly passed over for the position of Caliph three times. Finally, in 656, a group of Shiite soldiers mutinied, assassinated Uthman, and established Ali as the fourth Caliph.

Almost immediately, civil war broke out between the Sunnis, who made up the Islamic majority, and the Shiites, who had put Ali in power. Islam was deeply divided between those who supported Ali and those who had been loyal to Uthman, especially the powerful Umayyad tribe from which Uthman had come. Muhammad's favorite wife Aisha joined forces with Talhah and Zubayr to lead an attack on Ali for the professed reason that he had not punished Uthman's murders. Even though Ali personally revered Uthman and was shocked by the murder of the top religious leader of Islam by other Muslims, many of his Shiite followers argued that Uthman deserved to die because he was an apostate and had not followed the Quran rigidly like his predecessors. Eventually, Ali's armies prevailed over the opposition and severely defeated them in a battle near Basra which is remembered as the Battle of the Camel because Aisha rode with the soldiers and watched the battle seated atop

a camel.

Victory at the Battle of the Camel, however, did not end the conflict. Muawiyyah, the new leader of the Umayyad tribe, set out to avenge the murder of his kinsman, Uthman. The horrible prospect of a full-blown war between leaders of the Islamic community was compelling enough that both sides opted to meet and negotiate a settlement in 657 before full hostilities broke out. They put the issues before neutral Muslims for arbitration and the arbitrations went against Ali and his Shiite supporters. Muawiyyah deposed Ali and had himself proclaimed Caliph. However, many still understood Ali to be the Caliph and, in effect, there were two Islamic communities existing in the same area.

A large body of Shiite supporters known as Kharajites (seceders) then broke away from both the Sunni camp and the Shiite camp and the breakaway group gradually gained more and more adherents. Ali, like Muhammad and the first three Caliphs, was so committed to the concept of Islamic unity that he turned on the kharajis and suppressed them even though they had been his supporters. However, the ranks of the Kharajites continued to grow. They believed that the leader of Islam should be the most committed Muslim, the most devoted to the Quran, the most like Muhammad and they resented the idea that the leadership should go to the person who accumulated the most power. The kharajites were extremists who labeled both Muawiyyah and Ali as apostates. Even though the Kharajites movement was eventually stamped out, their memory is highly revered by modern Islamic extremists because of their focus on maintaining a pure Islam.

In 661, Ali was assassinated by a Kharajite and his Shiite supporters named Ali's eldest son, Hasan, as Imam (the term for the leader

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preferred by the Shiites because it emphasizes the religious qualities over the secular qualities of leadership). However, by this time, the idea that Muslims were fighting Muslims was becoming more and more abhorrent to everyone and the Sunnis and Shiites met for another set of negotiations. Hasan received financial consideration to step down and retired from public life, Muawiyah was again the sole Caliph, and the capitol of Islam shifted from Medina to Damascus, the center of the Umayyad tribe's area of influence.

As the first Caliph of what is usually called the Umayyad Dynasty, Muawiyah ruled the unified Islamic Community well until 680. He was a strong Caliph and gradually changed the role of the leader of the Islamic Empire from a simple religious leader to a more traditional emperor. Because he was such a strong leader, he held the Islamic community together even as it shifted away from its early ideals. However, when he died after naming his son Yazid I the next Caliph, the Shiites again revolted and acclaimed Husain, the second son of Ali, as Imam.

Again, civil war broke out. Husain and his family including women and children, all descendents of Muhammad, set out from Medina assuming that all of Islam would rise up to support them as the legitimate leaders of Islam. On the plain of Kerbala, just outside of Kufa, Husain, his family and all his followers from Medina were ambushed by Umayyad troops and massacred. Husain died holding his infant son in his arms. The civil war continued for a few years but, eventually, the Umayyad's were victorious over all their rivals and peace was restored. However, through all the conflicts and defeats, the Shiites became convinced that religious leadership and secular leadership could not be represented by the same person while the Umayyads were in

power so they simply "set themselves apart" as a separate denomination under the religious leadership of the descendents of Muhammad that they called Imams.

Ever since these early conflicts, Shiites have usually been ruled by Sunnis. The Shiites have existed most of the time as an oppressed and disinherited minority who, therefore, have come to understand history to be a test of the righteous community's perseverance in the struggle to restore God's rule on earth. They have virtually made a sacrament out of suffering and the tombs of Ali and Husain, both in modern Iraq, have become their most holy shrines. While Sunnis tend to look back to the glorious empires of the first four Caliphs and the century-long Umayyad Dynasty, Shiites tend to look back on the murders of Ali and Husain, the rightful heirs to the Caliphate. They identify themselves as the only true Believers that have been oppressed by the apostate Sunnis throughout the generations.

With the Shiites continuing in isolation from the Sunnis for centuries, they have developed some characteristic beliefs that set them apart from the larger body of Muslims. They believe that a succession of twelve Imams continued, each descendents of Ali, and that the qualities of holiness, wisdom, and religious mysticism continued to grow with each generation of Imams. However, the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Muntazar, disappeared as a child in 874 without leaving an heir. Similar to Christian beliefs in the Second Coming of Christ, Shiites believe that the Twelfth Imam did not die but is in hiding until a time when he will return to vindicate his followers, restore a faithful Islamic community, and usher in a perfect Islamic society of justice and truth. In the interim, Shiites put all of their trust in "interim" religious leaders called ayatollahs that have developed reputations for scholarship,

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wisdom and piety and are believed to have special sacred qualities.

There are two smaller Shiite sects that split away from the main “Twelvers” group over disputes about the number of legitimate Imams in the original chain. The Zaydis (called Fivers) recognize only five Imams and the Ismailis (called Seveners) recognize seven. Shiites represent approximately 15% of all Muslims. They are the dominant sect in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain and represent sizeable minorities in several countries.

? *Shiites are the only group in the world to have a “pure” Islamic state in which the secular rulers and the religious rulers are one in the same. The state is Iran and the rulers are the ayatollahs. The traditional Islamic government of Iran is much admired by Muslims around the world and much distrusted by Westerners. What is behind these feelings?*

? *Shiites make up more than two thirds of the population of Iraq. Do you believe Iraq will eventually have a Shiite Islamic government similar to the one in Iran?*

? *Some scholars believe that Western actions such as the American/British invasion of Iraq will eventually cause the Sunni and Shiite Muslims to unite after generations of hatred and hostility. What would be the impact of this on the Muslim world and the rest of the world?*

Sufis

Sufis are members of a mystical tradition of Islam named after the Arabic word “suf” (wool) in honor of the coarse woolen garments

similar to the garb of Christian monks and Jewish mystics that were worn by the early Sufis. Sufis seek to discipline both mind and body in order to experience the presence of God in their lives. However, they view their struggle to find God as one that takes place in this world rather than in a withdrawal from the world as has been common in the Christian monastic tradition. The members of the Sufi orders are normally married rather than remaining celibate as in similar Christian orders.

Sufis follow a set of exercises designed to guide them to self-sacrifice and discipline in a struggle within themselves to build up spiritual holiness and defeat greed, laziness, ego and worldliness. In short, they are involved in the “greater jihad” outlined by the Quran and exemplified in the life of Muhammad. Sufis devote themselves completely to the pursuit of fulfilling God’s will, loving God, studying and meditating on the Quran and Hadith writings, performing religious duties such as prayer and fasting extensively beyond the Islamic requirements, denying material desires that could distract them from God, and carrying out good works.

Sufism began as a reform movement in response to the growing materialism and wealth of Muslim society during the expansion and growth of the Islamic Empire. Unlike the Kharajites and Shiites that emphasized strict adherence to Muslim practices, rituals, and laws as a means of conditioning themselves against the threat of materialism, Sufis found these emphases to be spiritually lacking. Instead, they emphasized the spiritual path in tandem with the path of ritual practices as the way to regain the simplicity and spirituality of the time of Muhammad.

Sufis are not a sect or denomination separate from the rest of Islam. Nearly 40% of all

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Muslims belong to Sufi orders and there are Sufis in virtually every city and mosque around the world. Because of the intensity of their religion, the Sufis have played an important role in political life, in the formation of Islamic theology, and missionary work. Sufism is particularly popular in Europe and America where it has been a primary force in attracting new adherents to Islam.

Sufis have openly adapted local non-Islamic customs and practices from other mystical and holiness-seeking groups around the world and they often have more in common with Christian or Jewish or Buddhist or Hindu mystics than they do with non-Sufi Muslims. Their strong devotional practices and spiritual enthusiasm has helped them become a popular mass movement and, sometimes, a threat to the traditional Islamic religious establishment. Even though Sufis have become the focus of most popular piety in Islam, they have also been accused by the conservative religious establishment of being unfaithful to the tenets of Islam, allowing non-Islamic devotional practices, and slipping into magic and superstition.

The practice of Sufism varies considerably from place to place and is heavily influenced by each group's "Spiritual Master" who traces his ancestry back to Muhammad. The Sufis are divided into many religious orders that differ in name and in some of their customs, such as dress, meditation, and recitation, they are all in agreement in their principal ideas, especially their focus on submission to God and to the direction of their spiritual guide.

Locally, the Sufi disciples (called *faqirs*) are gathered together in groups that have their own ritual and style of devotional practices. Most practice the *khikr*, the constant repetition of the name or names of God. This repetition induces a trance-like state and is accompanied by drum

beating, the playing of musical instruments, and rhythmic body movements. The best-known movements are the spinning dances of the "Whirling Dervishes" of central Turkey. Sufis are neither clergy nor monastics in the Christian sense. Nearly all of them hold regular jobs, have regular families, and attend worship services at regular mosques. However, they gather together periodically in their special meeting places to sing, dance, pray, recite their rosaries and listen to discourses by their Spiritual Masters, all practices aimed at bringing them closer to God.

In general, Sufi's approach God on three levels. The first approach is acquiring an awareness of God's love and intensifying the Sufi's own love of God. The love poetry of the Sufis is famous around the world for its emphasis on the unmatched love of God for persons and the personal power of loving God in return. The second approach is through ecstatic trancelike practices in which the Sufis try to literally "stand outside themselves" much like Muhammad did on his famous "Night Journey" to Jerusalem and through the seven heavens. The Sufi practices aimed at inducing spiritual trances are not unlike the practices of some Christian mystics, monastics, and Pentecostals. The third approach is through rational learning of both Sufi mystical theology and mainstream Muslim doctrine.

The Sufis have been active missionaries, particularly in Africa, Central Asia, and India where charismatic Sufi holy men were known as healers and miracle workers that were not very strict with regard to their position on Islamic law and ritual. Many of them were considered so holy, especially in India, that their graves have become places of pilgrimage and many people believe that they can gain some of the charisma, holiness and blessings of the departed missionary just by touching his tomb.

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Many of the maxims produced by Sufis about Sufism help to show its esoteric qualities: "Sufism is to possess nothing, and to be possessed by nothing." "Sufism means being at ease with Allah." "Sufism is not composed of practices and science, but it is morals." "Sufism is keeping the heart pure from the pollution of discord." "Sufism is good nature first, towards God by fulfilling His commandments without hypocrisy; second, towards mankind, by paying respect to one's superiors and behaving with kindness to one's inferiors and with justice to one's equals, and by not seeking recompense and justice from mankind in general; and thirdly towards one's self, by not following the flesh and the Devil." (*The Treatise on Sufism by a-Hujwiri*)

? *Sufism seems similar to the "Church within a Church" concept of Martin Luther which indicated that, within every church, there is a group of intensely religious people who represent the core of the faithful. Is there a group like this in your church community?*

? *In general, Christians indentify more easily with Sufis than with the more propositional Muslims. Why do you think this is so?*

? *Why do you think there are so many parallels between mystics of virtually all religions?*

? *Are mystics the most religious in any religion, the unstable fringe, or something between these extremes?*

Wahhabism

While the division between Sunni and Shiite Islam goes back to only a few decades after the death of Muhammad, Wahabbi Islam is a relatively recent development. Most Christians

had never heard of Wahhabis until they became aware of the activities of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda in recent years. Wahhabism is an ultraconservative form of Islam that is the official form of Islam in Saudi Arabia and one which is rapidly spreading throughout the Islamic world with the help of the extreme wealth of the Saudi's. And, most troubling to many Westerners is that Wahhabism has spun off a variety of ultraconservative sects like al Qaeda and the Taliban that advocate militaristic jihad, including terrorism, against both more liberal Muslims, secular governments in Muslim countries, and Westerners.

The Wahhabi movement takes its name from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791), a scholar of Islamic law and theology in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Abd al-Wahhab became disillusioned by what he understood to be a decline and moral laxity of Islamic society largely brought about through contacts with Western culture during the early years of European Colonialism. He denounced many popular beliefs and practices as idolatry and paganism. He rejected most modern scholarship as fallible and at some times heretical. He called for a fresh interpretation of Islam that returned to the absolute fundamentals of the Quran and the Hadith writings. Like Christian Fundamentalists, he called for a rigid literal interpretation of the Quran and a return to the Islam of the time of Muhammad.

Eventually, Wahhabi joined forces with Muhammad Ibn Saud, a local tribal chief, to form a religious-political movement. Saud used Wahhabism to legitimate his jihad to unite the tribes of Arabia, converting them to this puritanical version of Islam. Wahhabi theology sees the world in rigid black and white: Muslim and non-Muslim, believer and unbeliever, rigid follower of the rules of the Quran

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and hypocrites. The Wahhabis preach that those who do not believe the same as they do are unbelievers and need to be changed or destroyed. Both Shiites and Sufis have been denounced as unbelievers by the Wahhabis and the destruction of the Shiite shrine at Husain's tomb in Karbala, Iraq by the Wahhabis has been a primary source of the intense antipathy between the Saudis and the Iranians and Iraqis.

By the early Twentieth Century, Wahhabism was firmly established as the official religion of the Saudi kingdom and all political, religious, economic, and social aspects of life in Saudi came under the ultraconservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic law. Because Saudi Arabia sits on top of the world's largest oil fields, it is an extremely wealthy country and both government-sponsored organizations and wealthy individuals have financed exportation of Wahhabism to the rest of the world including Western societies. Many of the 2,000 new mosques built in the United States in the last several years have been financed by the Wahhabis and they have been influential in the growth of the Taliban of Afghanistan, the Islamic fundamentalist rebels of the Central Asian Republics, al Qaeda around the world, and much of the modern

Islamic growth in Africa, China, and Southeast Asia.

It is not accurate to say that Wahhabi fundamentalism and the militant extremism of such groups as al Qaeda are one in the same. However, the relationship between the terrorist groups and Wahhabism is certainly akin to the relationship of the IRA to Sinn Fein and Hamas to the PLO. The militant Islamists generally look to the Wahhabis for their theological, intellectual and political undergirding even though some of the Wahhabis disown some of the activities of the militants.

- ?** *Why do you think Wahhabism is growing in the modern world?*
- ?** *If Wahhabism is predominantly a product of Saudi Arabia and is the father of such groups as al Qaeda and the Taliban, why does the Western world continue to treat the Saudis as friends and list their enemies, the Iranian Shiites and the Iraqis as enemies?*
- ?** *In what ways is Islamic Fundamentalism the same or different from Christian Fundamentalism and Jewish Fundamentalism?*

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The Bible and the Quran

The majority of the world's Christians are literate but few can say they have read the Bible through from cover to cover even though it is available in virtually every language in the world. In contrast, a large percentage of the world's Muslims are illiterate and yet millions and millions of them have memorized vast sections of the Quran in Arabic even though Arabic is the native language of only a small percentage.

