

Appendix 6

CROSS AND CRESCENT

WORKBOOK FOR A 5 SESSION COURSE

PREPARED FOR THE BIBLE SOCIETY

by

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TEACHING CHRISTIANS ABOUT ISLAM:

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**CROSS AND CRESCENT**  
**RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM**

**WORKBOOK**

- Notes:
1. This workbook contains more material than can be covered in the five sessions of this course. The leader will select what is most appropriate in any situation, and participants are encouraged to work through any other sections on their own after the course.
  2. The material included in the course comes from the book *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* by Colin Chapman, to be published by the Inter-Varsity Press (IVP) in 1994. The book covers much of this ground in greater detail, and deals with other relevant subjects not included in these five sessions.

**BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY**  
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**SESSION 1: RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS**

1. Meeting face to face
2. Working out an agenda
3. Facts and figures
4. Sects, groups and movements
5. Profile of the Muslim community in your area
6. Cultural issues
7. Visiting a mosque
8. Examining our attitudes
9. Bible study

**SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING ISLAM**

1. Muslims at prayer
2. Basic Muslim beliefs and practices
3. “Folk Islam” or “Popular Islam”
4. The Qur’an
5. Muhammad
6. Fourteen centuries of Muslim history and Muslim-Christian relations
7. What does it feel like to be a Muslim in Britain today?

### **SESSION 3: ENTERING INTO DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE**

1. Questions and objections concerning Christian practice
2. Questions and objections concerning Christian beliefs
3. Social and political issues
4. Guidelines and aims in discussion with Muslims
5. A deeper look at the main objections to Christian beliefs
6. Role play

### **SESSION 4: FACING FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES**

1. Theological questions
2. Crucial differences
3. Counting the cost of conversion
4. The political challenge of Islam

### **SESSION 5: SHARING OUR FAITH**

1. Natural openings in everyday life
2. Using the Bible
3. Strategies for the local church
4. Epilogue

Outline of the book *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam*

Further Reading

## **SESSION ONE**

### **RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS**

*“If we are to make any progress in dialogue with Muslims we must first of all get inside the world of Islam and make ourselves welcome as guests and friends.”*

(Roger Hooker)

#### **1.1. MEETING FACE TO FACE**

**Q.** What contacts have you had with Muslims in the past?

**Q.** What contacts do you have with Muslims now?

## **1.2. WORKING OUT AN AGENDA**

- Q. What questions do you have about Islam?  
What would you like to know?  
What do you think you need to know?**

- Q. What do you think are the major questions raised for Christians by the presence of Muslims in the UK?**

- Q. How important are the following questions in your mind?**

**Religious Education in schools  
School Assemblies  
Muslim Schools  
Multi-faith worship  
Racism**

**Are there other major questions?**

- Q. What do you think are the major questions raised for Christians by the existence of Islam as a world religion?**

### **1.3. FACTS AND FIGURES**

**Number and distribution of Muslims in the UK**

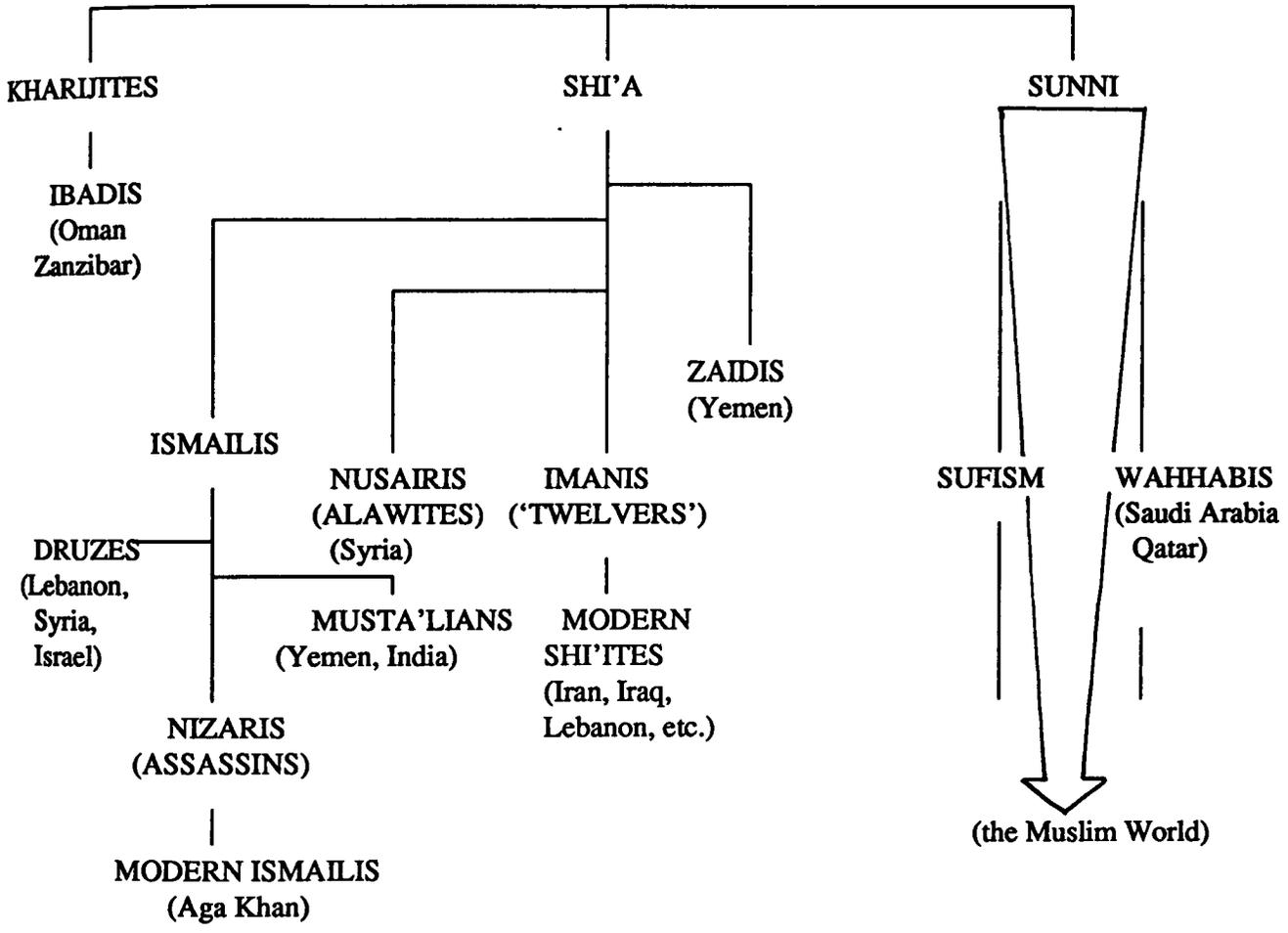
**Countries of origin, and languages of Muslim communities in the UK**

**Distribution of Muslims in Europe**

**Distribution of Muslims in the world**

# 1.4. SECTS, GROUPS AND MOVEMENTS

## 1.4.1. The main divisions of Islam



From *Faith and Power: the Politics of Islam* by Edward Mortimer, Faber, 1982.

#### **1.4.2. The main movements within the Muslim community in the UK**

*“Islam is far less homogenous than outsiders commonly suppose...”*

**(Philip Lewis)**

- a. The Deobandis
  
- b. The Tablighi Jamaat
  
- c. The Barelvis
  
- d. The Jamaat-i-Islami
  
- e. Ahmadiyya
  
- f. Other organizations:      **Ahl-i-Kitab**  
   **Islamic Propagation Society**  
   **The Muslim Parliament**

**1.5. PROFILE OF THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN YOUR AREA**

**1.5.1. How many Muslims are there?**

**1.5.2. Where do they come from originally?**

**1.5.3. What languages do they speak?**

**1.5.4. Where do they live?**

**1.5.5. Where are their mosques?**

**1.5.6. What kind of relationships are there between the Christian and Muslim communities?**

## 1.6. CULTURAL ISSUES

### 1.6.1. How can we begin to appreciate Muslim culture?

This is an outline of the Muslim way of life as described by a Muslim for non-Muslims, taken from *Islam: A Brief Guide*, published by the Muslim Educational Trust (130 Stroud Green Road, London, N4 3RZ).

#### Festivals

These occasions are observed with due solemnity to seek the pleasure of Allah, the corner-stone of all Islamic activity. There is no concept of a festival for pleasure's own sake; but there are occasions of joy and happiness. The happiest occasion of a Muslim's life is to see the sovereignty of Allah established in its totality in his land. *Idul Fitr* and *Idul Adha* are the two major festivals in Islam.

*Idul Fitr* is observed at the end of the month of Ramadan. On this day after the month of fasting, Muslims express their joy and happiness by offering a congregational prayer, preferably in an open field wherever possible. They express their gratitude to Allah for enabling them to observe the fast which is a training programme designed to prepare them to live as practising Muslims. Special food is prepared and it is customary to visit friends and relatives and to give presents to children to make the occasion lively and a special one for them.

*Idul Adha* begins on the 10th of Dhul Hijja and continues until the 12th day of the month. This celebration is observed to commemorate the willingness of Abraham when he was asked by Allah to sacrifice his own son, Ishmael. Abraham showed his readiness and Allah was well pleased. A lamb was sacrificed instead of Ishmael on Allah's command. Muslims offer congregational prayer on the day, and afterwards they sacrifice animals such as sheep, goats, cows and camels to seek the pleasure of Allah. The meat of the sacrificed animal is shared amongst relatives, neighbours and the poor.

Some other occasions to remember include the beginning of the *Hijra* (migration of the Prophet), *Lailatul Miraj* (Night of Ascension) and dates of Islamic battles fought by Muhammad (Pbuh). There is a night of special significance in Ramadan known as *Lailatul Qadr* (Night of Power). It occurs in one of the odd numbered nights of the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. The Qur'an mentions it as a night "better than a thousand months".

Islamic festivals are observed according to the Islamic calendar which is based on lunar months. The lunar year is shorter by about 10 days than the solar year. Festival dates are determined by the appearance of the moon.

### Marriage and Family Life

Marriage is the basis of family life in Islam. It is a solemn contract between a bridegroom and a bride. Muslim marriages are generally arranged by parents with the consent of the boy and the girl. Marriages are performed in a simple ceremony in the presence of relatives, friends and neighbours.

Islam does not allow free mixing of grown-up boys and girls; nor does it allow sex before marriage. Extra-marital sex is severely punished. No discrimination is made on the basis of sex. Husband and wife are equal partners of the family and play their part in their respective fields. Divorce is permitted but is regarded as the most abominable of lawful acts.

### Diet

There are some regulations regarding diet which must be observed by all Muslims. A Muslim is not allowed to eat the meat of:

- dead animals (due to disease and natural causes)
- animals slaughtered without invoking the name of Allah
- animals strangled to death
- pigs
- carnivorous animals
- animals devoured by wild beasts
- blood of an animal.

Fish and vegetables are permitted. Islamic law requires an animal to be slaughtered by a sharp knife penetrating the inner part of the animal's neck to allow maximum drainage of blood. The invocation of the name of Allah is obligatory at the time of slaughter.

All varieties of alcoholic drinks such as beer and spirits are prohibited. These rules aim at rooting out the evil effects of food and drink on the health of people living in a society.

### Dress

Muslims are required to cover their bodies properly and decently. No particular dress is recommended. Outlines for guidance include:

- a. For men, covering from navel to knees is a must.
- b. For women, covering of the whole body except the face and hands is compulsory and according to some jurists women above the age of puberty should cover their face while going out and meeting strangers. A woman must not wear a dress which arouses man's base feelings, e.g transparent, skin-tight or half-naked dress.

- c. Pure silk and gold are not allowed for men.
- d. Prohibition of women's clothes for men and vice versa.
- e. Symbolic dress from other religions is not allowed.

Simplicity and modesty are encouraged. Dresses expressing arrogance are disliked. The style of dress depends on local custom and climatic conditions.

### Social Manners

Islam teaches decency, humility and good manners. A Muslim greets another Muslim by saying:

*assalamu 'alekum* (peace be on you)  
and it is reciprocated by:  
*wa' alekum assalam* - (peace be on you too).

Keeping one's promises, truthfulness, justice, fairplay, helping the poor and needy, respect for parents, teachers and elders, love for children and good relations with one's neighbours are the most valued virtues of a Muslim.

Islam condemns enmity, back-biting, slander, blasphemy, ridicule, use of offensive names, suspicion, and arrogance. Muslims must not adopt these bad habits.

## 1.6.2. Some basic dos and don'ts

The following are basic guidelines which may be of help to any who have little or no experience of meeting with Muslims or with people from an eastern culture. Here again, however, we need to enter a strong word of caution, since not all of these points are relevant for all Muslims or all Asians. We will need to be guided by people who have more experience than ourselves in relating to the Muslim community in our area.

- You may need to learn a new approach to visiting. The saying "An Englishman's home is his castle" gives some idea of British ways of thinking! The mentality of most of the rest of the world is summed up in these words of an Egyptian Christian: "In this country, and throughout the East, you honour people more by visiting them in their homes than by inviting them to yours."
- Men should not visit women in their homes when they are alone, or be alone with women in other situations.
- Men should not be surprised if the women in the family retire to a back room and do not sit with the men of the family and other guests in the front room.
- A man should not try to look a woman in the eye.
- A man should not shake the hand of a Muslim woman unless she takes the initiative by holding out her hand.
- You should not receive a present or eat with your left hand, since the left hand is associated with functions that are regarded as unclean.
- You should not sit with your legs crossed if you are in the presence of an older person.
- If you are sitting on the floor, you should not sit with the soles of your feet facing another person.
- You should show respect for any copy of the Qur'an and of the Bible. It should not, for example, be left lying on the floor or under a pile of other books. Muslims show respect for the Qur'an and often keep it wrapped in a special cloth. They are also supposed to go through the ritual of washing before opening the Qur'an. They are therefore surprised and shocked when they see how Christians often treat their holy book.
- It is best not to admire anything in a person's home too much, or to admire someone's child. In the minds of people of some cultures this can be regarded as a kind of coveting associated with the "evil eye".
- If you are entertaining Muslims in your home, you will obviously never offer them pork. Strict Muslims will only eat meat that is *halal*, i.e. killed by a Muslim with the proper ritual and using the name of Allah. There need be no embarrassment about asking them if they prefer to have a vegetarian meal.
- If Muslims offer you meat in their home, there is no reason why you as a Christian should refuse to eat it. Most Christians would say that Paul's teaching about food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8) is not relevant at all to this situation.

## **1.7. VISITING A MOSQUE**

### **1.7.1. Why visit a mosque?**

### **1.7.2. What is the mosque for?**

### **1.7.3. What should you do before going?**

The leader of the group should make personal contact before going, either with the *Imam*, or some other leader of the community or a member of the mosque committee.

Women should wear a scarf to cover their heads. They may sometimes be asked to wear a long skirt or loose trousers, and to have their arms covered. Some mosques may ask that women should not visit during their time of menstruation.

Men are sometimes expected to cover their heads.

