

AN ARTICLE ABOUT
“A CRITIQUE OF ISLAM”

1. INTRODUCTION

“Although “apologetics” may sound like Christians need to apologize for something, the meaning of the word is quite different. Apologetics comes from the Greek word “apologia” which means “to give a defense” and it implies a defense supported by specific reasons and thought. This is the same kind of defense a defense attorney might give on behalf of his client, using reasons and arguments to prove innocence.

The concept of apologetics isn’t unique to Christianity, either. In a more general sense, anytime a person is asked to defend a position or a belief in some system, he is asked for an apologetic. However, it seems the concept of rationally defending your convictions in today’s society isn’t valued as much as it had been previously. Professors may speak of someone’s apologetic, but the phrase has fallen out of use in the popular vernacular.

In the Bible, the most famous apologetics passage is 1 Peter 3:15 where the Apostle commands believers to ‘sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense (apologia) to everyone that asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and respect.’”¹

The critique of Islam (the Arabic term for “submission”) in this paper offers an opportunity for me to have a disciplined conversation with Islam through the eyes of a committed Christian, but also one who also values rational thought. It is commonly accepted that Islam is the second largest religion in the world (Christianity is the first). Since the events of September 11, 2001, Islam has taken a renewed lease of life and ministry in the United States of America and around the world in our postmodern era.

The thesis for this critique suggests that there are elements of cultish theology and ramifications in this religion. Dr. Charles Braden (emeritus professor at Northwestern University) in defining the meaning of a cult writes, “By the term cult I mean nothing derogatory to any group classified. A cult, as I define it, is any religious group which differs significantly in one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture.”² I concur with the definition, but also with a number of others who add that a cult can also be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person’s misunderstanding and/or

¹ http://www.comereason.org/cmp_rlgn/apologetics.asp#ixzz2TC4Obcf6

² Walter Martin. *Kingdom of Cults*. 17

misinterpretation of the sacred writings found in the Bible. The fundamental theological orthodoxy for Christianity that will be used in this critique is the oldest known Christian Creed...

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he [descended](#) to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.³

There are only two religions in the world that have very clear and stated evangelism goals – Islam and Christianity.⁴ It is believed that by 2015, England will have Islam as the largest religious group in that country; and in the United States of America this world religion is growing everyday. We live in a world and cultures marked by a plethora of religions. This is truer in Queens, New York City which is the most diverse place in our City where I live and minister for Christ. It is a place desperately in need of the gospel of Christ in a hurting world; but people are hearing so many religious voices and Islam is one of the loudest. Therefore, the obvious question is what does Islam have to offer that is so magnetic? What are issues about Islam that all believers in Christ should be appraised of?

³ *Sing To The Lord Hymnal*, # 8

⁴ Personal lecture Notes. Course: The Paths of Faith.

2. THE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The first of the pillars of creed or confession of faith in Islam (so that the believer can escape the wrath and judgment of Allah - the Arabic term given by Muslims for God and cannot be easily translated into English) is known as Shahada. This consists of confessing a single sentence, "There is no god, but God, and Muhammad is his prophet." The power of saying repeatedly this pillar is believed to be two fold... firstly, it highlights the conviction of the cardinal doctrine of monotheism to Muslims [There is no God, but Allah]. Secondly, it is also giving authenticity or validity to the book Muhammad transmitted. The Shahada is supposed to give solace and comfort in the midst of a troubled world.

Salat or Namaz (prescribed prayers) is the second pillar of Islam. This pillar is intended to keep the believer's life in perspective. It is required that the believer speaks to Allah at least five times each day in prayer. It is required that Muslims pray facing Mecca. The power of this discipline is that it acknowledges humanity as a creature before the Creator, and when practiced means submitting one's will to the Sovereign.

The third rung or pillar of Islam is Zakat. This pillar addresses in a practical fashion help that should be given to others in a world that is filled with diverse disparities. The power of Zakat is understood in Muslims obeying the requirement to give a percentage of all money and possessions. Through Zakat or charity expressed Muslims are to start with those who have immediate needs and grow in the search to be a blessing to other human beings.

