

Allah Without Associates

Islam

MY DEAR BROTHER, please submit to Islam," an aged Muslim sheikh pleaded with tears as he embraced me. "Submission to God is peace."

The sheikh's invitation is in harmony with the mission of the global Muslim *ummah* (community). As mentioned before, Islam, like Christianity and Buddhism, is a missionary faith.

Submission to Allah

The cornerstone of Muslim witness is the conviction that there is one God only who is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. God has no associates. He alone is sovereign. That is the witness of one- sixth of the earth's people who are Muslims.

Muslims exert astonishing influence in global community. They have a mission—the expansion of peace into all regions of the earth. That

peace comes from submission to the will of the one and only God who has no associates. That is Islam.

Origins

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was born in the year of the elephant (A.D. 570). That is the year the Christianized empire of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) attacked Mecca in Arabia using elephants. Traditional lore describes the birds hurling pebbles on the advancing Ethiopians. Thus the birds helped save Mecca and the family of Muhammad from destruction.

This drama of sixth-century Arabian interaction with Christianized Ethiopia is an open window revealing the influences which helped to form Muhammad. Muslim beliefs and practices have not developed in a monotheistic vacuum. Sixth and seventh-century Arabians intermingled with Jewish and Christian communities and had some awareness of their biblical traditions. Christian and Jewish communities on the Arabian periphery and within Arabia itself exuded the aura of civilized peoplehood.

The surrounding Christianizing peoples had a book of God in their own languages. The Egyptian Christians had translations of the Bible in three dialects two centuries before Muhammad. The Ethiopians also had their own translation of the Bible. So did the Syrians. For six centuries the Greeks had both the Old and New Testaments. Yet the Arabs had no book of God in their own tongue.

No wonder so many of the Arab clans were considered barbarian by the civilized peoples of the region who possessed a book of God in their own languages. Muslims refer to the period in Arabia before Muhammad as *jahiliyah*, meaning the era of ignorance. The polytheistic Arabian clans with their perennial skirmishes were not a unified peoplehood. Sensitive Arabians trapped in jahiliyah yearned for inclusion in a peoplehood who were united and formed by a book of God.

Throughout the centuries Muslims have marveled that the merciful God did not ignore the plight of the barbarian Arabians living in jahiliyah. Miraculously God revealed Islam to these ignorant people. He revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad who could not read or write. Muhammad, the seal of all prophets, had been only an orphan of Mecca in Arabia; the Qur'an, the final book of God, is an Arabic Qur'an revealed in the language of those very people whom the world had once ignored.

In the inscrutable mercy and sovereignty of God, the orphan becomes prophet, the Arabic book of God becomes the final revelation, and the new peoplehood of God arising from among the jahiliyah of Arabia become the harbingers of the Islamic *ummah*, a light for all peoples. Those who were once considered barbarians have become the first participants in the new community of peace who submit to the will of God which is Islam.

The Hanif and Abraham

Muhammad's fellow Arabians were mostly jahiliya, who were enthusiastic polytheists. Yet most Arabians also believed in one Creator God who was above all other gods. A few worshiped only this Creator God; they stood within Abraham's tradition. These monotheists were known as hanifs.

The religious tradition of Muhammad's family was at least a vague expression of the monotheistic faith of Abraham. His father's name was Abdullah, which means the servant of Allah. As noted in the previous chapter, according to the Hebrew biblical texts, Abraham had spoken of God as El some twenty-five centuries earlier. Some students of Semitic languages perceive that the Ilah or Allah of Islam is the Arabian equivalent of the creator God, El, of biblical Hebrew.

Some of Muhammad's relatives were hanifs. They objected to the excesses of polytheism. They were inclined to worship Allah. The hanifs were intrigued by the oral traditions concerning Abraham and Ishmael. The etchings of the story, as passed down through the traditions or as recorded in the Qur'an, fascinate.

Abraham was prepared to offer his oldest son, Ishmael, as a sacrifice to God. The angel of God intervened and saved the lad by providing an animal for a sacrifice. Thereafter Abraham and Ishmael together cleansed the sacred *Ka'bah* and rebuilt the house of God in Mecca.

The Ka'bah is the House of God in which there is a sacred black stone,

in the heart of Mecca. Prior to Muhammad, many Arabian clans brought their idols to the Ka'bah. Muhammad transformed this center of Arabian polytheism into a sacred sign of God's transcendence and sovereignty.

Muslims believe that Abraham and Ishmael likewise had cleansed the Ka'bah from polytheistic worship many centuries earlier. They also prayed that God would provide an apostle for their descendants who would be one of them. Muhammad is that prophet and apostle! His spiritual and genealogical family descends from Abraham and Ishmael, who had established the true worship of God in the island of the Arabs many centuries previously. It is no wonder that Muslims believe Islam is the faith of Abraham.

The Prophet and the Qur'an

The prophet of Islam was a Meccan merchant who traveled widely. He was a reflective person and often went to a cave about three miles from center city Mecca for prayer and reflection. It was in this cave in the year A.D. 610, toward the end of the Arabian lunar month of Ramadan, that the revelation of the Qur'an began. Muhammad described the advent of revelation as a great light, which he later identified as the angel Gabriel.

The bright messenger commanded,

Proclaim!

In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher

Who created—
Created man out of a mere clot of
congealed blood.¹

The forty-year-old Muhammad did not know what to make of this event. Soon he received another revelation, then another and another. His wife, Khadija, was a steadfast encourager. She assured him that these revelations were from God and he should proclaim the message to his fellow country persons. Muhammad followed her counsel and for twelve years preached in polytheistic Mecca.

Muhammad condemned the idolatry. Even the sacred Ka'bah was a pantheon for hundreds of Arabian deities. He called for a more just society. God cared for the orphans and widows and so should society. Only a few heeded his preaching; most ignored him; some persecuted him and his followers. He was often discouraged. Yet in times of depression he was sustained by the memory that God had rescued him from abandonment in his orphan childhood.

The Qur'an proclaims,

Did he not find thee An orphan and
give thee shelter?
And he found thee wandering And he
gave thee guidance.
And he found thee in need And

made thee independent.
Therefore, treat not the orphan
with harshness
Nor repulse the petitioner
Of the bounty
Of thy Lord—
Rehearse and proclaim.²

A decade after he had begun preaching in Mecca, Muhammad experienced deep despair. Several hundred of his followers had immigrated to Ethiopia to escape the persecution in Mecca. His wife and supporter, Khadija, died. His uncle Abu Talib also died. He had been Muhammad's guardian as an orphan. The Meccans respected his uncle, who had used his stature among his townsmen to protect Muhammad from those who wished him harm. Now that Abu Talib had died, Muhammad's own life seemed in danger.

The Miraj and Jerusalem

It was during his time of discouragement that Muhammad received extraordinary affirmation in what Muslims describe as the *miraj*, or ascent into heaven. According to the traditions, in a mysterious instant he was whisked to Jerusalem, a city of great significance to both Jews and Christians. From the Dome of the Rock in central Jerusalem, he was

taken into the seventh heaven on the winged horse, Buraq.

Muslim tradition describes the miraj as an encouragement to Muhammad to continue his prophetic call. It sealed the significance of his ministry in the context of the biblical prophets; he ascended to heaven from the very rock on which the temple of God had once stood.

The miraj also guaranteed collision between Jewish and Islamic peoplehood. Popular belief identifies a niche in the Dome of the Rock as the spot where the foot of the horse rested when it descended from heaven with Muhammad. The miraj sealed Jerusalem as the third most sacred city for Muslims, with Mecca and Medina being the other sacred centers. Today the Dome of the Rock Mosque stands over that sacred rock from which the miraj commenced. This rock is also the place where Solomon's splendid temple once stood. The niche of Buraq the horse and the Wailing Wall, which is the foundation of the ancient Jewish temple, are at the same rock.

This is also the rock where Jews and Muslims remember a special event. The Jewish people believe that this rock is where Abraham was prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, until God intervened by providing a ram as a substitute. Muslims believe this is the place where Abraham was prepared to offer Ishmael as a sacrifice, until God intervened with an alternative sacrifice. Therefore, for both communities this rock is the place where their respective people-hoods were redeemed through the intervention of God.

In modern times, this collision between Jewish and Muslim perspectives has become especially vexing. Jerusalem and the Rock are sacred both to Islam and Judaism. The whole international community has been implicated as nations have struggled to decide whether they should place their embassies accredited to Israel in Jerusalem, or respect the profound Muslim objections to any hint of recognition of a right for Israel to extend political control over Jerusalem and the Rock. The miraj might have been an encouragement to Muhammad; however, it does complicate a resolution of the Jewish-Muslim struggle for control of Jerusalem.