Most Christians understand the New Testament to be their primary Scripture and whenever the revelation of the Old and New Testaments is in conflict, the revelation of the New Testament is understood to be a corrective on the Old Testament. Because Christians believe that Jesus was the ultimate and complete revelation of God, the New Testament record supersedes the earlier revelation found in the Old Testament.

Muslims view the Quran similarly. They understand the Quran to be the ultimate, complete and final revelation of God to humankind

and that any conflict between the revelation of the Quran and that of either the Old Testament or the New Testament is because of inaccuracies in the Bible. Islam views the Bible as sacred Scripture that was originally given to Jews and Christians through the Messengers Moses and Jesus in the same way that the Quran was given to Muslims through the Messenger Muhammad. The primary difference, they argue, is that the Bible was not written down at the time it was delivered to the original Messengers and was corrupted in hundreds of years of oral tradition. The Quran, however, was memorized by Muhammad who immediately dictated it to those closest to him and the chapters of the Quran were committed to print and protected in their original form almost immediately after they were recited.

? *Perhaps one of the most crucial questions for Christians is whether or not the Quran is the Word of God. Is it God's word in a new form or is it a*

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*creative writing of the man,
Muhammad?*

? *Is it possible that the Quran is God's Word except where it is in conflict with the New Testament? Where there are differences between the New Testament and the Quran, how do you know which one is correct?*

Christians view the Bible as “second-generation-revelation” in that they believe the revelation of God happened in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus and that the New Testament is merely a record of that revelation as witnessed by the people who knew him. Except for a few of the most conservative Christians, the New Testament is not believed to be sacred in and of itself because it is merely a written record of the divine event of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic because those were the languages of the people who wrote the books. Early on, the Bible was translated into Latin and since the Fifteenth Century, it has been translated into literally thousands of other languages. In the English language alone there are several different translations, each with a slightly different emphasis and language style.

In contrast, Muslims believe the Quran to be the actual words of God transmitted to Muhammad via the Archangel Gabriel in Arabic, the language of God. They believe the Quran is, therefore, “first-level-revelation” because it went straight from Gabriel to Muhammad and straight from Muhammad to print. The Quran is not believed to be a “record” of God's revelation. It is believed to “be” God's revelation. The Quran is not “about” the truth, it is the truth. Therefore, the actual Arabic poetry of the Quran is sacred and it is believed that it cannot be translated into

other languages. When the Quran is printed in other languages, they are called interpretations and they usually contain the Arabic text on pages or columns side by side with the interpretation language. Also, most of these interpretations contain many, many parentheses within the text because so much of the original Arabic does not translate well into other languages. Furthermore, the poetry of the Quran, considered to be a literary masterpiece in Arabic, ends up being cumbersome in most other languages.

Even though Muslims hold Muhammad in high esteem and remember him with a blend of admiration, respect, and affection, they never mistake him for the earthly center of the Islamic faith, the Quran. Muhammad is remembered as a shepherd, merchant, hermit, exile, general, lawmaker, prophet, priest, king, and mystic. However, he is also remembered as an orphan, the loving husband of a unique older woman, a father, a widower, and finally the husband of many wives, some of which were much younger than he was. In all of these roles he is considered to have been the perfect Muslim. Still, he is not identified as anything but a man whom God chose to give the Quran to humankind. He was not just a Prophet, he was the Messenger through whom Allah delivered the revelation of Himself in the form of the Quran.

The Quran was delivered piece by piece to Muhammad over 23 years and the fact that this illiterate prophet who could only barely write his name could have produced a book that provides the ground plan of all knowledge and is grammatically perfect and poetically artistic is remarkable. The Quran is certainly the most recited and memorized book in the world and many would argue that it is the most read and the most influential book in the world. Muhammad called the Quran, “God's standing

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miracle” and said to his followers, “Do you ask for a greater miracle than this, O unbelieving people, than to have your language chosen as the language of the incomparable Book, one piece of which puts all your golden poetry to shame?”

? *Is the Quran more reliable because it came from one man or is the New Testament more reliable because it was transmitted through hundreds in oral tradition and then written by several writers?*

? *Imagine the New Testament being used in worship only in the original Koine Greek which is now a dead language. This is the way in which the Quran is used in the 80% of the Muslim world that does not speak Arabic. How would that change your religion?*

? *Have you read the Bible through from cover to cover? The New Testament? Have you memorized any significant portions of the New Testament? Do you read the New Testament regularly?*

? *Do you consider the Bible to be a sacred book? The Quran?*

Muslims tend to read the Quran literally and they consider it to be the earthly facsimile of an “Uncreated Quran” that exists in heaven. In much the same way that Christians believe that Jesus was God in human form, Muslims believe that the Quran is God in book form. Because language and books are human inventions, most Muslims believe that the Quran is in its purest and holiest form only when it is being recited aloud. In Muslim countries the Quran is heard everywhere. Verses of the Quran are trumpeted from mosque minarets, broadcast 24 hours a day on radio and television stations, chanted by mystics on street cor-

ners, and inserted into virtually every conversation and printed document. And, most imams around the world have memorized the entire text of the Quran in Arabic.

The words of the Quran came to Muhammad in short segments over 23 years through voices that he identified as the Archangel Gabriel, the same angel that Christians believe brought the message of the coming incarnation of Jesus to Mary and Joseph. Muhammad is said to have had no control over the flow of the revelations. They descended on him independent of his will. When they arrived he was changed into a special state that was discernible by his friends and family. Both his appearance and the sound of his voice changed. He reported that the words assaulted him as if they were solid and heavy and these encounters with the divine usually left him exhausted and sometimes ill.

Even though the beauty of the Arabic poetry in the Quran has often been cited as converting people to Islam without any other impulse, for non-Arab Christians, the Quran is very difficult to read and understand. Sir Edward Gibbon once wrote that “the European will peruse with impatience the Quran’s endless incoherent rhapsody of fable and precept, and declamation, which seldom excites a sentiment or an idea, which sometimes crawls in the dust, and is sometimes lost in the clouds.” However, it is clear that the rhythm, melodic cadence, and rhyme of the Quran produce a powerful hypnotic effect on people, especially the people of the Middle East, Africa and Asia for whom even daily language is much more artistic, flowery, and symbolic than the rational, technological, journalistic language of the West. The impact of the revelation contained in the Quran is as much in the sound of the verses as in their meaning.

Just as the Quran is strange and awkward to Christians, the Bible is disappointing to

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Muslims because the verses of the Bible are not in the form of actual words from God. The Bible merely reports things that have happened or have been said while, in the Quran, God speaks in the first person. Allah describes Himself, makes known His laws for human beings and society, and tells humankind what will happen if it fails to obey His laws. The Muslim is therefore inclined to consider each individual sentence of the Quran as a separate revelation and to understand the words themselves, even their sounds, as God speaking to them. By contrast, the Jewish and Christian Scriptures seem more distant because they place religious meaning in reports of events instead of in God's direct pronouncements.

? *Some conservative Christians call the Bible the "Word of God" but most argue only that it only "contains" God's word and that it also contains some human error in scientific, biographical, and geographical details. How do these different attitudes toward Scripture shape attitudes toward the Quran?*

? *Mormon tradition holds that Joseph Smith received the Book of Mormon as sacred scripture direct from God in a manner not unlike the way in which the Quran was revealed to Muhammad. Is it possible that God has sent down a variety of revelations to meet a variety of human needs?*

Christians call their Scriptures the New Testament because the word "covenant" was mistranslated as "testament" in the 1612 King James Bible. In fact, we affirm that the Old Testament (Old Covenant) is the story of the original covenant between God and humankind through Abraham, Moses, David and the Prophets and the New Testament (New Covenant) is the story of the new covenant,

God's promise of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Quran means "recite" (or "read" or "proclaim loudly") because that is the first word of Sura 96, the first revelation received by Muhammad. Unlike the Bible in which the material is roughly in historical order, the 114 chapters (*Suras*) of the Quran are placed in order of their length from the longest to the shortest. The only variation from this pattern is the first chapter, called the Fatihah or "Opening," which is only seven verses long. This chapter is a significant part of the prayer sequence that every Muslim repeats at least seventeen times every day. All of the 114 chapters (*except the ninth*) begin with the words, "In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful..." and every chapter has a name (*rather than a number as in the Bible*), which comes from the theme of the chapter. The title often appears in the first line of the chapter.

? *Why do you think the suras of the Quran were not published in the order they were received or, at least, grouped according to subjects?*

Although they are scattered throughout the Quran, the chapters are often divided by scholars into the three historical periods during which they they were revealed to Muhammad: The early Meccan period before the beginning of conflict (610-615), the later Meccan period during the time of persecution by the Quraysh (615-622), and the Medinan period between the time of the immigration to Medina and the death of Muhammad (622-632).

The chapters from the First Period are shorter, warmer, and filled with encouragement to the people to turn away from idol worship to the one God, Allah. They emphasize the resurrection and judgment time when those who

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obey Allah's commandments will be blessed and those who refuse will burn in the great fire. Examples of this period, in probable chronological order, are Suras 96, 74 (*printed below*), 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, and 97.

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

1. *O you Muhammad enveloped in garments!*
 2. *Arise and warn!*
 3. *And your Lord magnify!*
 4. *And your garments purify!*
 5. *And keep away from the idols!*
 6. *And give not a thing in order to have more.*
 7. *And be patient for the sake of you Lord.*
 8. *Then, when the Trumpet is sounded*
 9. *Truly, that Day will be a hard day.*
-
26. *I will cast him into Hell-Fire!*
 27. *And what will make you know exactly what Hell-Fire is?*
 28. *It spares not any sinner nor does it leave anything unburnt!*
 29. *Burning the skins!*
 30. *Over it are nineteen guardians.*
 31. *And We have set none but angels as guardians of the Fire, and We have fixed their number only as a trial for the disbelievers, in order that the Christians and Jews may arrive at a certainty and the believers may increase in faith and that no doubts may be left for the Christians and Jews and the believers, and that those in whose hearts is a disease of hypocrisy and the disbelievers may say, "What does Allah intend by this example?" Thus Allah leads astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And none can know the hosts of your Lord but He. And this is nothing else than a reminder to mankind.*
 32. *Nay, and by the moon,*

33. *And by the night when it withdraws,*
34. *And by the dawn when it brightens,*
35. *Verily, it is but one of the greatest calamities.*
36. *A warning to mankind,*
37. *To any of you that chooses to go forward or to remain behind,*
38. *Every person is a pledge for what he has earned,*
39. *Except the true believers. (Quran 74.1-9, 26-39)*

The chapters from the Second Period are understandably longer, with more discussion and more doctrine, more Biblical material, and harsher attitudes toward those outside the Islamic community. Some of the Suras from this period are named after Bible characters such as Noah, Mary, Joseph, and Abraham. Examples from this period, in probable chronological order, are Suras 53, 43, 38, 39, 17, 23, 46, and 72 (*printed below*).

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

1. *Say O Muhammad, "It has been revealed to me that a group of demons listened to the Quran. They said, 'Verily! We have heard a wonderful recital,*
2. *That guides to the Right Path, and we have believed therein, and we shall never worship anything with our Lord Allah.*
3. *And exalted be the Majesty of our Lord, He has taken neither a wife, nor a son.*
4. *And that the foolish among us used to utter against Allah that which was wrong and not right.*
5. *And verily, we though that men and demons would not utter a lie against Allah.*
6. *And verily, there were men among mankind who took shelter with the masculine among the demons, but they increased*

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them in sin and disbelief.

7. And they thought as you thought, that

8. Allah will not send any Messenger.”

13. And indeed when we heard this Quran we believed therein and whosoever believes in his Lord shall have no fear, either of a decrease in the reward of his good deeds or an increase in punishment for his sins.

14. And of us some are Muslims and some are disbelievers. And whosoever has embraced Islam then such have sought the Right Path.”

23. Mine is but conveyance from Allah and His Messages and whosoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, then verily, for him is the Fire of Hell, he shall dwell therein forever.

24. Till, when they see that which they are promised, then they will know who it is that is weaker concerning helpers and less important concerning numbers.

25. Say O Muhammad “I know not whether the punishment which you are promised is near or whether my Lord will appoint for it a distant term.

26. He alone is the All-Knower of the unseen and He reveals to none his unseen

27. Except to a Messenger who He has chosen and then He makes a band of watching angels to march before him and behind him.

28. Allah protects the Messengers till He sees that they have conveyed the Messages of their Lord. And He surrounds all that which is with them, and He keeps count of all things. (Quran 72.1-8, 13-14, 23-28)

The chapters from the Third Period focus on the divine approval of Muhammad's leadership of the new Islamic community. Many ref-

erences to historical events reflect Muhammad's growing political authority and the growing importance of the Muslim community in the Arabic world. References to Muhammad gradually change from identifying him as a preacher to identifying him as a prince and the language style gradually shifts from the elegant poetry of the early chapters to a more pragmatic style. The times and directions for ritual prayers and fasts are more rigidly fixed and the attitudes toward Jews and Christians become less tolerant. This period also contains more references to the rules of family life, especially Muhammad's family situation. The Suras not listed above belong to this period including the samples printed below.

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

1. (A phrase that even modern Arabs do not understand)

2. This is the Book whereof there is no doubt, a guidance to those who are believers.

3. Who believe in the perfect prayers and spend out of what we have provided for them.

4. And who believe in the Quran which has been revealed to Muhammad and in the Torah and the Gospel which were sent down before you and they believe with certainty in the Hereafter.

5. They are on true guidance from their Lord, and they are the successful.

6. Verily, those who disbelieve, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe.

7. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearings, and on their eyes there is a covering. Theirs will be a great torment.

8. And of mankind, there are some who say, “We believe in Allah and the Last Day”

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while in fact they believe not.

9. *They think they deceive Allah and those who believe, while they only deceive themselves, and perceive it not! (Quran 2.1-9)*
58. *There are some who accuse you O Muhammad in the matter of the distribution of the alms. If they are given part thereof, they are pleased, but if they are not given thereof, behold! They are enraged!*
59. *Would that they were contented with what Allah and His Messenger gave them and had said, "Allah is sufficient for us. Allah and His Messenger will give us of his bounty. We implore Allah to enrich us.*
60. *Alms are only for the poor; and those employed to collect the funds; and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined toward Islam; and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for those fighting in the holy wars, and for the wayfarer; a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-knower, All Wise.*
61. *And among them are men who hurt the Prophet and say, "He is listening to wrongful things." Say, "He listens to what is best for you; he believes in Allah; has faith in the believers; and is a mercy to those of you who believe." But those who hurt the Messenger will have a painful torment.*
62. *They swear by Allah to you in order to please you, but it is more fitting that they should please Allah and His Messenger if they are believers. (Quran 9.58-62)*

? *The tone of the verses in the Quran shift based on the situation in which Muhammad found himself over the 23 years of the revelation. What does this say to you?*

Both the New Testament and the Quran contain some conflicting statements. However, most Christians are not troubled by the con-

flicting statements in the New Testament because they are mostly about geography or chronology (examples: In Mark, Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law before Peter is called to be a disciple and in Luke, the healing comes after the healing. In John, the Cleansing of the Temple happens roughly three years earlier than in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.). A few of the most conservative Christians find it necessary to develop elaborate explanations for conflicting statements in the Bible but most Christians attribute them to either misunderstanding or editorial focus of the original writers.