You should be prepared to take your shoes off before going into the main prayer room of the mosque.

During your visit your hosts will probably want to talk about the mosque and explain their faith to you - perhaps at some length. There will usually also be opportunities for you to ask questions. It can be helpful to think out in advance some of the questions you may want to ask.

You should be prepared to stay for at least an hour, and not be in a hurry to leave. You may be served with refreshments, and there may be an opportunity for you to ask further questions. If the leader of your group knows the mosque well, they should know how long the visit is likely to take.

If any members of your group have reservations about visiting a mosque, they should not feel under any obligation to do so. It may be helpful, however, if they can be encouraged to express their feelings openly and discuss them with the rest of the group.

### **1.7.3. What can you do and what can you see at the mosque?**

You may be welcomed by the *Imam*, whose position is roughly similar to, but not identical to that of the minister, pastor, or priest in a Christian church. It is worth asking about the responsibilities of the *Imam*, and finding out how they differ from those of a Christian minister. It is very possible, however, that you will be welcomed and shown round by any member of the community, who may not have studied Islam in any depth.

You may be able to see the place where those who come to the mosque carry out their ablutions, *wudu*, the ritual washing of the hands, arms, face, nose and feet, before they pray. Your hosts may be very willing to demonstrate to you how they say their prayers.

In the prayer room or prayer hall itself, you will see the *mihrab*, the alcove in the wall which marks the direction of Mecca, the central shrine of Islam, and thus indicates the direction which Muslims face to pray. They generally don't mind if visitors watch them from behind when they are saying the prayers, and are often willing to demonstrate for visitors the special postures that they adopt during their prayers.

The *minbar* is the pulpit with steps, usually made of wood, from which the *Imam* gives a sermon at the Friday Prayers.

There is often Arabic writing on the walls. This could be:

the name of God: Allah

the name Muhammad

The *Fatihah* (the first Surah of the Qur'an, which is used frequently in the set prayers, and is roughly equivalent to the Lord's Prayer)

Other verses from the Qur'an (e.g. Surah 112).

There may be a series of clocks indicating the times for prayer each day, and the Friday prayers.

There may or may not be a minaret. In a Muslim country, the call to prayer, the *Azan*, would be heard from the minaret, often by a loud speaker. In most mosques in Britain the call to prayer is only heard inside the mosque, and special permission has to be given by the local council if it is to be broadcast outside the building.

There may or may not be a separate Women's Prayer Room. If there isn't a special room, there may be a gallery or a curtained area in the main prayer hall which is used by women.

In many mosques there is a special room which is used for Qur'an classes. Children come here for an hour or more after school each day to learn the Qur'an. It may be worth studying the pictures and posters on the walls.

There may be a hall attached to the mosque, which is used for social functions, like weddings and the important festivals.

### 1.7.5. What should you do after the visit?

It may be helpful for the group to meet together, even if it is only for a short time, to share their impressions of the visit with each other.

It may be appropriate to write to your hosts to thank them for their hospitality, and perhaps even to send a donation to the mosque.

You should think together about the most appropriate way to follow up your visit. It may be possible, for example, to arrange further visits to the mosque, or to visit your hosts in their homes. If you invite them to visit your church, don't be surprised or offended if there is some reluctance to do so, and try to work out the reasons for their reluctance.

You need not feel that you always need to make an appointment to visit a mosque. You may be surprised at the welcome you receive, as a complete stranger, at any time of the day!

## **1.8. EXAMINING OUR ATTITUDES**

**1.8.1. Q What attitudes towards Islam and Muslims are common in our society in general?**

**1.8.2. Q What attitudes towards Islam and Muslims are common among Christians in our country?**

**Are you aware of any of the following views? To what extent do you agree with them?**

**“If Christianity is true, then Islam is false, and Muslims can’t have any relationship with God.”**

**“Islam is a religion that needs to be strongly resisted in the West.”**

**“It’s impossible to convert Muslims, and we shouldn’t try to anyway.”**

**“Muslims are very prejudiced and have closed minds.”**

## **1.9. BIBLE STUDY**

In groups of not more than six discuss one or at most two of the following topics or passages. Alternatively, if two people in the group are asked to choose one passage or topic, each of the pairs can spend some time in discussion and then share with the group what they have learned.

You are encouraged to continue with the other topics on your own after the course.

### **RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS**

#### **1.9.1. Reaching out beyond our own community (Read Matthew 5.43-48)**

Some Pharisees had twisted the OT commandment “love your neighbour” to mean that we should only love people from our own community, and hate our enemies. Jesus teaches here that love is not to be limited in this way.

**Q** If we are really honest with ourselves, what feelings do we have towards our Muslim neighbours? - fear, suspicion? Do we respect them or despise them? Are we friendly, cool or indifferent towards them?

What are the main reasons for us finding it hard to relate to our Muslim neighbours?

Is it prejudices in *us* or in *them*?

Is it the political situation in the country?

Is it something in our society?

#### **1.9.2. The golden rule (Read Matthew 7.12)**

**Q** How would you like your Muslim neighbours to treat you as an individual, and your community?

How should this affect the way you treat *them*?

Does it make any difference if the Muslim community is the majority and the Christians are a minority in your country, or the Christians are a majority and the Muslims a minority?

### **1.9.3. Showing love in action (Read Luke 10.25-37)**

Jesus answered the question “who is my neighbour?” by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. He was therefore saying that my neighbour is anyone I meet, anyone I come in contact with - especially if that person is in any kind of need.

Q What does this say to me about who *my* neighbours are?

What does this say about what it means to love my neighbours in practice? Am I prepared to love my neighbours like this?

What does the parable say about our prejudices? Jesus deliberately chose people from two communities which had strong feelings against each other.

### **1.9.4. Praying for our Muslim neighbours (Read 1 Timothy 2.1-6)**

Notice the special relevance of this passage to prayer for the Muslim world: the Muslim heartily agrees that “there is one God”, but the gospel goes on to say “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”.

Q What is the connection between praying for rulers and for peace (verse 2), and God’s desire that everyone should be saved and come to know the truth (verse 4)?

Why do we believe that we need a mediator between God and men? (Read Romans 10.1-2)

Q If this is how Paul prayed for his fellow-countrymen, can we pray in the same way for our neighbours - and particularly for our Muslim neighbours?

How well does Paul’s description of the Jew’s devotion to God apply to the devotion of Muslims whom we know?

## **UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES**

### **1.9.5. Understanding our history and culture (Read John 4.9)**

The Jews disliked the Samaritans -

because of their mixed ancestry

because of their rival temple on Mt Gerizim

because they recognized the OT law but not the Prophets, and

because of the political tension between the two communities over many centuries

**Q** Is there any parallel between Jewish prejudices towards the Samaritans and Christian prejudices towards Muslims?

Is it true in our situation to say, “Christians have no dealings with Muslims”? If so, what are the reasons?

### **1.9.6. The command to cross barriers of prejudice (Read Acts 1.7-8)**

**Q** Why did Jesus mention Samaria by name in this context? (cf Matthew 10.5-6)

### **1.9.7. The healing of the rift between the Jews and the Samaritans (Read Acts 8.4-17)**

**Q** What was the reason for this special apostolic delegation sent from Jerusalem (verse 14)?

What was special and unique about the way in which the Holy Spirit came upon these believers (verses 15-17)?

Is there any connection between the circumstances of this visit and the special way in which the Spirit was given on this occasion?

How would these events have contributed to the healing of the rift between these two communities within the church?

### **1.9.8. Rooting out racial and religious prejudice (Read Acts 10.1-48)**

**Q** What were the prejudices in Peter’s mind which made it difficult for him to meet these Gentiles?

**Do we have similar prejudices which make it hard for us to have close friendships with Muslims, or to believe that Muslims can come to faith in Christ?**

**How did the Holy Spirit deal with Peter's prejudices?  
How can he deal with our prejudices?**

**1.9.9. Admitting our suspicious mentality (Read Acts 9.10-19)**

**Q What were the questions and doubts which must have been raised in Ananias' mind when he heard that Saul had been converted?**

**Are they similar to the questions and doubts in our minds when we hear of someone from a non-Christian background who is converted?**

**1.9.10. Admitting our unbelief (Read Galatians 1.21-24)**

**Q Do we really believe that Muslims can change their minds about Jesus and come to faith in him?**

**If someone as prejudiced and hostile as Saul could be converted, is it any harder to believe that a Muslim can be converted?**

**1.9.11. Admitting our fear and praying for boldness (Read Acts 4.23-31)**

**Q How serious were the threats against the apostles (verse 29)?**

**To what extent do we face the same threats today? Is there anything in common between our situation and the situation the apostles were in?**

**What did they ask God to do for them? How did God answer their prayer? Are we prepared to ask God for his boldness?**

**What did they see as God's part in the proclamation of his word?**

**What part have supernatural evidences (healings, visions, etc.) played in the conversion of any Muslims we know?**

**Are we prepared to ask God to reveal himself today in miraculous ways?**

## UNDERSTANDING OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

### 1.9.12. The secret of genuine meeting and dialogue (Read Luke 2.45-46)

Notice five details in Luke's description of Jesus at the age of 12 in the temple:

- he was sitting among the teachers
- he was listening to them
- he was asking them questions
- he had understanding (RSV)
- he was giving answers

**Q** Can this picture help us to see what we must do if we want to have a genuine meeting of minds with Muslims? Our situation may be very different today, since Jesus was relating to his own culture, whereas for many of us Islam represents a religion and a culture which are foreign to us. But are there any principles that we can apply?

**a.** *Sitting among them:*

How much do we understand about the society to which they belong? about their history and culture?

Do we know what it feels like to be in their shoes?

Am I aware of how they react to *me* as a person (because of my colour and nationality; because of the language I speak; because of all the cultural and political factors which affect our relationship)?

**b.** *Listening*

Am I really willing to listen before I say what I believe?

**c.** *Asking questions:*

What kind of questions should we ask to help us to understand?

**d.** *Understanding:*

What is the difference between knowing about Islam and understanding Islam? between knowing about facts and discernment? between information and insight?

How do we obtain this kind of insight?

**e.** *Answers:*

Are my responses answering the questions in *their* minds or the questions *I* think they ought to be asking?

**1.9.13. Knowing “the heart of a stranger” (Read Exodus 22.21, 23.9 and Leviticus 19.33-34)**

**Q** Why should the children of Israel have been in a unique position to understand the feelings of foreigners and immigrants in their community?

What must it feel like to belong to a Muslim immigrant community in Europe or North America?

What can Christians in the West learn from these verses about their attitudes and responsibilities towards Muslim communities in their midst?

**1.9.14. The willingness to identify (Read 1 Corinthians 9.19-23)**

**Q** What would it mean to “live like a Muslim”? Is it (a) possible and (b) desirable?

Does it apply only to the “missionary” living among Muslims? Or could it also be applied to Christians living in the Islamic world?

What would it mean for a foreigner in his relations with Muslims?

What would it mean for a national in his relations with Muslims of his own nationality?

What is the meaning of verse 23, and how is it related to the question of identification? Is Paul thinking of the blessing he gives or the blessing he *receives*?

**GNB** “All this I do for the gospel’s sake, in order to share in its blessings” (cf RSV, NIV).

**NEB** “All this I do for the sake of the Gospel, to bear my part in proclaiming it.”

# SESSION TWO

## UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

*“One tries to get inside the mind and heart of Islam, to get the feel of it, to be at home within it.”*

(Roger Hooker)

### 2.1. MUSLIMS AT PRAYER

#### 2.1.1. The call to prayer

“God is most great, God is most great, I bear witness that there is no god except God; I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle of God. Come unto prayer. Come ye unto good. Prayer is a better thing than sleep. Come to the best deed. God is most great. God is most great. There is no god except God.”

“*allahu akbar*” - “God is most great”

“*la ilaha ill-allah*” - “there is no god but God”

“*hayya 'ala-ssalah*” - “come ye unto prayer”

“*hayya 'ala-lfalah*” - “come ye to the best deed”

Q Can we hear this as a call to pray *with* and *for* the Muslim community?

#### 2.1.2. The ablutions and compulsory prayers

Muslims are required to say a prescribed form of prayers five times a day, either in the mosque or wherever they happen to be at the time. The five times are (1) between dawn and just before sunrise; (2) between midday and afternoon; (3) between late afternoon and just before sunset; (4) between sunset and dark; (5) at night before midnight or dawn.

They must prepare themselves to offer prayer by carrying out the ritual Ablution (*wudu* - pronounced “*wudu*” or “*wuzu*”). These are the different stages they must go through:

wash both hands up to the wrists three times

rinse the mouth three times

sniff water into the nostrils

wash the tip of the nose three times

wash the face three times

wash the arms three times from wrist to elbow

pass the wet hand over the head and both hands over the back of the head to the neck

wash inside and behind the ears with wet fingers

wash both feet thoroughly up to the ankles.

The following are the stages in the basic sequence of the ritual prayer (called a *raka'ah*), with an English translation of words that have to be said in Arabic:

1. Stand upright on the prayer mat, facing the *Ka'abah* in Mecca.
2. Say some words expressing your "intention" (*niyya*) either aloud or silently: e.g. "I intend to say four *raka'ahs* of the Dawn Prayers for Allah facing the *Ka'abah*".
3. Raise your hands to your ears and say "God is most great" (*Allahu akbar*).
4. Place the right hand on the left just below the navel or on the chest and say: "O Allah, glory and praise are for you, and blessed is your name, and exalted is your Majesty; there is no god but you. I seek shelter in Allah from the rejected Satan. In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most kind."
5. Recite the *Fatihah*, the first surah of the Qur'an (see 1.4).
6. Recite any other verse(s) of the Qur'an.
7. Bow from the waist saying "God is most great"; and place your hands on your knees saying "Glory to my Lord, the Great".
8. Stand up saying "Allah hears those who praise him. Our Lord, praise be to you".
9. Prostrate on the floor, with forehead, nose, both palms and knees touching the ground, saying "God is most great. Glory to my Lord, the Highest".
10. Stand up again, saying "God is most great", and sit upright with knees bent and palms on the knees. Prostrate again, saying "God is most great. Glory to my Lord, the Highest". Then get up again saying "God is most great".
11. Other prayers, either memorized or extempore, (called *du'a*) can be said at this point; e.g. "O Allah, I have been unjust to myself and no-one grants pardon for sins except you, therefore, forgive me with your forgiveness and have mercy on me. Surely you are the Forgiver, the Merciful."
12. Turn your face to the right (whether or not there is someone praying beside you), saying "The peace and mercy of Allah be upon you" and then to the left with the same words.

This basic pattern is repeated with variations two, three or four times at the different times of prayer.

### 2.1.3. The *Fatihah*

This is Kenneth Cragg's translation of the prayer which is always included in every form of ritual prayer:

In the name of the merciful Lord of mercy,  
Praise be to God, the Lord of all being,  
The merciful Lord of mercy,  
Master of the Day of Judgement,  
Thee alone we worship  
And to Thee alone we come for aid,  
Guide us in the straight path,  
The path of those whom Thou has blessed,  
Not of those against whom there is displeasure,  
Nor of those who go astray.