The Problem of Suffering

The encouragement which Muhammad received from the miraj changed nothing in Mecca. This Arabian commercial and religious center created an agonizing theological crisis for Muhammad. The problem was this: surely the God of all creation is sovereign and all-powerful. Therefore, why does the faithful apostle of God suffer? The persecution and rejection which he experienced often pressed him into self doubt and discouragement.

Muhammad's personal struggle with the meaning of suffering in the overall plan of God is also a universal question. Recall the quest of Buddha seeking an answer to the riddle of suffering. His search led him to the conviction that divinity was irrelevant to the human condition. But Muhammad believed God had selected him as a prophet; the notion

that God is indifferent to the human condition was not an acceptable option for him.

Yet why did the God whom he served not rescue him from his plight in Mecca? The question moved beyond only the problem of personal suffering. It probed the very nature of divine providence, power, and intention. How *does* God reveal and establish his will? How does a community of faithful believers come into existence? How is that community of faith sustained and protected in a world which forgets and ignores the will of God?

Muslims believe it was providential that at this time of distress emissaries from Medina began to meet with Muhammad requesting that he come to their city as prophet and statesman. Factional strife was devastating their city. They sought Muhammad's leadership.

The Flight from Suffering

Then the *hijrah* (flight) occurred. This immigration of Muhammad's Meccan followers 250 miles north to Medina commenced in July, 622 A.D. By mid-September Muhammad joined the immigrants; the journey took about 9 days. Muslims calculate their era as beginning on July 16, 622; that is the first day of the lunar year in which the *hijrah* commenced. The *hijrah* is the Muslim root experience.

The Islamic era does not begin with the birth of Muhammad, the

beginning of revelation, or his death. It is the hijrah which marks the beginning of the Islamic era. This is an event of decisive theological significance. The hijrah provides Muslims with a solution to the riddle of unjust suffering; God rescues the prophet from his enemies.

This hijrah also conclusively demonstrates the authenticity of Muhammad's prophethood. How does the hijrah affirm his prophethood? It does so by providing him the opportunity to establish the Islamic ummah, the community of peace which submits to the will of God. At Medina, Muhammad received the instruments of political, economic, and military power. With these empowerments he was able to establish the community of peace.

As long as Muhammad was in Mecca, he was only a largely ignored prophet. He could not establish a coherent community of peace. In Medina all of that changed. He was now both prophet and statesman, both preacher and general, both teacher and judge. In Medina Muhammad established peace through political power. The flight from powerlessness in Mecca to political empowerment in Medina is a demonstration that he is indeed an apostle of God.

Recall that Siddhartha Gautama Buddha also had a flight. That flight is known as the "great renunciation." He left his wife and son as well as his political responsibilities to seek personal peace through escape from suffering. Buddha sought a personal peace through inner enlightenment. His personal peace involved a radical disengagement from family and

political involvement. Buddha invited a peace which is found in retreat from political responsibilities; that is a radically different perspective on peace than that of the prophet-statesman Muhammad in Medina.

Jesus also invited people to the way of peace. Yet he chose to confront rather than disengage from the political systems. That confrontation led to his crucifixion and death.

It is noteworthy that the hijrah of Muhammad is the opposite of the way of the cross which Jesus chose. Six centuries before the hijrah, Jesus had also struggled with the question: How is the kingdom of God established? At the height of his popularity in Galilee in the northern regions of Palestine, his admirers invited him to become their king. We assume that a Zealot army would have been at his command. Yet Jesus rejected this offer.

Instead Jesus turned his face toward Jerusalem, telling his followers that he would be betrayed and crucified in that city. Rather than use the instruments of political and military power to establish peace, Jesus chose the suffering way of the cross.

Thus we see the Islamic understanding of the nature of the kingdom of God and the manner in which the community of peace is established and preserved. They are the opposite of the gospel understanding. The way of the hijrah and the way of the cross are fundamentally different foundations on which the respective communities, ummah and church, are established. The emigration of Muhammad from suffering in Mecca

to political triumph in Medina and the journey of Jesus from triumph in Galilee to crucifixion and death in Jerusalem are movements in opposite directions.

Islam perceives that suffering for truth is an aberration. In Christian faith suffering for righteousness is redemptive. These different perceptions of the efficacy of suffering converge in the Messiah, Jesus. Both Muslims and Christians agree that the Messiah is Jesus. Islam, however, denies his crucifixion. The denial is consistent with Islamic theology: If God is sovereign, then he would not let the Messiah suffer the ignominy of the cross.

The difference between the cross and the hijrah has specific and practical implications for Christians and Muslims. For the faithful church, the way of obedience to Christ is a life of suffering, redemptive love, even toward one's enemies. For the faithful ummah, the way of faithfulness is to strive for Islam by all means necessary.

Striving for Islam is *jihad*. Although this word conjures up holy war for many, that is really the last acceptable defense which Muslims may use. Foremost, jihad means internal striving for faithfulness within oneself. Jihad also encourages defending the faith through the pen and mouth, an approach Christians and Jews also use!

The Creation of the Ummah

The hijrah enabled Muhammad to establish the ummah (community)

of believers who submitted to the law of God. The manner in which this first Muslim community functioned and the characteristics of its lifestyle is considered normative for all orthodox Islamic communities around the world. Faithful Muslims everywhere desire that their communities conform to the ideal model developed in Medina under their prophet's leadership.

As the Islamic ummah under the leadership of Muhammad gained control of Medinan affairs, the relationships of the various alternate groups such as Jews or idol worshipers were defined and regulated. The laws and practices of the town were brought under the authority of the ummah. People suspected of treason against the ummah were punished. Several hundred Jews were slain in Medina for presumably attempting to usurp the power of the ummah. Yet all who cooperated with the ummah were well treated. The rights of alternative faith communities were protected.

Even in this nascent stage, Muhammad insisted that there should be "no compulsion in religion."³ Although violence to protect the faith might be necessary and right, there has developed consensus among some modern Islamic scholars that violence to extend the faith is not consistent with the true spirit of Islam.⁴ They argue that violence is only justifiable as a last resort when protecting the ummah. We observe, however, that both in its early history and in modern times the ummah has not always followed that counsel.

The ummah has a mission among the nations. That mission includes extending the rule of the ummah to the ends of the earth. The regions which are ruled by the ummah are the *dar al-salaam* (region of peace). The regions not yet under the control of the dar al-salaam are the *dar al-harb* (region of war). Thus the whole global community participates in two communities—the region of peace or the region of war.

The fundamental mission of the ummah is to extend the region of peace throughout the global village. Muhammad himself demonstrated this Muslim missionary commitment. After the rule of the ummah was established in Medina, war developed between Mecca and the ummah. The battles extended to other groups in Arabia who also opposed the ummah. The ummah focused economic, political, and military pressure against groups who opposed it. All communities in Arabia were invited to accept the rule of the ummah. Within a decade of the hijrah, not only had Mecca come under the rule of the ummah, but all of Arabia was likewise under the rule of the Muslim nation. Arabia was incorporated within the dar al-salaam.

The ummah grew as people accepted the invitation to believe in the faith of Islam. The dar al-salaam enlarged through political and juridical expansion. All the people groups in Arabia did not become members of the ummah just because Muslims had extended their rule over them, thereby incorporating them into the dar al-salaam. Inclusion in the dar al-salaam meant that the ummah had control of political and military

authority; inclusion did not mean that people had confessed faith in Allah. Muslims encouraged people within the dar al-salaam to submit to Islam. But ideally, at least, they avoided coercing conversions.

Pillars of Belief and Practice

The ummah extends *daawah* (invitation) to all peoples to submit to the beliefs and practices of Islam. The profile of the belief and practice of the Muslim congregation who gather for prayers in the community mosque is simple and easily communicated. Muslims agree that there are five pillars of belief:

- Believe in one God only.
- Believe in the prophets of God.
- Believe in the books of God.
- Believe in angels.
- Believe in the final judgment.
- Some Muslims add belief in predestination as a sixth pillar.

There are also five pillars of duty or practice:

- Make the confession of faith: there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah.
- Pray five times daily facing Mecca.
- Fast during the month of Ramadan.

- Give alms to the poor.
- Take the pilgrimage to Mecca if possible.
- (Some Muslims add jihad as a sixth pillar of duty. Jihad requires a Muslim to defend Islam however necessary.)

Elaboration on these pillars of faith and practice is not necessary, except to recognize that these commitments are the primary glue which binds the world Muslim community together. All development of Islamic theology and practice subsequent to Muhammad has been only an explanation and a development of these foundational pillars.

How do these pillars of belief and duty guide the Muslim contribution to the global community? That question sets the tone for the exploration of Islam in the remainder of this chapter. Several pillars of belief or duty are especially pertinent to the themes of this exploration, and a brief elaboration follows. We shall highlight the fast, the pilgrimage, the prayers, the prophets, and the books.

Two of the annual Muslim festivals relate directly to pillars of duty: the fast and the pilgrimage. These festival pillars are especially pertinent to Islam as a global community.