Ramadan (Saum or Ruzeh) observed is the fourth pillar of Islam. This observance celebrates the supposed time that the prophet Muhammad received his initial revelation from Allah and his historic migration from Mecca to Medina (these places are a part of present day Saudi Arabia). To commemorate the previously mentioned occasions, Muslims who are able-bodied are required to fast in the month of Ramadan (Islam's holy month changes from year to year due to calendar used). Supposedly, the power attributed to fasting allows its adherents to think, practice self-discipline and sensitizes compassion among the followers.

The fifth pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage or Hajj. Once during his or her lifetime every Muslim who is physically and emotionally able, and is in a position to do so is expected to journey to Mecca. The purpose of the travel is to heighten the travelers or pilgrims' devotion to Allah and his will. Interestingly, on the arrival in Mecca, each traveler is expected to remove their normal attire and everyone wears the same clothing and in so doing pictures or symbolizes everyone being the same before God.⁵

⁵ Huston Smith, *The World Religions*, 242-248

There are many persons in this City and country who believe that Islam is compatible with Christianity. You can see this thought pattern all over the media and expressed with more enthusiasm by young adults. You will often hear that the God of Islam is the same God in Christianity. This begins the deception because the Muslim God in their holy book is not like the Christian God revealed in the Bible.

“Jihad is *sometimes* referred to as the ‘sixth pillar of Islam’. Since September 11, 2001, there has been constant debate about the meaning of the term, Jihad. Many Muslims, and some secular experts on Islam, have tried to say that jihad only refers to personal spiritual struggle. Jihad can and often does mean one’s individual efforts to be righteous, but it is often used by Muslims both past and present to refer to actual military struggle or ‘holy war.’ Saying that jihad is simply spiritual struggle ignores Islamic history and the actions of contemporary Muslims, including militants like Osama bin Laden, who use it to refer to acts of killing in the name of Allah.”⁶

3. BRIEF COMPARISON OF THE LIFE OF PROPHET MUHAMMAD AND THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

The prophet Muhammad is seen as a central mouthpiece for Islam. The prophet did not create the religion. In fact, to see Muhammad as more than a conveyor of truth would be offensive to this religion, because it would be understood as focusing on a prophet - man, rather than Allah.

In Christianity, Jesus Christ is believed to be God Incarnate. Jesus is the CENTER of the Christian faith and is far more than a mouthpiece for a religion. Jesus is God/man who for a few years lived in the midst of humankind. From the onset in our comparison between Jesus and Muhammad there is a clear demarcation.

What are some other useful comparisons? Muhammad was born in the latter half of the sixth century C.E. In Islam it is believed that there were other authentic prophets before Muhammad (Jesus was simply one of them). But, in Muhammad is the seal of the prophets or the culmination of prophets.

The prophet Muhammad was born of earthly parents in A. D. 570. The early life from my notes state that the early life of the prophet was cradled with tragedy. Both mother and father of Muhammad were dead by the time he was 8 years. The uncle of the prophet raised the prophet and he had to work hard minding flocks. Dr. Huston Smith speaks of the prophet as growing up in corrupt culture and time and he earned the titles ‘the True’ and ‘the Upright’. On reaching maturity Muhammad joined the caravan business, and at age twenty five entered the service of a wealthy woman, named Khadija. They later married and he was 15 years younger than his spouse (who was his first convert to Islam and became a tower of strength).

⁶ Martin, 447- 448

Muhammad received his commission in A.D. 610. The prophet is accredited with one miracle that is, receiving the writings of the Qur'an (the world's most memorized book and Koran is the older spelling for Qur'an). As a religious and political leader, Muhammad is accepted as one of the most influential persons in human history. In summary, Islam sees the prophet Muhammad as "a shepherd, merchant, hermit, exile, soldier, lawmaker, prophet-priest-king and mystic; he was also an orphan, for many years the husband of one wife much older than himself, a many times father, a widower, and finally a husband of many wives, some much younger than himself."⁷