However, because Muslims believe the Quran to be the actual statements of God to humankind, conflicts of this kind are difficult. (examples: Sura 2.219 implies some value in drinking alcoholic beverages and gambling even though they are generally to be avoided while Sura 5.90 absolutely forbids intoxicants and gambling in all cases. In Sura 2.142-3, Jerusalem is the direction to face during prayer but in 2.144-150, Mecca is the direction.) Muslim theologians disagree about whether conflicts such as these were caused by Allah changing his mind because of some change in the situation of the Islamic Community or by Muhammad misunderstanding a revelation that needed to be corrected later or by Satan sneaking a thought into Muhammad's mind that was later corrected by God. These conflicts, which are very few, are handled by a theological process called abrogation in which the newer verse cancels out the earlier verse. In some cases both the original verse and the corrective verse are both in the Quran usually with a notation that the first verse has been abrogated. In other cases, the original verse has simply been replaced by the second.

106. Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar

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to it. Know you not that Allah is able to do all things?" (Quran 2.106)

A couple of early unofficial biographies of Muhammad listed a notorious incident in which Satan sneaked a few verses into the Quran by deceiving Muhammad. According to these stories, God later abrogated it and the earlier verse was replaced. These "Satanic Verses" said that three goddesses, Al Lat, Al Uzza and Al Manat, could be revered as intermediaries between God and humans. The verses that abrogate the earlier verse are:

19. *Have you then considered Al Lat, and Al Uzza*
20. *And Al Manat, the other third?*
21. *Is it for you the males and for Him the females?*
22. *That indeed is a division most unfair!*
23. *They are but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which Allah has sent down no authority. (Quran 53.19-23)*

Even though most Muslim scholars argue that the stories were apocryphal and the incident never happened, the story has remained a part of Muslim popular lore and has especially been the focus of Western anti-Muslim thinking. In 1988, when Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, was published, it caused a major furor in the Islamic world. In addition to using the ancient story about the Satanic Verses creeping into the Quran, Muslims argue that the novel dredges up all the old negative stereotypes about Muhammad that the enemies of Islam have used for centuries: that he was an imposter with purely political ambitions and a lecher who used religion to allow him as many women as he wanted. In addition, Muslims were infuriated by the denigration of the Quran in the novel. The furor came to its

peak when the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran issued a fatwah calling for the execution of Rushdie as a blasphemer. The fatwah was condemned by 48 of the 49 member states of the Islamic Conference within a month but Rushdie still had to go into hiding for fear of being killed.

The protection of the absolute wording of the Quran has always been an important issue to Muslims. Almost immediately after the text of the Quran was solidified, four original copies were placed in trust in four Islamic centers of scholarship to be used from then on as the guide for all future publications.

? *Does the idea that Allah could change His mind after a few years because of changes in human society seem strange to you?*

? *Do you believe that Satan could have sneaked a few verses into the Quran? What if some got in that were never abrogated by God?*

? *The Muslim idea of protecting the original text of the Quran shortly after it was canonized was remarkable. What would be the difference in our faith if the same thing had been done in Christianity?*

The Hadith

Second only to the Quran in sacred authority are the sayings and actions of Muhammad enshrined in a large body of literature called Hadith. The Hadith literature is similar to the New Testament to the extent that it preserves the words and deeds of Muhammad in much the same way the New Testament preserves the words and deeds of Jesus.

The record of Muhammad's words and deeds that finally ended up in the Hadith literature evolved gradually. For several genera-

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tions at least, Muslims hesitated to put the words into writing, perhaps out of concern that the words of the Prophet might be confused with the Word of God in the Quran. A few Hadiths were written down, but memory of Muhammad's sayings and actions remained alive largely through oral transmission in much the same way as the sayings and actions of Jesus were transmitted in the First Century.

An important difference in the oral transmission of the Hadith material, however, was that the early Muslims sought to remember not only what Muhammad had said and done, but who transmitted the oral memories. Some people came to be known as particularly important and trustworthy living repositories of the traditions. After a few generations, however, religious scholars became concerned that the chain of trustworthy transmitters of the traditions was growing too large and the possibility of editing or other modification of the original stories might eventually corrupt them. Therefore, near the end of the Eighth Century, a vast concerted effort was launched to gather and verify all available evidence of the living record. Their search for Hadith material took the collectors across the central Islamic lands, interviewing countless individuals known for reliable powers of recollection.

But collecting was not the end of the process. Scholars then subjected the material to intense scrutiny, inquiring into the background and trustworthiness of every individual named in the chains of transmitters associated with each saying or event description.

Analysis of such personal characteristics as veracity, intellect, uprightness, and devotion, along with other data concerning the times and places the individuals had lived, allowed scholars to classify transmitters as part of an emerging science. A single weak link in a chain would indicate an unreliable Hadith.

By the end of the Ninth century, a group of six major collections had come to be regarded as authoritative among Sunni Muslims, each containing thousands of sayings each with an assessment of its reliability and a record of its chain of transmitters. There are dozens of other collections as well and Shiite Muslims also developed several major collections of their own. Like the New Testament, the Hadith are considered to be divinely revealed through the work of individual transmitters, collectors and writers. Because Muslims believe Muhammad was the perfect Muslim, the details of the Hadith collection have become extremely important to Islamic law and practical theology.

? *“What Would Jesus Do?” is a popular Christian movement that focuses on something that has always been a part of Christianity: using the life and teachings of Jesus as a model for our own behavior. Are there any ways in which this is different from the way in which Muslims try to emulate Muhammad?*

? *In final analysis, how do you evaluate the sacred quality of the Quran?*

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Session Eight

Pillars of Faith

? *At the beginning of today's session, it would be helpful to have the group, either by dividing into smaller groups or as a whole classroom, try to come up with a list of five "Pillars of Faith" for your particular branch of Christianity. In this context, "pillars" should be "things that Christians do that sets them apart as Christians." Some will lift up the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion and Baptism. Others might focus on prayer, preaching, ethics, morality, outreach, evangelism, or worship. If you get a larger list, have the group try to agree on a list of only the five most important "pillars."*

The Five Pillars of Islam

The Declaration of Faith (Shadada)

Every Muslim the world over can repeat the simple declaration of faith that is the first pil-

lar of Islam, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his Messenger." Furthermore, most of them can repeat it in Arabic even though only 20% of the world's Muslims speak Arabic. The declaration of faith is known as "Shahada" (the act of bearing witness). However, it is also often called Shahadatayn (the two witnesses) because Muslims are keenly aware that there are two distinct parts to the declaration.

The first witness, "There is no God but Allah" affirms the Muslim's absolute acceptance that there is only one God. Across Islam, the declaration of monotheism is a unifying force and it is such a rigid principle that Muslims have no doubt but that the Yahweh of the Jews and the God of Christians is actually Allah because, to them, there is no alternative. Monotheism is such a rigid principle for Islam that even the Trinity of Christianity is offensive to them. They understand that Christians believe they are worshipping the same God in three different forms but, for Muslims, it still

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sounds like polytheism. Islam means “submission to God” and the creedal phrase, “There is no God but Allah,” is the first of several ways in which Muslims affirm that submission.

The second part of the declaration of faith, “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,” is equally important to Muslims. Through it, Muslims further affirm their submission to God’s will by declaring that Muhammad was both the vehicle of the Quranic revelation and a perfect Muslim who totally submitted himself to God’s will. Different from the way in which Christians believe in Jesus, all Muslims affirm that Muhammad was simply a human being, not divine in any way. However, they do believe that he was a very special man. He was a Prophet in the long tradition of Prophets in the Bible and in Arab folklore. The Muslims number over two dozen figures sent to particular peoples, including the Old Testament figures of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Noah, the Arabians Hud, Salih, and Shuayb, and the Christian figures of Jesus and John the Baptist.

However, Muhammad was more than just a Prophet, he was a Messenger. All Messengers were Prophets but not all Prophets were Messengers. Only five Messengers are mentioned in the Quran: Abraham through whom God delivered the Scrolls (now lost), Moses through whom God delivered the Torah, David through whom God delivered the Psalms, Jesus through whom God delivered the Gospel, and Muhammad through whom God delivered the Quran. Islam affirms that the Quran was the final revelation of God to humankind and, therefore, Muhammad was the final Messenger of God. When Muslims affirm, “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah,” they are saying that the truth of the Quran supersedes all other revelation and that Muhammad was the last human being through

whom revelation will come to humankind. Shiites, however, believe that the Twelve Imams (*all descendents of Muhammad*) and many of their modern ayatollahs continue to receive revelations direct from God even though these are somewhat less important than the Quranic revelations.

? *Can you articulate two simple tenets that are universal to all Christians and absolutely necessary for all Christians to believe?*

? *How is the title “Messenger” different from that of Prophet? How is the title “Christ” different from both Messenger and Prophet?*

? *What do you think is the value of a simple statement of faith that is universally known and accepted by all members of a religion?*

The Daily Prayers (Salat)

The second pillar of Islamic faith is to make the required five prayers each day while facing in the direction of the Great Mosque in Mecca that contains the Kaaba. These prayers, known collectively as Salat, are performed just before dawn, at noon, at mid-afternoon, just after sunset, and in the evening from an hour after sunset to around midnight. Even though these rituals are defined as prayer and contain places for personal petitions, Christians would define them more as ritual acts than prayer. Indeed, the words and movements of the Salat are aimed more at proving the praying person to be in total submission to God than in the more informal style of communication between humans and God that Christians understand. Even the definitions of prayer in the Hadith literature depict it as the quintessential act of submission to God, the primary proof that a Muslim is a faithful believer.

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The central importance given to ritual prayer in Islam recognizes that the performance of the rituals forces the believer to respond bodily to the reality that has already been acknowledged by the heart and tongue in the First Pillar, the Declaration of Faith. The rituals emphasize the absolute independence and power of God while affirming the total dependency of humans.

The prayers are to be performed wherever the believer is at the time designated for the prayer and in Islamic countries, it is common to see people stop whatever they are doing on the streets, in shops, in schools, in their homes and offices, and in mosques to pray, especially for the noon and mid-afternoon prayer times. Many factories, shops, schools and office buildings in Muslim countries provide a special prayer room that is kept spotlessly clean and marked with the direction of Mecca. The Friday noon prayer is usually performed at the mosque and led by an imam who follows the ritual with a sermon.

The call to prayer is chanted by the muezzin from the minarets of local mosques calling Muslims either to come to the mosque or to prepare themselves wherever they are for the ritual prayer. The muezzin chants in Arabic and, in most cases these days, is amplified by a loud speaker system so, at prayer time, you can hear several calls to prayer going on at the same time from different mosques in large Muslim cities. The call is:

*God is the greatest. God is the greatest.
God is the greatest. God is the greatest.
I testify there is no other god but God. I tes-
tify there is no other god but God
I testify that Muhammad is God's
Messenger. I testify that Muhammad is
God's Messenger.
Come to prayer. Come to prayer.*

Come to success. Come to success.

God is the greatest. God is the greatest.

There is no god but God.

*(at the dawn prayer, another line is added to
the call)*

Prayer is better than sleep.

To perform the prayers, the believers must first put themselves in a state of purity by performing either a ritual ablution or a bath. This act is clearly symbolic because it can either be done by washing with clean water or by rubbing clean sand over the areas to be cleansed. A full bath in which water is poured over both the body and the head is needed in cases of serious ritual pollution or after sexual intercourse. One's clothing must also be clean at the time of prayer if at all possible. The washing before prayer is done in a prescribed pattern. First, both hands are washed. Then, the face is washed followed by the forehead, arms, forehead again, back of the neck, ears, back of the neck again, and feet. This ceremonial cleansing is understood as an expression of respect for God and as a preparation of the believer for meeting and addressing God.

The movements of the Muslim prayer are patterned after attitudes of obeisance that were associated in late antiquity with entering into the presence of a great ruler. Because Arabs at the time of Muhammad were extremely independent and extremely resistant to bowing before any emperor or king, the prostration part of the prayer ritual was especially hard for the early Muslims to accept. But, once they became believers, prostrating themselves in submission to God 34 times a day was a powerful symbol of their obedience to God's will.

The believer first stands facing Mecca and states how many prayer sequences he is going to do. Normally, they do two full sequences at dawn, four at noon, four at mid-afternoon,

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three at sunset, and four in the evening.

Then, the believers raise their hands to their ears (*men*) or shoulders (*women*) and shout, "God is most great!" This phrase, like all of the recitations in the prayer sequence, must be done in Arabic whether or not Arabic is the language of the believer. The believer then bows slightly with hands crossed in front of him and recites the first Sura of the Quran:

*In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent,
the Most Merciful.*

*All the praises and thanks be to Allah, the
Lord of all.*

*The Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.
The Only Judge of the Day of
Resurrection.*

*You alone we worship, and You alone we
ask for help.*

Guide us to the Straight Way

*The Way of those on whom You have
bestowed Your Grace, not the way of those
who earned Your Anger, nor of those who
went astray.*

This is followed by the recitation of any verse of the Quran that the worshipper chooses. Most Muslims choose to recite Quran verses that list some of the many divine attributes of God at this point but any verse will do.

Then, the believer bows fully from the waist saying, "God is most great! Glory to my mighty Lord. Glory to my mighty Lord. Glory to my mighty Lord," after which he or she returns to a standing position and recites, "God hears those who praise him. Our Lord praise be to you."

The next part of the prayer ritual is the climactic act of submission when the believers prostrate themselves before God. They begin by saying "God is most great!" and then they fall to their knees and prostrate themselves

before God by placing both hands flat on the ground and touching their forehead to the ground between them. While in this position, they recite, "Glory to the Lord Most High! Glory to the Lord Most High! Glory to the Lord Most High!"

They rise to a sitting position for a moment and repeat "God is most great" again followed by a second sequence of prostration just like the previous one. After this, the believer stands up and repeats the entire cycle again once, twice, or three times depending on which prayer time it is. After every second cycle (and after the third cycle at sunset), the worshippers sit back on their heels and address God with these phrases:

*All prayer is for God and worship and
goodness*

Peace be on you O Prophet

And the mercy of God and his blessing

*Peace be upon us and on the righteous ser-
vants of God*

*I bear witness that there is no god but God
and I bear witness that Muhammad is his
Servant and Messenger.*

This is followed by private petitioning to God in much the same way that individual Christians pray for God's guidance, forgiveness, aid, peace, comfort, etc. The believer then ends by looking to the left and right while repeating the phrase, "May the peace and mercy of Allah be upon you." This invocation is to both other worshippers on their right and left and to their guardian angels hovering over their shoulder during prayer. The full sequence of prayers for that prayer time is then completed.