The fast during the month of Ramadan is a remembrance of God's gift of revelation. The Qur'an invites,

Has not the time arrived For the Believers

that Their hearts in all humility Should
engage in the remembrance Of God and
of the Truth Which has been revealed.⁵

The month-long daytime fast from early dawn to sunset unites the worldwide Muslim community in remembrance of the gift of revelation. Believers also perceive of the fast as a form of identification with the poor. The gift of revelation is a mercy to humankind; the Muslim believer should also show mercy to the hungry and the poor.

Every night the fast is broken with feasting. Then there is the grand conclusion of the fast with three days of festivity, when the first sliver of the crescent new moon appears at the end of the month of Ramadan. The feasting reminds Muslims that the night of revelation is more excellent than ten thousand other nights.

The Qur'an exclaims,

We have indeed revealed this (Message)
In the Night of Power;
And what will explain
To thee what the Night
Of Power is?
The Night of Power
Is better than
A thousand months.⁶

Another significant festival pillar is **the annual hajj** (*pilgrimage*) to Mecca during the month of Dhu-al-Hijjah. This festival also unites the entire ummah. The event is a bonding experience for the pilgrims as well as for every Muslim homestead and hamlet. Muslim communities everywhere commemorate the pilgrimage with the sacrifice of an animal. The sacrifice is a reminder of the Islamic tradition that Ishmael was saved from death when an animal was miraculously provided as a substitutionary sacrifice.⁷ The identification of Islam with Abraham and Ishmael are central themes in the pilgrimage; recall that Muslims believe Abraham and Ishmael worshiped together at the Ka'bah.

The identification of the ummah with the origins of human history is also a theme within the hajj. Muslims believe that the Ka'bah is the place from whence human community on earth commenced, and Adam was the first Muslim. The Ka'bah was Adam's first home. For Muslims the pilgrimage to the Ka'bah is a visual demonstration of and a commitment to the primal faith of humankind which is the true religion of Islam.

All pilgrims dress alike in white sheets—the rich and poor, those of high status and beggars stand equal before God. Yet when the pilgrims return home they have a new name: *Hajji* for the men and *Hajjia* for the women. The hajjis and hajjias recount the stories of their pilgrimage among their kin and friends. As the boys and girls listen, they determine that someday they too will be pilgrims to Mecca, and will pray at the Ka'bah.

Faithful Muslims everywhere participate in the prayers five times a day facing the Ka'bah. The right worship of God requires bowing with their faces to the ground. Often a faithful Muslim will have a carbuncle on her forehead, which comes through kneeling so often with her face on the ground. The bowing in prayer is a sign of her commitment to submit to the guidance of God, a guidance which is the same as that revealed to Adam, Abraham, and Muhammad, and all the other prophets of God.

Bowing in prayer facing the Ka'bah is a sign that the will of God does not change. Ritual prayer or *salah* unites the believer with all those faithful worshipers throughout the ages who have submitted to the unchanging will of God. The daily prayer is a powerful ritual providing unity, not only with the faithful of the past, but with all contemporary Muslims living in communities around the earth.

Salah can take place anywhere, yet many prefer the mosque, where the believers stand in rows and bow in unison, all together, the young and old, the rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, bowing before God, all facing the niche in the mosque which indicates the direction of the Ka'bah and Mecca. (Men and women are always separated in prayer and worship.) The prayer is always in Arabic, as is the recitation and reading of scripture. The language of worship itself bonds the believers in the local meeting with all those millions of other believers in distant places.

The prayer which Muslims recite during salah is the *Fatiha*, or

opening. This is the first chapter in the Qur'an; it is the perfect prayer that summarizes the essence of all prayer.

An English interpretation of the prayer follows:

In the name of God,
Most Gracious,
Most Merciful Praise be to God,
The Cherisher and Sustainer of
the worlds;
Most Gracious, Most Merciful;
Master of the Day of Judgment.
Thee do we worship,
And Thine aid we seek.
Show us the straight way,
The Way of those on whom Thou
has bestowed Thy Grace,
Those whose (portion)
Is not wrath,
And who go not astray.⁸

God's guidance is a precious gift. He reveals his guidance through **the prophets**. There have been many prophets throughout history; the Qur'an identifies twenty biblical personalities as prophets. The Qur'an names twenty-five prophets; the traditions state that there have been as

many as 124,000 prophets throughout the ages.

However, the very first prophet was Adam. He was the first to receive guidance from God. Sadly the descendants of the first human parents soon began to forget God's good guidance. The role of the prophets, then, is not to bring a new word of revelation, but rather to retrieve again and again the primal guidance so quickly forgotten by human frailty and negligence.

In several specific instances, God has revealed his guidance through written scripture. **The books** of God are revealed through the mediation of angels. Prophets who receive scripture are known as *rasuls* or apostles. There have been only five rasuls—Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus the Messiah, and Muhammad. The book which the prophet Abraham received is lost. However, other books of revelation remain available, including the *Taurat* (Torah) of the prophet Moses, the *Zabur* (Psalms) of the prophet David, the *Injil* (Gospel) of the prophet Jesus the Messiah, and the Qur'an (Recitation) of the prophet Muhammad.

Muslims believe the Qur'an is the final revelation of God and summarizes all former revelations. It is the criterion of all truth, for it is in perfect harmony with all the former revelations of God.

Although all Muslims must believe in books of revelation which they recognize as Torah, Psalms, and Gospel, these books of scripture are not contained in the Qur'an as scriptural entities. The Qur'an alludes occasionally to accounts from these other scriptures and declares that

God will never permit his revelation to be corrupted. Surprisingly the Qur'an commands Muslims to go to those who had the previous scriptures to receive clarification on the meaning of obscure Qur'anic passages.

We read, "If thou wert in doubt as to what we have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee."⁹ Nevertheless, most Muslims never read any portions of the Bible; only the scholars are aware that the Bible contains the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil which the Qur'an refers to as revealed books. However, Muslims often debate the authenticity of these biblical scriptures.

Muslims, Christians, and Jews

The Jewish community, the church, and the Muslim ummah are confident that they are the faith heirs of Abraham. All three communities believe that there is only one God, one humanity, one morality. Yet each of these communities has a different truth center.

Islam is grounded in the belief that the Qur'an is the criterion for all truth. It sifts believers from those who do not believe. Only unbelievers reject the Qur'an when they hear it read.

Christian faith is founded on the conviction that Jesus the Messiah is the criterion of truth. Christians confess that Jesus is Lord and therefore interpret the biblical Scriptures from that perspective. They also evaluate the Qur'an in the light of Jesus.

The soul of Judaism is the belief that the Torah is the center point of

truth.

Dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims is helpful in providing better understandings of these different perspectives. Yet the experience of theologians who participate in dialogue demonstrate that these differences are fundamental.

For several decades I have regularly participated in dialogue between Christians and Muslims, often in a mosque or church setting. In dialogue we discover that there are convergencies. For example, both agree that Jesus is the Messiah. Yet within these convergencies, there are painful divergencies. For example, Muslims deny the crucifixion of Jesus; yet Christ crucified is the core of the Christian gospel. Such divergencies are not academic; they are the core of faith and the foundations of the respective faith communities.

Foundational theological commitments do affect the intercommunity relations between Muslims and Christians, sometimes with tragic consequences. On the other hand, in multitudes of communities Muslims, Christians, and Jews live together in harmony. Their faith divergencies do not prevent fairly relaxed relationships. However, it is sad that often an understanding develops which bases intercommunity peace on avoidance of any conversations about faith.

When on a visit to the Middle East, I asked a Jordanian Christian business person to describe the quality of Christian-Muslim relations in his country.

"Positively excellent!" he responded expansively. "We talk about all matters of mutual concern in a harmonious spirit. Yet when any matter of faith enters the conversation, we simply turn our backs on each other and walk away."

There is an awareness among the participants in Muslim- Christian- Jewish dialogue that ultimately the Qur'an, Jesus, or the Torah lead us in quite different directions. These three faith streams whose spiritual legacy is Abraham comprise half the world's population. They meet and intermingle throughout the global community. This is the core issue that unites and divides these faith communities: What does it mean to be a people in covenant with God and in mission in our world?

Islam and Culture

The vision of Islam is clear—the people who comprise the ummah must submit to the will of God as revealed in the Qur'an. That submission is peace. Islam, like Judaism, has inspired enormous energy in clarifying and defining the will of God. The Qur'an is at the very center of the community. It is an Arabic Qur'an, revealed over a period of a couple decades to Muhammad the prophet of Islam.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the perfect copy of the eternal word of God; it is the earthly replica of the heavenly Mother of Books. The Muslim view of revelation is exact and verbatim. The angel Gabriel taught Muhammad the exact words in the heavenly book, word by word,

and line by line. As he recited these scriptures to his followers, they in turn memorized them, or wrote them on surfaces such as "scraps of parchment and leather, tablets of stone, ribs of palm branches, camels' shoulder-blades and ribs, pieces of boards and the breasts of men."¹⁰

Shortly after Muhammad's death in 632, his companions began compiling the Qur'an. During the reign of Othman, who was the third caliph, they completed the compilation in a form similar to the Qur'an today. Muslims believe the Arabic Qur'an as we have it today is the exact replica of the eternal heavenly tablet.

