

Exploring Islam in the light of Scripture (1)

Questions About Islam

Westerners are puzzled by Islam. Why has this religion such a strong hold on its confessors? They wonder about the way Muslims give their lives for their cause and wreak vengeance on those who offend Allah and his prophet Muhammad. They cannot conceive of people in the name of Islam to be involved in horrific acts of terrorism, such as the spectacular suicide attacks on September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington. Immediately following these attacks, questions were raised about the role of Islam in the rise of global terrorism. Some Muslims have tried to dismiss the charge of Islam's involvement, claiming that Islam does not condone violence, only aberrant Islamic organizations are to blame. They claimed that Islam is a peaceful religion. This may well have been true, at least in theory. Yet not every Muslim cleric or academic expert agreed even on that issue. And it was a plain fact that huge numbers of approving sermons were delivered from mosques throughout the vast Muslim world, while hordes of ordinary believers cheered and danced for joy in celebrating the terrorists as martyrs who would be rewarded with a special place in Paradise. Did the terrorists have a legitimate right to act in the name of Islam - as so many of their clerical supporters maintained - or were they "hijacking" a religion and distorting it for political purposes? And why is Hezbollah in Lebanon out to destroy Israel? Its leader, Sheik Nasrallah, clearly states that his organization will do whatever it takes to further their aim of denying a homeland to Israel.

Not only Westerners, but also Easterners have their questions about Islam. The Indian Hindu scholar Nirad C. Chaudhuri notes that Islam does not permit any Muslim to remain under the rule of unbelievers, and since the beginning of Islam, no large group of Muslims has ever remained under non-Muslim rule. When Muslims are in a majority position, they treat their non-Muslims citizens as second-class citizens or worse. When the British ruled India, Muslims found themselves to be very much like Dhimmis, or tolerated unbelievers. Chaudhuri observes that a very basic principle of Islam is the brotherhood and solidarity of all the Islamic countries and peoples. He points to the emergence of a new Islamic nationalistic movement in India, which was Pan-Islamism. The first wave of the Pan-Islamic movement reached India in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The Pan-Islamic sentiment became stronger and stronger from the Muslim fear of being submerged with the Hindus. Muslims wanted a country for themselves. The Indian Muslims hit on the idea of a partition of the country in order to give themselves the homeland they lacked by carving out a Muslim state from the historic, undivided India. Chaudhuri states that in 1947 "the monstrous and unnatural partition of India became a fact." In the newly formed nation, Pakistan, the founder of the Islamic Organization, Mawdudi (1903-1979), complained that the root cause of Muslim decline was to be found in the widespread departure from the Koran and the sunna (following Muhammad's example). His aim was to educate a small and disciplined elite who would work to capture social and political leadership in Pakistan

and bring it back to true Islam and establish a true Islamic state. With the dispersion of members of the Islamic Organization to the West, that group, with its mission objectives, entered British and European society.

Some important questions for Christians are:

- What is the relationship between Islam and Christianity?
- How should Christians approach Islam?
- When Christians and Muslims talk about God, are they talking about the same God?
- What is the role of Muhammad?
- Is he the final "seal of the prophets?"
- Is Jesus Christ the Son of God or one of Islam's prophets?
- And why is it so hard for Muslims to leave Islam?
- Why are converts viewed as "apostates", and consequently, "blasphemers"?
- Why does Islam persecute Christians?

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Christian believers, ex-Muslims in Egypt, published an open plea for the right to freedom of belief in that country in October 2003. This plea was made in response to the arrest of 22 converts earlier that month, and those who assisted them in trying to obtain new "Christian" identities in Alexandria. British Anglican missiologist, Dr. Bill Musk argues in his latest book, *Kissing Cousins: Christians and Muslims Face to Face* that the two faiths seems to him like "kissing cousins." He believes there exists "a lot of commonality and great deal of the sense of 'being on the same side.'" He thinks, under the surface we may perhaps hold more in common than meets the superficial eye. He notes Islam and Christianity share a common ancestor - Abraham - and a conviction about a sole, sovereign God, the creator and sustainer of the world. He hopes for an attitude-change of Christians and Muslims toward one another. He believes if followers of each faith will better understand where each religion is "coming from", maybe we can have hope for more positive communication across the gap between them. But at the same time, he declares there is a tremendous distance between the two faiths.
(To be continued)

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