? *What are some of the things that
Christians in different denominations
memorize and repeat or chant regularly
as ritual?*

? *Reflect on the devotion of 80% of the muslim world that repeat a cycle of ritual prayer 34 times each day in a language that they do not speak. What is the power that would keep people doing this?*

? *How can prayer or ritual have meaning when the worshipper does not understand the words that he or she is saying?*

? *Does Christianity need some required ritual for all members to perform daily?*

Alms Giving (Zakat)

Christians normally think of their giving to churches and other benevolent organizations as charity that they give out of their thanksgiving to God and their sense of generosity. Many Christians also feel a sense of duty with regard to supporting their congregations, denominational activities and foreign missions, but few would understand this duty to be an absolute obligation of their membership in the Christian community.

For Muslims, the annual Giving of Alms (Zakat) is the Third Pillar of Faith and, like the Declaration of Faith and the five times a day Ritual Prayers, Almsgiving is an absolute obligation. All Muslims are required to contribute 2.5% of their personal wealth annually to religious leaders or, in countries where Islamic Law is the law of the land, to the Islamic government. The required tax is not a percentage of their earnings for that year but a percentage of everything they own whether or not they earned anything that calendar year.

Almsgiving is not viewed as “charity.” Instead, it is seen as an obligation for those who have received their wealth from God to respond to the needs of less fortunate members of the community. The Quran and Islamic Law stipulates that alms are to be used only to sup-

port the poor, orphans, and widows; to free slaves and aid debtors; and to support those working in the “causes of God” such as building mosques, operating schools and hospitals, supporting evangelists, and funding military action against those who try to oppress Muslims.

In addition to the tax, Muslims are urged throughout the year to contribute to charity, to provide help to widows, orphans, the sick, the needy, etc. as an ongoing expression of their Muslim faith. Shiites are required to contribute an additional 20% of their annual income to their religious leaders to be used in a variety of religious pursuits such as feeding the poor, supporting scholarly activities, and defending the faith. And, a regular part of the three major Festivals (*end of Ramadan, end of the Hajj, and Muhammad's birthday*) are special collections of food and money for the poor.

? *What is the primary difference between alms giving as an obligation and alms giving as a voluntary act?*

? *What would happen in your church if a tithe was required for you to retain your membership?*

? *How do you feel about alms that are used equally for feeding the hungry and purchasing weapons for the defence of the faith?*

? *Does your denomination require any obligatory gifts to operate its national and international operations?*

The Ramadan Fast (Sawm)

The Fourth Pillar of the Islamic Faith is to observe the month-long fast of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. During the 29 or 30 days of the fasting period, believers whose health permits must abstain

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from food, drink, and sex during daylight hours (*as long as 18 hours when Ramadan falls in the middle of summer*). It is a serious and deeply religious time for Muslims in which they follow a variety of devotional practices aimed at focusing their sense of dependency on God and compassion toward others.

At dusk each day during Ramadan the fast is broken with a light meal popularly referred to as breakfast. Then, later in the evening, families and friends share a special meal together with special foods and sweets served only during Ramadan. Many go to their mosques for special prayers that are recited only during Ramadan. Some try to recite the entire Quran as a special act of devotional commitment during the month. Families rise before dawn every day to take their first meal, which must sustain them until sunset.

Ramadan is seen as an annual act of purification through sacrifice. It is a purification because it involves the sacrifice of a person's bodily desires and is performed for the sake of God alone. By also denying drink, the believer further ensures that his or her body will feel the sacrifice. The pain that is felt by the believer during the fast reminds them of their larger social responsibility. It is also a time of consecrating their minds and hearts to God and the believers use the fast to recall their responsibility toward their fellow human beings. By undergoing hunger and thirst for an extensive yet limited period of time, the believer recalls people whose "fast" never ends because they never have enough to eat. Muhammad said that "Prayer is the proof of Islam and fasting is the key to heaven."

Near the end of Ramadan (*the 27th day*) Muslims commemorate what they call the "Night of Power," a celebration of the night when Muhammad first received God's revelation from the angel Gabriel. The month of

Ramadan ends with the lesser of the two major Islamic celebrations, the Feast of the Breaking of the Fast, which Christians would recognize as being similar to Christmas with its spirit of joyfulness, special celebrations, special foods, decorations, exchanging gifts, and contributing to help the poor.

? *The Christian periods of Lent and Advent had, at one time, much of the serious religious overtones that Ramadan has for Muslims. Do you believe Christianity was weaker or stronger when it placed more emphasis on Lent and Advent?*

? *Do you participate in any kind of religious fast?*

? *Do Christians do anything similar to the Fast of Ramadan?*

The Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj)

The first four Pillars of the Islamic Faith are required either daily or annually. The Fifth Pillar, the Hajj, is required for every Muslim that is physically and financially able to make the trip at least once in a lifetime. However, many of the world's Muslims are poor and, in the modern Muslim world, many of them live vast distances away from Mecca making the journey impractical. So, only a small percentage of the world's nearly two billion Muslims end up making the pilgrimage. Still, between two and three million believers make the Hajj every year.

The pilgrimage season is during the first ten days of the month of Dhul-Hijjah (*the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar*). The vast crowd that travels to Mecca comes from all corners of the globe representing a tremendous diversity of languages and cultures. However, in Mecca, they form one huge, united Islamic community living out their faith.

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There are nine essential rites that make up the Hajj experience.

The “garments of consecration.” At the beginning of the Hajj, the pilgrims put on special garments so that everyone, regardless of personal wealth, education, social status, or ethnic origin, is dressed exactly the same. The special covering consists of two pieces of white unsewn cloth for men and it covers all parts of the body except the face, hands, and feet for women. While in the garments of consecration, it is not permissible to have sexual relations, to kill animals or insects, or to remove any hair from the body.

The First Circumambulation of the Kaaba. The Kaaba is a large cube covered in black cloth embroidered in gold with verses from the Quran. The Kaaba sits in the center of the courtyard of the Grand Mosque of Mecca and Muslims believe the first Kaaba was built by Adam and then destroyed by the great flood of Noah's time. Then, it was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael and has been restored again and again over time. Muslims believe the Kaaba is an earthly representation of the heavenly throne of God and that their circumambulation around it is patterned after the movement of the angels around the heavenly throne. The Kaaba contains the “Black Stone,” a meteorite believed by Muslims to have been placed there by Abraham and Ishmael to commemorate the original covenant between God and Abraham, which they believe was made on behalf of both Jews and Muslims.

The pilgrims circle around the Kaaba seven times in a counterclockwise direction. While doing this, many pilgrims also attempt to touch or kiss the Black Stone which sits in one corner of the Kaaba, although this is not a required part of the pilgrimage. Most pilgrims also perform the unofficial act of “running” seven times along a corridor of the Grand

Mosque to commemorate Hagar's search for water in the desert for her infant son, Ishmael.

Standing at Arafat. On the ninth day of the twelfth month, pilgrims walk 12 miles stopping midway at Minah. That night they gather in the plain at the foot of Mount Arafat even if they can only stay for a short time. The next day, around midday, the pilgrims cry out “Oh God, here I am!” Those who have reserved a spot, and are able to remain for a longer period of time listen to a sermon delivered from the heights of Mount Arafat, the same place from which Muhammad delivered his farewell sermon.

The Encampment at Muzdalifah. After Arafat, the pilgrims spend the night at an encampment halfway between Arafat and Minah called Muzdalifah.

Stoning Satan. After camping at Muzdalifah, the pilgrims arise the next morning and run to Minah, each collecting seventy stones along the way. In Minah, the pilgrims throw their collected stones at three pillars marking the place where, according to Muslim tradition, Satan tried to tempt the Prophet Ishmael. This is done once before the sacrifice at Minah, and then again two days after the sacrifice.

The Sacrifice. At Minah, the pilgrims each sacrifice an animal (*usually a sheep or a goat, but sometimes a cow or camel*) and the meat is distributed to poor Muslims around the world. At the same time that the sacrifices are happening at Minah, all other Muslims around the world also have animals ritually slaughtered with part of the meat being saved for their Feast of the Sacrifice festival celebrations, the most important festival of the Islamic year, and the remainder being distributed to the poor. This sacrifice commemorates God's acceptance of a sheep as a sacrifice in place of the Prophet Ishmael. Muslims believe that Abraham was asked to sacrifice his firstborn, Ishmael, rather than Isaac (*as in the Bible*) as a

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test of his faithfulness. Abraham's first son, Ishmael, was born from the slave woman, Hagar, because his wife, Sarah, was barren. However, after a miraculous intervention by God, Sarah was able to give birth to Abraham's second son, Isaac, who Jews and Christians identify as the person through whom God's covenant continued. Muslims believe that Arabs are descendents of Abraham through Ishmael just as Jews are descendents of Abraham through Isaac. Muslims also believe that the child of a female slave and the child of a free woman are equally legitimate and both can legally claim shares of their father's inheritance.

Second circumambulation of the Kaaba. After the sacrifice and celebrations at Minah, the pilgrims return to the Grand Mosque in Mecca to, again, move around the Kaaba seven times.

Water from Zamzam. After the second circumambulation, the pilgrims drink water from the well called Zamzam that is located in the precincts of the Grand Mosque of Mecca where Muslims believe God provided water for Hagar and her infant son Ishmael during their wanderings in the desert.

Canonical Prayers. Finally, the pilgrims perform two cycles of a special prayer in the precincts of the Grand Mosque of Mecca known as the Station of Abraham, the spot where it is believed that Abraham and Ishmael prayed together after building the Kaaba.

The minimum requirements of the Hajj are the wearing of the special clothing, standing at Arafat, and the second circumambulation of the Kaaba. Although the Hajj may be completed without performing the remaining rites, the pilgrim is required to pay expiation for his fail-

ure to complete them. During the entire Hajj the pilgrim is expected to avoid thinking about anything other than the remembrance of God and the rites of the pilgrimage itself.

Persons who have taken the Hajj are revered by their peers in their home communities and mosques. The men are from then on addressed as, Hajj, and the women as Hajja. Some of those who have taken the Hajj change their appearance by dyeing their hair, wearing a white skull cap, or wearing white robes from then on as outward signs of their new spirituality. Muhammad said that every step taken by a pilgrim during the Hajj blots out a sin and persons who die while on the Hajj pilgrimage go into heaven as martyrs. In addition to the annual Hajj, many Muslims visit these same holy sites at other times of the year in lesser but still meaningful pilgrimages.

? *Christians who visit the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem on Good Friday or Bethlehem at Christmas report many of the same spiritual benefits that pilgrims on the Hajj report. Are there other Christian pilgrimages that have similar meaning?*

? *Discuss the situation of the Hebrew people believing that they flow from Abraham through his second son, Isaac, and of the Arab people believing they flow from Abraham through his first son, Isamael. When Abraham received the Covenant from God, he first circumcized Ishmael and then Isaac so both races participate in the same Covenant. What do you think keeps these two ancient Semetic peoples so far apart?*

Session Nine

Religious Leadership and Worship

? *At the beginning of today's session, it would be helpful to discuss your own denomination's requirements for ordained clergy. What education is required? How are spiritual qualifications evaluated? How are clergy hired or assigned to the individual congregations in your denomination? How does each congregation evaluate the qualifications of its clergy?*

? *Have members share what they know about the above questions for churches in other Christian denominations.*

? *Discuss what elements are common to virtually all church buildings. Altars, pulpits, pews, fellowship halls, classrooms, steeples, stained glass windows, crosses, ? What furnishings are essential for a building to be called a church?*

Mosques

The Arabic word for "mosque" means "place of prostration." It is where the faithful perform their devotions, particularly the required five daily prayer sequences. In Islam the "place of prostration" can be any place where the believer is at the time of prayer, however, since the time of Muhammad, special sanctuaries have been set aside specifically for these devotional activities.

When the Muslims immigrated to Medina in 622, one of the first things that Muhammad did was to build a mosque. The structure was a large enclosure with mud brick walls running more than fifty meters along each side. It had an open portico at one end constructed from a double row of palm tree trunk columns roofed with palm leaves and mud. A smaller roofed structure along a portion of the wall opposite the portico was for the use of impoverished members of the young community. A number of modest huts for Muhammad and his wives

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and children were attached to the outside of one wall, each with an entrance into the large courtyard. The primitive simplicity of this structure made it an all-purpose community center that was used for general instruction in the faith, discussions of political, military, and economic issues, and communal gatherings, as well as prayers.

Over time, the major mosques of cities and towns became known as congregational mosques, distinguishing them from smaller neighborhood mosques or the special mosques that developed as adjuncts to tombs or shrines of Muslim saints. Most of these congregational mosques have an enclosed area after the fashion of the Medina mosque with an open courtyard and covered sanctuary divided by columns. The courtyard usually contains a large water basin at which worshippers can perform the necessary pre-prayer ablutions. The back wall of most mosques contains an arched concave niche, usually highly decorated, that designates the direction of Mecca and the Kaaba toward which worshippers must face during the recitation of daily prayers. This niche, called the mihrab, is often further highlighted by an ornate dome. The imam leads the congregational prayers from in front of the mihrab.

To the right of the mihrab is the minbar, a pulpit-like structure of wood or stone with a flight of steps on which the imam delivers the sermon after Friday noon prayers. Traditionally, these sermons have been a mixture of theology, commentary on the Quran, reflections on Islamic law, exhortations on personal morality, and a substantial dose of politics. Today, sermons frequently contain criticism of the policies of non-Islamic governments, calls for hostility toward governments that are oppressing Islamic people, and calls to holy war against the enemies of Islam, particularly

the United States and other Western nations.

The architecture of mosques around the world has changed considerably since the simple mosque built by Muhammad in Medina. When Islam became a great empire, the mosques began to reflect its power, wealth, and majesty. The mosques from the imperial period are some of the most beautiful and elegant worship sites in the world. Many of the grandest mosques also are a tribute to the early advances in architecture and engineering that developed in Islam.

As Islam spread from Arabia to other parts of the world, the style of mosques changed to fit the environment and architectural styles of the area in which they were built. For instance, when Islam moved into Anatolia (*modern Turkey*), the mosques dispensed with the open courtyard because the winters were so much colder that doing a lot of things outside was impractical. In Turkey, however, the dome was developed as a massive structure that covered the entire sanctuary area without the many, many columns that filled the interiors of the Arabian mosques. Some of the largest free-standing domes in the world are still over the mosques of Turkey.

In the lands immediately East of Arabia, especially Iran, Afghanistan and India, the mosques retained much of the style of the Arabian mosques but, further East in China, Indo China and Indonesia, the mosques began to take on the look of other religious edifices indigenous to each region. The same is true for the mosques of the African continent that range from traditional Arabian style mosques in Egypt to mud-hut structures in central Africa.

The minaret, from which the muezzins chant the call to prayer five times a day, is the most distinguishable and most common architectural element in virtually all mosques. Many are

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tall slender towers that project from the ground to several stories above the main buildings of the mosque.

A second feature of many mosques is the use of calligraphy as decoration. If Christians put giant Bible verses all over the exteriors and interiors of their buildings, everyone would think it looked like so many giant billboards and would find it distasteful. However, because Muslims prohibit the visual representation of Allah, they have developed calligraphy into one of the most characteristic of all Islamic art forms.

? *Like Christian churches, mosques take many different forms in different cultures around the world. However, the activities at the mosques are much more consistent around the world than are the worship activities in the Christian churches. Why do you think this is so?*

? *Would you like to be able to walk into any Christian church anywhere in the world and find the same thing happening as is true in mosques around the world?*

? *What would happen if your clergyperson took a strong political stance from the pulpit? What if political activities were happening regularly in your fellowship hall?*

? *Christians are free to celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday and Jews are free to celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday but many Muslims in Christian countries find it difficult to get away from work for their Sabbath. Should this be changed?*

? *Many mosques operate schools. Jewish schools and Christian schools often receive government support in the*

United States and Europe but nowhere do Muslim schools receive the same support. Should this be changed?