The Muslim view of revelation is challenged by modern global culture which has been formed by the European Enlightenment (chapter 11). The Enlightenment worldview insists that all claims to truth must be based on evidence and that the scriptures of any religion should be studied in the light of the historical and cultural context in which those scriptures developed. These approaches to the study of scripture are known as the historical-critical method.

For many years biblical scholars have been enriching the Christian understanding of their Scriptures through this approach to biblical study. This is not to suggest, however, that the historical-critical method has never been a problem to Christians. For example, many Christians are disturbed when the historical-critical method assumes that extraordinary events are impossible.

However, the objection of Muslims to the historical-critical approach

to the Qur'an is consistent and deep. The issue is this: How can the Qur'an be studied from a historical-critical perspective if it has come directly from God? It is a revelation which transcends and supersedes history and human culture.

An illustration of the problem alluded to above—the Qur'an denies that Jesus was crucified. Yet there is much biblical and some extra-biblical evidence that he was crucified. However, if the Qur'an is the direct dictated word for word revelation from God, there is no way to debate the issue of the crucifixion of Jesus. Any contrary historical evidence is just an illusion.

Inviting Muslims to view the Qur'an from a historical-critical perspective is encouraging Islam to undergo a major paradigm shift. The consistent resistance of Muslim scholars globally to any such considerations suggests that the ummah suspects that the Islamic faith could not survive such a paradigm shift. Islam is grounded in the conviction that the Qur'an came from God. Computer analysis of the wonder of the rhythm of its divine poetry is appropriate, but assessing the Qur'an from a historical or cultural perspective is irreverent and irrelevant. It cannot be done.

The Qur'an is in Arabic. Translated, it ceases to be the exact recitation of the word of God as revealed by the angel Gabriel. Although in recent years there have been some translations of the Qur'an, none of these is Qur'an. They are only interpretations of the Qur'an, for the original

recitation was in Arabic. It is for this reason that learning sufficient Arabic to recite portions of the Qur'an will always accompany the Islamization of a people.

It is not surprising that Arabian cultural influences seem to accompany Islam. That notion is reinforced by the location of the Ka'bah in Arabia, the heartland of the Arabian culture. Both the annual pilgrimages and the direction of the daily prayers turn toward the Arabian center. For a person looking at Islam from outside the faith system, these nudges toward an Arabian cultural orientation may either encourage or discourage interest in Islam. It depends on what a person is seeking.

However, in recent years there has been sharp resistance to Islamization in some areas in Africa and Asia. Resistance to Islam is often triggered when it appears to a group that Islamization will tug their culture toward Arabization. To my knowledge all African Muslim theologians and scholars are calling for the de-Africanization of Islam so that the African expressions of the ummah may become more truly Islamic. In contrast, African Christian theologians call for the Africanization of Christianity. In an age when much of the global village is becoming self-consciously ethnic, a universal faith which seems to undermine ethnic culture and identity can create resistance.

The societies of southern Sudan have resisted Islamization from northern Muslims with catastrophic consequences. Southern resistance

has invited endemic war and occasional genocide. During the first half of the 1990s, southern Sudan had become an example of the way not to extend dar al-salaam over a people. The southern peoples as a whole just do not want Muslim hegemony over their cultures and social institutions. Consequently hundreds of thousands have died.

The issues of faith versus culture run very deep in Islam. The word *Islam* means "submission." The word *Muslim* means "a person who has submitted to Allah." Muslims believe that Islam is the way of submission to the will of God; in that submission a person finds peace. The revealed will of God specifically informs every area of human culture. Muslim scholars therefore speak of Islamic culture.

In reality there are many Muslim cultures. There is considerable diversity within the worldwide Islamic ummah. The Muslim Somalis of northeastern Africa describe this phenomenon with a proverb: "Custom is more powerful than religion." However, although there is considerable cultural diversity in the worldwide Muslim ummah, the theologians lament that diversity. The ideal goal of Islam is the formation of one universal Muslim culture.

The Way of the Prophet

The theologians believe that one universal Muslim culture is a reasonable expectation when all Muslims truly conform with the teachings of the Qur'an. That is the goal of all faithful Muslims. Yet they

need assistance in defining how these teachings apply in practical life.

The *Shari'ah* (law or path) provides that guidance. Recall that Judaism developed the Talmud to define the meaning of the Torah for everyday living. The sources and composition of the Talmud and the *Shari'ah* are rather different. Yet both the Jewish and Muslim community desired to obey God's will fully. The quest for obedience to God inspired the development of the Talmud within Judaism and the *Shari'ah* within the Muslim ummah.

Shari'ah is really an authentic expression of the way of the prophet Muhammad. After all, he knew better than any of his contemporaries the true meaning and application of the Qur'an. It is thus not surprising that very early on Muslims developed a concern for patterning their lives on the ideal model of the prophet Muhammad, who they believe was the seal of all prophets. To follow Muhammad's example, Muslims learn as much as possible about the *sunna* (the *example* of the prophet Muhammad). The oral and written hadith (the tradition concerning the prophet) help them in their quest.

During the first two centuries following the prophet Muhammad's death, Muslim scholars began developing the comprehensive system of guidance known as *Shari'ah*. The Qur'an is at the center of the whole system, but the traditions of the prophet of Islam which are known as the hadiths are also a significant source of *Shari'ah* authority. The hadiths are based on the anecdotes concerning the way in which

Muhammad conducted himself. They describe the precious sunna of the prophet.

Traditions and legends concerning Muhammad multiplied after his death. It was a huge task for the Muslim scholars of the third Islamic century to search out the authentic reports of Muhammad's sunna. They needed to ferret out traditions to determine which ones were authentic transmissions of the sunna. In the third century of the Muslim era, two authoritative works were compiled, one by Muslim and the other by al-Bukhari. The latter has gained particular prominence within the worldwide Muslim community.

The collection by al-Bukhari consist of 7,300 traditions, each attested for authenticity through the reliability of the *isnad* (chain) of witnesses through which it had been handed down. The *isnad* of evidence for each tradition is recorded. For example: "It was told us by Abdullah ibn Yusuf who said, it was told us by al-Laith, who had it from Yazid, who had it from Abdu'l-Khair who had it from Uqba ibn Amir—he said...."¹¹

Together all these hadiths form a composite portrait of the sunna of Muhammad; they define the personality traits and practices which faithful Muslims desire to emulate. No other major religion has developed such a focused interest in the personality of its founder. Although Buddhism, Confucianism, and Christianity each are named after their respective founders, none of these religions has developed such a fascination with the founder's personality as is found in Islam.

However, Muslims resent being called Muhammadans, for they rightfully point out that they do not divinize Muhammad. Yet through the universal Muslim desire to emulate the sunna of Muhammad, the personality of the seal of the prophets influences the thought and practice of faithful Muslims quite significantly. Thus, with some qualifications to be sure, one can speak nevertheless of a Muslim personality.

Consensus and Change

As the hadiths were being formalized, the Shari'ah system was also developing. During the second and third centuries of the Muslim era, scholars working from within different regions or perspectives of the ummah wrote four principal systems of Shari'ah: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali. Each of these systems of law was based on three sources of authority—Qur'an, sunna, and *ijma'* (consensus). Differences between the Shari'ah systems were to some extent determined by the different weight the scholars gave to these three sources of authority.

Ijma' needs further comment. For the first two or three centuries of the Muslim era, the process of *ijma'* was dynamic and developmental. However, as the consensus of the *ulama* (experts) was recorded into the various systems of Shari'ah law, the developmental process ceased. Thereafter any attempts to modify or reinterpret Shari'ah came under censure as innovation. Muslim conviction is that the function of the

ulama was only clarification of the will of God. Once that process of clarification was completed and the decisions recorded, the duty of all Muslims was now self-evident—obey the Shari'ah. Don't change the Shari'ah! That would be *bidah*!

Islam has always prohibited *bidah*, or innovation. This is consistent with the Islamic worldview which believes that Islam is not a new religion, but rather a retrieval and elaboration of the original faith of Adam. Thus even Muhammad, the seal of the prophets, has brought nothing new. There can be no innovation in religion; *bidah* is prohibited.

