

Christianity and Islam

In 1985 while assigned to the XVIII Airborne Corps at Ft. Bragg, I attended an intelligence briefing along with other Corps personnel. I still remember the young Major. He gave a comprehensive assessment and then concluded with, "It is our estimation that the greatest threat in the future will come, not from international communism or the Soviet Union, but from radical Islam."

I thought, "What? What's this guy been drinking? He's crazy! He's way out in left field." This was during the height of the Cold War in which we faced a coalition of Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces vastly superior to our own. From having done a threat analysis some years before, I knew their strategy and the odds; we were outnumbered by: 2 to 1 in numbers of soldiers; 4 to 1 in numbers of tanks; and 6 to 1 in numbers of artillery pieces. I had served overseas in Germany for over four years in units facing those same hostile forces. I was very aware of what that threat was.

Since that time, of course, the Soviet Union has fallen and while there is still danger from various "communist" countries such as China, North Korea, and Russia, we all recognize that the most compelling threat is exactly as the Major had said – from radical Islam.¹

Then on September 11, 2001 our country, the United States, was attacked in a manner unprecedented in the history of our country. Even the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941 that ushered us into World War II was not as serious. As regrettable as that attack by Japan was, it was made against military personnel and facilities; the September 11th attack killed more people than at Pearl Harbor and was made against innocent men, women, and children who had nothing to do with military operations (other than those in the Pentagon).²

This was a wake up call for all of us, although there were indicators of an attack long before this incident. In our recent history, we remember the truck bombing of the Marines in Lebanon in which 191 men were killed; the attack on Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia; the first attack on one of the Twin Towers in New York which failed to topple the structure; the attack on the USS Cole in which over thirty sailors were killed; and the bombing of our embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. And then came the September 11th attack was. These are only the latest manifestations of violence in the long history of Islam.

When studying the Islamic religion it is helpful to remember Mohammed's background and the influence his culture had on later beliefs. He was born in 570 A.D. in Mecca in what is now Saudi Arabia into a society divided among many competing powers. There were many beliefs, cults, and religions that worshiped a plethora of gods. Chief among these influences was one with worship centered on the Ka'ba (or Kabah), a large cubic stone structure with a black cloth. The worship of an Arabian "moon god" figured greatly in the culture of the time. After Mohammed started receiving revelations about what would come to be a "competing" faith, he met opposition and was forced to flee to Medina. After he had gained a following, solidified his power, and proven himself in battle, he returned and took Mecca by force in 629 A.D. Even after his death, the four "caliphs" who became his successors followed a policy of offensive warfare to spread the new belief – chiefly by the sword. Since then, it has grown to nearly one billion adherents.³

He formulated the five "pillars of Islam": Shahada-the Declaration of Faith, Salat-five daily prayers, Zakat-welfare contribution, Hajj-pilgrimage to Mecca, and Sawm-fasting during the lunar month of Ramadan. Despite the fact that "jihad" or holy war is not one of them, it is still encouraged among faithful Muslims.

Two questions are, "Is this violence reflective of just a radical sect of Islam, or more of its true nature?" and "Are Islam and Christianity compatible?"

Examining the second question first, let us look at how fundamental teachings of Christianity are treated in the world of Islam. Our Christian faith is grounded in the Person of Jesus Christ and His being the incarnate son of God. Furthermore, we believe in the Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and their differing functions in the practice of our faith. The Bible, of course, is God's revelation to us through His prophets.

The Islamic faith is delineated primarily by the Qur'an and a body of tradition contained in the Hadith, which were histories of the life of Mohammad from various authors, and teachings on how to live one's individual life to other

matters such as community affairs. This is further complicated by the fact that there are over 150 sects of the religion and roughly fifty translations or versions of the Qur'an, some being considered more accurate than others. In addition not all Hadiths are accepted by the various sects of Islam as being authentic. As we know from recent history, some sects of Islam war against each other in addition to non-Muslims.

Selected Teachings in the Qur'an - The Trinity

The Qur'an states in Surah IV:171⁴ ("Surah" means "step" or "gradation"*), "O People of the Book! [i.e., "Jews and Christians"] Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of God aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in God and His apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: It will be better for you: For God is One God: Glory to Him."