*(The Event of the Qur'an, p 74)*

Q What are the main elements in the prayer?

What are the similarities and differences between the *Fatihah* and the Lord's Prayer? Are there any sentiments in the prayer which Christians could not share?

## 2.2. BASIC MUSLIM BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

### 2.2.1. Basic beliefs

#### Islam

Islam is a complete code of life. It tells man about the purpose of his creation and existence, his ultimate destiny, his place among other creatures and, more importantly, provides him with the guidance to lead a purposeful life to be rewarded in the life hereafter.

The Arabic word Islam means the voluntary surrender to the will of Allah and obedience to His commands. Allah, also an Arabic word, is the proper name of God. Muslims prefer to use the name Allah rather than the word God. The Islamic way of life is based on total obedience to Allah. This is the way to obtain peace here and hereafter; hence, Islam also means peace.

#### Muslim

A person who freely and consciously accepts the Islamic way of life, and practises it, is called a Muslim.

#### Basic Beliefs

The three fundamental Islamic beliefs are:

*Tawhid* (oneness of Allah)

*Risalah* (prophethood)

*Akhirah* (life after death)

*Tawhid* is the most important Islamic belief. It implies that everything on this earth originates from the one and only creator who is also the sustainer and the sole source of guidance. This belief governs all aspects of human life.

Islam views human life as a compact whole and rejects any compartmentalization. The creator and source of guidance is one and the same and therefore deserves worship and obedience from mankind. There is no scope for any partnership. *Tawhid* is pure monotheism. It tells man that Allah is neither born nor is anyone born of him. He has no son or daughter. Human beings are His subjects. He is the supreme and ever active Lord of the Universe. He is Allah, the One.

**Tawhid** brings a total change in the life of a believer. This belief makes him bow down only to the one and only creator who is ever watchful of all his actions on earth. He must work for the supremacy of his creator in all areas of life and by doing so he achieves the purpose of his life - the pleasure of Allah.

**Risalah** is the channel of communication between Allah and mankind. Allah, the Creator, has not left man without guidance (*Hidayah*) for the conduct of his life. Since the beginning of creation, he has sent down his guidance through selected people to convey it to their fellow men. These chosen people are called prophets and messengers. The chain of *Risalah* began with Adam (*peace be upon him*), included Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses and Jesus, and ended with Muhammad (*peace be upon them.all*). The message of all the prophets and messengers is one and the same. They all urged the people of their time to obey and worship Allah alone and none other. It was necessary to send prophets at different times to bring back straying human beings from deviations to the Right Path (*Siratul Mustaqim*).

Our merciful creator has not only sent prophets and messengers to guide us, he has also sent down books of guidance with them. The Qur'an, which was revealed to Muhammad (*Pbuh*), is the last of these books of guidance.

**Akhirah** means life after death. This belief has a far-reaching impact on the life of a believer. A believer is accountable to his creator on the Day of Judgement. Belief in *Akhirah* implies that all our actions will be judged by Allah in the life hereafter. A person who obeys Allah throughout his life will be rewarded and will be assigned a permanent place of happiness in Paradise; the person judged to be an evil-doer will be punished and sent to Hell, a place of suffering.

One who believes in *Akhirah* is not expected to behave against the will of Allah. He will always bear in mind that Allah is watching all his actions and the angels are recording them. Many present day problems in the world would disappear if everyone acted fully in accord with this belief.

From *Islam: A Brief Guide*

### 2.2.2. Basic practices

#### Five basic duties of Islam

Islam has five basic duties called the pillars of Islam. Performed regularly and correctly with an awareness of their relevance to practical life, these duties bring a Muslim's life into line with the wishes of his creator and master. He then is able to fit himself neatly into the system of Islam which aims at the establishment of truth and the eradication of untruth. In fact, the performance of these duties in the manner required can revolutionize the whole concept of living and give meaning and purpose to life.

1. *Shahadah*, the first of the five basic duties, is to pronounce knowingly and voluntarily the first *Kalimah*, known as the declaration of faith:

*La ilaha illal lahu Muhammadur rasulul lah*

“There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is Allah's messenger.”

This declaration contains within it the two basic concepts of *Tawhid* and *Risalah* stated earlier. The other four pillars of Islam revolve round this central pillar.

2. *Salah* (compulsory prayers) is offered five times a day individually or in congregation. It is the practical demonstration of faith. It has been designed to keep a believer in constant touch with his Creator, and make him conscious of his basic duty to work for the establishment of true order in society and to remove untruth, evil and the indecent. *Salah* induces in a person the qualities of self-discipline, steadfastness and obedience to the Truth. It makes him honest, truthful and courageous.

Five times a day *Salah* provides a wonderful chance of making adjustments and corrections in life. It is both a moral and a physical training aimed at keeping a man truly obedient to his creator.

The five daily prayers are:

*Fajr* (dawn prayer)

*Zuhr* (after midday prayer)

*Asr* (late afternoon prayer)

*Maghrib* (after sunset prayer)

*Isha* (night prayer)

3. **Zakah** (welfare contribution) is a compulsory payment from the annual savings of a Muslim. The rate of payment is 2.5% on cash, jewellery and precious metals and there is another rate for animals and agricultural produce. It is neither a charity donation nor a tax. Charity is optional, and taxes can be used for any governmental purpose. But **Zakah** can only be spent on fixed headings like helping the poor and needy, the disabled, the oppressed and lonely, to free captives and debtors and for other welfare purposes.

**Zakah** is an act of worship. It is one of the fundamental principles of an Islamic economy, designed to develop an equitable society where everyone has a right to contribute and share. **Zakah** is paid with the consciousness that the wealth of a person actually belongs to Allah and the person owning it is merely a trustee of the wealth.

4. **Sawm** (fasting in Ramadan) is the third basic duty that a Muslim is required to undertake to please his creator. From dawn to sunset every day of the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, a Muslim refrains from eating, drinking, smoking and conjugal relations. It is a means of achieving self-control, designed to raise a person's moral and spiritual standards above selfishness, greed, laxity and other vices. **Sawm** is a yearly training programme to refresh a person's determination to fulfil his obligations towards Allah, his creator and sustainer.

5. **Hajj** (pilgrimage to the house of Allah) is an annual event obligatory on those Muslims who can afford to undertake it at least once in a lifetime. It is a journey to the House of Allah (*Al-Ka'bah*) in *Mecca*, Saudi Arabia. **Hajj** symbolises the unity of mankind and is the Annual Assembly of the Muslim community (*ummah*). **Hajj** stands as the peak of the obligatory duties in that it lays bare to a Muslim that he belongs to none but his Creator. **Hajj** also demonstrates the equality of mankind.

From *Islam: A Brief Guide*

### **2.3. “FOLK ISLAM” OR “POPULAR ISLAM”**

These are terms used to cover a number of practices which are very popular, but which seem to be inconsistent with the “Ideal Islam” or “Orthodox Islam” that has already been described. We need to recognize, of course, that there may be a similar gap between “Ideal Christianity” and Christianity as it is actually practised in particular communities! The following are examples of these practices, which can be found in Britain as much as in other parts of the Muslim world.

#### **2.3.1. Magical practices**

- wearing an amulet as a kind of lucky charm to ward off evil spirits
- warding off the “evil eye” through displaying, for example on a house or a car, a representation of the eye
- writing a verse from the Qur’an on a piece of paper, putting the paper in water and then drinking the water
- using the names of God in a magical way
- drinking water from a particular spring because it is regarded as having magical powers

#### **2.3.2. The veneration of saints**

Shrines are built over the graves of people who have been specially holy, and people visit or make pilgrimage to the shrines of these “saints” to obtain blessing or to seek relief from any kind of trouble or evil. Sometimes they visit shrines as a substitute for going on pilgrimage to Mecca. Many of these saints are regarded not only as examples of holy living but also as intercessors who can act as intermediaries between the individual and God.

### **2.3.3. The veneration of the Prophet Muhammad**

**Although the Qur'an teaches that Muhammad was an ordinary man who needed to seek forgiveness from God, popular piety has often tended to exalt the status of the prophet and to attribute to him qualities that seem to be semi-divine or even divine. The veneration of the prophet has become specially popular in recent years in Pakistan.**

### **2.3.4. "Miracles, signs and wonders"**

**Many of the phenomena which we associate with "charismatic gifts" can be found in Islam - healings, visions, and miracles of different kinds.**

### **2.3.5. Astrology and occult practices**

**Many of the ideas and practices that we are becoming familiar with in western societies today can be found in Muslim societies.**

**It needs to be emphasized that whereas in some situations practices of these kinds are widespread and public, in others they are not so common and certainly not evident to the casual observer.**

## 2.4. THE QUR'AN

### 2.4.1. What does the Qur'an mean to Muslims?

The Qur'an is the sacred book of the Muslims. It is the last book of guidance from Allah, sent down to Muhammad (*Pbuh*) through the angel, Jibrail (Gabriel). Every word of it is the word of Allah. It was revealed over a period of 23 years in the Arabic language, it contains 114 Surahs (chapters) and 6,236 verses. Muslims usually learn to read it and many memorize it by heart. They are expected to understand its meaning and practise its teachings.

The Qur'an is unrivalled in its recording and preservation. The astonishing fact about this book of Allah is that it has remained unchanged even to a dot over the past fourteen hundred years.

The Qur'an deals with man and his ultimate goal in life. Its teachings cover all areas of this life and the life after death. It contains principles, doctrines and directions for every sphere of human life. The theme of the Qur'an broadly consists of three fundamental ideas: *Tawhid*, *Risalah* and *Akhirah*. The success of human beings on this earth and in the life hereafter depends on obedience to the Qur'anic teachings.

*From Islam: A Brief Guide*

“Muslims and Christians have been alienated partly by the fact that both have misunderstood each other's faith by trying to fit it into their own pattern. The most usual error it to suppose (on both sides) that the roles of Jesus Christ in Christianity and of Muhammad in Islam are comparable... If one is drawing parallels in terms of the structure of the two religions, what corresponds in the Christian scheme to the Qur'an is not the Bible but the person of Christ - it is Christ who is for Christians the revelation of (from) God.”

(Wilfred Cantwell Smith)

**2.4.2. Further questions:**

- a. Was Muhammad illiterate?
- b. How was the Qur'an written down and collected?
- c. Can the Qur'an be translated?
- d. How do Muslims expound the Qur'an?

### 2.4.3. Reading the Qur'an

It is probably just as hard for a Christian to read the Qur'an from beginning to end as for a Muslim to read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation! The following, therefore, are some of the points at which we can begin to read it:

Note: the following verse numbers are from Pickthall's translation; in some other translation of the Qur'an the numbering of verses is slightly different. If the verses you have looked up in your translation do not seem to be the right ones, read a few verses before or after, until you find the right verses.

#### 2.4.3.1. The shortest surahs

Surah 1 - The *Fatihah*, often described as "the essence of the Qur'an".  
96 said to be the first surah revealed to Muhammad  
74 said to be the second surah revealed after some months  
82, 84, 93, 101, 112, 113, 114 - all short surahs at the end of the Qur'an

#### 2.4.3.2. Some well-known passages

2.255 - a well-known verse about the sovereignty of God  
24.35-36 - a passage which has been a source of inspiration to mystics  
2.256 - "there is no compulsion in religion"  
59.22-24 - verses about "the most beautiful names" of God

#### 2.4.3.3. Typical passages

- about the Creation, 3.189-191; 13.2-4; 31.10-11; 32.4-9
- about heaven and hell, 2.24-25; 38.49-60; 44.47-57
- about prophets, 2.124-134

#### 2.4.3.4. Laws

- about marriage, 4.3
- theft, 5.38
- usury, 2.275-279
- obedience to parents, 29.8
- wine, 2.219
- pork, 2.173
- a summary of the moral law 2.83 - 2.177

2.4.3.5. Use the index to look up subjects like: Abraham, Marriage, Divorce, Jews, Christians, Satan, Adultery, etc.

2.4.3.6. Complete surahs

12 Joseph (compare and contrast with the story of Joseph in Genesis, chapters 37-50).  
2 The Cow - generally said to be the first surah revealed at Medina; one of the longer surahs, but one which contains many important Quranic themes.

Look up the following verses in Qur'an:

2.4.3.7. About the Qur'an itself

The Qur'an revealed in the Arabic language 12.2; 46.12

Muhammad "the seal of the prophets", 33.40

The Qur'an reveals clearly what Jews and Christians have hidden in their scriptures, 5.15

Verses about "Abrogation", the belief that some revelations to the Prophet can be superseded by later revelations, 2.106; 16.101; 22.52

2.4.3.8. About the Bible

- revelations in Scripture recognized by the Qur'an:
  - the *tawrat* (revealed to Moses), 2.87; 3.3
  - the *zabur* (revealed to David), 4.163
  - the *injl* (revealed to Jesus), 5.46-48
- the Qur'an confirms the message of previous scriptures: 2.91; 3.1-4; 3.84; 4.47
- God has protected the Scriptures: 5.48; 18.28
- Muhammad is to consult the Scriptures already revealed if he is in doubt about what is revealed to him 10.94-95
- Jews and Christians are accused of tampering with their Scriptures:
  - a. they are ignorant of them, 2.78
  - b. they conceal them, 2.146, 159, 174; 5.15
  - c. they change them, 2.75
  - d. they sell false Scriptures for gain, 2.79
  - e. they believe parts and disbelieve other parts, 2.85

2.4.3.9. About Christians

- a. passages which are sympathetic: 2.62, 136-137; 5.69, 82; 22.40.
- b. appeals to Christians to accept Muhammad's message because it confirms the *injl*, 3.64-71; 29.46.
- c. passages which are more critical; 5.14, 51, 9.29-31; 57.27.

2.4.3.10. Passages about Jesus

- a. the annunciation, and the birth of Jesus, 3.35-47; 19.16-35
- b. the ministry of Jesus, 3.48-54; 5.110-117; 57.27; 61.6
- c. the death of Jesus, 3.55; 19.33; 5.117; 4.155-159
- d. Jesus and God, 3.59; 4.171-172; 5.72-75, 116-117, 9.30-31

## 2.5. MUHAMMAD

### 2.5.1. What does Muhammad mean to Muslims?

#### Muhammad (Pbuh)

Muhammad (*peace be upon him*), the last messenger of Allah, was born in Mecca, Saudi Arabia in the year 571 (Christian Era). His father, Abdullah, died before his birth and his mother, Aminah, died when he was only six. He married Khadijah, a noble lady of Mecca, when he was 25.

He received revelation from Allah at the age of 40 in 611 CE, and that marked the beginning of his work as Allah's messenger.

The people of Mecca at that time worshipped idols. Muhammad (*Pbuh*) invited them to Islam. Some responded favourably and became Muslims, while others rebuked him and turned against him. Undaunted, he continued to preach the message of Allah and gradually the number of his followers increased. He and his followers had to undergo terrible suffering and face stiff opposition from the idolators.

In the twelfth year of his priesthood in 622 CE, he migrated from Mecca to Medina. The people of Medina accepted him as their leader and he established the first Islamic state there. The Islamic calendar begins from the day of the migration of the prophet.