The Islamic view of *bidah* in a world of change fomented debate and tension within the worldwide ummah. Often the politicians and modernists join hands calling for reinterpretation and change, while the theologians insist that change cannot be Islamic. In recent years the tensions between modernity and the theologians has in some circumstances become explosive. The Muslim scholar Fazlur Rahman has identified the crisis in the soul of the Muslim ummah in modern times in this way: How does a theology of no change cope in a world of change?¹²

Nevertheless, Muslim theologians believe that the most perfect expression of Islam is that of the prophet and his companions. The Shari'ah helps define that ideal community. A hadith says it well: "The best generation is mine (i.e., of my Companions), the next best the following one and the next one the succeeding one. .."¹³

Thus it is that the faithful Muslim community seeks to replicate the faith and practice of Muhammad and his companions in the modern context. That is a difficult calling!

The Shi'ah

The difficulties of knowing the way of faithfulness are especially evident in the contrasting approaches to authority developed by the Shi'ah and Sunni Muslim communities. These differences within the primal Muslim community were exacerbated when civil war broke out as Ali ibn-abi-Talib, the son-in-law of Muhammad, became the fourth caliph. He was assassinated.

The worldwide Muslim community still lives in the shadow of that war and assassination, for ever since this conflict Muslims have divided into the Shi'ite and Sunni communities. Today the Shi'ite Muslims comprise about a tenth of the worldwide Muslim community.

Authority is the issue dividing Shi'ah and Sunni Muslims. Sunni approaches to authority have been described. The Shi'ah believe that spiritual authority is incarnated in the imam, the genealogical descendant of Ali, who was married to the prophet's daughter. Over the centuries various Shi'ah groups have developed, usually over disputes as to which son of the imam should become the next imam.

The dominant Shi'ite community in Iran is the Ithna Ashariyah, or Twelvers. They believe that the line of spiritual authority vanished after

the twelfth imam. The true imam is now hidden, and only indications of this spiritual authority are evident through the ministry of the ayatollahs. Someday, it is believed, the hidden imam will reappear in an imam who may establish the dar al-salaam throughout the earth.

There had been hope by some Iranian Shi'ah Muslims that Ayatollah Khomeini might have been the incarnation of the imam. His failure to extend his version of the dar al-salaam significantly beyond Iran suggests that the Ithna Ashariyah hope for the reincarnation of the imam has not yet been fulfilled. However, his disciples have not despaired; they seek to export Ayatollah Khomeini's version of the dar al-salaam everywhere.

The martyrdom of Ali, and later his son al-Husayn at Karbala, contributes a suffering theme in Shi'ah Islam. This martyr legacy within Shi'ah Islam sometimes opens doors for Shi'ah Muslims and Christians to meet with some degree of understanding on the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus. Every year on the tenth of Muharram, Shi'ah Muslims throughout the world participate in passion plays commemorating al-Husayn's martyrdom. Worshipers sometimes flay themselves in an attempt to identify with his suffering. These themes of suffering and even martyrdom for righteousness sake are cultivated by Shi'ah Islam.

The Mystics and Their Way

Sufism is the mystical stream especially prevalent within the Sunni ummah. Sunni Islam emphasizes submission to the will of God, although God himself is the hidden one, the unknown and unknowable one. In its quest to experience God, sufism strains at the leash of orthodox constraints. As in Shi'ah Islam, sufism also has its martyr history. The martyrdom of al-Hallaj in the third century of the Muslim era has inspired many sufi devotees. Al-Hallaj believed that a person could experience unity with God.

The sufi quest for unity with God moved through the ummah like a slow burning grass fire. Today a high percentage of the Sunni Muslims are involved in some form of sufism. These sufis form communities who rally around the spiritual efficacy of a saint, either living or dead. Through the saint disciples learn the inner mystery of the *tariqah-orders*, which is the way of knowing God.

In some tariqah-orders, the way to become absorbed into divinity includes the use of euphoria enhancing techniques such as drugs and the constant repetition of the name of God.¹⁴ This is known as *dhikr*. For a number of years, our family lived across the street from a mosque in which a sufi congregation gathered every Thursday night. The dhikr chant continued late into the evening. The rhythm of the dhikr was consoling. Yet the use of drugs which accommodated these mystical events became addictive for many of the young men. These practices debilitated the well-being of our neighborhood.

Often the sufi saints are local persons. They therefore provide powerful cohesion and identity to the local Muslim community. For example, at Kudus in central Java, Muslim companions awed me with astonishing descriptions of miracles wrought by their saint of Java. They described how the walls of the mosque at the shrine were built by angels overnight from a pile of bricks imported from Egypt! Even after his death, people believe they are blessed and empowered through prayers offered at his tomb.

Many poor Javanese Muslims will never have the opportunity to visit Mecca. They cannot even read or hear God's word for their Arabic is too poor. Yet they can touch the mystery of God through pilgrimages to the tomb of their own Javanese saint, which adjoins the mosque. And they come, hundreds of thousands annually on pilgrimages to Kudus. Although they may never visit Mecca, the blessing of God is present among them through their own saint.

In regions of the earth where violence is endemic, the sufi communities often function as islands of peace. Of course, sufi communities can also become involved in violence. Nevertheless, as alternative communities to the mainstream of orthodox Islam, these communities sometimes function as signs of the dar al-salaam.

These communities within the Muslim ummah have often provided the missionary impetus for Islam. They function as training centers equipping disciples to strive faithfully in the way of Islam. Usually the

sufi missionary disciples in any particular tariqah are bonded together in a covenant. Each tariqah-order has its own covenant symbols and rituals.

The relationship between orthodox Islam and sufism is not always cozy. Nevertheless, sufism can be a bridge between Muslims and other communities. Some of the sufi practices and beliefs concerning absorption into divinity might have commonality with Hinduism and Buddhism. In Ethiopia for many centuries, Orthodox Christians, animists, and Muslims have joined in pilgrimages to the graves of some of the great Muslim saints, seeking the blessing of God together. This is one reason why the mainstream ummah worry about sufism. It opens the door for syncretism with other religions.

A Witness to the Nations

Muslims refer to Islam as the religion of the mean, *din al-wasat*. It is not given to the excessive asceticism of Christian monasticism, nor the impracticality of Christian ethics, nor the legalism of Judaism, nor the hedonism of paganism. The Islamic community was birthed and nurtured in Arabia, the nation which exists amid the nations. In the same way the ummah is the middle community of faith and peace which stands between the nations, offering practical and achievable moral and religious guidance.

Thus have we made of you
An *ummat* (community) justly balanced,
That ye might be witnesses over the
nations.¹⁵

Muslim teachers affirm that the ummah supersedes Israel as the community called by God to be a light to the nations. The Qur'an recognizes that at one time God preferred Israel "to all others." ¹⁶ Yet now through the emergence of the Muslim ummah God is fulfilling his call and promise to Abraham to be an imam (spiritual leader) to the nations. It is through the Muslims, who are the spiritual progeny of Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael, that God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled. Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments, "The arguments about the favor to Israel is (*sic*) thus beautifully rounded off, and we now proceed to the argument in favor of the Arabs as succeeding to the spiritual inheritance of Abraham."¹⁷

The Muslim witness is grounded in the conviction that Islam is the middle faith; it is also the primal and final faith. It is the primal faith, for Islam was the faith of Adam, the father of all humanity. Every people group have had a prophet or prophets calling people to the primal and universal religion of Adam. For this reason, every child is born a Muslim. Only the parents or society educate a child away from Islam. The natural inclination of humankind is the faith of Islam. We read that Islam is the "standard religion" which is according "to the pattern on which he has

made mankind."¹⁸

Adam, Abraham, and Muhammad each enjoyed a similar mission, the establishment of the true worship of God at the Ka'bah. The religion of the primal (Adam), middle (Abraham), and final (Muhammad) is the same. Thus Islam is the primal, middle, and final faith of humankind. There is no change. There cannot be innovation in religion. Muhammad brought nothing new. His prophetic mission was to proclaim the will of God, which is identical with the guidance revealed to Adam and Abraham and all other prophets of God. Muslims in prayer facing the Ka'bah in Mecca are a sign that Islam is the primal, middle, and final religion.

The Region of Peace and the Region of War

We have discovered that the Muslim ummah is engaged in a mission of peace in the global human community. We now explore more intentionally the implications of that mission, with particular attention to the universal issues of survival as a wholesome, viable, global human community. In what ways does Islam address modern global issues? What is the nature of the peace which Islam offers a world in which there is much despair?

The Islamic mission commitment moves on several levels. There is the shahada which is the word of confession and witness: *La Ilaha Illa'llah Muhammadan Rasulu'llah* (There is but one God, Muhammad is the apostle of God). Today Muslims proclaim the shahada faithfully from

the minarets of their mosques in hundreds of thousands of communities around the world. *Daawah* is the invitation to faith which the shahada implies. The confession and witness is also an invitation for all who hear to submit to the will of God.

The mission of Islam also includes *dawlah*—the political or governing order of a society. The ummah is incomplete until it controls the mechanisms of political power. Thus, although Muslims may exist as a community of faith in societies or political orders not controlled by Islamic power, these Muslim faith communities are only incomplete islands of Islamic practice until they become full participants in the Islamic dar al-salaam. That requires political control of the society.

