

**Chapter 1 : Full text of "The Christian approach to Islam"**

*The Christian approach to Islam [James L. Barton] on www.nxgvision.com \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. This is a reproduction of a book published before.*

President George Bush was faced with an international crisis that he felt warranted an immediate and decisive military response. Under the direction of Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded the small, bordering nation of Kuwait. The threat of destabilization in this oil-rich region prompted President Bush to dispatch thousands of troops into Saudi Arabia, which began Operation Desert Shield. In early , U. During this conflict, which potentially threatened global peace, millions in the U. Technology and dauntless reporters kept us abreast of practically every frightening clash between Iraqi and allied forces. With the increasing awareness of our global society, and with the worldwide proliferation of this religion, it is important for Christians to understand and respond to Islam. The immensity of the subject and space restrictions preclude an exhaustive treatment of these points. Hence, only a broad survey of the origin and contours of Islamic thought and practices will be presented. Muhammed, Mohammed , who was born c. The early orphaned Muhammad was reared by his grandfather and uncle who, though disputed by some Western scholars, appear to have been prominent members of the Qurayyah tribe. This Arabian clan was the guardian of the Kaabah var. According to Arabian tradition, the black stone fell from heaven in the time of Adam, a possible indication that it was a meteorite that landed in the sands of Arabia Humble, , 4: Muslims believe that, on his pilgrimage to Mecca with Ishmael, Abraham built the Kaabah and positioned the meteorite within its walls. Khadija was so impressed with his dependable and conscientious service that she married Muhammad, provided him with wealth and success, and encouraged his religious inclinations. During this process, Muhammad developed a passionate monotheistic belief, and became extremely frustrated with the polytheism and superstitions of his fellow Arabs. His first alleged encounter with the heavenly messenger was quite violent. While Muhammad was in a deep trance, Gabriel appeared to him and, either by choking or some other life-threatening gesture, forced Muhammad into submission. Since the encounter was both violent and accompanied by convulsions that sent him into an unconscious trance, Muhammad at first was unsure of the source of his vision. He feared that he possessed one of the jinn demons commonly believed to inhabit Arab poets and soothsayers Anderson, , p. Khadija and others, however, assured Muhammad of the divine source of his visions. Since, as many Muslims argue, Muhammad was illiterate, he did not record these revelations personally. Koran , though many passages were preserved only in the memory of his followers and were committed to writing after his death Shorrosh, , p. By emphasizing the resurrection of the dead, and the subsequent judgment of God, he challenged the populace to submit to the One Allah true God, and to show compassion to the poor. As might be expected, Muhammad met with considerable opposition, and succeeded in making only a few converts. Due to the increasingly aggressive hostility directed against him by the traders at Mecca, Muhammad and his small band of followers fled from Mecca to Medina on July 16, Reflecting this point of origin, the Islamic calendar is calibrated to the Hijra. According to Islamic chronology, for example, A. Unlike his experience in Mecca, where he was rejected as an eccentric purveyor of an unpopular and unprofitable religion, Muhammad enjoyed greater success in Medina. He particularly was disappointed at his lack of reception among the Jewish population. The Return to Mecca Once his relationship with the Jews was severed, Muhammad no longer looked to Jerusalem, but refocused on Mecca as the center of the Islamic religion. Enlisting the help of nomadic Arab tribes, Muhammad led a series of armed raids on Mecca, and in A. Mecca quickly was purged of all its polytheistic symbols, and the Kaabah became the focal point of the religion of the one true God. Before his death in A. Naming such an individual proved to be a difficult and divisive task. Along with other issues of interpretation, the role of, and criteria for appointing, the Caliph eventually fragmented Islam into two major divisions that remain today: The Sunnis derive their name from this emphasis on the sunna. While there are subdivisions of this group, distinguished by specific points of interpretation, they all call themselves Sunni. They believe, however, that the ayatollahs senior experts in Islamic law have access to the hidden imam, and thus, have the right to interpret Islamic law and make religious rulings Kerr, , p. Sufis Though more a movement within,