So we know from this Surah that a trinity of the Father, Mary, and Jesus is alleged, yet it says to not refer to a "Trinity" and does not refer to Jesus as the son of God.

Selected Teachings in the Qur'an – Jesus, the Son of God

Indeed, an even greater obstacle of the Christian faith to the Muslim is that God has a Son. In Surah XIX:35 we find, "It is not befitting to (the majesty of) God that He should beget a son."⁵; in Surah CXII:3 we find, "He begetteth not, nor is He begotten..."⁶; in Surah IV:171⁵⁵⁵ the continuation of the preceding Surah, "(Far Exalted is He) above having a son..."⁷; and finally in Surah IX:30 we find, "...the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (In this) they but imitate what the Unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be on them; how they are deluded away from the truth!"⁸

We have been told that there are some versions of the Qur'an that have been "sanitized" to remove some of the more strident verses and make them more appealing to those in the Western cultures. Indeed, the copy that I have was given to me by Saudi Arabian Colonel Khalif, who was trying to "evangelize" me to Islam. Nevertheless, a careful reading of even these copies confirms some of these aspects of Islamic teaching. It is interesting to note that in the "more Westernized" copy of the Qur'an that I have, Surah II:116. states, "They say: 'God hath begotten a son': Glory be to Him[i.e., "God"]" while in the copy of the Qur'an referenced by Islamic scholar G. J. O. Moshay this paragraph reads, "They say God has a Son? NEVER!" (emphasis in the original).⁹

Selected Teachings in the Qur'an - Allah

One may ask, "Is Allah the God of the Bible?" Even in some translations of the Qur'an the word "God" is used in place of "Allah" as is the case in the "sanitized" version that I have. But to be intellectually honest, one must point out the irreconcilable conflict that Jesus is the Son of Jehovah God, but Allah has no son. Who, then, is Allah? It is interesting that in normal references, Muslims invariably refer to their god as "Allah" and rarely to "God" and certainly not "Jehovah." Historically, before Islam came into existence, pagan Arabs used to worship "some 360 pagan gods" one of whom was named "Allah" - who was deemed to be the highest god of all.¹⁰

This is reinforced in the book *Who is this Allah?* by Moshay who wrote that history records that pagans in Arabia had been visiting the Ka'ba in Mecca which housed many of these [pagan] gods and "has remained the temple of Allah which Muslims revere and go to worship and kiss in Mecca during the Hajj" [i.e., pilgrimage]. This is amplified in Robert Morey's book *The Islamic Invasion* where he devotes several pages to this discussion including several pictures excavated in archaeological digs.¹¹

The Qur'an Itself

While Muslims allege that the Bible is "corrupt" as they put it, there are serious problems with the historicity of the Qur'an, from literary, scientific, historical and archaeological perspectives. An examination of the Qur'an itself reveals discrepancies in how it treats Biblical figures such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Mary not to mention those of Jesus Himself. Indeed, as many ideas in the Qur'an came from the Bible, so also from Jewish sources such as the Talmud and the Midrash, not to mention adaptation of Arabian fables. (Surahs 2:55, 56, 67; 2:259ff; 3:35-37; 5:30, 31; 21:51-71; 27:17-44; and 87:19 for Jewish adaptations. Suras 2:65 and 7:163-166[a village turned into apes]; 7:73-77[a she-camel leaped out of a rock and became a prophet]; and 18:9-26[seven men and their animals slept for 309 years in a cave] for some of Arabian stories.)¹²

Selected Teachings in the Qur'an – Jihad (“Holy War”)

So we know that Islamic doctrine discourages the teaching of the Trinity and abhors the idea of Jesus being God's son. What does it teach about “Jihad” – the conducting of “holy wars” against non-Muslims? It is interesting to note that “jihad” appears in the Qur'an more times than does the word for “pray.”¹³ Even though “jihad” is not one of the five “pillars of Islam” it is prominent in the teaching of Islam.¹⁴

While Surah II:256 states, “Let there be no compulsion in religion” history has shown that this statement was made in the early stage of Mohammed's life when he did not have the political nor military strength to carry out campaigns against the much larger and more powerful pagan Arabic, Christian and Jewish tribes who were then in the majority at Yathrib (Medina).¹⁵ This peaceful approach was needed to give him time to build his following. Once he had gained sufficient power, however, his message changed. As soon as Surah V:36, we find, “The punishment of those who wage war against God (i.e., oppose Islam) and His Apostle... is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter.”¹⁶