Muhammad (*Pbuh*) went on organizing his followers and preaching the message of Allah with unmatched patience and wisdom. Eventually Islam was established in the whole of the Arabian peninsula and it was set to make a tremendous contribution to the history and civilization of the world. Within a short span of time, the message of Islam spread from Arabia to most parts of the world of that time. Over a billion Muslims of the present day world still bear testimony to this message. The ideology of Islam, completed at the time of Muhammad, is capable of solving present day human problems. Islam is the only hope for the present as well as for the future. The need is to practise it faithfully.

From *Islam: A Brief Guide*

“Prophet Muhammad (according to the Qur’an, the ‘blessing for the Universe’ and the ‘perfect example to follow’”) died in 632 CE. He left behind him the Qur’an and his Sunnah as the sources of guidance for all generations.

“The encounter with the story of Muhammad’s life, like the encounter with the Qur’an, requires a shift in perspective both on the part of the Christian and of the secularist... The Christian, if he wishes to understand Islam, must resist the temptation to compare Muhammad with Jesus, for these two had entirely different roles in the scheme of things...”

**“If the Muslim is to... become ‘one who understands’, he has no choice but to model himself upon this ‘perfect exemplar’, imitating Muhammad so far as he is able, both in this character and in his mode of action... The intimate knowledge we have of Muhammad’s life (much of which we owe to A’isha) is, from a practical point of view, just as important as his religious teaching and the example he set in affairs of greater consequence. The believer feels close to him in life and hopes to be closer still after death, loving him not only as master and as guide but also as brother-man...’**

**(Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* pp 96 and 186)**

## 2.5.2. The life of Muhammad

- AD 570 Birth of Muhammad; belonged to tribe of Qureish.  
Father died before he was born, and mother died 6 years later.  
Brought up by grandfather and uncle, Abu Talib.
- c592 According to tradition began travelling to Syria with trading caravans, and on one of these journeys met Bahira, a Syrian Christian monk.
- 595 Married Khadijah, a wealthy widow, and began working with her in her trading business.
- 610 Muhammad's first call to be a Prophet, while meditating in a cave on Mt Hira near Mecca.
- 615/6 Persecution from his own tribe of Qureish forced some of his followers to emigrate to the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia.  
Muhammad and his "Companions" stayed in Mecca.
- 619 Death of Khadijah, and of Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and protector.  
Muhammad's position now less secure in the tribe.
- 622 *The Emigration (hijrah)* to Medina in response to an invitation from a group of Muslim converts ("Helpers") for him to come to resolve the conflicts between the different communities in Medina. Beginning of the Muslim era.
- 624 Muslims began raiding caravans from Mecca - which led to a series of battles:
- Battle of *Badr* Muslims (with 324 men) defeated Meccans (with 950 men)
- 625 Battle of *Uhud* - Muslims defeated by Meccans
- 627 Battle of *Ahjab* - Muslims repelled the Meccan attack on Medina
- 628 The Treaty of Hudaibiyah between Muhammad and the Meccans, which enabled him to return to Mecca for pilgrimage the following year.
- 629 *Muhammad and the Muslims returned to Mecca* on 11 January with 10,000 men. Meccans submitted without fighting. Muhammad declared a general amnesty. All idols in the *ka'bah* destroyed.  
Muhammad returned to Medina. Beginning of mass movement of tribes embracing Islam.
- 631 Muhammad's last pilgrimage to Mecca.
- 632 Muhammad died in Medina.

### 2.5.3. Arabia before and at the time of Muhammad

#### Political

Some of the tribes were nomadic bedouin of the desert; others were semi-nomadic, while others were permanently settled in smaller towns (like Ta'if) or larger cities (like Mecca and Medina). While individual tribes were united by alliances, there was no unity in the area as a whole. Blood-feuds between tribes were settled by the tribal ethic of revenge and reprisal.

#### Foreign Powers

The two great world powers in Muhammad's time were the Byzantine Empire and the Persian Empire; Arabia was influenced by the power struggle between these two great powers.

- a. **Byzantine Empire** (Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, SE Europe; capital in Constantinople). Fiercly "Orthodox" (Christian) in doctrine, and strongly opposed to other "heretical" doctrines like Monophysitism and Nestorianism.

Supported the Ghassanid Dynasty in Syria as a buffer state against the Arabs.

- b. **Persian Empire** under the Sassanid Dynasty (Iraq to Afghanistan; capital in Iraq).

Supported the Lakhmid Kingdom of Hira in Iraq as a buffer against the Arabs.

In 614 AD the Persians captured Jerusalem from Byzantine power; but in 628 the Byzantines defeated the Persians. Both empires were exhausted by the struggles, leaving a power vacuum at the time when Islam was beginning to spread.

#### Economic and Social

There was a flourishing caravan trade along routes running north-south and east-west. Mecca had become an important commercial centre, as well as a centre of pilgrimage. There were many social evils, e.g., female infants were often buried alive, and women had little protection.

#### Religion

Although there is some evidence of belief in one supreme God (Allah), religious practices centred round a host of lesser deities: e.g. at Mecca three goddesses were worshipped: Manat, Al lat, and Al Uzza. There were also many idol cults, and sacrifices were offered to spirits (e.g. of caves, trees, wells, stones). Superstitious rituals were practised at many shrines, and there were annual pilgrimages to the major shrines like the *Ka'bah* at Mecca. There was a strong belief in Fate, and little or no belief in an after-life. A rich tradition of Arab poetry had been developed.

## Other Religions

- a. There were some Jewish communities or tribes, especially in and around Medina.
- b. There were people called hanif, who were a kind of monotheists, but had little influence.
- c. Christians: there were several nomadic tribes in the Hajaz (around Mecca) which had previously embraced Christianity. The area of Yemen in the south had been Christian since the fourth century.

In Mecca itself the Christians were mostly foreigners, e.g., black slaves from Ethiopia, labourers and traders from Syria. According to tradition, Muhammad's first wife Khadijah had a cousin, Waraqah ibn Naufal, who had become a Christian.

Muhammad may well have had some contact with Syrian monks in the desert.

## Christianity at the time of Muhammad

- 2.5.3.1. The Christianity which Muhammad saw was basically a foreign religion. Most of the Christians with whom he came in contact were not Arabs but foreigners from the neighbouring countries, many of whom had settled in Arabia because they had been persecuted elsewhere. They kept themselves aloof from the Arabs; they continued to worship in their own foreign languages. It is generally agreed that Muhammad cannot have had access to any books of the Bible in his own language of Arabic.
- 2.5.3.2. The Christian Church was deeply divided over doctrinal disputes. Ever since the great Councils of Nicaea (AD 325) and Chalcedon (451), the churches in the East had been arguing about the doctrines of the Trinity and the person of Christ. Apart from those who accepted the doctrines of Chalcedon, the
  - Monophysites emphasized the divinity of Jesus, and gave the impression that Jesus was not fully human.
  - Nestorians could not accept that manhood and godhead could be combined in the person of Jesus;
  - Gnostics tended to think that matter was evil and that salvation depended on an experience of mystical enlightenment. They denied the incarnation, and some believed that Jesus was not crucified.
- 2.5.3.3. Christianity was a religion associated with political power and colonial expansionism. The Byzantine emperors stood firmly for the Orthodox faith and fiercely persecuted the different heretical sects. For many Arabs, therefore, Christianity was synonymous with Byzantine domination and fierce repression of any beliefs which differ from the religion of the state.

**2.6. FOURTEEN CENTURIES OF MUSLIM HISTORY AND MUSLIM - CHRISTIAN RELATIONS**

600	632 632 - 661 661 660 - 750	Death of Muhammad First four caliphs Split between Sunnis and Shi'ites Omayyad Dynasty rules in Damascus
700	710 714 732  750 - 1258	Muslim forces reach the Indus River Muslim occupation of Spain Islamic Empire stretches from Spain to Persia Charles Martel defeats Muslim forces at Poitiers The Abbassid Dynasty rules in Baghdad A "Golden Age of Islam"
800		
900		
1000	c 1000  1096 - 1291  1060	Muslim invasion of Punjab; Muslim governor in Lahore  The Crusades  Beginning of campaigns to drive the Moors out of Spain
1100		
1200	1169  1206 1220 - 1249	Jerusalem captured from Christians by Saladin  Muslim Turks invade N India; Sultanate of Delhi Mongol invasion of Persia under Genkis Khan; Bahghdad destroyed

1300	1316	Turks enter eastern Europe
	1390	Mamluke Dynasty in Egypt; Cairo becomes centre of Muslim world
1400	1453	Fall of Constantinople to Ottoman Turks
	1503 - 1722	Safavid Empire in Persia
	1512 - 1918	Ottoman Empire, centred in Turkey
	1526 - 1858	The Mogul Empire in North India
	1565	Turkish attack on Malta repulsed
1600	1653	Turkish attack on Vienna repulsed
	1792	William Carey begins his work in India
	1798	Napoleon arrives in Egypt
1800	1800 - 1812	Henry Martyn work in India and Persia
	1857	The Indian Mutiny/War of Independence
	1918	General Allenby enters Jerusalem
	1922	Defeat of the Ottoman Turks, end of the Ottoman Empire The Caliphate abolished by Ataturk
1900	1948	Creation of Pakistan State of Israel established

## **2.7. WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE A MUSLIM IN BRITAIN TODAY?**

“The chief external fact about twentieth-century Islam is that almost everywhere it has recovered its political self... Political power is almost everywhere back in Muslim hands where there are Muslim people. The years since the Second World War, and even before it, have recorded the recession of western empire and the emergence, in Asia and Africa, of Muslim states, independent and autonomous...”

(Kenneth Cragg, *Islam and Muslims*)

“The British community is described by many present-day Christian writers as post-Christian. Secularization has become so effective and so pervasive as to make it a serious challenge for the truly religious person to live and function ... it is in a sense a Christian secularism. The Muslim is therefore confronted with the challenges from secularism *per se* and also from its Christian content, which may conflict with his belief.

“To add to their difficulties, the Muslims as immigrants face the expected indifference, even hostility, of some members of the host community. This is compounded by the attitude of the unfriendly media which often portrays Muslims in the worst possible light ... Is it any wonder that so many of them feel a sense of insecurity and grievance towards the community and its public institutions?

“The manner in which the media reports Muslim events here and abroad seems designed to create in the mind of the ordinary reader a close association between Islam and violence, Islam and the oppression of women, and Islam and a severe penal code. To add to its difficulties the Muslim community regards non-interference by the secular authorities in its religious life not as a guarantee of religious freedom but as a manifestation of neglect...

“A proselytising religion cannot stand still. It can either expand or contract. Islam endeavours to expand in Britain and has attracted a number of English, Scottish and Welsh adherents...

“...Throughout the history of Islam some pockets of Muslims lived under the sway of non-Muslim rulers, often without alternative. They nonetheless felt sufficiently committed to their faith to attempt to regulate their lives in accordance with its rules and regulations in so far as their circumstances permitted... Nevertheless Muslim theology offers, up to the present, no systematic formulation of the status of being a minority...”

(Zaki Badawi, *Islam in Britain*, Ta-Ha Publishers)

- Q. What do you think it feels like if you came from Pakistan, Bangladesh or India in the 1960s?**
- Q. What does it feel like if you are a teenager and have grown up in Britain?**
- Q. What are the special problems and pressures that Muslims of different ages and backgrounds face in Britain?**

## SESSION THREE

### ENTERING INTO DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE

*“O that I could converse and reason, and plead, with power from on high! How powerless are the best directed arguments, till the Holy Ghost renders them effectual!”*

(Henry Martyn)

#### 3.1. QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS CONCERNING CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

The following are examples of the kind of questions which Muslims often put to Christians, and possible answers that can be given. It is important to try to understand *why* Muslims ask these particular questions, and to answer in a way that is related to their way of thinking.

**“Why do you eat pork which is unclean”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: the Jews were taught in the *tawrat* (the Torah) that pork was unclean. People today think that this was partly because of hygiene; but it was also a sign that they were God’s special people. Jesus, however, taught that cleanliness and uncleanliness in God’s eyes is more a matter of what goes on secretly in our hearts than of what we eat or don’t eat. This is the teaching that he gave when he had a dispute with the Jewish teachers about keeping traditions concerning cleanliness: “Nothing outside a man can make him ‘unclean’ by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him ‘unclean’... Don’t you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn’t go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body... What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean’. For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly, all these evils come from inside and made a man ‘unclean’ (Mark 7:15-23).”

**“Why do you drink alcohol?”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: In the *tawrat* there is no command to refrain from drinking alcohol, although any individual could take a special vow not to drink alcohol, and call himself a “Nazarite”. In the *injil* we are taught that Jesus did drink wine, but that John the Baptist (Yahyah in the Qur’an), his cousin, who prepared the way for him did not drink. This means that since there is no law on the subject, we are free to follow the spirit of the teaching of Jesus, which is that we should practise self-control and be careful stewards of what God has given to us. All Christians believe that it is wrong to be drunk. Some choose voluntarily not to drink alcohol, but others feel free to drink in moderation.

**“Do you drink wine in church?”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: we do have a special service that Jesus commanded us to keep, which we call “the Holy Communion” or “the Lord’s Supper” or “the Mass”. It is a time when we remember the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have just a taste of wine and a small piece of bread, following the command that Jesus gave at the last meal before he died.

**“Christianity makes impossible and unrealistic moral demands (like ‘turning the other cheek’). Islam doesn’t demand more than is reasonable, or expect an unnatural degree of self-denial.”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: we agree that Christianity does set very high moral standards, but this is because God is holy and says many times in the Bible, “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (e.g. Leviticus 11:44). When we read the the teaching of Jesus, we try to understand the spirit of what he said rather than treat it as a series of laws which have to be obeyed to the letter. “Turning the other cheek”, for example, means that when I am insulted, I don’t reply with an insult.

Although we recognize that the standards set by Jesus are very high, we believe in God’s forgiveness. When, therefore, we know we have fallen short of God’s standards and ask forgiveness, we can be sure that God has forgiven us. We also believe that the Holy Spirit of God lives within us when we trust Jesus. He quickens our conscience, prompts us about how we should behave in particular situations, and gives us power beyond our own natural power to follow the way of Christ.

**“Islam has no priesthood, no special cast of people who are set aside to perform priestly functions which no one else can perform.”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: in most churches there are certain services (like Holy Communion or Lord’s Supper, baptism and marriage) which can only be led by a priest or an ordained minister, although in some churches there are no ordained ministers. Different churches give different reasons to explain the reasons for this, but all agree that these ceremonies are not a special kind of magic. They believe that for the sake of good order in the Church, the service should be led by a person who is authorized by the whole Church to lead them. There is no suggestion that the priest is a kind of mediator without whom we cannot come into the presence of God.

What other questions are you aware of that Muslims ask in relation to the practice of Christianity, and how would you answer them?

### **3.2. QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIONS CONCERNING CHRISTIAN BELIEFS**

The following are some of the main objections which Muslims tend to put to Christians about their beliefs. It should be emphasized that what is set out here is nothing more than suggestions for immediate answers which can be given. They are not intended to be exhaustive, and are no substitute for hard thought and study on our part. All we are attempting to do here is to suggest the kind of short answers that we can give, which (hopefully) will lead into further discussion.