rather than a sect of, Islam, a third identifiable group that should be mentioned is the Sufis. Reacting to the externally oriented, and legalistic disposition of the Islamic religious system, Sufis seek a mystical experience of God. Though there are differences of opinion surrounding their application, six articles of faith form the core of the Islamic religion. As indicated earlier, pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. Worshiping or attributing deity to any other being is considered by Muslims to be shirk, or blasphemy. Muslims believe in a well-structured organization of angelic beings. At the lowest level in the hierarchy of spirit beings in Islamic thought are the jinn, who are capable both of committing good and evil deeds, and of inhabiting human beings. After his first frightening encounter with Gabriel, Muhammad feared that he was possessed by one of these potentially fiendish beings. The angels of God are above the jinn in rank. In Islamic angelology, each Muslim is accompanied by two angels—one on the right, the other on the left. This angelic pair is responsible for recording the good and evil deeds of the Muslim, respectively. Chief among these Islamic sacred texts are: Muslims believe that there has been a long succession of prophets through whom Allah revealed his will. While there is no consensus regarding the exact number of prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are considered the five prophetic predecessors to Muhammad. Similar to elements of Christian eschatology, Muslims believe in a general resurrection of humankind, followed by a final judgment. In this connection, human works are central. How successful a Muslim was at keeping the mandates of Islamic law determines his or her eternal fate. Those who have accomplished more good deeds than bad will be admitted into paradise, a place abounding with sensual pleasures. Those who are deficient in good deeds will be consigned to hell in which, among other excruciating torments, they will be attired in fiery garments. Though not a mandatory doctrine, most Muslims accept a rigid form of predestination reflected in the comment made by the devout: The creed kalima or shahada. This is the first duty of every Muslim, for it is necessary to recite this creed before at least two witnesses to become a Muslim. And, the faithful Muslim will repeat this creed constantly. Muslims, regardless of their social or economic status, submit to a rigorous daily regimen of prayer. They recite prescribed prayers together with the appropriate action of placing the forehead to the ground. Regardless of their geographic location, the faithful Muslim will face toward Mecca and perform this prayer ritual at the appropriate intervals. It is further incumbent on all adult male Muslims to gather each Friday at noon for community prayer, and to hear a weekly sermon. Almsgiving zakat and sadaqa. Orphaned himself at a young age, Muhammad was very sensitive to the plight of the destitute. Almsgiving is divided into two broad categories. The zakat are the legal alms, which require that Muslims allocate 2. Different percentages are assigned to agricultural produce and cattle. The sadaqa are free-will offerings that are above and beyond the legally binding proportion of almsgiving. During the month of Ramadan the ninth lunar month of the Islamic year, all healthy, adult Muslims except pregnant women, nursing mothers, and travelers are required to abstain from food, liquids, and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. There are both historical and theological reasons for Ramadan. Historically, Muslims believe that during the ninth lunar month, Muhammad received the first revelations from God and that during this same month, he and his followers made their historic escape from Mecca to Medina. Every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. Since the rituals involved in the pilgrimage are physically demanding, the old or infirm can perform this duty by proxy. The Hajj serves to solidify Islamic faith, and to promote the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims. Rood, ; McDowell, , p. The Holy War jihad. Though not a part of the Five Pillars, the jihad is a duty usually associated with them. Extremists interpret jihad as literal warfare against non-Muslims, and believe that Muslims who die in a holy war are assured of a place in paradise. In addition to these basic beliefs and practices, Muslims are guided by numerous laws and traditions contained in the hadith. The State, Law, and Religion: Rood, Rick, What Is Islam? We are happy to grant permission for items in the "Islam and Other World Religions" section to be reproduced in part or in their entirety, as long as the following stipulations are observed: For catalog, samples, or further information, contact:

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Summary Why is it that some Muslims become Islamists and some Islamists turn to violence? A summary of some basic convictions held in varying degrees by all Muslims is followed by an explanation of how Islamists have developed these ideas in response to various challenges especially political of the modern world. As a result of the failure to make these distinctions, many suggest, for example, that terrorism carried out by Muslims is a natural expression of Islamic beliefs. While the parallel is not exact, one could say that a Muslim studying terrorism in Northern Ireland in recent years would similarly have needed to distinguish between Christianity, the Roman Catholic Church and the IRA. Many Muslims dissociate themselves completely from the militants and terrorists. There are significant numbers of British Muslims, however, who would not actively support the use of violence, but would not openly condemn it. They are painfully aware of the decline of the Muslim world in relation to Europe that began around the sixteenth century, and are very conscious of the weakness and humiliation of the Muslim world today. They therefore have a distinctive way of understanding their own history, which sees the weak state of the Muslim world as a result of the decline in the practice of real Islam. Their thinking about politics is guided by a number of basic concepts which are closely related. They also make it harder for some Muslims to come to terms with the fact that around one in four Muslims are now living as minority communities in pluralist societies in different parts of the world. Warfare and violence are justified in self-defence. Muslims generally, therefore, have no hesitation in saying that they have had a right to defend themselves against all that the West has been doing to the world of Islam in recent centuries. During his time in Medina the Prophet Muhammad believed that he received revelations from God permitting him to fight in order to protect the new Islamic community from the pagans of Mecca who sought to defeat him. It should also be noted that Islamic law lays down clear guidelines for the conduct of war, and that there are some similarities between traditional Islamic teaching about jihad and the Christian concept of the Just War. Muslims can never forget the fact that at various times between the mid-eighteenth century and the mid-twentieth century, the majority of the Muslim world came under direct Western colonial rule, and even in those areas that were not colonised, Western powers were actively interfering in their attempts to extend their influence. This is particularly difficult for Muslims to accept since for centuries they had been ruling in the Middle East over populations which at first were largely Christian. It is appropriate in their minds, therefore, for Muslims to be ruling over Christians, but hard to understand how God could have allowed Christians to rule over Muslims. The creation of Israel is seen as the last and most provocative example of Western colonialism, since whereas the older empires have passed away, this colonial entity remains as a major thorn in the flesh at the heart of the Muslim world. Related to izzat is the concept of ghaira Arabic, meaning zeal, jealousy, fervour, sense of honour or self-respect; Urdu ghairat , which means upholding the honour of Islam. The Prophet Muhammad, however, had a difficult relationship with the three main Jewish tribes in Medina, largely because they refused to accept his prophetic claims and were accused of colluding with the idolaters of Mecca against him. Some verses are very positive. Other verses are more critical and argumentative. The most hostile verse instructs Muslims: Do so until they pay the Jizyah [tax on tolerated communities] personally, once they have been reduced to submission. This is particularly important in dealing with verses about violence. There are two principles used by Muslims to enable them to interpret verses of this kind. Commands to fight enemies cannot therefore be turned into a general rule for all time, since the command was appropriate for the particular historical situation and may not be relevant to Muslims today. It is the later revelation which provides an authoritative ruling for Muslims today. Convictions which turn a Muslim into an Islamist The question now becomes: Some try very deliberately to contextualise these ideas in the British, European or Western context. Islamists have decided that they must do something to change the terrible situation they are in. This can be a real problem or merely a perceived injustice or indeed