In Islam the faith community and the political system should be governed by the same authority. Muhammad is the model for this merger of the two; in Medina he was both prophet and statesman.¹⁹ And the function of the political order is to protect the well-being of the ummah; the state has no other essential function. The Medina experience has become normative for Muslim political expectations.

The Islamist Bernard Lewis says,

The body politic and the sovereign power within it are ordained by God himself to promote his faith and to maintain and extend his law.²⁰

The principal function of government is to enable the individual

Muslim to lead a good Muslim life. This is, in the last analysis, the purpose of the state, for which alone it is established by God, and for which alone statesmen are given authority over others. The worth of the state, and the good and evil deeds of statesmen are measured by the extent to which this purpose is accomplished.²¹

The Islamic conviction that state and religion should be one is not unlike much of the Christian experience during and after the fourth century, when Christian communities within Europe and the Middle East had become Constantinianized. However, the union of church and state is a distortion of the New Testament model, and within Islam the separation of church and state is a distortion of the Medina model. The primal norms of the church and ummah are radically different in their understanding of the relationship between the community of faith and the state system.

The missionary goal of Islam is that the whole earth may some day be blessed by being brought under the benevolent authority of the Islamic *dar al-salaam*. However, that goal is still far distant. Consequently, until that happens the world is divided into two regions, the region of peace and the region of war. The region of war is known as the *dar al-harb*. This is the region which has not yet come under the rule of Islam.

Kenneth Cragg comments,

Community may be an inadequate word,... but there is hardly a better word available to express the consciousness of "otherness" deep in the Muslim mind and soul, whatever precise political or cultural form is chosen to implement it. *Dar Al-Islam* and *Dar Al-Harb* is a fundamental distinction running through all humanity: the household of submission to God and the household of non-Islam still to be brought into such submission.²²

The Ummah and Pluralism

A region can become dar al-salaam even though there are few Muslims present. The key is rule and authority. The region of peace is ruled by the ummah, even though Muslims may be a minority community in that society as a whole.

The goal of Islam in mission is to extend daawah (the invitation to believe) and also dawlah (Islamic rule) to all people and societies. The expansion of the dar al-salaam throughout Arabia during the final decade of Muhammad's leadership of the ummah is the model for the expansion of Islam throughout the earth. During that first decade of growth throughout Arabia, Muslims extended the region of Islamic peace through using both daawah and dawlah. Expanding political control and the invitation to believe went together. That is the way Muslim mission proceeds most authentically.

Communities which are not Muslim are protected by the ummah in

the dar al-salaam. In a significant number of Middle Eastern societies, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians have had over 1,300 years of experience living within the dar al-salaam. The effect has been the development of the millet system. The millet is an identifiable community, although usually not as tightly circumscribed as the Jewish ghettos had once been in Europe. Each non-Islamic community functions in the confines of its own millet. Each millet is permitted to practice its own faith, but with constraints.

Here are examples of the constraints and privileges of the millets. Religious conversions may take people only in the direction of Islam. A Muslim man may marry a Christian woman, but no Christian man may marry a Muslim. In the traditional millet system, Christians or Jews were not admitted into the military. However, they paid extra taxes for the privileges of military protection. The millets need to seek permission from the Muslim authorities to build a place of worship; in many circumstances patterns have developed which make it difficult to acquire such permissions. The millet system defines the non-Islamic community.

Persons in such protected communities often feel they are not as equal as they would be in a secular state which adheres to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In recent years the Islamic Declaration of Human Rights has highlighted tension points between the United Nations commitments to human rights and the commitments

of the Muslim World League. The Islamic declaration emphasizes the rights and integrity of communities. The United Nations highlights the rights of the person.

A critical issue is the right to persuade and be persuaded, to be converted from one faith community to another. Ideally Islam affirms the right of the community to worship freely. It is much more difficult for Muslims to accept the right of the person freely to choose her faith community, unless that choice is toward Islam.

The Ummah and the State

These issues of religious commitment and political power confound the Middle East region (and all other regions of the world as well) wherever religion and political power converge. In Islam a genuinely secular state is inconceivable, although the politicians in some settings have sometimes boldly attempted to develop secular political institutions, as in the Baath political party in Syria and Iraq. Nevertheless, religious affiliation and political power are mingled in the whole Middle East region.

Sometimes these religious political systems work fairly adequately. Tragically there also have been horrendous convulsions—endemic civil war in Lebanon between various Muslim factions and between Muslims and Christians, the Turkish pogrom against Armenian Christians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hostility and violence

between Israel and the Arab Christian and Muslim communities in the region. In the nation of Israel, religious considerations bring strain into relationships among her own Jewish, Christian, and Muslim citizens.

In another region of the world during the mid-twentieth century, the Islamic concept of ummah and dar al-salaam confounded Mahatma Gandhi as he strove to bring a united India into independence from England. Chapter four noted that Muslims, Hindus, and Christians strove together in the nonviolent struggle for independence. However, as freedom from imperial rule came into view, the Islamic community under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah determined to form a separate Muslim state. Gandhi worshiped the Hindu god Rama. Hindu polytheism horrified Muslims. They could not participate in a state in which the key leaders practiced idolatry.

Although Muslims appreciated and respected Gandhi's central role in the independence struggle, their leaders warned against the dangers of participation in either a secular or a Hindu state. Gandhi's fasts and appeals for unity availed nothing. Muslims remembered earlier eras when the ummah had dominated the sub-continent. They yearned for a return to the dar al-salaam of those times.

Consequently the Indian subcontinent was split in 1947 between the secular state of India and the Muslim state of Pakistan. Hundreds of thousands died in the conflagration which ensued. For many weeks fires of burning hamlets lit the night skies of the Punjab as Sikhs, Muslims,

and Hindus, who had lived together in considerable amity for many centuries, turned on one another in horrendous fury. The mayhem was unbelievable; entire train loads of fleeing refugees were slaughtered. More than ten million people were displaced.

Of course, not all Hindus in Pakistan left, nor did all Muslims in India leave. Nevertheless, the recreation of the dar al-salaam in the Indian subcontinent involved a horrible paroxysm of violence and enormous dislocation of peoples. Yet many Muslims are convinced that the cost was justified, for the Muslim ummah functions with most completeness when it exists in the dar al-salaam.

The Ummah and the Secular

The Islamic imperative to combine political and religious power is grounded in Islamic theology. The Islamic *shahada* confesses that God is one—that is *tauhid*. Any divergence from tauhid is *shirk*— that is, being loyal to authorities other than God. Shirk is blasphemy, for God has no associates. Shirk is the ultimate sin. And just as there is one God, so there is also one guidance. That guidance is Islam.

God who is one has revealed one universal guidance for humanity. All areas of existence must submit to his will; no human experience or institution is exempt. It is therefore impossible for the faithful community ever to divide the secular and religious or the political and spiritual. While it is true that some modern Muslim states have attempted to secularize, these attempts are laced with tensions. In all

these societies the dialogue between the theologians and the politicians is intense. Sometimes the tension becomes violent.

The theologians know that Muhammad's rule in Medina must be the primal norm for the Islamic state. However, a secular pluralistic state cannot fit that norm. Consequently during the twentieth century the Middle East political reformers who sought to separate the ummah and the political order did not look to Islam for their inspiration. They reached into the pre-Islamic heritage of their societies in Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Turkey. Yet those experiments have been fraught with difficulties; Iran has experienced a colossal backlash.²³

Muslims also experience dismay living in secularized Western cultures where nothing appears sacred. These concerns became globally significant following the 1989 publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.²⁴ The global Muslim ummah was in profound dismay, for this fiction seemed to be a veiled yet irreverent portrayal of Muhammad. Some Muslim *ulama* called for Rushdie's death. He went into hiding to escape assassination. Violent riots exploded in many Muslim communities far from Britain where the author resided.

While Muslims perceived Rushdie to be guilty of blasphemy, British authorities proclaimed the inalienable right of free speech. Many faithful Muslims were perplexed, astonished, outraged that Western societies seemed incapable of comprehending the seriousness of blasphemy. Is there nothing sacred in Western culture? Is there no reverence, not even

for the prophets through whom God reveals his will? Surely freedom of speech must not include the right to blasphemy! Only God is God! He has no associates!

There are powerful economic, ideological, cultural, and political cross-currents in the modern global community which are contrary to the Muslim ideal. One modern trend is the encroachment of Western culture and hedonism into Muslim societies. These seductive forces invite exuberant and intense Muslim reform movements. In spite of powerful contrary currents, all these reform movements attempt to model their lives according to the example of Muhammad and his companions.

The Ummah and Israel

A vexing modern development has been the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 and Israel's occupation of Jerusalem since the 1967 war. Recall that Jerusalem is the third most sacred city for Muslims. Israel has therefore projected a serious theological crisis into the soul of the Muslim ummah; Israel exists in a region formerly under the control of the dar al-salaam. Yet the Muslim theologians insist that no global opponent can overwhelm the faithful ummah.