**“Why do you believe in the Trinity? Do you believe in three gods?”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: we don't believe in three gods! We believe in one God as strongly as any Muslim. When we speak of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, we are not thinking of three separate and distinct gods. Christianity is a monotheistic religion, as much as Islam. The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible; but the idea is taught in the Bible.

**“Why do you say that Jesus is the ‘Son of God’?”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: because Jesus called himself “the Son” and spoke of God as “the Father” and “my Father”. We don't believe that Jesus was the Son of God in any physical sense; this idea is as repugnant to us as it is to Muslims.

We believe that “God is love” in his very nature, and that there has always been a relationship of love between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, even before the creation of the universe. Jesus of Nazareth is “more than a prophet”, since he was fully human and fully divine. When we say that Jesus is the Son of God, what we mean in the simplest possible language is that he was like God in a way that no other human being has ever been. When we look at Jesus, therefore, and see what he was like, we have some idea of what God is like.

**“Why do you believe that Jesus was crucified?”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: because this is what our Scriptures teach. The *injl* explains that it wasn't out of weakness that God allowed Jesus to be crucified. It was his way of showing up the evil in human nature in its true colours. But it was also his way of showing how much he loves us and wants to forgive us for all our sins. God allowed Jesus to experience death because all human beings have to die. But by raising him from the dead, God not only vindicated Jesus and revealed his true identity, but also destroyed the power of death once and for all for all who trust in him.

**“Your Scriptures have been corrupted”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: I know this is what you have been taught. But have you read them? According to the Holy Qur'an, the message which God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad was a confirmation of the previous Scriptures, i.e. the *tawrat* revealed to Moses, the *zabur* revealed to David, and the *injl* to Jesus. If these Scriptures which were in the hands of the Jews and the Christians at the time of the Prophet Muhammad were already corrupt, how could the Qur'an be a confirmation of these Scriptures? Can you tell me who corrupted the Scriptures, and when it was done?

Would you like to read the life of Jesus as it is recorded in our *injl*? How can you say that our Scriptures are corrupted if you haven't read any of them?

**“Your Scriptures are full of mistakes and contradictions”**

What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: Christians are aware of the so-called contradictions that you find in the Bible, which have been noted by Christian scholars for a long time. But the scholars have their own way of explaining these differences, and some of them can be explained very easily. Others raise harder questions of interpretation. Are you prepared to listen to the way we explain these difficulties?

Two can play the same game! Some Christians say that they find contradictions in the Qur'an. How would you feel if I were to criticize the Qur'an? But I don't want to do so, because I am not interested in criticizing the Qur'an. If Muslims don't like Christians criticizing the Qur'an, why do Muslims criticize the Bible?

The basic reason why you have problems with the apparent contradictions in the Bible is that you are comparing the Bible with the Qur'an. You believe that the Qur'an is the very words revealed directly to the mind of Muhammad, and you assume that the Bible was revealed in exactly the same way. Christians do believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and that God through his Holy Spirit inspired those who wrote the different books of the Bible. But the Word of God in the Bible has come through a large number of different authors. The Bible is therefore for us both the Word of God and the words of human beings. The fundamental problem between us at this point is that we have different views of revelation and inspiration.

**“We recognize Jesus as a prophet. Why don't you recognize Muhammad as a prophet?”**  
What is the thinking behind the question?

Possible answer: if we did recognize Muhammad as a prophet in the way that you do, we would be Muslims. We are glad to accept the teaching of the Qur'an about the One true God which we also find in our Scriptures. But we cannot believe the whole Qur'an, because its teaching is different at certain points from the teaching in our Scriptures.

We believe that Jesus was the last of the prophets, God's final word to the world. We see Jesus as the most complete revelation of God in the form of a human being. If this is what he was, we cannot believe that there could be any new revelation of God after Jesus.

**“Why do you not recognize that the Bible foretells the coming of Muhammad?”**

There are two verses which are often used to support this argument:

- a. The words from Deuteronomy about a new prophet who was to come: “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers...” (Deuteronomy 18.15).
- b. The words of Jesus about the coming of the Paraclete: “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever - the Spirit of Truth...” (John 14.16; cf 14.26; 15.26; 16.7).

Possible answer: Deuteronomy 18.15 could hardly refer to Muhammad since Moses says that this prophet is to be raised up “from among your own brothers”, i.e. from among the children of Israel. Christians have always interpreted the predictions from John as being about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Jesus never spoke about another prophet who was to come after him.

### **3.3. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES**

**“Children don’t obey their parents here like they do in Muslim countries.”**

**What is the thinking behind the comment?**

Possible answer: we recognize that Islam emphasizes obedience to parents very strongly, and as Christians we agree with this teaching because one of the Ten Commandments says, “Honour your father and mother...” (Exodus 20.12). So both Christianity and Islam have the same teaching at this point. This is an example, however, of how the Christian way of life is not being followed in the West. The methods of discipline that are used in some societies rely on the pressure of the extended family and the pressure of the community. But these pressures tend to become weaker in western societies, with the result that young people of all religious communities don’t see the same need to obey and respect their parents.

As Christians living in a society that is not Christian, we try to teach our children the right way to live and behave; but when they reach a certain age we don’t feel we can force them against their will to live in a certain way. We want to leave them free to choose the right way for themselves, and we believe that in the end they may be stronger if they follow this way without being forced to.

**“Look at how degenerate the West has become! If this is what Christianity has done for the West, it isn’t a very good advertisement for Christianity.”**

**What is the thinking behind the comment?**

Possible answer: for many centuries during the Middle Ages, it was assumed that almost everyone in western countries was a Christian, just as in Muslim countries today everyone is regarded as a Muslim, unless they belong to another religion. The situation today, however, is very different: only a minority would call themselves committed or convinced Christians, while the majority would say that they are Christians only in name, that they believe in God but not in Jesus, or that they have no religious beliefs at all.

Christians would argue that violence and permissiveness in the West today are not the result of following Christian teaching, but of refusal to follow Christian teaching. If Muslims say that the West is in a bad state because of its Christianity, it’s all too easy for the Christian to reply that the Muslim world is in a bad state because of Islam. We need to get beyond this kind of accusation and try to understand that both Christians and Muslims face the same difficult problems and challenges in the modern world.

**“Why do Christians tend to support the state of Israel without question?”**

**What is the thinking behind the question?**

Possible answer: we have to admit that many Christians do give strong support to the Zionist state, partly because of their sympathy with the Jewish people, and partly because they have been taught that the establishment of the state is the fulfilment of promise and prophecies given by God in the Bible. A growing number of Christians, however, disagree with this way of interpreting the Bible. They are also becoming critical of the policies of Israel and are questioning the idea of having a Jewish state. Official statements from church leaders have encouraged Christians to have a more balanced view of the conflict. They are very aware of all the injustices suffered by the Palestinian Arabs, and want to work for a just solution which allows Jews and Arabs to live side by side in peace.

**“The government accepts private, independent Muslim schools. But if Anglicans, Catholics and Jews can get state funding for grant-aided schools, why can’t Muslims do the same?”**

**What is the thinking behind the question?**

Possible answer: there are differences of opinion among Christians and among people in general in this country on this issue. Some believe that the Muslim community should have the opportunity of state funding for Muslim schools, provided they fulfil all the requirements for schools laid down by the government and follow the National Curriculum, etc. Others oppose the idea, however, because, for example, they are afraid that grant-aided schools would make Muslim communities more self-contained than they already are and become more like ghettos.

In this situation there is a need to listen carefully to what Muslims are saying and recognize where they have genuine grievances. But it is also important for Muslims to listen to the reservations and objections being expressed. In some situations it may be possible for Christians to play a role as mediators between the Muslim community and the host community, because they are (or at least ought to be) in a unique position to be able to interpret the feelings of each side to the other.

In some situations we may also want to ask what the response would be if Christians in Muslim countries were to make the same kind of request that is being made in this country.

### **3.4. GUIDELINES AND AIMS IN DISCUSSION WITH MUSLIMS**

#### Some basic dos and don'ts

#### **3.4.1. Don't start an argument if you can possibly help it!**

Whenever we see the warning signals in ourselves, we need to be reminded of Paul's words addressed to Timothy, the young and enthusiastic Christian worker: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful." (2 Timothy 2.23-24)

#### **3.4.2. Resist the temptation to criticize Islam**

The words of Jesus about standing in judgement on other people are surely relevant to our dealings with Muslims: "Do not judge, or you will be judged. For in the same measure you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Matthew 7.1-2). In other words, if we criticize Islam, its civilization, its beliefs and its whole way of life, we may be inviting Muslims to do the same to us and our faith.

The words that follow are also relevant: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye... You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Matthew 7.3-5)

#### **3.4.3. Do all you can to remove misunderstandings (e.g. about Christians worshipping three gods, about Jesus being "Son of God" in a physical sense, about the West being Christian, etc.)**

Even if we don't feel we have achieved very much by doing so, we may at least be clearing the ground, making it easier for someone to see Jesus and understand the Christian way more clearly. Robert Bruce, a missionary in Persia in the nineteenth century used to say: "I cannot say I am reaping a harvest; I am not even planting seed. Perhaps all I am doing is removing the stones."

#### **3.4.4. Try to distinguish between what is important and what is less important**

For example, don't spend all your time debating secondary issues (like eating pork and drinking wine), if you then have no opportunity to deal with the more important issues like the role of law, the need of man, forgiveness, etc.

### **3.4.5. Be prepared to admit the mistakes and crimes of Christians in the past and present**

We need to be willing to accept that Paul's words in Romans 2.24 about the Jews of his time can easily be paraphrased and made to apply to the Christian Church throughout its history: "Christ's name is blasphemed in the Muslim world because of you."

We need to be willing to say with the Psalmist: "We have sinned, even as our fathers did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly." (Psalm 106.6) This means admitting our shame about the Crusades.

### **3.4.6. Be positive**

Don't always be defending Christianity. Take every opportunity to say what you believe and why you believe it. 1 Peter 3.15

### **3.4.7. Love is more persuasive than argument**

Even if you win an argument, you may lose the person. Even if you lose an argument, you may still win the person if you show that you really love him or her.

### **3.4.8. Don't underestimate the power of personal testimony**

If you believe that you know God in a personal way, don't be afraid to say so, and to say why you believe that this kind of personal relationship is possible. If you believe your sins have been forgiven and that you have no fear of the Day of Judgement, explain the basis of your confidence in God's forgiveness. (1 Peter 3.15)

### **3.4.9. Be content to explain one small aspect of the Gospel at a time**

Don't feel you have failed if you haven't been able to explain "the whole gospel" at one time.

There is no single technique for explaining the Gospel to a Muslim. We must resist the temptation to think that one simple technique is bound to produce results and save us from much heartache and agony.

You can sometimes convey more of the gospel in an indirect way than in a direct way.

### **3.4.10. Make it a priority to encourage your friend at the appropriate time to read one of the Gospels. If he or she says that the Bible has been corrupted, say that you are willing to discuss the question after he or she has read some of the Bible**

Luke is perhaps the best gospel to start with (see 5.2: Using the Bible). Matthew is also valuable, and the Sermon on the Mount is specially powerful for Muslims. But some Muslims find it difficult because it is so Jewish. Mark introduces a stumbling block in the very first sentence by speaking of Jesus as "the son of God." John may be helpful as a second gospel to read, or with Muslims who have been influenced by Sufism.

### 3.5. A DEEPER LOOK AT THE MAIN MUSLIM OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

We want here to go deeper into some of the objections touched on in Section 2, 3.2. It is important for us first of all to listen carefully to try to understand what is behind the question or objection.

#### 3.5.1. “The Bible has been corrupted”

The Qur’an speaks of three Scriptures that were revealed before the Qur’an:

- the tawrat (Torah), revealed to Moses (e.g. Q 3.93)
- the zabur (Psalms), revealed to David (e.g. Q 4.163; 17.55; 21.105)
- the injl (“Gospel”), revealed to Jesus (e.g. Q 5.46).

Jews and Christians are called ‘People of the Book’ (e.g. 2.105; 3.64), and Muslims are told that they must believe the previous Scriptures as well as the Qur’an:

“O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which He hath revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime. Whoso disbelieveth in Allah and His angels and His scriptures and His messengers and the Last Day, he verily hath wandered far astray” (Q 4.136; cf 5.66, 68).

Muslims are to believe the previous Scriptures because the Qur’an confirms the truth of the previous Scriptures:

“As for that which We inspire in thee of the Scripture, it is the Truth confirming that which was (revealed) before it.” (35.31; cf 2.97).

There are, however, four verses in the Qur’an which speak about the “corruption” or “falsification” (*tahrif*) of these previous Scriptures.

“... a party of them used to listen to the Word of Allah, then used to change it, after they had understood it, knowingly” (2.75).

“Some of those who are Jews change the words from their context... distorting with their tongues and slandering religion...” (or “pervert words from their meanings”) (Bell) (4.46).

“They change words from their context and forget a part of that whereof they were admonished” (5.13).

“... the Jews: listeners for the sale of falsehood, listeners on behalf of other folk who come not unto thee, changing words from their context...” (5.14).

**Possible ways of understanding and answering this objection:**

- a. **None of these verses suggest that the text of the Bible has been corrupted.**
- b. **The accusation about the corruption of the text of the Bible was developed by later Muslim apologists.**
- c. **In answering Muslims who say that our Scriptures have been corrupted, we can politely but firmly ask in reply, “When do you believe they were corrupted and by whom?”**
- d. **There are verses in the Qur’an which speak about God “watching over” Scripture; these suggest that God is concerned to protect Scripture from falsification.**
- e. **If Muslims claim that the Gospel of Barnabas is the original *injl* which was revealed to Jesus, it is not difficult to show from internal evidence that it cannot be an authentic gospel from the first century.**
- f. **We need to recognize also that underlying the charge of corruption is the Muslim understanding of revelation and inspiration of Scripture, which is different from the Christian understanding.**
- g. **Even if we can convince Muslims with these arguments, however, we have not solved the problem for them! As for as they are concerned, since the New Testament speaks of Jesus as God, or as the Son of God, it must by definition be corrupted - regardless of what the Qur’an or Muslim apologists say. Our arguments, therefore, have limited value unless we can persuade our Muslim friend to read one of the gospels with a slightly more open mind. And we will then need to be able to tackle other fundamental issues, like the divinity of Christ, the Trinity and the Crucifixion.**

### **3.5.2. “Jesus was not the ‘Son of God’”**

The Muslim denial of the divinity of Christ is based on passages like the following:

“And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son. Be He glorified! Nay, but whatsoever is in the heaven and the earth is His. All are subservient unto Him” (2.116).

“And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!

“They have taken as lords besides Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship only One God. There is no god save Him. Be he glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)!” (9.30-31).

“Say: He is Allah, the One!

“Allah, the eternally Besought of all!

“He begetteth not nor was begotten.