In Surah XLVII:4 Muslims are commanded, “Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks” and then is the time for either generosity or “exact a ransom from them” but then points out that “God could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself) but he lets you fight in order to test you...” Surah IX:19-22 teaches commands Muslims to fight those who oppose them as do 29, “Fight those who believe not in God... nor hold that forbidden... by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth (even if they are) of the People of the Book until they pay the Jizya [i.e., tax] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.” Invariably, all of the Hadiths support the mandate for “jihad” or holy war.

Analysis of their actions

To judge the “jihadists” against their teachings, their actions are only logical. This is verified by internal Pentagon briefings.¹⁷ Intelligence analysts have reached a wholly different conclusion [from previous analyses] after studying Islamic scripture and the backgrounds of suicide terrorists. They've found that most Muslim suicide bombers are in fact students of the Qur'an who are motivated by its violent commands – making them, as strange as it sounds to the West, “rational actors” on the Islamic stage.

In Islam, it is not how one lives one's life that guarantees spiritual salvation, but how one dies, according to the briefings. There are great advantages to becoming a martyr. Dying while fighting the infidels in the cause of Allah reserves a special place and honor in Paradise. And it earns special favor with Allah. “Suicide in defense of Islam is permitted, and the Islamic suicide bomber is, in the main, a rational actor,” concludes a recent Pentagon briefing paper titled, “Motivations of Muslim Suicide Bombers.”

Suicide for Allah a ‘win-win’

“His actions provide a win-win scenario for himself, his family, his faith and his God,” the document explains. “The bomber secures salvation and the pleasures of Paradise. He earns a degree of financial security and a place for his family in Paradise. He defends his faith and takes his place in a long line of martyrs to be memorialized as a valorous fighter.

“And finally, because of the manner of his death, he is assured that he will find favor with Allah,” the briefing adds. “Against these considerations, the selfless sacrifice by the individual Muslim to destroy Islam's enemies becomes a suitable, feasible and acceptable course of action.” The briefing cited a number of passages from the Qur'an dealing with jihad, or “holy” warfare, martyrdom and Paradise, where “beautiful mansions” and “maidens” await martyr heroes.

What, then, about interfaith cooperation that we are urged to practice? It is interesting that after December 7, 1945, there was no discernible clamor for us to study Buddhism, Shintoism, or Taoism to better understand the Japanese who had just attacked Pearl Harbor. Yet in response by some church leaders to study and try to reach an accord with Islam, I would offer the analysis of Dr. Moshay: “So, all Islamic leaders who come to British and American Church leaders for inter-faith co-operation are either defying the instructions of Allah or they have a hidden agenda. The Islam of the 7th century A.D. is the same today, probably under new guises as the situation demands. It is the same tactic of “No compulsion in religion” that Mohammed first adapted to Christians and Jews, that Muslims are using in the Western world today:

“Migrate to Christian areas because they are tolerant. Pretend to be peaceful, friendly and hospitable; begin to clamour for religious, political and social rights and privileges that you will not allow Christians in an Islamic country; breed fast there and settle down; there should be no Christian activities in your community; you may speak or write to discredit their religion, but they must not talk about Islam; begin to expand your community; Christian activities should be restricted in all the places you expand to; the moment you have enough military might against these ‘disbelievers’, go ahead and eliminate them or suppress them as much as you can, and be in control.”

Where immediate invasion is not possible, that has always been the policy.”¹⁸ Does this sound familiar? Remember, this was written in 1994 over thirteen years ago - before September 11, 2001.

The other question that needs to be answered: “Is this violence reflective of just a radical sect of Islam, or more of its true nature?” History gives us the answer.

* This is very roughly akin to a chapter in the Bible, although some Islamic scholars find even this grammatical comparison unsatisfactory.

+ Even though the edition of the Qur’an in the library of Concerned Methodists does not have the copyright information in it indicating when it was translated, the book *The Islamic Invasion* by Robert Morey gives it on page 209.

Appendices

A – Islam Through the Years

B – A View from “The Eye of the Storm”

C – Islam – Conclusions