both. When they are accused of using illegitimate means to achieve their goals, they argue that the end sometimes justifies the means. It is important to recognise that Islamists are generally just as angry – and sometime even angrier – with fellow-Muslims than they are with the non-Muslim West. Ibn Taymiya in the fourteenth century issued a highly significant fatwa legal ruling which called on Muslims to use violence to overthrow their own rulers who were not faithful to Islam. These ideas have been taken up by Islamists today who use the word takfir to pronounce someone a kafir [unbeliever] and therefore to excommunicate and apply it to unfaithful Muslims in general and to corrupt and autocratic Muslim governments which collude with the West in particular. Islamists see Islam as a complete religio-political system. Since Islam has always been seen as a complete way of life, Islam should be self-sufficient, relying on resources within its own tradition to renew itself. While Muslims can benefit from advances in science, technology and medicine, they do not need any of the ideologies developed in the West and do not need to incorporate elements of Western law into traditional Islamic law. Thus while some aspects of modernity can be embraced, whatever is inconsistent with Islam must be firmly rejected. Many Islamists have adopted the word khalifa caliphate to sum up their goal of uniting the whole of the Muslim world in adherence to Islamic law and under a central leadership. Islamists tend to be critical of traditionalist, orthodox Muslims for not engaging with the real problems today. Most Islamists not only condemn the actions of the state of Israel since its creation in 1948, but question its right to exist as a Jewish state. While the recent rhetoric of the Iranian President suggests that his goal is to bring about another Holocaust and drive all Israeli Jews into the sea, what he and other Islamists are probably calling for is the abolition of Israel as a Jewish state and the creation of either a more secular state in which Jews and Muslims are equals or an Islamic state in which Jews, if they want to live there, would live under Islamic rule. Convictions which encourage Islamists towards violence Why is it that some Islamists believe that violence in the name of Islam is justified in certain situations, while other Islamists believe that it is never justified? What were some of the beliefs that turned Osama bin Laden, a devout orthodox Muslim, into the leader of a network of Muslims dedicated to violence? Here we can note four basic convictions. Activism channelled into legitimate social and political activities is never going to be enough to achieve the radical changes required. Jihad must therefore be both defensive and offensive. Violence is justified in overthrowing unjust governments. Abdelaziz Azzam, who had a profound influence on Osama bin Laden: This is how Anthony McRoy explains the Islamist distinction between suicide and martyrdom in the thinking of Islamists: If it is to please God by fighting the enemies of Islam, necessitating self-sacrifice in the process, that is not suicide, but martyrdom. The main issue concerns the objects of the action. Islamists engaged in terrorism regard the use of violence as a legitimate application of Islamic beliefs and values. The really obvious gulf is not so much between traditionalist, orthodox Muslims and politically involved Islamists, as between Muslims who practise and approve of violence and those who do not. So, for example, Ziauddin Sardar, a British Muslim, writes: Only by recognising this brutal fact would we realise that the fight against terrorism is also an internal Muslim struggle within Islam itself. Indeed, it is a struggle for the very soul of Islam. Christians will therefore want to ask: But where do we go from here? Both groups are singing from the same hymn-sheet, but singing very different tunes. These are some recent expressions of this approach: In the long term it would appear that the only way to bring an end to Islamic terrorism is to reform the teaching of Islam with regard to war and violence. Without a theology to fuel it, Islamic terrorism would eventually shrivel and die. Unless the militant interpretation of Islamic sources is recognized as the basic cause of Islamic terrorist activities, there is little hope of a lasting solution. Wahhabi ideas were taken from Arabia to the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century and, having motivated many Muslims in their struggle against the British Raj from then into the twentieth century, have continued to inspire resistance among Muslims to any and every form of imperialism. Support moderate Muslims in challenging Islamist interpretations of Islamic sources Christians will naturally want to point to the differences between Jesus, who was willing to go to the cross, and Muhammad, who took up the sword to protect himself and extend his rule. They will also want to draw attention to the differences between the first three hundred years of Christianity, in which Christians were a powerless and sometimes persecuted minority and the first three hundred years of Islam which witnessed the spread of Islamic rule through conquest over the whole of the Middle East and North Africa. Muslims,