In comparison to what has been stated about the prophet Muhammad, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the second person of the ONE Triune God. He is seen as always eternally one with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus according to the Bible (John 1: 1-18) created the world by His Word and as a human being was born by Immaculate Conception; that is, Jesus' birth was by the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary. In Jesus Christ were two perfect natures; that is very God and very man; the God-man (the Symbol of Chalcedon – 451 A. D.) **Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of all human history.** Jesus lived on earth for 33 years and he never got married. His ministry that led to the Cross started at age 30 and during Jesus' ministry, he is the source of numerous miracles (thus showing His Divine authority and power). Jesus did not write a book, but no one has more books written about. Jesus gathered and commissioned disciples (Matthew 28: 18-20) to carry his gospel and teachings to the whole world after his death and proven resurrection from the dead. As Christians, we believe that Jesus' life on earth was without sin.

Even more importantly, Christians believe that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world on the Cross. He further rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and is presently there engaged in intercession for the world. On the other hand, the prophet Muhammad is still dead today since his death in A.D. 632.

Some years ago I visited one of the leading worship Mosques in New York City (Islamic Cultural Center). The feature that struck me most in a deliberate personal learning experience was the "militaristic tone" exhibited in preparing for worship and the actual worship experience. Yet still, it was attracting many young men in vast numbers. What is the reason behind this phenomenon? I am now convinced that the structured environment of Islam gives young men a place of feeling belonging and importance. Christianity has failed our youth all too often in not offering similar or better belonging and genuine accountability. Christianity has often tried to shield adherents from a greater appreciation of Islamic theology and mindset. I have wondered if this is due to Christians being weak in one's own theological appreciation and sound expression of beliefs.

⁷ Smith, 231

But, “Christians have every right to be critical of Islam for the persecution of the church. However, Islam cannot be dismissed simply because of its ‘dark’ moments in church history, such as the Crusades and the Inquisition. The theology of any religion must be judged separately from the behavior of its participants. Furthermore, it must be admitted that many Christians and so-called Christians have committed their share of atrocities: the Crusades, with burnings, and the Inquisition being prime examples.”⁸

The value of family life is one that offers a number of positive similarities between Islam and Christianity. “Islam views family as the foundation of human society. The peace and security offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued and seen as essential for the spiritual growth of its members....The family is the basis of the entire socio-cultural structure and a self-sustaining mechanism to ensure social, ideological and cultural stability over the entire span of society on the one hand and in the time past, present and future on the other....And family life begins with the sacred matrimonial relation between man and woman. It is the institution off marriage which seeks to prohibit fornication and adultery...

Although marriage is a divinely ordained institution, each marriage as such is in the nature of a contract.”⁹ So much of what was previously quoted was stated from an Imam that could easily have been said by a minister referring to Christianity, and not Islam.

4. MAJOR THEOLOGICAL ERRORS IN ISLAM AS VIEWED THROUGH THE BIBLE

Some quick facts and points about Islam that all readers should be aware of include...

- The sovereignty of Allah is paramount: He is the one, true God. Mohammed is the chief prophet.
- There is no original sin. Humans are not predisposed toward sin, but they commit sins.
- Jesus was not the Son of God. He is revered as a spiritual guide.
- Salvation is by the will of God through human obedience to God’s law.
- The Qur’an is the perfect Word of Allah.¹⁰

Recently, our Protestant/Evangelical congregation has been visited regularly by a very intelligent and well versed person from a country governed by Islamic law. A lot of the above facts have been verified by this person in conversation over an extended period who is well versed in cultural and religious background of Muslims. The interest relevance of this spiritual relationship mentioned is to highlight how one rational and thoughtful person rejected most of what Islam teaches as wrong. Although very close to making a full commitment in being a

⁸ Martin, 443

⁹ Article in 2004 magazine on *how Islam values Family Life* by Sheikh Ali (Assistant Imam, the Islamic Cultural Center of New York)

¹⁰ Martin, 434

disciple of Christ...the major concern is fear of physical reprisal to other members in their family, if word gets back home about that person's Christian faith. Therefore, a serious and prayerful decision is being honestly considered. This is a good illustration as to why more believers in the Lord Jesus Christ should pay more attention to Apologetics re: having a working and accurate critical perspective of Islam.