? *In Medieval Europe, the cathedrals were the center of all activity in the cities -- religious, political, and economic -- but today, the churches are relegated largely to Sunday morning worship activities. What is the impact of this on the general culture?*

Imams

Islam has no ordained clergy as such, though some individuals do pursue special training in religious studies and law for the purposes of providing local leadership in their communities. Their studies emphasize a thorough familiarity with the Quran in its original language, Arabic, including scriptural exegesis. Most also study the Hadith literature that cover the sayings and deeds of Muhammad, theology and basic Islamic law as defined by one of the dominant law schools. In addition, most imams have memorized the entire Quran and studied effective recitation and preaching.

Every mosque has an imam but it might be a different person every Friday. In smaller congregations various members of the community often take turns in the role. The imam is not ordained but is chosen from among the upright and competent men of the local community to lead the prayer and to preach the Friday sermon. Larger communities frequently have full-time imams that function in ways very similar to the pastor of a Christian church. However, even in larger congregations, other male members of the community sometimes take turns leading the ritual prayer on days when the imam cannot be at the mosque during prayer time.

In addition to leading the main occasions of ritual prayer, the imam instructs young people planning to marry, leads weddings and funerals.

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als, visits sick members of the congregation, and acts as overall administrator of the mosque activities. Many mosques also have schools and community centers that also come under the jurisdiction of the imam. Some imams in North America and Europe also participate in interreligious activities. Unlike Christian clergy, imams are often involved in political leadership, especially in countries in which Islamic law is the law of the land.

? *Do you sense any significant differences between the way imams function in Islam and priests or ministers function in Christianity?*

? *One of the ways in which different branches of Islam such as the Wahhabis and Shiites spread their particular brand of Islam is by training imams and making them available to new mosques around the world. What do you think the long term impact of this is?*

Ulama

Another kind of clergy that has a significant impact on the Islamic world are the ulama or “learned legal scholars.” These scholars of the Quran, Islamic law, and theology gradually became more and more important in Islam as the community got further and further away from the time of Muhammad. During Muhammad’s time and during the time when people who had known him personally were still in authority, questions of theology and practice were answered by reflecting on what Muhammad would have said or done in each case. However, in time, a group of scholars began to develop who, collectively, continued to develop Islamic law and theology. It is important to understand that Islamic law has developed around the decisions of faithful scholars rather than around the decisions of judges, courts, or

governments.

The ulama are now a formal body of religious scholars that are often distinguished by special clothing. They play a primary role as the protectors and authoritative interpreters of Islam. Today, these scholars are called by many different titles based on whether they are specialists in theology or law. Mujtahid is a special title for the ulama who are qualified to interpret Islamic law through independent reasoning as well as the study of precedent. A mufti is a specialist in Islamic law competent to deliver a fatwa, a legal interpretation or judgment. Some ulama are imams but most do not serve local congregations. Many are the equivalent of professors in the madrasahs, Islamic theological schools.

Islam means submission to the will of God and Muslims put primary emphasis on obeying God as prescribed in Islamic law. Muslims believe they must strive (jihad) or struggle in the path (shariah) of God in order to implement God’s will on earth, expand and defend the Muslim community, and establish a just society. Because of this emphasis on “doing the right thing,” Islamic law and its interpreters are critical to the Islamic community. The purpose of Islamic law is to provide guidelines and requirements for virtually all aspects of life: religious, social, economic, sexual, military and political. Therefore, the ulama, collectively, are the interpreters of nearly all aspects of Islamic life. Throughout history, Islamic law has remained central to Muslim identity and practice because it provides the ideal social blueprint for the believer who asks, “What should I do?”

Sunni Muslims recognize four official sources to guide the development of Islamic law: the Quran, the Hadith literature, analogical reason, and consensus. Shiite Muslims accept the Quran and Hadith as well as their

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own collections of traditions from Ali and the eleven other Imams that descended from Muhammad, whom they regard as supreme authorities and legal interpreters.

The Quran provides moral directives, setting out what Muslims should aspire to as individuals and achieve as a community. The Hadith traditions that record the private and public life of Muhammad illustrate Islamic faith and practice and supplement the Quran. Analogical reasoning provides answers to situations or principles when no clear text is found in the Quran or Hadith literature. The fourth source of law, consensus, comes from Muhammad's reported saying that "My community will never agree on an error." Therefore, consensus among the ulama becomes infallible law in Islam just as the pronouncements of the pope become infallible doctrine in Roman Catholicism.

Sunni Muslims around the world adhere to the teachings of four distinct schools of law that emanate from the work of four scholar jurists recognized as the founders of the schools.

The largest school, is the *Hanifi School* of thought that is followed in India, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Afghanistan. It is based on the work of the non-Arab Iraqi, Abu Hanifah who died in 767. He was a noted exponent of analogical reasoning and consensus in defining Islamic law.

The second largest is the **Maliki School** followed in North Africa, West Africa, and Kuwait. It is based on the scholarly work of Abu Abdallah Malik b. Anas, a contemporary of Hanifi who lived well into his eighties. Malik's work focused more on the Hadith traditions about the prophet.

The *Shafi School* is followed primarily in Asia, especially the large Islamic states of Malasia and Indonesia, and in East Africa. The Shafi school is named after Abu Abdallah

Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafii, a descendent of the Quraysh tribe of Mecca and a student of Malik. He died in 820 after producing more than a hundred books on various aspects of Islamic law including works that called for rigorous application of philological and linguistic studies of both the Quran and Hadith writings. He was more suspicious of analogical reasoning and consensus as a means of establishing legal principles and focused more on a rigid search of the Quran and Hadith writings for precedent.

The last school, the *Hanbali School*, is followed only in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the places in the world where the more conservative Muslims from these two countries have established new mosques and schools. This school of legal thought is named after Ahmad b. Hanbal from Bagdad, the most recent of the scholar jurists whose names are attached to the four dominant schools of thought. He was primarily a collector of Hadith material and the Hanbali school is, therefore, the most fundamentalist about rigorously following the examples of Muhammad in daily life, government, etc.

? *Islamic Law covers everything including sexual relations, military activities, economics, politics, family life, religious practices, clothing, and foods. What would happen to the Christian church if it tried to regulate these vast areas of life?*

? *What would be the impact on the world if all countries with a Muslim majority enacted Islamic Law as the law of the land?*

Devotional Practices

So much of Muslim life is proscribed by the Five Pillars and the minutia of Islamic laws

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that form the Shariah that it would seem unlikely that Muslims would have much of a popular devotional life beyond what is required. However, this is not true. In fact, Islam is no different from other religions in that there is an “official” religion defined by the scholars and clergy and a “popular” religion that has grown up among the people. In Christianity, swearing oaths while placing one’s hand on the Bible, believing in guardian angels, praying to specific saints, fearing the devil and demons, and other popular aspects of religion have little doctrinal or theological basis but they remain important to individual Christians. The same is true in Islam, particularly in rural villages where religion and superstitions tend to get mixed up together.

Many Middle Eastern Muslims have a strong belief in demons, particularly in Umm al-Subyan, the Mother of Children, an evil spirit that is believed to cause great harm to people. To protect themselves from these evil spirits, many Muslims pray to archangels and angels, recite specific verses from the Quran, wear amulets, and seek out Prophets or soothsayers for guidance.

Many Muslims believe that some illnesses are caused because persons have violated certain popular religious taboos or because they have become possessed by demons. These taboos and demons vary from culture to culture but can be very important in the minds and hearts of the people. The corrective in almost every case is turning to Allah and to rigidly following the precepts of Islam.

In addition to the two official festivals of the Islamic year, the Feast of Breaking the Fast at the end of Ramadan and the Feast of the Sacrifice at the end of the Hajj, many Muslims celebrate the birthday of Muhammad on the twelfth of Rabi al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic year. It is a happy festival and, in

some areas, the entire month of Rabi al-Awwal is filled with gathering of Muslims focused specifically on remembering the Prophet.

Although music is not a part of the mosque services, Muslims like to sing and have developed a collection of hymns of praise, mostly about Muhammad that they sing at various occasions. Many Sufi groups use music and chanting as part of their devotional rituals and these practices have been picked up by many individual Muslims to strengthen their personal devotions.

Like Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christians, Muslims have developed many shrines around the world and it is believed that visiting these holy places increases one’s faith and preparation for the Last Judgment. Several of the sites from Muhammad’s life as well as places with relics (*hairs from his beard enshrined at Topkapi, Istanbul, his tomb at Medina, his footprints on stones of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, etc.*) are revered pilgrimage sites. In addition, shrines have developed around the birthplaces and tombs of many popular Muslim saints and millions of Muslims travel to these shrines regularly to pray, make personal vows, and enrich their faith.

Many Muslims use rosaries or “worry beads” in their private devotion. The most common practice is to recite the many names and characteristics of Allah found in the Quran in sequence using the beads as a counting device.

? *Do you find the private devotional practices of Muslims to be much different from those of Christians?*

? *What are some private devotional practices of Christians that are not part of the official religion but are regularly practiced?*

Session Ten

Primary Theological Beliefs

Every religion has a few key beliefs that characterize it. Usually these are a few basic doctrines out of which virtually all other beliefs flow. The different branches of Christianity are characterized by their emphasis on core doctrines: Roman Catholic theology evolves around the Doctrine of Atonement, Eastern Orthodoxy focuses on the Doctrine of Incarnation, and mainstream Protestantism is characterized by its emphasis on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith.

The fundamental core doctrine of Islam is summed up in the Shahada, the Declaration of Faith, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is God's messenger." Virtually everything else flows out of this simple statement. Islam means "submission" and Muslims believe they are preserved from harm through submission to the will of the Creator God, who is one, having no duality or trinity in his oneness and through living in obedience to God's commands. The word Muslim means "one who submits to Allah" and Muslims argue that

Islam is not just a religion but a complete way of life with guidance provided by God for all aspects of individual and corporate living.

Muslims believe that our universe is governed by divine laws and that the whole of creation is called upon to obey the laws of God. However, even though humans are bound by God's natural laws, we also have been given free will and can, therefore, choose whether or not to submit to God's authority in the way in which we live our lives. We are free to become Muslims and submit to God's will or to remain unbelievers. Believers achieve completeness in their lives by consciously opting to obey God's laws in the domain in which we have freedom of choice.

? *The most obvious difference between Muslim theology and Christian theology is the belief by Muslims that God's salvation can be earned through good works. This is the same with Judaism. How is this different for Christians?*

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Muslims believe that unbelievers, who have made conscious decisions to deny God, will live in constant tension and pain in this life and will be held accountable in the afterlife for their crimes against nature. The believers, however, will live lives filled with godliness, piety, righteousness and truthfulness and, in eternity, will be showered with God's choicest blessings and live in eternal peace, joy and bliss because they will have discharged their duties ably, fulfilled their mission successfully, and emerged from their trials triumphantly.

Allah is, first of all, the Creator:

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. Whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Allah, and He is the All-Mighty, All-Wise.*
 - 2. His is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth; it is He who gives life and causes death; and He is able to do all things.*
 - 3. He is the First and the Last, the Most High and the Most Near and He is the All-Knower of everything.*
 - 4. He it is who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then was established on the Throne of Authority. He knows what goes into the earth and what comes forth from it, what descends from the heaven and what ascends thereto. And He is with you wherever you may be. And Allah is the All-Seer of what you do. (Quran 57.1-4)*
-
- 22. He is Allah, the only being who has the right to be worshipped, the All-Knower of the unseen and the seen. He is the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.*
 - 23. He is Allah, the only being who has the right to be worshipped, the King, the Holy, the One free from all defects, the Giver of security, the Watcher over His creatures,*

the All-Mighty, the Compeller, the Supreme. Glory to Allah! High is He above all that they associate as partners with Him.

- 24. He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor of all things, the Bestower of forms. To Him belong the Best Names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorify Him. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (Quran 59.22-24)*

There are 99 "beautiful names" for Allah in the Quran and the Hadith literature and many Muslims recite them as a devotional practice, often with the use of a rosary or "worry beads" to help them keep track of where they are in the list. A few of the names found frequently in the Quran are: The Merciful, the Compassionate, The King, The Holy, The Peace, The Guardian of Faith, The Forgiver, The Provider, The Opener, The First, The Last, The evident One, Outwardly Manifest, and The Inward, Hidden One.

The doctrine of Allah's unique unity is called Tawhid in Arabic. For a Muslim, this doctrine means three things.

First, God can be called "He" because God is a being, not an abstract conception of philosophy. Some Muslims refer to God as a Personality but all Muslim scholars warn against identifying God with our limited conceptions of reality. God is "wholly other" in that no human being can fully comprehend, describe, or explain God.

- 26. Say O Muhammad, "O Allah! Possessor of the kingdom, You give the kingdom to whom You will, and You take the kingdom from whom You will, and You endue with honor whom You will, and You humiliate whom You will. In your hand is the good. Verily, You are able to do all things.*
- 27. You make the night to enter into the day,*

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and You make the day to enter into the night. You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living. You give wealth and sustenance to whom You will, without measure. (Quran 3.26-27)

Second, God is uniquely one, without parts or partners:

2. He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and who has begotten no son and for whom there is no partner in the dominion. He has created everything, and has measured it exactly according to its due measurements. (Quran 25.2)

Third, God is eternal, ever-lasting, and absolute, one in his attributes, not having a multiplicity of powers or wills.

Fourth, God is one in his works, no other being beside God has any influence on God at all.

Muslims see monotheism as Islam's unique contribution to the world. They reject both the polytheism of the Hindus and the Trinitarian formula of the Christians as being in error because these ideas violate the absolute concept of God's oneness. The first thing about God's nature that strikes anyone who reads the Quran for the first time is God's awesomeness, his fear-inspiring power. This is not, however, terror in the face of a tyrant but it is the only appropriate emotion when humans face up to the consequences of being on the right or wrong side of God's will.

This "holy dread" that Allah inspires seems, at times, to be stern, wrathful, domineering and ruthless. However, Muslims would say this is clearly a misreading of the Quran which speaks of God's compassion and mercy nearly 200 times, more than any other feature of God's personality. For Muslims, the world of

the Quran is a world of joy. It fills them with confidence in ultimate justice, abiding assistance as they make their way in the world, and forgiveness for their violations.

In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful...

- 1. By the forenoon*
- 2. And by the night when it is still*
- 3. Your Lord has neither forsaken you nor hated you.*
- 4. And indeed the hereafter is better for you than the present.*
- 5. And verily, your Lord will give you all good so that you shall be well pleased.*
- 6. Did He not find you, O Muhammad, an orphan and gave you a refuge?*
- 7. And He found you unaware and guided you?*
- 8. And He found you poor, and made you rich?*
- 9. Therefore, treat not the orphan with oppression*
- 10. And repulse not the beggar;*
- 11. And proclaim the Grace of your Lord. (Quran 93.1-11)*

? *What differences do you see in the basic Muslim understanding of God and the basic Christian understanding of God?*

? *Is the Allah of Islam and the God of Christianity the same being?*

? *How would you explain to a Muslim how Jesus and the Holy Spirit are just different aspects of God and not different gods?*

Six Core Beliefs of Islam

Like the Five Pillars of Islam that make up the required practices of the faithful, there is also a list of six basic beliefs that are consid-

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ered the minimum “checklist” of things in which Muslims are expected to believe.