“And there is none comparable unto Him.” (112.1-4)

“They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: who then can do ought against Allah, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah son of Mary and his mother and everyone on earth? Allah’s is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. He createth what He will. And Allah is able to do all things.” (5.17; cf 5.72)

“It befitteth not (the majesty of) Allah that He should take unto Himself a son. Glory be to Him! When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is.” (19.35; cf 19.91-92)

The following are points that can be made in working out our responses:

- a. The original background to these denials of the divine sonship of Jesus seems to have been Muhammad's crusade against the gods and goddesses in Mecca who were thought to have sons and daughters.
- b. There are good reasons for believing that that "Trinity" rejected by Muhammad was not the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as we understand it.
- c. There is no need to make too much of the title "Son of God" in discussion with Muslims, and there is good biblical precedent for avoiding names and titles that cause offence and create misunderstandings.
- d. Our belief in Jesus as the Son of God is based on the words and actions of Jesus himself, and not only on the teaching of John, Paul and the other apostles.
- e. It may be helpful to speak from the point of view of the first disciples of Jesus, and try to explain how they followed Jesus as a teacher and gradually came to understand that he was "more than a prophet".
- f. Our belief in the divinity of Christ is not tied to this one title.
- g. The question of the sonship of Jesus is not a purely theological issue, but has profound implications for our understanding of who we are and the kind of relationship God wants to have with those who trust in him.
- h. There are certain possible starting points for further discussion within the Qur'an itself.

### 3.5.3. “Jesus was not crucified”

The most important verses in the Qur’an about the crucifixion come in a passage which lists many of the sins of the Jews: they worshipped the calf (4.153); they broke the covenant made at Sinai; disbelieved the revelations of God; killed his prophets (4.155); and spoke against the Virgin Mary “a tremendous calumny” (4.156). The passage continues:

“And because of their saying: we slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger - They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain,

“But Allah took him up unto Himself. Allah was ever Mighty, Wise.

“There is not one of the People of the Scripture but will believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he will be a witness against them...” (4.157-159).

The traditional interpretation of this passage is that God raised Jesus up to heaven in a miraculous way before he was actually crucified, and that someone else who looked like him was crucified in his place. This interpretation has been linked with a saying of Muhammad about the return of Jesus to earth at the end of the world.

Many Muslims today, therefore, believe that when Jesus returns, he will establish Islam as the one true religion. Jews and Christians will believe in him in the same way that Muslims believe in him now. He will die and be buried. Finally on the Last Day he will be raised along with all people, exposing the false beliefs about him held by Jews and Christians.

There are at least two ways of understanding and responding to this traditional interpretation of the text:

3.5.3.1. It can be argued that the Qur’an does not actually deny the crucifixion; all it denies is that it was the Jews who carried out the crucifixion.

3.5.3.2. Another approach to the question of the crucifixion in the Qur’an is to proceed in the following stages:

- a. We should start with the traditional Muslim interpretation that these verses deny that Jesus was crucified, and accept the possibility that the Qur’an may not be entirely consistent with itself. While some verses may suggest a natural death, others suggest a miraculous deliverance.
- b. We take care to distinguish between what the Qur’an seems to deny and what it does not deny. Kenneth Cragg, for example, has drawn attention to the fact that the Qur’an does not deny that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus, or that Jesus was willing to be killed. All it seems to deny is that God could allow it to happen.

- c. We should note that before the time of Muhammad there were heretical sects which taught that Jesus was not crucified. Muhammad may therefore have heard the idea from sources of this kind.
- d. If this was the background to the denial of the crucifixion in the Qur'an, it might explain the difficult phrase *shubbiha lahum* ("it appeared so to them" 4.157). Muhammad could have first heard the idea from heretical Christian circles, and accepted it - not because he believed the teaching of the Docetics, but because the idea of Jesus not being crucified fitted in with his understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus and of God's obligation to vindicate his apostles. Since Jesus was unique in that he was born of a virgin, worked miracles, and was the "Word" of God and "a Spirit from Him", it makes perfect sense to believe that God should rescue him from death through a clearly supernatural intervention.
- e. The greatest challenge for us is to find ways of helping Muslims to see the deeper logic which demands that the Messiah must suffer before entering his glory. We believe that God did vindicate and honour him, but not by rescuing him before death. He allowed him to go through death on our behalf, and only after that raised him from death.

Muslims believe that since forgiveness depends only on God's mercy and man's repentance and belief, there is no need for any sacrifice or atonement. Christians believe that forgiveness somehow involves suffering. God cannot simply forgive, as it were by decree or a word, since forgiveness that is as easy as this must inevitably undermine the divine law. But by allowing Jesus to die on the cross, God demonstrates his judgement and condemnation on all that is evil, and at the same time shows his sacrificial and forgiving love to all who turn to him.

It may be helpful to remind ourselves that the first disciples had the greatest difficulty in understanding how God could have allowed Jesus to be crucified. Peter's reaction to Jesus' announcement of his cruel death (Mark 8.31-38) is very close to the reaction of the Muslim to the idea of an apostle of God being killed. After his resurrection Jesus had to explain the necessity of this suffering and death to his disciples: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24.26 RSV).

If Muslims can begin to see the reason why God could allow Jesus to be crucified, they may be more willing to accept the fact that he was crucified.

### 3.6. ROLE PLAY

Divide into groups of four.

Two people in each group should take the part of Muslims, and the other two the part of Christians.

Choose one topic from sections 1, 2, 3 or 5. The two taking the part of Muslims should spend five minutes on their own in discussion in order to make sure that they have understood the subject from the point of view of Muslims and can speak as if they were Muslims. The two taking the part of Christians should go over some of the points they can use in discussion.

Then for ten minutes, the four meet together to continue their discussion.

## **SESSION FOUR**

### **FACING FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES**

*“... the problem in mission to Islam is theological.”*

(Bishop Arne Rudvin of Karachi)

*“Islam is a one-way door, you can enter through it but you cannot leave.”*

(Abul ala Maududi)

#### **4.1. THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS**

##### **4.1.1. Is the God of Islam the same as the God of Christianity? Is Allah “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”?**

- a. This is a “trick question” and needs to be broken down into three smaller questions:
  - b. An illustration
  - c. The example of Paul at the Areopagus (Acts 17.19)
  - d. The experience of enquirers and Christians from a Muslim background

#### **4.1.2. Is there any revelation in the Qur'an and in Islam?**

Different answers given by Christians:

- a. The Qur'an is inspired by the Devil. It doesn't matter how much truth there may be in it, because taken as a whole, it denies the deity of Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection, and therefore takes the heart out of the gospel. It cannot therefore be regarded as being inspired by God in any sense.
- b. We should recognize everything in the Qur'an that is consistent with the revelation of God as we know it in the Bible and in Christ. We should be glad of the common ground there is between the Christian faith and Islam, but help Muslims to see where the Muslim understanding of God differs from the Christian understanding.
- c. Muhammad should be regarded as a prophet in some sense. Since he enabled the Arabs to reject polytheism and idolatry and accept monotheism, he must have received some genuine revelation from God. He can perhaps therefore be regarded as being comparable to OT characters like Gideon or Elijah, even though he is not part of the biblical "salvation history" and falls short of the revelation of God given in Christ.
- d. Muhammad should be recognized as a genuine prophet for Muslims. In spite of the differences between the revelation of God in the Qur'an and the revelation of God in the Bible and in Christ, the Qur'an should be recognized as a revelation of God that was appropriate for the Arabs in its original context and is still appropriate for Muslims all over the world today.

## 4.2. CRUCIAL DIFFERENCES

In this section we attempt to compare Muslim and Christian beliefs in seven different areas. In the first four there is a summary of what most Muslims believe (in the column on the left), and alongside it (in the column on the right) a summary of Christian belief. In the last three, the column on the right is left blank, for you to write in your own summary of what you believe on that subject.

### Revelation: can God be known?

While the Qur'an uses expressions like "seeking the face of God" (e.g. 2:272), orthodox Islamic theology teaches that God himself cannot be known; only his will can be known.

The "names of God" reveal something of the character and attributes of God; but God is so "wholly Other", so different from humans that the meaning of these names when applied to God is not the same as when applied to people.

God has revealed his will for the human race through the Qur'an.

Christian theology teaches that God can be known because he has revealed himself - through the universe, through human conscience, through the Bible, and supremely through Jesus.

We need not be so sceptical about the meaning of such words. When God says "Be holy, for I am holy", he defines the meaning he gives to the word "holy", and does not leave it to humans to decide what it may mean.

Jesus spoke about the possibility of knowing God, and related this possibility to his own coming into the world (John 17.3).

### Inspiration: in what sense is Scripture “the Word of God”?

The very words of the Qu’ran were revealed to Muhammad. (Surah 12.2-3)

Muhammad did not write the Qur’an, he simply received it and recited it, so that his own thoughts and ideas did not contribute to the revelations. (7.157 and 29.48)

It is unnecessary and wrong to try to find the “sources” of the Qur’an.

Because the Qur’an was revealed in Arabic, it is vital to read and recite it in Arabic.

Translations of the Qur’an may or may not be permitted; but even when permitted, they do not convey the full meaning of the original.

The writers of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. “Men spoke from God” (2 Peter 1.21). The Bible is therefore both the word of God and the word of humankind. The writers were not passive instruments used by God like typewriters; they thought about what they were doing and wrote in their own individual style.

Although they were inspired, there is no reason why we should not study the Bible as we study other literature and ask questions about the sources, etc.

The OT was written mostly in Hebrew, and the NT writers wrote in Greek and used Greek translations of the OT. We encourage translations of the Bible because we believe God wants all people to understand as best they can. A translation of the Bible is just as much “the Bible” as the original Hebrew and Greek. The meaning of the original can be conveyed adequately in any language.

### The unity of God: what do we understand by the “oneness of God”?

God is One, not three - he cannot possibly have a “son” (112.1-4).

Idolatry (*shirk*) means putting anything (a human being, an angel or any other “god”) on the same level as the one true God, or associating them with God in any way (7.191-194).

“God is great” - e.g. he is greater than all our ideas of him. He is the “Lord of all worlds”, the creator and sustainer of the universe (3.189). At the same time he is nearer to man “than the jugular vein” (50.16).

Christians are as convinced monotheists as Muslims are. “The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6.4). We think of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as three “persons” within the One God, bound together in a relationship of love, not as three distinct “gods”.

Christians have a similar belief about the sovereignty of God, but tend to put more emphasis on the nearness of God to man, and use more personal terms for God such as “Father”.

God is almighty and predestinates everything in the universe, including both good and evil. At the same time man is still held responsible for his actions (4.79).

Christians also try to maintain a balance between God's predestination and man's freedom and responsibility; but we tend to put less emphasis than the Muslim on God's predestination of everything, and never speak of God decreeing or creating evil.

### Human nature: what is the true diagnosis of the human condition?

The proper relationship of people to God is that of a servant to his Master. "To be the slave of Allah is the proudest boast of the Muslim, bondage to Allah liberating from all other servitudes" (Pickthall).

Man is a creature created in the "image and likeness of God". This image has been spoiled and marred, but not completely destroyed. God wants men to be his "sons" who know him as "Father".

Human beings have been created as stewards to look after the world God has made (2.30).

We believe similarly that man was created to subdue the earth (Genesis 1.28).

When Adam sinned, this did not amount to a "Fall" for the whole human race.

Adam's sin affected the whole human race. "Sin came into the world through one man..." (Romans 5.12). "In Adam all die" (1 Corinthians 15.22).

Every man is born sinless, with a clean sheet before God.

Original sin means that we inherit the fallen human nature of our parents, and are born in a state of alienation from God. We are not guilty before God because of our parents' sin, but we inherit the tendency to sin.

God's requirements for man are contained in the law (*shari'a*); and the most important are the Five Pillars.

God's requirements for man are revealed supremely in the Ten Commandments which cover our relationship with God and with our neighbour. This basic law is explained and amplified in the rest of the OT and the teaching of Jesus.

Repentance means confessing our sins and turning from the wrong that we have done.

Repentance needs to go deeper than the confession of sins and include the confession that there is something wrong not only with our actions, but also with our nature.

Apart from what is prescribed in the law, the life and teaching of Muhammad as revealed in the Qur'an and the traditions give us a standard of the way we should live as individuals and as a community.

Christians think of Jesus as the supreme example of the kind of person God wants us to be. They believe that the Holy Spirit of God lives in the hearts of those who want to be followers of Jesus, helping them to become more and more like him in their attitudes and behaviour.

(Some Muslims believe that Muhammad was sinless and even pre-existent, though this is not supported by the Qur'an.)

For the following three subjects, write your own summary of what you believe, alongside the summary of Muslim belief. Try to write it in a way that would be understood by Muslims.

Jesus: "only a prophet" or "more than a prophet"?

He was a prophet sent by God to the Jews.  
He was one of the greatest prophets, the last in the line of prophets before Muhammad.  
He was born of a virgin and worked miracles (5.110).

God rescued him from death by crucifixion, and raised him to heaven (4.156-158).

He will return to earth again before the Day of Judgement.

Forgiveness and salvation: how does God forgive? What is the meaning of salvation?

God is merciful and willing to forgive all men who sincerely repent, believe and devote themselves to good works. God forgives simply by pronouncing forgiveness. There is no need for any sacrifice or atonement. Forgiveness depends simply on the mercy of God and his declaration of forgiveness (4.106).

Our good deeds and our bad deeds will be weighed in the balance by God on the Day of Judgement. We can trust that, if we live a good life, our good deeds will outweigh our bad deeds; but we cannot know until the Day itself (2.82).

(Some Muslims believe we can trust the intercession of the Prophet to help us.)

If God accepts us, we will be admitted to Paradise; if not, we go to Hell (7.40-46).

(Some Muslims are more universalist and believe that God's mercy will reach to all.)

Politics and the state: what is the place of the state in the kingdom of God?

Muhammad was both "prophet" and "statesman". Not only did he receive the revelation from God in the Qur'an; he believed he was called to establish an Islamic Society in Medina.

Muslims therefore find it difficult, if not impossible, to separate "Church"/"Mosque" and "State", between "the things that are Caesar's" and "the things that are God's", between what is religious and what is secular. Muslims generally believe that the rule of God in the world needs to be embodied in an Islamic State and have the conviction that "Islam must rule".

### **4.3. COUNTING THE COST OF CONVERSION**

#### **4.3.1. “Conversion” as seen by Islam**

The following are the main passages in the Qur’an which teach how Muslims should deal with Muslims who renounce the faith of Islam:

“They long that ye should disbelieve even as they disbelieve, that ye may be upon a level [with them]. So choose not friends from them till they forsake their homes in the way of Allah; if they turn back [to enmity] then take them and kill them wherever ye find them, and choose no friend nor helper from among them...” (4.89)

“Lo! those who disbelieve after their [profession of] belief, and afterward grow violent in disbelief: their repentance will not be accepted. And such are those who are astray.

“Lo! those who disbelieve, and die in disbelief, the [whole] earth full of gold would not be accepted from such an one if it were offered as a ransom [for his soul]. Theirs will be a painful doom and they will have no helpers” (3.90-91).