From a Muslim perspective, the creation of the state of Israel is far more than a political and real estate crisis. It is a theological crisis, with roots in the hijrah itself, when Muhammad migrated from the ignominy of Mecca to become a successful statesman and general in Medina.

Muslim apologists point to the triumphs of Medina as evidence that Muhammad is the faithful prophet of God. That perception is extended to the ummah. Just as the faithful prophet was victorious over his enemies in battle, so God will also preserve the faithful ummah from defeat.

The Qur'an elaborates the theme that God will defend the faithful ummah.

O ye who believe!

When ye meet a force,

Be firm and call on God In

remembrance much and often That

ye may prosper;

And obey God and his Apostle;

And fall into no disputes,

Lest ye lose heart And your

power depart

And be patient and persevering;
For God is with those Who
patiently persevere.²⁵

These verses emphasize four themes—belief in God, obedience to God and the apostle (Muhammad), perseverance, fearlessness. These basic themes are elaborated further in the Qur'an and the traditions. These teachings would lead Muslims to believe that God will not permit defeat for the faithful ummah. Those who turn their backs in battle when fighting for the ummah will be punished by God, but those who die will be eternally rewarded. Retreat is acceptable only as a tactical move, in preparation for final victory, just as Muhammad retreated from Mecca for a period of time before returning in victory and triumph.

In light of Muhammad's experience in Medina, it is not surprising that Muslim brotherhoods oppose negotiations with the enemies of the ummah. Some would want these enemies to be defeated and treated ruthlessly—unless they show penitence, in which case they should be treated mercifully²⁶ These Muslim theologians perceive that such understandings are a faithful response to the teachings of the Qur'an and the sunna of the prophet of Islam.

The themes of war and peace described above significantly inform the response of the Muslim ummah to the phenomenon of Israel. It is understandable why Egypt was a pariah among all the Muslim states in the Middle East after the 1978 Camp David peace accords and the later

signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. The nation of Islam, which includes Egypt, should avoid negotiating with the enemies of the ummah.

However, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) always has been a secular organization. The Arab Christian influence in the PLO encouraged a secular orientation in that organization following the 1948 debacle. It is not surprising that the secular nature of the PLO could enable more negotiating flexibility than would be theologically possible for an Islamic organization. Yet in spite of theological objections, all Israel's neighbors desire a more normal relationship; they have recognized that Egypt might after all be a model of possibilities.

Thirteen years after the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel, other nations in the region seemed persuaded that a negotiated peace might not be the theological and political catastrophe they had feared. On October 30, 1991, cautiously and fearfully Israel and her Arab neighbors met in Madrid for the first time to explore peace.

On September 13, 1993, nearly two years after Madrid, the world pondered in amazement as PLO and Israeli leaders met on the White House lawn in Washington, D.C., to sign an accord for a mutual commitment to work toward peace.

However, many Muslims are persuaded that greater faithfulness to God and his apostle Muhammad would be the most effective response to the expansionist presence of the state of Israel in the region. It is

noteworthy that no Muslim Palestinian organizations were involved in the peace accords initialed between Israel and the Palestinians. The secular PLO signed the accords. The inclination of the Islamic groups was to consider negotiations with the enemy at best as an irrelevant sideshow, and at worst as treason.

During the years that followed the signing of the peace accords in 1993, Israelies initiated extensive expansion of settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. This infuriated many of the Palestinians, many of which turned to militant Islam, islamic jihadism, and even suicide bombings as a way to rectify their grievances against the Israeli occupiers.

The presence of Israel in a region of the earth which was once included in the dar al-salaam nurtures a Muslim yearning to live with the same expressions of submission to God's will as practiced by Muhammad and his companions. From Kudus to Timbuktu, from Paris to Medina, a wind is blowing across the Muslim ummah. How did the prophet do it? That is both the question and the essence of resurgent Islam. Submission to Islam is the only way the ummah can again become an indestructible and victorious community.

The Muslim Nation and the Nations

Recall the Qur'anic assertion, "Thus have we made you an *Ummat* justly balanced, that ye might be witnesses over the nations." ²⁷ The ummah today struggles heroically to maintain its credentials as the

"justly balanced" community. The nation-state is one of the most intransigent distortions of the ummah.

Occasionally Muslim nations have gone to war against each other. The more than one million fatalities in the Iran-Iraq War sting the conscience of the world Muslim community. External forces are blamed for helping exacerbate that conflict. The weakening and bleeding of Iran and Iraq was in the self-interest of some of the great powers.

The 1991 war the United States and her allies launched against Iraq after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was a theological earthquake.

How does one comprehend theologically the intrusion of military powers from the dar al-harb in the dar al-salaam? Arabia, the land which had birthed the ummah, sought help from the region of war for protection from a fellow Muslim country! The land of the Ka'bah, toward which all Muslims face in prayer, was protected by the armies of unbelievers. The region of peace accepted help from the region of war! A whirlwind of theological ferment swirled throughout the global ummah in the wake of that war.

Muslims are dismayed by the fracturing of the ummah through national divisions. They recall the first four Muslim leaders after the death of Muhammad and remember them as the "rightly guided caliphs." These four—Abu-Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali—set the tone for an expanding multinational community united by Islam. Caliphate dynasties came and went, often determined by imperial fortunes or

personal ambition. Nevertheless, throughout the centuries the institution of the caliphate often provided a symbolic center for the far-flung Sunni ummah. The caliph was a sign that there can be only one Muslim nation.

In modern times, after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, the caliphate was abolished in 1922 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The whole nation of Islam was shaken by this event, which abrogated a significant sign of the unity of the ummah among the nations of the global community. Nevertheless, in time other pan-Islamic institutions have arisen which attempt to overcome nationalistic divisions. The World Muslim League is one such institution. A significant function of the League is attempting to enable the ummah to transcend political and national considerations so the worldwide community of Islam really functions as one global ummah.

The transnational commitments of Islam are fully consistent with the primal vision of the emergent ummah in Medina. The Muslims under Muhammad's leadership looked beyond the immediate task of bringing peace between the conflictual clans of Arabia. The nations beyond Arabia were also their concern.

Muhammad and the Muslims were dismayed by the conflicts between the Christianized nations. Some of these conflicts seemed related to theological differences. The Qur'an describes the mission of the ummah as bringing unity and understanding among all believers in God. Modern

Muslims often describe the ummah as the moderate middle community whose mission is brotherhood and sisterhood in a world divided by national and religious strife. Christian denominations, Hindu caste, racism, or tribal strife anywhere reveal the need for the Muslim community which unites people from nations, tribes, and races in the submission to God which is Islam.

Nevertheless, Muslims have experienced division, even in the primal community. It is said that Muhammad predicted seventy-three divisions and sects among Muslims. These tendencies began already in the primal community.²⁸ Violence marred the leadership of even the first four "rightly guided caliphs." Uthman, the third caliph, was murdered. Ali, the fourth caliph, was assassinated. As mentioned earlier, civil war at the time of Ali's death solidified the division of Muslims into Shi'ah and Sunni communities. Strife in the nation of Islam is not just a modern development.

The Ummah and the Family

Marriage and family practices vary widely among Muslims. Nevertheless, the Shari'ah does provide a profile of acceptable and expected family practices.

Islam is opposed to extramarital sex. So as not to entice men sexually, women are veiled in many Muslim societies. In some societies they are not to be seen in public. Covered overhead walkways arch across the narrow streets in the quaint Indian Ocean island town of Lamu, just off

the coast of Kenya. These walkways enable Muslim women to visit from house to house without being seen by men on the street. Yet in other Muslim societies women are full members of the work force.

Debate concerning the status of women in Islam creates tension in many Muslim societies. Does the soul of Islam really affirm that women are fully equal to men? Is it right that the daughter gets half as much inheritance as the son when the father is deceased? Is it ever acceptable for a husband to beat his recalcitrant wife? Should the wife be a field or a companion? Is it appropriate for the children to belong to the husband when there is divorce? Just prior to the 1991 Gulf War, scores of Arabian women drove cars through Riyadh as a protest against the roles society had circumscribed for them.

There are Muslim communities which do enjoy stable family relations. Nevertheless, in modern Muslim societies, there is tension between modernity and tradition in the quest for marital stability and women's rights. Reformers lament the instability of family relationships which blight many Muslim societies.

Some reformers plead for a reinterpretation of Shari'ah and the Qur'an. They lament that divorce in the ummah is too easy and that the rights of the woman are not sufficiently considered. They are concerned because the Qur'anic description of woman as a field²⁹ is interpreted by too many Muslim men as justification to discard a woman, who cannot bear more children, in favor of a younger woman of childbearing age.