1. *Belief in Allah.*
2. *Belief in angels.*
3. *Belief in Allah's revealed books, which include the Quran revealed through Muhammad, the New Testament revealed through Jesus, the Psalms revealed through David, the Torah revealed through Moses, and the Pages (now lost) revealed through Abraham.*
4. *Belief in Allah's messengers, which include many of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as well as Jesus, John the Baptist, and such previous Arab prophets as Hud and Salih.*
5. *Belief in the Last Day. Islamic eschatology is close to that of Christianity and even includes an intercessory role for Jesus. Many Muslims also believe in a quasi-prophetic figure called the Guided One who will come after Jesus and usher in a period of peace and justice that will last until Judgment Day.*
6. *Belief in Allah's determination of affairs, whether good or bad. This is an affirmation of God's providence and fore-knowledge.*

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Mary is greatly honored in Islam and Jesus is called the “Son of Mary” 23 times in the Quran. Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran and one whole chapter (*Sura 19*) is devoted to her and named after her. Mary is mentioned by name more times in the Quran than in the New Testament and the Quran gives more biographical information about her than the New Testament. Jesus' birth stories are particularly vivid in the Quran. Some of the images are very familiar to Christians while others are very different.

42. *And remember when the angels said, “O Mary! Verily, Allah has chosen you, purified you, and chosen you above other women.*
43. *O Mary! “Submit yourself with obedience to your Lord Allah and prostrate yourself, and bow down along with those who do so.”*
44. *This is a part of the news of the unseen, which We inspire you with, O Muhammad. You were not with them, when they cast lots with their pens as to which of them should be charged with the care of Mary; nor were you with them when they disputed.*
45. *Remember when the angels said, “O Mary! Verily, Allah gives you the glad tidings of a Word from Him, his name will be the Messiah Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and in the hereafter, and will be one of those who are near to Allah.*
46. *He will speak to the people in the cradle and in manhood, and he will be one of the righteous.”*
47. *She said, “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” He said, “So for Allah creates what He wills. When He has decreed something, He says to it only, ‘Be!’ and it is.”*
48. *And He will teach Jesus the Book and the wisdom of the prophets and the Torah and the Gospel.*
49. *And will make him a Messenger to the Children of Israel saying, “I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I design for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave; and I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I bring the dead to life by Allah's leave. And I inform you of what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely, therein is a*

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- sign for you, if you believe.*
50. *And I have come confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you, and I have come to you with a proof from your Lord. So fear Allah and obey me.*
51. *Truly! Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him alone. This is the straight path.” (Quran 3.42-51)*
18. *And mention in the Quran, O Muhammad, the story of Mary, when she withdrew in seclusion from her family to a place facing east.*
19. *She screened herself from them; then We sent to her Our archangel Gabriel, and he appeared before her in the form of a man in all respects.*
20. *She said, “Verily! I seek refuge with the Most Beneficent from you, if you do fear Allah.”*
21. *The angel said, “I am only a Messenger from your Lord, to announce to you the gift of a righteous son.”*
22. *She said: “So, your Lord said, ‘That is easy for Me and We wish to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us and it is a matter already decreed.’”*
23. *So she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place called Bethlehem,*
24. *And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said: “Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight!”*
25. *Then Jesus cried unto her from below her, saying, “Grieve not! Your Lord has provided a water stream under you;*
26. *And shake the trunk of the palm tree towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you.”*
27. *“So eat and drink and be glad, and if you see any human being, say, “Verily! I have vowed a fast unto the Most Beneficent so I shall not speak to any human being this day.””*
28. *Then she brought the baby to her people, carrying him. They said, “O Mary! Indeed you have brought a mighty thing!*
29. *O sister! Your father was not a man who used to commit adultery, nor was your mother an unchaste woman.”*
30. *Then she pointed to Jesus. They said, “How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?”*
31. *Jesus said, “Verily! I am a slave of Allah, He has given me the Scripture and made me a Prophet.*
32. *And He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and benevolence as long as I live.*
33. *And dutiful to my mother, and made me not arrogant or unblest.*
34. *And peace be upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!”*
35. *Such is Jesus, son of Mary. It is a statement of truth, about which some doubt. (Quran 19.18-35)*

Jesus is an important figure in the Quran, which affirms the truth of the teachings of Jesus as found in the Gospels. Like Christians, Muslims believe in the virgin conception of Jesus by God's Spirit. The Quran also records some of Jesus' New Testament miracles such as giving sight to the blind, healing lepers, and raising the dead. It also includes the story of Jesus breathing life into clay birds, which does not appear in the New Testament but is included in the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Jesus is mentioned in 93 verses in the Quran and is given several honorable names. Jesus is also listed as strongly affirming Allah as the one God.

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116. And when Allah will say on the Day of Resurrection, "O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?' He will say, "Glory be to You! It was not for me to say what I had no right to say. Had I said such a thing, You would surely have known it. You know what is in my inner-self though I do not know what is in Yours, truly, You, only You, are the All-Knower of all that is hidden and unseen.

117. "Never did I say to them aught except what You did command me to say, 'Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord,' And I was a witness over them while I dwelt amongst them, but when You took me up, You were the Watcher over them, and You are a Witness to all things. (Quran 5.116-117)

However much the Quran reveres Mary and Jesus, it would be a mistake to say that Muslims accept them in the same way that Christians do. Even though Jesus is referred to as Messiah 11 times, the term does not have the theological importance for Muslims that it does for Christians. Jesus is certainly not the "Christ" for Muslims. Similarly, the Quran does not refer to Jesus as the "Son of God" and, in fact, it denies that Jesus was anything more than a Prophet and Messenger like Muhammad. The Christian belief that Jesus was God in human form is blasphemous to the rigid monotheism of Islam and, even though the Quran does talk of "God's Spirit" from time to time, the Christian concept of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is understood by Muslims to be polytheism.

72. Surely, they have disbelieved who say, "Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary." But the Messiah said, "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord."

Verily, whosoever sets up partners in worship with Allah, then Allah has forbidden Paradise for him, and the Fire will be his abode. And for the polytheists there are no helpers.

73. Surely, disbelievers are those who said, "Allah is the third of the three." But there is no god but Allah. And if they cease not from what they say, verily, a painful torment will befall the disbelievers among them.

74. Will they not repent to Allah and ask His forgiveness? For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

75. The Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a believer in Allah. They both used to eat food. Look how We make the revelations clear to them, yet look how they are deluded away from the truth.

76. Say, "How do you worship besides Allah something which has no power either to harm or to benefit you? But it is Allah who is the All-Hearer, All-Knower.

77. Say, "O Christians and Jews! Exceed not the limits in your religion other than the truth, and do not follow the vain desires of people who went astray in times gone by, and who misled many and strayed from the Right Path." Quran 5.72-77)

Finally, Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The idea that a Messenger of God could have been arrested by government authorities, tried for blasphemy, convicted as a criminal, and executed by crucifixion is a repugnant idea to Muslims. They are proud of the way in which Muhammad responded to being abused by the Quraysh tribe by raising up an army and eventually defeating his enemies. All of the

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Messengers mentioned in the Quran are heroic, successful figures and the idea that God somehow failed to protect Jesus is anathema to them. They believe that it merely appeared that Jesus was crucified but that God actually took Jesus into heaven in a manner similar to what happened to Elijah. Muslims do not believe in the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, so they believe there is no need for the atoning sacrifice of Jesus to rescue persons from the grips of sin. Therefore, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was unnecessary for human salvation. Muslims believe that each of us will be held accountable before God for our own actions and we are therefore each responsible for our own salvation. We earn salvation through being obedient to God's will, faithfully fulfilling God's requirements as defined in the Quran and Hadith literature, and reaching out in benevolence to other persons.

157. *The Jews say, "We killed Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah," but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Jesus was put over another man whom they killed, and those*

who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely, they killed him not.

158. *But Allah raised him up with his body and soul unto Himself in the heavens. And Allah is Ever All-Powerful, All-Wise. (Quran 4.157-158)*

? *The most difficult thing for Christians trying to relate to Muslims is the issue of Jesus' divinity. How would you describe what you believe about Jesus being a representation of God? How was Jesus the same as Muhammad and how was he different?*

? *How would you explain to a Muslim how God forgives persons for their failure to follow God's rules?*

? *How would you explain that the crucifixion of Jesus was not a failure but a victory?*

? *How can you describe the Christian understanding of salvation in a way that it would make sense to a Muslim?*

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Session Eleven Culture and the Role of Women

? *At the beginning of this session, it would be valuable to do a “stereotype” exercise with regard to Western culture and Muslim culture. Write the word “American” at the top of a chalkboard or newsprint pad and ask the group for single words that describe an American. Then, do the same with the words “Christian,” “Arab,” and “Muslim.” Stereotypes are helpful in understanding how people think about people from other societies and they often reflect our perception of other cultures more than the reality of those cultures.*

Not many of us could define a “Christian culture” and if we did, it would probably be Western or American culture rather than Christian. As American Christians, we are so conditioned to the concept of separation of church and state that we no longer think of our Western culture in religious terms. But, it is very different for Muslims. Virtually all

aspects of life are spelled out in Islamic law so that the ways of worship, educational policies, government proceedings, economic dealings, family relationships, and sexual relations are all defined. Persons know what kinds of clothing they are to wear for specific situations, how to address other people, how to fulfill religious requirements, and even how to guide warfare. Some things are required of individuals and societies. Other things are taboo. Still other things fall in between these two extremes.

In general, the Western world view and the Eastern (*or, at least, Middle Eastern*) world view are very different. Regarding religion, the Western view is that religion is an individual matter, persons can be either religious or not, sacred and secular things are compartmentalized in society, and religion is largely kept to Sunday worship. In contrast, Muslims see religion as a communal function in which sacred and secular things are commingled, religion permeates all areas of life, and the idea of

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being non-religious is largely non-existent.

In social life, Westerners maintain time oriented relationships in which everyone has a watch or clock and meeting times are important. The equality of the sexes is generally assumed and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation is generally believed to be wrong. Middle Easterners, on the other hand, believe that people are more important than time and believe that allowing time for bargaining, elaborate conversations, and poetic language is more important than keeping time schedules. The sexes are segregated in most areas of life and discrimination on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation is generally assumed to be right.

Family views are also different between East and West. Westerners see members of a nuclear family as being independent of one another and individual family members choose who they are going to marry, where they are going to move, and where they are going to work. Loyalty is to the individual first and the family or clan second. Elderly people are usually segregated from the younger members of a family and live out their final days in institutions. In contrast, Middle Easterners believe that members of a family are interdependent, more than half of all marriages are between cousins, marriages are arranged by fathers and older brothers, most decisions by family members are decided by the father, and elderly people are kept in an honored position at the center of the family or clan. Loyalty is to the family and clan more than to the individual.

Westerners view education as being achievement oriented involving deductive logic. Creative problem solving is valued more than retention of details. Middle Easterners, on the other hand, view education as life centered and aimed at improving the situation of the family or clan. Rote learning and memorization of

details is more important than creative problem solving.

These cultural differences would not be as important in the relationships between Christians and Muslims if members of the two religions understood the relationship between religion and culture in the same way. But, they do not. In general, Christians, who tend to separate religious and secular areas of life, have great difficulty in understanding why Muslims require women to wear special clothing, why Muslims want their religious and secular leaders to be one in the same, why they tolerate and sometimes support terrorism, and why Muslims see American soldiers as enemies of the faith. At the same time, Muslims, who see culture and religion as one in the same, have great difficulty understanding how Christians can tolerate pornography, preemptive wars, promiscuity, and alcohol and drug abuse. In the long run, cultural differences may have as much, if not more, to do with tensions between the two religions than beliefs.

? *How much do you think an Arab Christian and an American Christian would have in common? How much of the culture that we attribute to Arab Muslims do you think would also be true for Arab Christians?*

? *How much do you think Persian Muslims, Turkish Muslims, Arab Muslims, African Muslims, and Indonesian Muslims have in common and how much do their individual cultures separate them? What about Christians from these different cultures?*

The Role of Women

Probably the two issues that trouble Westerners most about Islam are the treatment of women and the religious support of vio-

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lence. And, in many ways, the same could be said of Islam's suspicions toward Christians. Both issues are widely misunderstood by both sides. Next week's session focuses on the violence question and the remainder of this week's session is focused on the role of women in Islam.

First, it is important to note that the revelation of Islam in the Seventh Century raised the status of women substantially over what it was before Muhammad came on the scene and, in most cases, substantially over what was true in Christian culture at the same time. Early on, Islam prohibited female infanticide, established women's legal rights, granted women the right to receive their own dowries, changed marriage from a man gaining property to a contractual relationship between a man and a woman, allowed women to retain control over their property and use their maiden names after marriage, granted women financial maintenance from their husbands, and limited the husband's free ability to divorce.

The Quran declares that men and women are equal in the eyes of God (*Quran 51.49*), describes the relationship between men and women as one of love and mercy (*Quran 30.21*), says that men and women are to be like members of one another (*Quran 3.195*), and to be like each other's garments (*Quran 2.187*). Men and women are equally responsible for adhering to the Five Pillars of Islam.

71. The believers, men and women, are supporters of one another, they enjoin monotheism and all that Islam orders one to do, and forbid from polytheism and all that Islam has forbidden; they offer their prayers perfectly, and give their alms, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.

72. Allah has promised to the believers – men and women – gardens under which rivers flow to dwell therein forever, and beautiful mansions in gardens of Paradise. But the greatest bliss is the Good pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme success. (Quran 9.71-72)

The above verses were the last ones revealed about relations between men and women and most Muslims argue that they outline the ideal vision of the relationship between men and women in Islam – one of equality in the eyes of God.

? If the Quran and Hadith originally elevated women substantially, how do you think the subjugation of women crept back into Islam over the years?

? How would you describe the role of women in North American culture? In your denomination? In your local church? In Christianity around the world?

Women played important roles while Muhammad was alive and in the early Muslim community. Muhammad's first wife Khadija was the first person to learn of the revelations given to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and her affirmation and support was an important factor in Muhammad's identification of the revelations as being from God. Moreover, she owned her own business, hired Muhammad, and later proposed to him, leading later Islamic scholars to recommend that women could propose to men if they so desired. Women fought in battles and nursed the wounded during the time of the prophet. They were consulted about who should succeed Muhammad after his death and they contributed significantly to the collection and compilation of the final editions

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of the Quran and played an important role in the transmission of numerous Hadith traditions.

Woman prayed regularly along with men in the mosques during the early period of Islam as well as owning and selling property, engaging in commercial transactions, and both seeking and providing educational instruction. Many women were instructed in religious matters in Muhammad's own home and his favorite wife, Aisha, played a unique role as an authority on history, medicine, poetry, and rhetoric as well as becoming one of the most important transmitters of Hadith traditions.