We will now move on to a conversation about facts that are not commonly known by Christians through the writings of the *Kingdom of Cults* which continues today as a crucial tool and text in counter cult ministry and evangelism by the Church.

"God

For the Muslim, Allah is the only true God. There is no such blasphemous thing as the 'Trinity.' The Muslim God is unapproachable by sinful man, and the Muslim's desire is to submit to the point where he can hold back the judging arm of Allah and inherit eternal life in a heavenly paradise, often pictured in terms of food, wine, and sexual pleasure....But unlike Christians, Muslims do not emphasize a personal relationship with God. Scripture tells us that those who trust in Christ and do the Father's will have been redeemed and have been adopted as sons (Romans 8: 14-15; Galatians 3: 26)....

To Muslims, God has no likeness (Sura 42:11-*similar to verse in Bible*), is transcendent (Sura 4: 17), is unknowable (apart from revelation), and is wholly other and totally different. He is neither physical nor spirit. The Bible, contradicting the Qur'an, tells us that we have knowledge of God in our hearts (Romans 1: 19-20). Moreover, Scripture tells us that God is spirit (John 4: 24)....

Jesus Christ

To the Muslim, Jesus Christ is merely one of the many prophets of Allah (Sura 4: 171; 5: 74). According to Islam, the prophet Muhammad supersedes Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is not the Son of God or a part of any Trinity (Sura 5: 17; 5: 116; 19: 35). We are told that He has nothing but a slave on whom God showed favor (Sura 43: 59); yet elsewhere we are told the Messiah is not a slave (Sura 4: 172). Jesus Christ did not atone for anyone's sins, although he was himself sinless (Sura 3: 46)....

It is interesting to compare Jesus and Muhammad according to the Qur'an:

- Jesus did miracles (Sura 3: 49; 5: 110), but Mohammed did not (Sura 13: 8)...
- Jesus was sinless (Sura 3: 46), but Muhammad sinned and needed forgiveness (Sura 40: 55...)

- Jesus was called ‘the Messiah’ and was even born of a virgin (Sura 3: 45-47)! Yet Muhammad is supposed to be the greatest of the prophets.

Sin and salvation

The Qur’an teaches that all have sinned: ‘If God were to take mankind to task for their wrongdoing, he would not leave here one living creature’ (Sura 16: 61a...)... We are even told that Muhammad sinned (Sura 40: 55; 47: 19; 48: 2). Every Muslim who hopes to escape the judgment of Allah must fulfill the works of the Five Pillars of the Faith (Sura 10: 109).¹¹ This teaching in Islam is contrary to what is taught in the Bible about personal salvation.

“The evidence clearly shows that the Bible we have is very close to the original [text] and that it has not been tampered with. Moreover, there are multiple discrepancies in the Qur’an as well as many places where it contradicts Scripture. Sura 11: 42-43 contradicts 6-7 by saying that Noah had a son who died in the Flood, and Sura 3: 41 contradicts Luke when it says that Zechariah was speechless for three days (Luke 1: 18-20). Sura 61: 6 claims that Muhammad fulfills prophecy both in the Torah and Gospels.¹²

5. CONCLUSION

The critique of Islam in these reflections is not indicative of the love that Christians should always show towards Muslims or persons from any other religion. It is obvious to any one who looks on at practitioners of Islam that most Muslims have a definite zeal for God and religious matters.

In fact, the devotion of Muslims is a type of spiritual fervor that would serve many Disciples of Christ very well in our postmodern world that needs hope in the midst in an era skepticism; confidence in God in time of doubt and truth in a climate of relativism. Yes, indeed Islam is a powerful world religion, but there are also some theological and practical tents in this religion that would also been seen among cults in the “Christian arena.”

To conclude, I love what Dr. Martin writes, “The Christian should respect the Muslims’ sincere intentions and share with them the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian should also share the fact that he believes God is great. When a Christian can demonstrate the power of the Word of God through the Holy Spirit and use his own life as an example of the joy and peace possible to those who love Jesus Christ, he becomes an effective example to the Muslim

¹¹ Ibid, 444-447

¹² Ibid, 448-449

of the opportunity to know and worship the true God rather than Muhammad's distorted concepts about God."¹³

¹³ Ibid, 450