However, Muslim defenders of traditional practices point out that the track record for women's rights and marital stability in more liberal Christianized societies is often less than ideal.

Although prostitution is prohibited, many societies do accept the Muslim institution of temporary marriage for the traveler who desires a sexual companion when away from home. Divorce is hated by God, yet it is acceptable when necessary. In the temporary marriage arrangement, divorce is institutionalized.

Polygyny is permitted in Islam, provided all wives are treated equally and there are not more than four. Some modernists attempt to reinterpret Islam in favor of monogamy, suggesting that polygyny demeans womanhood and erodes quality family relationships.

Muslims have often confided to me that Islam cannot receive the Christian perception of marriage as a binding one flesh covenant relationship united by God. They tell me that Islam is the practical religion; it does not aspire to the unrealistic Christian ideals of marriage and family life. In Islam marriage is a contract; in biblical faith it is a covenant.

Muslims believe children are a blessing from God. Faithful Muslims could never condone abortions, for human life is precious. Some Muslim societies struggle with the propriety of birth control.

When visiting in remote Bangladeshi villages, I learned that a vigorous debate was raging in the mosques concerning the ethical

implications of family planning—this in one of the earth's most densely populated societies, where over 100 million people live in an area smaller than the South Island of New Zealand. In this Muslim society, the babies are received as one of God's most precious blessings. The preachers in the mosques passionately pressed this question: Is it not presumptuous to “plan” these blessings?

The Ummah and the Earth

The marvel of conception and birth reveal the creative power and wonder of God. So does all of creation. The Qur'an describes the wonders of creation as *ayat*—signs which point people toward God. Muslims speak of creation rather than nature. God creates and sustains the earth and the universe, but the creation is not divine.

Islam strongly emphasizes the sovereignty and transcendence of God. Some streams of Muslim theology have significantly accented these dimensions of faith in relationship to creation. In practical terms, this can lead to the conviction that it is presuming on God's sovereignty to expect nature, which he creates and sustains, to function with predictability. Creation is therefore considered capricious. This line of thinking is not conducive to the development of scientific technology. Instead, it encourages fatalism.

Yet at the soul of Islam there is a different spirit. Humans are created to be God's caliph, caretakers of the earth. Islam in its truest essence

joins hands with all humanity in modern ecological commitments. Humankind is commanded by God to care for the good earth which God has created. Biblical faith and Islam converge in this commitment.

Nevertheless, in this convergence a significant difference is present. In the Qur'an, God teaches Adam the names of the animals. In the Bible, Adam names the animals. These divergences in the primal accounts of creation may seem insignificant. But they are not, for these differences nurture a full-orbed worldview. In Islam God provides guidance which instructs humankind in every aspect of life. In biblical faith Adam names the animals, while God looks on, perhaps with some amusement, seeing what these people will do.

The accent in Islam is on submission to the will of God. The accent in biblical faith is on human responsibility in a covenant relationship. Through the centuries, as these quite different emphases have influenced cultures and societies, significant divergences have also developed in the manner in which these cultures perceive of a right and ideal relationship between people and the earth.

A development consultation in East Africa several years ago is an example of the different worldviews which seem to emerge from Qur'anic and biblical faith. Muslims and Christians had planned respective consultations on economic development in an arid region in northeastern Africa. The Muslim conference focused primarily on teaching Arabic throughout the region, so all children could actually

read the Qur'an. In this way they would have access to God's guidance on right development. The Christian conference had some biblical devotionals, to be sure, but the main input for the conference came from scientifically trained ecology and development experts.

The long-term consequence of the Muslim commitments in this region will be increased religious practices and the Christian commitment will increase secular and development-oriented activity. Muslims might worry that the Christian-secular approach will be irreverent, rely too much on human enterprise, presumptuously ignore or damage the ayat of God in creation. Such worry is not without justification. In time the wells which the churches dug induced more intensive grazing in the areas around the water. The consequence was denuded grasslands and desert for miles around the wells. Respect the ayat of God, implore the Muslims!

The Ummah and Progress

Approaches to development, especially human and cultural development, are informed by a society's understanding of history. Consider these examples.

A Hindu or Buddhist worldview considers history a tragic and meaningless cycle controlled by fate.

An African traditional worldview understands all history to be moving from the present to the past. Both the Chinese and Africans idealized the past.

The ideal good of Greek Platonic philosophy was an unchangeable universal principle which governed the universe and history.

Northern hemisphere polytheists viewed history as a phenomenon trapped in the cycles of death and resurrection of the nature gods.

A biblical worldview sees history moving from the garden of Eden and the tragic human distortions which occurred there to a consummation in the future in a majestic city, the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Biblical faith is permeated with a sense that history has purpose and destiny and movement.

In the Muslim perspective, Islam is the primal, middle, and final religion, without innovation or change. The Islamic view is that history is suspended between creation and the final judgment. History is neither cyclical nor linear, oriented toward neither past nor future. There is no movement.

These views of history affect people's attitudes toward personal responsibility and the meaning of life.

In prayer five times daily, the community of Islam turns toward the Ka'bah, the primal navel of the earth, where Adam first appeared when sent from paradise for a period of testing for him and his progeny. At the judgment day when history ends, the testing will be over, and all humans will receive their reward, either in the gardens of paradise or in hell. History is a parenthesis between Adam and the judgment.

The geographical expansion of the dar al-salaam does take place in

history. In that sense there is movement in history. Yet the mission of Islam is an invitation to conformity in the parameters of the Shari'ah, which is a clarification of the right guidance practiced by Adam, Abraham, Muhammad, and other prophets of God. That guidance does not change; the function of prophets after Adam is just to retrieve or clarify. Muslims facing the Ka'bah in prayer or going to the Ka'bah in pilgrimage are affirming that history is anchored to the faith and practice of Adam.

The Muslim view of history is nurtured by the Islamic doctrine which abhors *bidah* (innovation). That theme has already been explored. The faithful ummah lives with internal tension as the community faces the Ka'bah in submission to the unchangeable guidance of Islam in a world of movement and change.

Global Issues

We have found that the hijrah and Muhammad's subsequent establishment of the original Muslim ummah in Medina is a root experience for Muslims. That event informs Muslim understanding of their mission in the global community. That mission is the extension of the region of peace throughout the earth. We have discerned ways in which the Muslim region of peace relates to the issues of global community and well-being.

Our exploration has surveyed specific ways in which the ummah

relates to a variety of issues in modern global community. These include pluralism, the nation-state, authority, cultural diversity, the political order, international relations, peace and war, violence and nonviolence, secularism, cultural development and change, human rights, womanhood, family, children, ecology, economic development, ethics, and the meaning of human history.

We have found the Muslim contribution to all global issues is defined by the core conviction of Islam—God is one and has no associates. This conviction is expressed concretely, practically, culturally in the universally authentic guidance God has revealed as his will.

Yet Muslims live in a global community in which people have countless other loyalties. For this reason the Muslim ummah unapologetically and urgently challenges and invites the global community to submit to the will of God. It is not surprising that in many regions of the earth there is tension between the ummah and other communities. Most Muslims are not worried by that tension; it is to be expected wherever communities are still outside the reign of peace which is the dar al-salaam.

Muslims believe that Islam is the peace which comes from submission to the will of God. The Islamic witness is heard in vast regions of the global community—*La llaha Ula'llah Muhammadan Rasulu'llah* (There is but one God, Muhammad is the prophet of God). Daily the Muslim ummah proclaims its witness and invitation to faith,

submission, and prayer from the hundreds of thousands of minarets in the hamlets, towns, and cities of our world.

For multitudes of the world's approximately 1,000 million Muslims, the witness and invitation is serious business. They are persuaded that the way of Islam is the only hope for peace.

One evening in a mosque in one of North America's great cities, the elders told me, "We are an island of peace separated by thousands of miles from the support inclusion in the dar al-salaam would provide. Although we are alone, we try to be faithful witnesses in a society which does not respect Islam. Once our neighbors burned this mosque to the ground. We are an island of peace in a violent country.

"We hope and work for the day when this troubled land of America comes under the control of the dar al-salaam. In the meantime we shall live faithfully as a witness and invitation to the way of peace."

Reflection

1. What are the unifying aspects of Islam?
2. In what ways does the notion of an Islamic culture help or hinder the growth of the ummah in modern times?
3. Consider the Islamic view of humankind and history. In what ways might these views affect economic and cultural development?
4. Consider the implications for global community of the Islamic view of dar al-salaam and dar al-harb.
5. Recall that the Temple Mount in Jerusalem figures centrally in the

account of the miraj. What are other events for Jews, Muslims, and Christians which make that mount significant? What are the implications for global peace of the conflict between the Jewish and Muslim communities over the issue of control of Jerusalem? What reasonable suggestions do you have for the resolution of the conflict?

6. From an ideal Islamic perspective, how should the ummah relate to the phenomenon of pluralism?

6. What is the mission of the ummah?