Muhammad's only surviving daughter, Fatima, played a prominent role in the political, military, and religious leadership of the early Islamic community and has become something of a role model for women in Islamic popular literature. Fatima was the wife of Ali and mother of Husain and Hasan, the first three Shiite Imams. Fatima experienced many difficulties with her husband and Muhammad had to act as arbiter in their disputes. However, she fought against Abu Bakr (*first Caliph*) for Ali's right to succeed Muhammad as leader of the Islamic community. Recently, several Muslim scholars, including female scholars, have lifted up Fatima as the example of the liberated Islamic woman because of her independent thinking and courage in the face of adversity.

In traditional sources, however, Fatima appears as the utterly devoted wife. Stories about her appear in many languages and cultural settings throughout the history of Islam and her memory has taken on much of the same quality as the Virgin Mary in popular Christian lore. Many aspects of her life remain fairly constant in different Muslim cultures but others take on the characteristics of each culture in which the stories appear. She is revered

as the "ideal woman" in each society and, therefore, her image is shaped by the values of each culture in which she is remembered.

Christianity is 2,000 years old and yet, women have only moved toward equality in the last century. The right to vote, the right to equal pay for equal work, sexual freedom, full legal rights in marriage and divorce, and many other equality issues have only come to pass for Western women in the last century and the changes remain uneven from one place to another. In the church, women have been barred from clergy and other leadership roles until recently and, in the majority of Christian denominations, they are still barred.

In many modern Islamic societies, women occupy a wide variety of positions in business and the professions, excel in education, and enjoy the same freedoms as women in Western societies. And, even though these freedoms are not as universal as they are in Western societies, they are changing faster than they did in the Christian world. Islam is 700 years younger than Christianity and is moving toward equality for women at a rapid pace in many areas even though most of the cultures in which Islam is predominant have virtually no history of sexual egalitarianism.

? *Do you think the emancipation of women in Islamic cultures is moving forward or backward?*

? *What situations are you aware of that leads you to believe women in Islamic cultures are moving toward equality either faster or slower than in Western society?*

Still, even with the gains that are happening in many Muslim societies, the plight of women in others, especially where Islamic fundamentalism is in control, remains bleak. In several

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societies, those who hold political power continue to exercise rigid social control by severely limiting the options available to women, invariably claiming Quranic sanction for their policies. In some areas, these restrictions are not “old fashioned” but are relatively recent developments that have accompanied the growth of Islamic fundamentalism in reaction to the devastation and humiliation of Western colonialism. Many of the modern restrictions on women arose as a reaction to Western colonialism as a means of protecting Muslim women and families from what many Muslims perceived as the rampant sinfulness of Western society that was being thrust upon them. Today, the same argument is used by fundamentalist Islamic religious and political leaders as a defense of women and families against the onslaught of corrupt Western values brought into Muslim lands through commerce, military invasion, and the media.

? *What Western values do you think Muslims would consider to be blatantly sinful? What things about the treatment of women in the West do you think are repugnant to Muslims?*

? *Is it possible for persons to retain relatively puritan values in the midst of the overt sexuality and greed shown in modern media and commerce?*

? *Have attitudes about such things as sexual morality, drugs, and honesty changed substantially in Western society in the last two or three decades?*

? *Why do you think Fundamentalist Islam and the accompanying subjugation of women is growing?*

Even though the Islamic emphasis on human dignity virtually demands that all persons, men

and women, have equal access to education, women are discouraged from seeking educations in a few conservative Muslim societies and it was banned entirely by the ultra-fundamentalist Taliban of Afghanistan. Traditionally, it was understood that the domestic role of women did not require formal education and did not leave time for it but, as women are making up a larger part of the workforce in Muslim countries, these attitudes are slipping away gradually in most areas and very rapidly in others.

In a few Islamic countries, women are not allowed to work outside the home and are not allowed to be outside the home without being escorted by their husbands, fathers, or older brothers. Although female circumcision is practiced in a few countries that are predominantly Muslim (*and in some that are predominantly Christian*), it is not a Muslim practice but a cultural practice. The Quran does not mention the practice at all and there is only one brief reference to it in volumes and volumes of Hadith tradition where it is generally outlawed. Many Muslim countries have outlawed the practice and a number of Muslim writers, both men and women, have targeted the practice as inhuman, immoral, and religiously indefensible. Still, in a few ultra-fundamentalist Islamic societies, the practice is condoned as a means of protecting a young woman's virginity, virtue, and fertility for marriage.

? *How much do you think the limitations on women in Islamic countries are a product of Islam and how much a product of the ethnic and national culture?*

? *Why have male dominated societies throughout history, including Christian societies, severely limited the rights of women?*

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Marriages for sons and daughters in many Muslim families are still “arranged” by their parents because they believe it is the best way to guarantee good marriages for their children. Most Muslims argue that marriages done in this way produce more lasting, more religious and more loving partners than the “hit and miss” approach they see as typical of the Western style of courtship. Premarital sexual relations are still taboo in Muslim societies even though they have become routine in Western society.

? *Most people would argue that premarital sexual relationships have become the norm in Western society. Do you think this strengthens or hinders the fidelity of marriages? Does it strengthen or hinder the general moral fabric of society?*

? *What values might arranged marriages have in some cultures?*

Polygamy predates the beginnings of Islam in the Middle Eastern, African and Asian cultures where Islam predominates. Several of the leading characters of the Old Testament – Abraham, David, Solomon, etc. – had multiple wives and the practice continues today in a few Muslim societies. The Quran states unambiguously that a man may marry up to four wives so long as he can treat them all equally, both materially and emotionally (*Quran 4.3*). The Quran allowed Muhammad to exceed that number because of his responsibilities as leader of a complex society. Even though Muhammad had a harem of several wives and some concubines, most of them were widows he married or brought into the harem so he could provide for them financially or they were women he married for political reasons to help build the Islamic alliance. The Hadith

records show that Muhammad respected women and liked being in their presence. The accounts of his family life show him to have been a loving and somewhat doting husband to his wives and a dedicated and loving father to his children.

The Quranic legislation allowing up to four wives seems to have been instituted for much the same reason. Because of the violence of Arab society prior to Islam, there was always a severe shortage of men. Widows and orphans had no rights to property. The legislation in the Quran about women, property rights, dowry ownership, eliminations of female infanticide, divorce rights, etc. were revolutionary in the Seventh Century and extraordinarily advanced. The same rights were not accorded women in most Christian societies until the late Eighteenth Century. Therefore, it is important to understand that the legislation allowing only four wives was understood as a substantial increase in women’s rights and a severe limitation of men’s freedoms when the Quran was revealed in the Seventh Century.

Today, most Muslim societies have either outlawed polygamy or tightly control it by requiring legal contracts and acceptance of new wives by existing wives. The vast majority of modern Muslims simply assume that monogamy is the only feasible marriage practice even in the few countries where polygamy remains legal.

It is not uncommon for both Christians and Muslims to “proof-text” the Bible and the Quran to find a single phrase to under gird an idea that goes against the general tone of their faith. Racism, homophobia, and the abuse of women have regularly been justified by quoting an occasional verse. For Muslims, Sura 4.34 contains the isolated verse that conservative Muslims use to justify restricting women’s rights:

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34. *Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend from their means to support them. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard. As to those women on whose part you see ill conduct, first admonish them, then refuse to share their beds, then beat them but if they return to obedience, seek not against them other means. Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great. (Quran 4.34)*

The practice of women wearing veils in some Muslim countries is one of the most obvious visual distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, it is not a universal practice. It varies from society to society. And, the Quran does not require it nor was it practiced much in early Islam. However, the Quran does stipulate that men and women dress modestly at all times:

31. *Tell the believing women to lower their gaze from forbidden things and protect their private parts and not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent and to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's father, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their sister's sons, or their sisters in Islam, or the female slaves whom their right hands possess, or old male servants who lack vigor, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex. And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment. And all of you beg Allah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful. (Quran 24.31)*

In a few conservative Muslim societies where Islamic law is the law of the land (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan under the Taliban, etc.), female modesty has been judged to include covering the face with either a slightly transparent veil or a cloth with a slit for the eyes. In other countries, some women from very traditional families also wear veils. And, virtually everywhere that there are Muslims, including North America and Europe, a sizeable number of Muslim women choose to wear loose-fitting, full-length garments and headscarves in public.

Veiling did not become widespread in the Islamic world until nearly a hundred years after the death of Muhammad even though it was common in both the Christian Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire where veils were worn by wealthy women to distinguish them from the common people. During Muhammad's time and the next hundred years or so, veils were worn only by Muhammad's wives and the wives and daughters of religious and political leaders as symbols of their religious status. Generations later, the practice in Islam became more like the practice in the Christian and Persian areas: a means of distinguishing the upper-class women from the lower-class women. Gradually, over the centuries, the practice came to be understood as a means of protecting a woman's modesty rather than a status symbol.

Many non-Muslims look disapprovingly on Muslim women who choose to cover themselves, regarding them as reactionary or hyper-conservative. The veil is often seen by Westerners as a symbol of women's inferior status, backwardness, and oppression while Western clothing is seen as a symbol of individual freedom. However, it is important to understand that Muslims believe that such things as modest clothing, for both men and women,

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show respect for human dignity and that some Western clothing shows disrespect for both men and women. Western advertising, Muslims argue, is particularly rampant with images that debase women's bodies by making them the chief enticement in marketing products.

Some Muslim women, both conservative and liberal, choose to wear traditional dress when it is not required because they believe it provides freedom from emphasis on the physical and allows them to focus on their spiritual, intellectual, and professional development. For most of the modern Muslim women who choose to wear traditional clothing, the reason is deeply religious. They choose to wear the clothing as a bold witness to their faith. For some, it is also a source of national and ethnic pride in much the same way that Palestinian men began wearing the kafiya headress when it was banned by Israel and like the Scotsmen who wear kilts at ceremonial occasions to differentiate them from the English. Many young Muslim women intellectuals, in particular, have adopted Islamic dress to symbolize their defiance of Western imperialist

traditions that they believe show little respect for women.

So veiling is a complex subject. In some situations, it is forced upon women and is, indeed, a form of repression. But, in other situations, it is chosen by women as a form of women's liberation. In all but a few Islamic societies, veiling is a matter of choice and women are allowed to dress in traditional clothing or Western clothing. However, the Quranic emphasis on modesty still keeps religious Islamic women from wearing the kinds of overtly sexual clothing that is common in the West.

? *Discuss the idea that veiling could be a form of women's liberation?*

? *Do you think time will bring about more or less freedom for women in Muslim societies?*

? *Can a traditional understanding of family roles remain functional while providing full rights and freedom for women in a modern society?*

Session Twelve

Violence and Warfare

Two significant periods in world history reflect the past willingness of Christianity and the Western powers to invade and brutalize areas of the Islamic world: the Crusades and Western Colonialism. And, the deeply embedded memories of these two periods coupled with an immense fear that the heavily armed West is eager to repeat them has a great deal to do with current Muslim hostility toward the West.

The Crusades

Before September 11, 2001, most Westerners were relatively ignorant of the Crusades and thought they were nothing more than a small blip in world history and an embarrassment to modern Christianity. However, after that day, many Americans in particular became more sensitive to fact that the Crusades are vastly more important in the historical memory of Islam than in the West. For Muslims, the Crusades represent the worst of Christianity in that they were blatant and brutal attacks on

Muslim people in the name of religious enthusiasm. And, for Muslims, the Crusades represent the best of Islam in that, under attack, they rose up and drove out the Christian invaders in a defensive Holy War while at the same time showing considerably more tolerance and compassion toward their enemies than was expressed toward them.

After the September 11 attacks on the United States by Islamic militants, American leaders talked of launching a “crusade against terrorism.” This further enflamed the Islamic world because any use of the term “crusade” means Holy War to them. Osama bin Laden deliberately invoked memories of the Crusades to enlist supporters in his cause. To many Muslims, the Crusades have long been considered a crime against Islam and images of the Crusades are frequently incorporated into modern political and religious rhetoric against the West.

Also, the great victory of Saladin in driving the forces of Richard the Lionhearted out of

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Jerusalem and then recapturing most of the Holy Land for Islam is one of the favorite heroic tales of Muslims around the world. Even though the Muslims of Antioch, Edessa, Tripoli, and Jerusalem had been brutally slaughtered by the Crusaders when they captured these cities, Saladin was substantially more generous and compassionate to the Christians when he took these areas back. This image of Saladin as the supreme Islamic warrior who was both victorious in defending Islam and compassionate toward his enemies is seen by Muslims the world over as an Islamic ideal.

Briefly, the Crusades began when Pope Urban II addressed a crowd of bishops, senior clergy, and nobles at Clermont, France on November 27, 1095. The Islamic Empire had begun in 632 and, within a little more than a hundred years, it had spread East into India, north into Russia, and East across all of North Africa. It had crossed the Mediterranean Sea and spread across most of Spain, it had taken over all the lands of the Persian Sasanian Empire and most of the lands of the Christian Byzantine Empire and in 1095, it was clear that Islam would soon move into the areas that are modern Greece and Yugoslavia. In all these areas, Christians and Jews were allowed to continue worshipping as they pleased because they were "People of the Book" who worshipped the same God as the Muslims and because the Quran prohibits forcing anyone to become a Muslim. But, the lands were still under Islamic control and Europe was nervous.

In addition to the rapid advances of Islam, the Christian world had just been severely split into the Roman Catholic West and the Orthodox East. While the two halves of Christendom were not at war with one another, the tensions were severe and there were fairly frequent skirmishes along their borders. In

addition, Europe was divided into hundreds of feudal estates that were often more powerful than the kings. This feudal hierarchy of counts and barons and knights was essentially a militarized society that, in general, had reached a level of enough stability that there wasn't anyone to fight against.

So, Pope Urban II launched a carefully orchestrated campaign to unite the European feudal lords and the two halves of Christendom in a great war against the "infidels." With powerful oratory supported by published appeals, Urban issued the challenge at Clermont and then went on a tour of Europe to sell his concept. Soon thousands and thousands of knights with their entire entourages of foot soldiers and priests set off for the Holy Land bent on destroying the Muslims and capturing the Biblical holy sites.

On the way, they attacked dozens of Jewish communities in the Germanic lands slaughtering everyone in what has been called the first Holocaust. When they arrived in the Eastern Orthodox lands, still on route to the Muslim areas they began killing Byzantine Christians. When they arrived in Palestine, they rather easily routed a relatively peaceful Islamic/Christian/Jewish population that had coexisted peacefully for five centuries. The Crusaders mercilessly slaughtered the population of Jerusalem and the historical records talk of blood flowing in streams down the streets and corpses putrefying in the gutters for several weeks. They established the Crusader kingdoms as European feudal states and settled in for what they believed would be forever.

Over the next hundred years, the Muslims gradually took back various areas and, each time the Christians lost another major city, another pope would call for another Crusade. These further Crusades were all less successful than the first and, eventually, the Muslim

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leader Saladin came on the scene and drove the Christian armies out for good.

It is easy for modern Christians to write off the Crusades as an aberration of history and it is certainly true that there were many things besides Christian motivation at work in them. However, as we seek to understand the feelings of modern Muslims, it is imperative that we be aware that, because of the Crusades, many understand the Christian world to be excessively violent and imperialist and that they must protect themselves against a possible Christian onslaught. The devastation and humiliation brought upon Muslims during the 200 years of occupation by Western powers during the Colonial period simply reinforced these images. And, the modern onslaught of American culture into Islamic lands through commerce, media, and militarism has intensified these feelings even further.