“O ye who believe! Whoso of you becometh a renegade from his religion, [know that in his stead] Allah will bring a people whom He loveth and who love Him, humble toward believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah, and fearing not the blame of any blamer. Such is the grace of Allah which He giveth unto whom He will. Allah is All-embracing, All-knowing” (5.54).

“... whoso becometh a renegade and dieth in his disbelief: such are they whose works have fallen both in the world and the Hereafter. Such are rightful owners of the Fire: they will abide therein” (2.217).

“Whoso disbelieveth in Allah after his belief - save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with Faith - but whoso findeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allah. Theirs will be an awful doom.

“That is because they have chosen the life of the world rather than the Hereafter, and because Allah guideth not the disbelieving folk” (16.106-107).

The following points need to be noted concerning the interpretation and application of these texts:

- a. It should be noted that these verses in the Qur’an speak only of punishment in the life after death.
- b. A study of Muslim commentaries shows that, in their original context, none of these verses are concerned with Muslims becoming Christians. Most of them deal with those who were known as “hypocrites”, i.e. people who made a profession of Islam, but were not sincere and later went back to their former way of life.

- c. **There is considerable diversity among Muslim commentators in their interpretation of the key verses. Some take a very strict line, while others give a much more liberal interpretation.**
- d. **The *Hadith* literature (Tradition) contains a variety of sayings of the Prophet about apostasy, and it is here that we find reference to the death penalty, which is not mentioned in the Qur'an: e.g. "Whoever changes his religion, kill him." "Slay [or behead] him who changes his religion".**
- e. **The classical formulations of Islamic law are unanimous in saying that an adult male who is of sound mind and has not acted out of compulsion must be put to death. Women apostates, according to some authorities, are to be imprisoned, until they adopt Islam, while according to others, they should be put to death.**
- f. **Muslim views today cover the same wide spectrum of positions that has existed in the past.**
- g. **The most significant test of Muslim attitudes to conversion, however, is not the statements of jurists and theologians, but what actually happens in practice. However liberal and tolerant Muslim leaders can be, what really seems to count at the end of the day is the attitude of a particular family to one or more of their number who seem to be turning their back on their religion, and bringing shame and dishonour on the whole family.**
- h. **It needs to be pointed out that there is a real tension, if not an inconsistency, at this point between the typical Islamic responses to conversion and the UN Declaration of Human Rights. This charter has been officially accepted by most countries, including Islamic states, and states in which Muslims are a majority. It upholds the freedom not only to practise one's own religion, but also to propagate and to change one's religion.**

### **4.3.2. Issues involved in conversion**

**What are the practical questions that Muslims have to face when they feel themselves being drawn to the person of Christ? And how can Christians help them in thinking through the sensitive issues involved?**

**The following discussion material, which raises some of these questions, is based on a number of biblical passages, and can be used for talking through these questions. It is important that we should understand the difficulty and the complexity of the questions, and recognize that in several cases there are different ways of interpreting and applying the passages.**

#### **4.3.2.1. Open confession?**

**The importance of confession Read Matthew 10.32-33; Romans 10.9-10**

**Q What is the importance of confession for the new believer?**

**Does the confession always have to be public? Must the convert always confess his faith openly to his family and friends from the very beginning?**

**Is a “secret disciple” a contradiction in terms? Read John 3.1-10, 7.50-52, 19.38-42, 12.42-43**

**Q Does the gospel account imply any criticism of Nicodemus, Joseph and other Jews who believed, for being secret disciples?**

**Did they in any way deny Jesus by hiding their commitment to him?**

**Did their actions amount to a public confession of Jesus?**

**Is there any reason why a Muslim convert should not in certain circumstances remain a secret disciple until the time is ripe to declare his faith openly?**

#### **4.3.2.2. What about relationships with the family and the community?**

**Christ and family loyalties Read Luke 14.25-33, Matthew 10.16-23, 34-39, and Mark 10.23-31**

**Q Will the family be tolerant, critical or hostile?**

**Will the convert be able to remain within the family?**

**Is the opposition likely to be such that he will have to leave his family for his own safety or peace of mind?**

### **4.3.2.3. How should they relate to Christians and to the Church?**

**Welcoming the new believer Read Acts 9.10-19**

**Q How easy was it for Ananias to go to Saul and say “Saul, my brother...”? What were the fears and prejudices in Ananias’ mind which had to be dealt with?**

**What can we do to help the new Muslim believer to feel that he is fully accepted as a brother?**

### **4.3.2.4. Is baptism essential?**

**The significance of baptism Read Matthew 28.18-20; Mark 16.15-16**

**Note that these verses in Mark are from an old ending of the Gospel which is not found in the earliest manuscripts. Even if it is genuine, it should be noted that it does not say that the person who believes but is not baptized will be condemned.**

**The Jews were familiar with the practice of ceremonial washing for purification. They also baptized proselytes, i.e. non-Jews who wanted to accept the faith of Judaism. At the time of Jesus, therefore, the practice of baptism was known, and it was already connected in people’s minds with the idea of cleansing from sin. What Jesus did was to take a practice which was already known, and make it a once and for all act of initiation, performed in his name.**

**The Gentiles were not familiar with the practice of baptism, and it would have been entirely new to them. They would not bring to baptism any negative ideas or misunderstandings from their own background.**

**To the Muslim, baptism means nothing more nor less than apostasy from Islam. It means that the Muslim has cut himself off from his family and his society; he is renouncing his religion and his community, accepting a new religion and joining a different community.**

Q Are we to say that every Muslim convert must be baptized? Or are there circumstances in which a Muslim convert might delay his baptism - perhaps indefinitely - because he does not see baptism in the same light as his Muslim family?

We want Jesus and the message of the cross, and not any secondary issues, to be the only stumbling block. Are there situations in which baptism creates an unnecessary stumbling block for the rest of the Muslim community, because it is seen not only as a sign of public confession of Jesus but as a final repudiation of the Muslim community?

If Jesus was simply adapting a ceremony already familiar to Jews, could we not on the same principle consider adapting a similar ceremony already known to the Muslim?

The Muslim practices a ceremonial washing before he says his *salat* five times a day. Is it conceivable that a ceremony similar to the ritual washing could be evolved in which, for example, the Muslim disciple of Jesus has water poured out for him as it would be in the preparation for the ritual prayer? The significant thing in this case, however, would be that the one who pours water for him would do it "in the name of Jesus" and in the presence of the community of believers.

#### 4.3.2.5. Is suffering inevitable?

The disciple and his master Read Matthew 10.24-25

Q What kind of treatment does Jesus warn his disciples to expect?

Rejoicing in suffering Read Acts 5.40-42

Q Why were the apostles being persecuted?

**How did they accept this persecution and suffering?**

**The shame of rejection Read Hebrews 13.10-14**

**Q How can the example of Jesus help us when we find ourselves rejected by our own community and converted with shame in their eyes?**

#### **4.4. THE POLITICAL CHALLENGE OF ISLAM**

##### **4.4.1. Islamic theory and practice in the past and present**

- a. Muhammad - prophet and statesman
- b. Quranic teaching about the treatment of Jews and Christians
- c. The treatment of Jews and Christians by the first Muslims
- d. The so-called “Code”, “Ordinance” or “Pact of Umar”
- e. Classical statements of “*Jihad*”
- f. Some contemporary Muslim views

##### **4.4.2. Christian responses**

- a. Accurate information and responsible publicity
- b. United local protest
- c. United protest from international bodies
- d. Lessons from history
- e. “Turning the other cheek”

f. The Golden Rule

g. Appealing to Islamic principles

h. Appealing to international law

**4.4.3. Applying the principles. How should Christians respond in different situations today in which they feel the political challenge of Islam?**

## SESSION FIVE

### SHARING OUR FAITH

*“... the call of the minaret must always seem to the Christian a call to retrieval. He yearns to undo the alienation and to make amends for the past by as full a restitution as he can achieve of the Christ to Whom Islam is a stranger. The objective is not, as the Crusaders believed, the repossession of what Christendom lost, but the restoration to Muslims of the Christ Whom they have missed.”*

(Kenneth Cragg, The Call of the Minaret)

#### 5.1. NATURAL OPENINGS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The most effective Christian witness, as a general rule, arises naturally out of situations where Christians and Muslims meet together. It is impossible, therefore, for our responses to be “programmed”, or for us to learn in advance what we should say in different situations. What we can do, however, is to begin to reflect on the kind of situations in which there will be opportunities to share our faith.

The following conversation is taken from Margaret Burness’s book *What Shall I Say to my Muslim Friends?* The conversation takes place at the time of “Eid”, i.e. *Eid Al Adha*, the Muslim feast celebrating Abraham’s sacrifice of a ram in place of his son (whom Muslims believe was Ishmael, not Isaac). The celebration of this festival has several similarities with Christmas as it is celebrated in the West and in certain other parts of the world: i.e. it is a public holiday in Muslim countries, and there are family parties, greeting cards and presents. The typical greeting between Muslims is “*Eid Mubarak*” (“May this feast be blessed”).

There is a knock on Elizabeth’s door, and when she opens it, she sees her neighbour’s daughter Fatima with a bag of cakes.

Elizabeth: Hello, Fatima. Do come in.

Fatima: Good evening, Mrs Twining. No, I can’t, thank you. I have to go and help mother - she’s very busy preparing food for all our guests tomorrow. She sent me to bring you these special cakes - she would be very glad if you and Mary could come to see us tomorrow evening, and my father would be glad to welcome your husband - it’s our Eid.

Elizabeth: Thank you very much. We’ll come tomorrow if we can. What does Eid mean?

Fatima: It’s a festival - people come from miles away to greet their families and friends. We exchange special greeting cards, and presents. We dress up in our best clothes, and eat special food. It’s not as good as it was at home, though - we’re not allowed to kill a ram here - you have some law against it, I think. It’s just like your Christmas, no difference.

**What is Elizabeth to say to Fatima? How appropriate do you think are the following possible responses?**

- a. **“Of course there’s a difference - we don’t kill rams!”**
- b. **“It does sound rather like Christmas, I hope you have a very happy day tomorrow with families and friends!”**
- c. **“There is something more to Christmas than turkeys and presents - we are celebrating a very special present God has given to us all, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. It’s his birthday we remember at Christmas. I would love to hear some time what you are celebrating tomorrow - but it’s not the same thing is it?”**
- d. **“Yes, the cards, presents and the family parties are much the same, but there is another connection too. We Christians, remember, like you, how Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son, and how God made a greater sacrifice - Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who died to take away the sins of all the world. At Christmas we celebrate the birthday of Jesus, the Lamb of God.”**

## 5.2. USING THE BIBLE

### 5.2.1. The parable of the prodigal son

What's so unique about this parable in the context of our witness to Muslims? There are at least five reasons why it can be specially valuable as a way of introducing them to the message of Jesus:

- a. It's a story told by Jesus himself. Whatever Muslims believe about the corruption of the Bible, many of them are curious to know what the Christian version of the *injl* actually says. We can tell them that this story is given in our *injl* as a story told by Jesus, and that it summarizes much of what was unique in his teaching.
- b. It presents the message of Jesus in the form of a story. If we are in the habit of trying to share the gospel by explaining a series of abstract, theological propositions (like "All people are sinners; Christ died for our sins" etc.), we might get further if we could learn the art of telling stories. A story is something that can be told, elaborated and dramatized. A series of pictures will be printed on the minds of those who hear it. Their imagination will be stirred, and there will be something that we can discuss together. Long after they have forgotten us and what we have said, they may remember this vivid story.
- c. The parable teaches the essence of the good news proclaimed by Jesus. Kenneth Bailey, in his study of the parables of Jesus believes that the basic message of Jesus can be summed up in the following words: "the costly demonstration of unexpected love."

God loves all people.

His love is unexpected, because it's hard to understand how he can love his creatures who are so sinful.

He demonstrates his love for us - he doesn't just say that he loves us

He demonstrates his love in ways that are costly.

The parable of the prodigal son expresses all these points with special force. The father loves his sons - both the rebellious one who wants to leave home and the older one who has such cold and formal relationship with him - and goes on loving them, even when we might expect him to want to punish us and reject us. He demonstrates his love to both of them in ways that would have been considered surprising, if not shocking. And in demonstrating his love to them, the father suffers in the process.

- d. The parable comes out of a culture which is similar to the culture of much of the Muslim world. The strong emphasis in Islam on the unity of the family and family loyalties and the fact that most of the Muslim world is in Africa and the East should make it easy for Muslims to understand what is happening in the story. What Muslim could imagine a younger son asking for his share of the inheritance while his father is still alive? Shouldn't fathers punish their sons when they dishonour the name of the family? Has the elder brother got to swallow his pride and welcome home his younger brother who has disgraced himself?

- e. **The teaching of the parable is specially appropriate for the Muslim mind.** Muslims are taught to think of themselves as “servants” who relate to God as their “Master”. When the prodigal thinks of coming home, his face-saving plan is that he will ask his father to accept him back as a servant or slave, so that he can earn his wages and at least have something to pay back to his father. Such a solution, however, is unthinkable to his father, who wants to welcome him home as a son. Jesus, who spoke of himself as “the Son” who enjoyed a specially intimate relationship with God as “Father”, brought the good news that all his disciples can approach God as “Father” and have all the privileges and responsibilities of being full members of God’s family, and not just servants.

A copy of the parable and its interpretation, set out in such a way that they can be photocopied and used as a leaflet to be passed on to Muslims is included in this pack. The first page contains the story on its own without any commentary, in the hope that the reader will at the very least have enough interest and curiosity to read the complete story. It is introduced as a story told by “Esa”, using the Quranic name for Jesus, and the final sentence invites the reader to explore the meaning of the story.

In the remaining three pages, the Bible story is broken up into short paragraphs. In the wider paragraphs are some comments to explain what is happening in the story. This may be just as important for many western Christian readers who may not be aware of all that is happening in the story, since their own culture is so different to that of first-century Palestine. The column on the right points out the deeper meaning which Jesus must have been trying to convey through the story.

One surprising thing about the parable is that it doesn’t have an ending. Perhaps this is because Jesus wanted us as readers or listeners to put ourselves into the shoes of the elder brother and ask ourselves, “What would I do if I were in his place? Would I listen to my father’s pleading and join in the party to welcome my brother home? Or ... would I be so angry with him that I would take the nearest stick and beat him in full view of all the guests? And if God is like the father, and wants me to know and love him as a Father, how am I going to respond to his love?”

If the leaflet can be used in a context in which there can be genuine discussion, it can be followed up with gently probing questions like these:

Have you been taught to believe that God is like a loving Father?

What is your picture of what God is like?

Do you believe that God loves you and loves all people?

Do you think there is any difference between saying “God is merciful” and saying “God is loving” or “God is love”?

How do you think God shows his mercy or his love to us?

This whole interpretation of the parable is based on Kenneth Bailey’s work in his two books *The Cross and the Prodigal* and *Poet and Peasant*.