? *How do you feel about the church calling for a Holy War on the Muslims during the Crusades? Can you envision this same thing happening in the modern world?*

? *Discuss how Christian versus Christian wars such as World Wars I and II appeared to Muslims.*

? *Discuss how the preemptive invasion of Iraq and its vast oil fields appears to Muslims who understand all of life, even military action, to be a part of one's religion.*

Colonialism

After more than a thousand years of “dark ages” in which European culture stagnated while Islamic culture flourished, the West came to life almost overnight. After lagging behind the rest of the world for decades, the Western nations began a process that would

enable them to dominate the rest of the world. The new societies of Europe and America developed a new economic and political structure. They developed technology, industry, and investment capital at an amazing rate and the agrarian states of the rest of the world were no match for them.

This had fateful consequences for the largely agrarian Islamic world. As the industrial economies of the West continued to expand, they needed new markets and they sought them abroad. They began, in various ways, to colonize the rest of the world in order to bring them into the European/American commercial network. Colonized countries were exploited for raw materials that were fed into European industry. In return, the colonized countries received cheap manufactured Western goods that destroyed local industries. And, the Western powers tried to forcefully transform and modernize the colonized areas along European/American lines to further bring them into the Western economic system. However, colonization was not simply a commercial enterprise. Western imperialism was supported by technologically superior militaries that were able to keep native people in subjugation and Christian missionaries came along bent on converting the rest of the world to Christianity.

This colonization was experienced by the agrarian areas as invasive and alien. The populations of the colonized countries became severely divided between the vast lower income classes whose situation was made substantially worse and the upper classes and military that benefited from modernization, commerce, and the subjugation of the rest of the population. The rich became richer and the poor became poorer and the brutality of the Western overlords began to build a distrust, hatred, and fear of the West that had not existed before in Muslim lands. Areas were arbi-

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trarily divided into nation-states by the Western powers and secular foreign law codes were imposed on them. Around the world, Muslims were humiliated, brutalized, and driven into poverty. People deeply resented the fact that they were no longer in control of their own destiny.

In the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, as Western nations were no longer able to maintain vast colonial empires, most of the Muslim nations became independent and found themselves strangely stuck in a world that was partly Western and partly Eastern. Much of the modernization that had happened still seemed alien but it was also clear that they could never go back to life as it was before. Ultimately, this resulted in a wide variety of societal and political structures ranging from totally secular dictatorships such as Iraq under the Baathists; totally Islamic states such as Iran under the Ayatollahs, Saudi Arabia under the royal family and the Wahabbis, and Afghanistan under the Taliban; and Islamic democracies such as Egypt and Turkey.

None of these societies and governmental forms has worked particularly well for long and constant change has been the norm in Muslim society for the last few generations. Clearly, the Muslim world is still trying to find a way in which the dynamics of Islam and the needs of modernization can coexist and most scholars agree that it is going to take something new. Virtually all agree that it is going to have to happen from within, that it cannot be imposed from outside, especially from the West. The Islamic world cannot go back to the old golden age of Islamic empires nor can it accept the Western cultural and political ideas that are still trying to be thrust upon them.

The most critical result of the colonial period, however, is that a deep distrust of Western imperialism has become established in the

Muslim mindset. With the rapid growth of wealth tied to oil production in some Middle Eastern countries has come the parallel fear that Western nations, especially the United States with its vast military and insatiable need for resources, will simply come into the Muslim world and take whatever it wants by force. In a very real way, the growth of modern militant organizations such as al Qaeda are a direct result of the abuses of colonialism. Militant Islam believes that the only hope for the Muslim world is to purge itself of all Western influence. They understand their actions, no matter how heinous they may be by either Christian or Muslim standards, to be defending Islam against Western oppression.

? *What do modern Christians need to do to show that we are neither on a Crusade to steal Islam's resources nor trying to convert them to Western values for our own benefit?*

? *To what degree are the current actions of Western governments intensifying anti-Western and anti-Christian feelings in Islam?*

? *Why do you think so many Westerners see Islam as an enemy?*

Jihad

The Arab term, jihad, which means "to strive or struggle" has become as common to Christians as Muslims. Virtually every day, it appears somewhere in the Western press to describe violent actions of Muslims, usually in some kind of attack against Westerners. Many militant Islamic nations have the term as part of the title of their organization and the news is always reporting on some Islamic religious or political leader that has called for a jihad against America.

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In fact, the term jihad is similar to what Christians would call the “pursuit of holiness.” It is a call for a struggle to be obedient to the will of God and to follow the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his early companions. Much of the history of Islam is best understood in the light of the Quranic teachings about jihad to the degree that some Muslims call jihad the Sixth Pillar of Islamic Faith. Jihad as struggle pertains to the difficulty of living a good life, of struggling against the evil in oneself to be virtuous and moral, of making a serious effort to do good works and of helping to reform society. Under certain circumstances, it can also mean fighting injustice and oppression, creating a just society, and defending Islam through the use of armed struggle.

The two opposite meanings of jihad – violent and non-violent – are contrasted in a well-known tradition about Muhammad. When he returned from battle he told his followers, “We return from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.” Muhammad preached that the greater jihad (*the pursuit of holiness*) was always the more difficult and more important struggle because it was a struggle against one’s ego, selfishness, greed and evil.

Jihad as a military concept is startlingly parallel to the Christian “just war” theory. Because military jihad is understood only in defensive terms, it had pretty well disappeared from Islam for three centuries until the Crusades when Muslims had to rally themselves to defend against the invading Christians. Once safe from further oppression, the concept fell into disuse again. However, following the humiliation and defeats at the hands of Western powers during the Colonial era, the concept of military jihad has again become a rallying cry. In recent decades, with the rise of fundamentalist Islam, the military intervention

in Muslim countries by the French, Americans, Russians and British, and the rise of Western-supported secular governments in Islamic countries, the call to military jihad has increased. And, the easy access of modern weapons to militant groups has made jihad even more formidable.

? *Discuss the Christian concept of a just war and the Islamic concept of jihad, both of which require that the motives for war are just and aimed at peace, that military action be only defensive in nature, that harm to non-combatants be avoided, that only the minimum force necessary be used, that war be waged by a legitimate authority and involve a declaration of war, and that war be waged only as the last resort.*

? *Do the actions of modern militant Islamic organizations fall within the boundaries of jihad?*

? *Do the actions of Christian nations such as Russia in its invasion of Afghanistan and America in its invasion of Iraq fall within the boundaries of just war?*

? *What can the peaceful majority of Muslims and Christians do to reduce the tensions between the fundamentalists and secularists in both of our societies?*

? *There are certainly such things as Islamic governments. Is there any such thing as a Christian government?*

The Quran and Violence

Even though the overall tone of the Quran is aimed at peace and faithfulness, it does have passages that condone or encourage violence in defense of Islam. Most of these passages

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were dealing with specific situations in the time of Muhammad but they are being used more and more by militant organizations such as al Qaeda, Hamaz, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah and many others to justify military and terrorist activities.

Following is a selection of the most important passages in the Quran about violence and warfare:

- 5. Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and prepare for them each and every ambush. But if they repent and offer prayers perfectly, and give alms, then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*
- 6. And if any one of the polytheists seeks your protection then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of Allah and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men who know not.*
- 29. There is no blame on those who are weak or ill or who find no resources to spend on jihad, if they are sincere to Allah and His Messenger. No ground can there be against the good-doers. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*
- 91. Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, and those who acknowledge not the religion of Islam among the people of the Scriptures, until they pay the tax with willing submission and feel themselves subdued. (Quran 9.5-6, 29, 91)*
- 39. Permission to fight is given to those believers who are fighting the polytheists because they have been wronged, and surely, Allah is able to give them victory.*
- 40. Some have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said, "Our Lord is Allah." Had it not been that Allah sends believers to stop others, monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques, wherein the Name of Allah is mentioned, would surely have been pulled down. Verily, Allah will help those who help His cause. Truly Allah is All-Strong, All-Mighty. (Quran 22.39-40)*
- 190. And fight in the Way of Allah those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, Allah likes not the transgressors.*
- 191. And kill them wherever you find them and turn them out from where they have turned you out. And polytheism is worse than killing. And fight not with them at Mecca unless they first fight you there. But if they attack you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.*
- 192. But if they cease, then Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*
- 193. And fight them until there is no more disbelief and all worship is only for Allah. But if they cease, let them be no transgression except against the polytheists.*
- 194. The sacred month is for the sacred month, and for the prohibited things, there is the law of equality. Then whoever transgresses the prohibition against you, you transgress likewise against him. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is with the believers. (Quran 2.190-194)*
- 57. So if you gain the mastery over them in war, punish them severely in order to disperse those who are behind them, so that they may learn a lesson.*

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Session Twelve: Violence and Warfare

58. *If you, Muhammad, fear treachery from any people, throw back their covenant to them and be suspicious of them. Certainly Allah likes not the treacherous.*

59. *And let those who disbelieve know that they cannot outstrip punishment. Verily, they will never be able to save themselves from Allah's punishment.*

60. *And make ready against them all you can of power, including steeds of war to threaten the enemy of Allah and your enemy, and against others whom you may not know but whom Allah does know. And whatever you shall spend in the cause of Allah shall be repaid unto you, and you shall not be treated unjustly.*

61. *But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and put your trust in Allah. Verily, He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. (Quran 8.57-61)*

17. *No blame or sin is there upon the blind, nor is there blame or sin upon the lame, nor is there blame or sin upon the sick that they go not to war. And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, He will admit him to Paradise, and whosoever turns back, He will punish him with a painful torment. (Quran 48.17)*

90. *Except those who join a group, between you and whom there is a peace treaty, or those who approach you with their breasts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. Had Allah willed, indeed He would have given them*

power over you, and they would have fought you. So if they withdraw from you, and fight not against you, and offer you peace, then Allah has opened no way for you against them.

91. *You will find others that wish to have security from you and security from their people. Every time they are sent back to temptation, they yield thereto. If they withdraw not from you, nor offer you peace, nor restrain their hands, take hold of them and kill them wherever you find them. In this case, We have provided you with a clear warrant against them. (Quran 4.90-91)*

? *Both Christians and Muslims see one another as violent even though the majority in both religions are peaceful and greatly disturbed by the levels of violence in modern society. What can we do to change both the perception and actuality of violence in the modern world?*

? *Clearly, the growth of modern Islamic fundamentalist movement is frightening to both moderate Muslims and Christians. What can be done to reverse these patterns?*

? *An old adage is that "violence begets violence" and yet that is the spiral that seems to be happening between Muslims and Christians. How can Christians express the love of Jesus Christ to the Islamic world?*

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Session Thirteen: The Future of Christianity and Islam

Session Thirteen

The Future of Christianity and Islam

There is a general feeling in both the Christian world and the Muslim world that the world's two largest religions are on a collision course. Even though we have coexisted in peace, for the most part, for thirteen hundred years, the tensions are clearly growing today.

Islam is finding a new vitality after three decades of humiliation and oppression under Western colonialism. There is a significant revival happening within Islam and it is leading many Muslims back to their roots. Muslims have a renewed pride in their faith and their cultures. Islam is growing four times faster than Christianity in virtually all areas of the world while Christianity is growing only in the southern hemispheres. In Europe, Christianity is in severe decline and in North America, it is generally stagnant.

A significant part of Islam's phenomenal growth is the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, often funded by some of the oil-rich conservative powers in the Middle East. This fun-

damentalism, in itself, is neither frightening nor threatening to Christians or Westerners and it is bringing a new emphasis on morality and faithfulness. However, the militant offshoots of Islamic fundamentalism are very threatening because they have carried the idea of defensive military jihad to a new level. Their targets are no longer only invading armies, oppressive secular governments, and foreign occupational forces as they have been in the past. They are now the innocent non-combatants who work in tall buildings, worship in synagogues and churches, and celebrate at discotheques. Average citizens of countries that are seen as attacking and oppressing Islam are now viewed by militants as viable targets in the defense of Islam.

On the other side, Western governments (viewed as Christian governments by Islam) have relied only on military force to respond to Islamic militancy. And, violence has continued to beget violence. In occupied Palestine, the Israelis have become aware that everytime

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they launch an attack on militant organizations, they so infuriate the rest of the population that they drive even more into the camps of the militants. The Russians fought against Afghan and al Qaeda fighters in Afghanistan for a decade and it resulted only in strengthening both the Taliban and al Qaeda. Before the American and British invasion of Iraq, it was a secular Middle Eastern nation with no history of Islamic militancy whose secular Baathist government was hated by Islamic militants around the world. However, the invasion was seen by both liberal and conservative Muslims as another act of Western imperialism aimed at stealing Islamic resources and forcing Muslims to accept Western values so the invasion has become a significant recruiting tool for Islamic militants around the world.

One of the most important things that Christians can do today is to gain a greater understanding of Islam and that has been the primary focus of this study. This last session should be used to review what the study group now knows about Islam, to discuss how the study has changed their feelings about both Christianity and Islam, and to focus on where we all go from here.

If you live in a city large enough to have a mosque or Islamic center, contact them and invite an imam or informed lay person to visit your group. Most Muslims are pleased to do this even though they are likely to approach it with some suspicion and apprehension that your purpose is to convert them. It would be helpful to offer the imam a copy of either the Christianity and Islam student book, the leader's guide, or both before he visits your church.

The questions that were addressed in the first session are still valuable ones. If you collected your responses the first week, use that information to see whether or not any of the

knowledge and attitudes of the group have changed. The questions are repeated here for your convenience.

? *Have the class members mention words that come into their minds when you say "Muslims," or the "Quran," or "Muhammad," or "Shiites" or "al Qaeda," or "Islamic Fundamentalist," or "Islamic women," or "Ramadan," or "Taliban," or "Jihad," or "Holy War," and make a list on a chalkboard or newsprint pad.*

? *Have the class list ten beliefs or practices that they believe Christians have in common and write these on a chalkboard or on newsprint sheets.*

? *You know that Islam is growing four times faster than Christianity. Why do you think this is so? What will be the impact of Islam becoming the world's largest religion?*

? *What do you think are the biggest differences between Islam and Christianity?*

? *What are the biggest differences between Muhammad and Jesus?*

? *What nationalities and ethnic groups do you most associate with Islam? What is the nationality of the largest number of Muslims?*

? *Are Muslims inherently more violent than Christians?*

? *Have you ever read anything from the Quran?*

? *The four holiest places in the world for Christians are probably Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Rome. What*

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do you think are the four holiest places in the world for Muslims?

- ?** *Do you know any Muslims and, if you do, have you ever discussed religion with them?*
- ?** *Why is there so much anti-American sentiment in the Islamic world?*
- ?** *When an Islamic terrorist blows himself up in a suicide bombing, is that a religious act? When an American soldier kills a hostile Iraqi, is that a*

religious act?

- ?** *What do Muslims believe about Jesus?*
- ?** *What are the differences between a mosque and a church?*
- ?** *How do Muslims feel about Christians?*
- ?** *How many Muslims do you think there are in America? Compared to Methodists? Compared to Presbyterians? Compared to Catholics? Compared to Jews? Compared to Catholics? Compared to Baptists?*

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