## 5.2. The message of the Tawrat, the Zabur and the Injil

In 1981 the Bible Society in Lebanon published a folder of selected Bible passages, specially chosen for Muslim readers, under the title *The Message of the Tawrat, the Zabur and the Injil*. It was initially distributed in Arabic, French and English, and since then has been translated into other languages in the Muslim world.

The passages were grouped under ten themes, with each one on a separate piece of paper. The intention here was that it was important to study them one by one, and in the order in which they were presented. And if Christians were able to study the passages with interested Muslims, it would be valuable to proceed slowly and take one subject at a time.

The following were the main ideas which lay behind these selections:

- a. The title uses the Quranic names of the three main Scriptures which Muslims believe were revealed before the Qur'an: the *tawrat* revealed to Moses, the *zabur* to David, and the *injil* to Jesus. In the Qur'an God says that the message revealed to Muhammad contains the same message as that revealed in the previous Scriptures. And Jews and Christians are invited to believe Muhammad's message because it is no different from the message contained in the Scriptures which they have in their possession.

The title is therefore intended to convey something like this to the Muslim reader: "You believe that these are Scriptures which were revealed by God to the Jews and Christians, and that the Qur'an was simply confirming the message that was contained in their Scriptures. But do you know what these Scriptures contained? The following passages give an idea of the central message of these Scriptures which are in the same form as those in the hands of Jews and Christians in the time of Muhammad ..."

- b. The Introduction needs to explain briefly what the Bible is. Since the Qur'an for Muslims consists of what God revealed to one man in the course of 25 years, it isn't easy for them to grasp the idea that the Bible is like a library of books containing, history, stories, prayers, letters, visions, etc., written by many different writers over a period of anything up to 2,000 years.

For the same reason each passage needs an introduction to explain what it is that we are about to read: is it history? Is it a letter? Who recorded these words, who were they addressing? And what is the main point of what is said in this passage?

- c. We need to avoid controversy as much as possible. Thus, for example, the word Trinity is not mentioned, although the claims of Jesus are clearly presented. We avoid any emphasis on Jesus as the "Son of God", because of possible misunderstanding in the mind of Muslims, and because it must be possible to draw attention to the claims of Jesus about himself in different ways.

- d. **We need to start on common ground. The first studies therefore deal with God as Creator and man the creature, and with God who reveals his laws for man. In this way we are trying to build bridges with Muslims by studying truths which they also believe, even if they express them in a slightly different way. We are also trying to lay foundations for the later studies. Thus long before we come to the delicate question of the crucifixion, we have tried to prepare the way by looking at the holiness and love of God.**
- e. **The terminology needs to be as Islamic as possible, provided there is no compromise of Christian belief. For this reason we use the Quranic names for Jesus, John the Baptist, the Devil, etc.**
- f. **The most important theological assumption that is made in the studies is that we need to present the gospel in the way that is unfolded in Paul's letter to the Romans. Law must come before grace. We need to know that we are sinners under the judgement of God *before* we can see Jesus as God's answer to our need. When the law has shown us "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" in our own hearts, we are compelled to turn to the one through whom God has done something to deal with that sin.**

**In this respect the approach differs quite radically from that implied in the parable of the prodigal son. There, and in other parables of Jesus, as Kenneth Bailey has pointed out, the emphasis is on God demonstrating his unexpected love in costly ways. Sinners turn to God in repentance and faith in response to this unexpected demonstration of love. They become fully aware of their sin after they have seen how much God loves them and how much he has done for them to win their love.**

- g. **Each study ends with a prayer from the Bible. This is intended so that even if there is discussion or controversy in the study of the passages, it is possible to end in a spirit of prayer and worship rather than of controversy. When using the studies with some Muslims, I have tried to discuss the prayers with them, and then asked them if they would like to read the prayers aloud with me. It would be quite wrong to put words into their mouths which they cannot in all honesty say as Muslims. But in many cases there is nothing in the prayer which is likely to offend Muslims and which they could not pray.**

**In the following pages a revised version of each of these themes is printed on a separate page, so that they can be photocopied and used in any appropriate way. At the foot of each page are some notes explaining the relevance of these passages for Muslim readers. If Christians are doing the studies with Muslims, they need to understand how Muslims may respond to these passages, and discuss them with the Muslims in a way that is intelligible.**

**The English translation that is used is the Good News Version.**

### **5.3. STRATEGIES FOR THE CHURCH: WHAT CAN WE DO TOGETHER?**

The following questions may give the group an opportunity to ask “where do we go from here?”

Are there any of these things that I ought to be doing to follow up what I have been studying?

Are there any of these things that my church should be doing?

Are there any things that our churches in this area should be doing together?

Are there any practical steps that we can take to continue the discussion opened up through the course and to put into practice what we have learned?

#### **5.3.1. Meeting**

How well do we know our Muslim neighbours? How much personal contact do we already have with Muslims?

What can we do to encourage more face to face meeting, for example with neighbours, colleagues, etc.?

What kind of visiting could we do, for example visiting homes, mosques, etc.?

#### **5.3.2. Service**

Are there any ways in which we and others can help to serve the Muslim community, for example through the teaching of English, through voluntary organizations, through local community projects, etc?

### **5.3.3. Political action**

**What does the Muslim community feel are the important issues for them in the local area, for example housing, schools, permission for mosques?**

**Are there any ways in which it would be right for Christians to work with Muslims on any of these issues?**

**Are there any national issues of concern to Muslims in which we need to be involved, for example the aftermath of the Rushdie Affair, immigration, the question of state-funded Muslim schools?**

### **5.3.4. Teaching in the church**

**Has this course answered any of the questions you noted in the session “Working out an agenda?” If not, what could you/we do to find answers?**

**What are we teaching about the other faiths and our relations with other faith communities?**

**What should we be teaching?**

**Is there a need for planning a programme which will include teaching in Sunday School, Youth Fellowships, Wives Groups, House Groups, Sunday sermons, etc.?**

**What books do we know of that could be recommended for people to read?**

**What material is being produced by different denominational bodies on the subject of other faiths?**

### **5.3.5. Relating to their leaders**

**Is it appropriate for churches leaders, ordained and lay, to meet with leaders of the Muslim community from time to time? If so, how should it be done?**

### **5.3.6. Schools**

**How is Religious Education being taught in schools in our area? What is the approach to the teaching of Christianity and other faiths?**

**Who are the members of our local SACRE (Special Advisory Committee on Religious Education)? How do they work? What is the agreed syllabus for our area?**

**How many pupils in our schools belong to other faith communities?**

**What, if any, are the particular issues that concern the local Muslim community about schools?**

### **5.3.7. Finding people with special gifts**

**We need to be aware of the danger of “passing the buck”, of thinking that we are not properly equipped to do any of the things we have been talking about, and should therefore leave it all to the “experts”. But are there people in our churches who have special gifts in this area (e.g. because they have worked with Muslims overseas and can speak one of their languages), and could therefore help us (but not do it all for us!)?**

**What individuals and groups do we know who are already involved in work with Muslims?**

**Do we need to have other individuals set aside to work either part-time or full-time?**

### **5.3.8. Prayer**

**How should we be praying about our relations with people of other faiths in general, and Muslims in particular? If we were to pray regularly about this subject, how should we do it? What should we be praying for?**

**Is the question of “multi-faith worship” an issue in our area? Are we aware of any multi-faith worship events that have been held, and the response to them?**

### **5.3.9. Sharing the Gospel**

**We should be able to assume that some of the other activities already discussed will provide opportunities for sharing our faith. But are there any other initiatives that we can or should be taking? For example:**

- **are Bibles, New Testaments or other portions of Scripture in different languages easily available for sale in local shops?**
- **is there a correspondence course that is particularly appropriate for Muslim enquirers that could be advertised?**
- **how could one get hold of a video (like the *Jesus* film) in different languages to lend to friends who may be interested?**

### **5.3.10. Concern for the Church overseas**

**Are there ways in which we can learn from the experience of the church in predominantly Muslim countries?**

**Are there ways in which we can support the churches in these countries?**

## **5.4. EPILOGUE**

The title of this course brings together the symbols of two major world religions.

If the cross is to be more than a symbol of our Christian faith, what will it mean to us in our thinking about Islam and our relations with Muslims?

If Jesus was walking the way of the cross throughout his ministry, how can his teaching and example help us as we seek to follow him in continuing to work at the five main areas of this course?

### **Relating to our Muslim neighbours**

“In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 7:12)

### **Understanding Islam**

“After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions...” (Luke 2:46)

### **Entering into discussion and dialogue**

“...he began to teach them that the Son of Man had to undergo great sufferings, and to be rejected... At this Peter took him by the arm and began to rebuke him. But Jesus turned round, and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter, “Away with you Satan,” he said; “you think as men think, not as God thinks.” (Mark 8:31-33)

### **Facing fundamental issues**

“...Jesus...suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.” (Hebrews 13:12-13)

### **Bearing witness to Jesus**

“...but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor 1:23-24)

# ***CROSS AND CRESCENT: RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAM***

## **BOOK OUTLINE**

\* indicates chapter from which material is included in the course

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **PART 1. RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS**

1. Meeting face to face \*
2. Appreciating their culture \*
3. Examining our attitudes \*
4. Visiting a mosque \*
5. Facing immediate issues \*
6. Bible study \*

#### **PART 2. UNDERSTANDING ISLAM**

1. The Muslim at prayer \*
2. Basic Muslim beliefs and practices \*
3. The Qur'an \*
4. Muhammad \*
5. Tradition
6. Law and theology
7. Sub-groups in Islam
8. Sufism
9. "Folk Islam" or "Popular Islam" \*
10. The spread and development of Islam \*
11. Islam in the modern world
12. Women in Islam

#### **PART 3. ENTERING INTO DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE**

1. Questions and objections concerning Christian practice \*
2. Questions and objections concerning Christian beliefs \*
3. Social and political issues \*
4. Guidelines and aims in discussion with Muslims \*
5. A deeper look at the main theological objections \*
6. Learning from the controversies of the past
7. Exploring dialogue

#### **PART 4. FACING FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES**

1. Theological questions \*
2. The Islamic view of Jesus
3. Crucial differences \*
4. Thinking biblically about Islam
5. Counting the cost of conversion \*
6. Facing the political challenge of Islam \*

## **PART 5. SHARING OUR FAITH**

1. Natural openings in everyday life \*
2. Responses of “folk Islam” \*
3. Using the Bible - The Prodigal Son \*
  - The Message of the *Tawrat* \*
  - The Gospel of Luke \*
4. Starting from Qur’an - God and his prophets
  - God and his Word
  - God and his mercy
5. Strategies for the church: what can we do together? \*

**CONCLUSION: Walking the way of the cross**

## FURTHER READING

### GENERAL

- Martin Goldsmith *Islam and Christian Witness*  
IVP, 1982
- Kenneth Cragg *The Call of the Minaret*  
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- Kenneth Cragg *Islam and the Muslim*  
Open University, Arts/Social Sciences, Units 20-21 1978
- Michael Nazir-Ali *Islam: A Christian Perspective*  
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- Michael Nazir-Ali *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter*  
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- Anne Cooper *Ishmael My Brother: A Biblical Course on Islam*  
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- Jacques Jomier *How to Understand Islam*  
SCM, 1989
- Ghulam Sarwar *Islam: Beliefs and Teachings,*  
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- Arab World Ministries *Reading Muslims Today: A Short Handbook*  
c/o STL Distributors, PO Box 48, Bromley
- R W Thomas *Islam: Aspects and Prospects: A Critical Analysis*  
Light of Life, Austria, 1988
- James Dretke *A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections from West Africa*  
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- Hugh Goddard *Islam: Towards A Christian Assessment*  
Latimer Studies, No 39, Latimer House, Oxford, 1992
- M Y McDermott  
& M M Alison *The Muslim Guide for Teachers, Employers,  
Community Workers and Social Administrators in Britain*  
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- Lausanne Committee *Christian Witness to Muslims*  
Lausanne Occasional Papers, No 13, Thailand Report
- Jens Christensen *The Practical Approach to Muslims*  
North Africa Mission, 1977

## SESSION 1: RELATING TO OUR MUSLIM NEIGHBOURS

- Roger Hooker *Uncharted Journey*  
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- Roger Hooker and Christopher Lamb *Love the Stranger: Christian Witness in Multi-Faith Areas*  
SPCK, 1986
- Andrew Wingate *Encounters in the Spirit*  
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- Zaki Badawi *Islam in Britain*  
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- Mohammad S Raza *Islam in Britain, Past, Present and Future*  
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## SESSION 2: UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

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Penguin, 1983
- W Montgomery Watt *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*  
Oxford University Press, 1975
- Gai Eaton *Islam and the Destiny of Man*  
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- Phil Parshall *Bridges to Islam: A Christian Perspective on Folk Islam*  
Baker, 1983
- Bill Musk *The Unseen Face of Islam*  
MARC Europe, 1989
- Bill Musk *Passionate Believing: The "Fundamentalist" Face of Islam*  
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- John L Esposito, ed. *Voices of Resurgent Islam*  
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- Abul A 'la Mawdudi *Towards Understanding Islam*  
The Islamic Foundation, 1981
- Lion Handbook *The World's Religions*  
Lion, 1982
- John Hinnels, ed. *A Handbook of Living Religions*  
Penguin, 1985

### SESSION 3: ENTERING INTO DISCUSSION AND DIALOGUE

- B D Kateregga and  
W D Shenk                      *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and A Christian in  
Dialogue,*  
Eerdman, 1980
- Anne Cooper, compiler        *In the Family of Abraham*  
People by People International, PO Box 26  
Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 5AZ, 1989
- Chawkat Georges  
Moucarry                        *Islam and Christianity at the Crossroads*  
Lion, 1988
- John Gilchrist                    *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*  
Jesus to Muslims, PO Box 1804, Benoni, S Africa, 1986
- Jean-Marie Gaudeul            *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*  
Pontifical Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies, Rome 1984
- W Montgomery-Watt            *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misperceptions*  
Routledge, 1991

### SESSION 4: FACING FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

- Michael Nazir-Ali                *Islam: A Christian Perspective*  
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- Michael Nazir-Ali                *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter*  
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- Phil Parshall                      *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim Mind and  
Heart*  
Tyndale House, Wheaton, 1989
- Jens Christensen                *The Practical Approach to Muslims*  
Arab World Ministries, 1977
- Hamid Enayat                    *Modern Islamic Political Thought*  
Macmillan, 1982
- Edward Mortimer                *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam*  
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- Kenneth Cragg                    *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response*  
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## SESSION 5: SHARING OUR FAITH

- Don McCurry                      *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*  
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- J Dudley Woodberry, ed.        *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road: Crucial Issues in*  
*Witness Among Muslims*  
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- John Gilchrist                      *The Christian Witness to the Muslim*  
Jesus to the Muslims, 1988
- Vivienne Stacey                    *Christ Supreme Over Satan*  
Masihi Isha'at Khana, 16 Ferozepur Road, Lahore 16, Pakistan
- C R Marsh                            *Share Your Faith With A Muslim*  
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- Abdul Haqq                        *Sharing Your Faith With A Muslim*  
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- Phil Parshall                        *Beyond the Mosque*  
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