however, are quick to point to many examples in the history of Christianity – like the Crusades and the conquest of Latin America – where the Christian faith has been closely identified with power and where Christians have used the sword not only to defend but also to extend their rule. Drawing attention to the example of Jesus, therefore, needs to be supported by a critical view of Christian history and an honest recognition of the contemporary issues which have fuelled the anger of Muslims. A middle way between these two extremes would mean a being realistic about the real intentions of some Muslims, b recognising the diversity among Muslims and relating to them as individuals and groups with openness and honesty, c taking a firm stand on issues of human rights, d working for the common good of the whole society, e demonstrating a fundamental respect for Islam without agreeing with all its teaching, and f unapologetically commending the Christian faith through word and deed. Recognise the role that Christians can play as peacemakers One of the major problems in Western democracies is that since the link between religion and state has either been totally severed or become almost meaningless, Western governments find themselves at a loss in dealing with Muslims and Islam. Secular politicians can take strong measures to safeguard the rights of every community and to protect their countries from terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. In this situation Western Christians may have a significant role as interpreters, because they ought to be able to understand and sympathise with both sides – with God-fearing Muslims on the one hand with whom they share many moral values and secular Westerners on the other because this is the world in which they have been living. If there is genuine trust between Christians and Muslims, Christians may be able to act as peacemakers and bridge-builders. Challenge and dissociate ourselves from Christian Zionism One-sided Western and especially American support for Israel is at the top of the list of grievances of all Islamists and most Muslims, and they are frequently baffled and appalled by the unquestioning support that is often given to Israel by Christians. Christian Zionism, therefore, needs to be challenged publicly by Christians who can both point out the negative effects of one-sided support for Israel and present an alternative and more convincing way of interpreting the Bible in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. As a result they are often paralysed by fear, and want to have as little to do with Muslims as possible. Their fear can also inhibit them from sharing their faith with Muslims. A more healthy approach is to see Muslims not as people to be feared and resisted, but as neighbours to be loved Matthew 22:37–39. If and when we are able to build relationships of trust, we may have the opportunity to ask the difficult questions. Christians in Britain need to be reminded that the vast majority of Muslims all over the world are not Islamists, and that Christians living in Islamic countries are not always persecuted and often have surprising freedom to live and share their faith. They also need to know that some of the Muslims in the Middle East who have become disciples of Jesus in recent years have been Islamists. If it was possible for Saul the Pharisee, who persecuted Christians, to turn to Christ, why should we not believe that Islamists can be changed by the message of the gospel? And although it is hard to have meaningful dialogue with violent Islamists, it should not be so difficult to have serious discussion with mainstream Muslims and moderate Islamists who are aware of the crisis that has been created for Islam by terrorism carried out in the name of Islam. In this dialogue, alongside all the areas where we have common ground with Muslims, these are some of the harder questions we may want to ask: You are critical and sometimes bitter about centuries of Western imperialism. Many of us are concerned about the clear tensions that seem to exist between internationally accepted standards of human rights and traditional Islamic values – e. Does the end justify the means? While we recognise that many Islamists are totally committed to work within the law and democratic processes, we are concerned when we hear some Islamists saying that they have no qualms about using democratic processes to subvert democracy. We have seen many examples in history of what happens when religion is too closely related to the state, when faith is too closely identified with power. Christians also need to recognise the importance of the political issues that need to be addressed alongside the theological issues. What are the reasons for the anger of Muslims, and do they have good reason to be angry? As disciples of Jesus, they ought to have a distinctive way of responding to injustice and seeking to change the world. Is there a Christian Response? He is now enjoying semi-retirement in Milton, Cambridge. Riddell, Christians and Muslims: Holy War and Unholy Terror, Phoenix, 2002, p. Politics and Religion, Pluto Press, 2003, pp. Riddell and Peter Cotterall, Islam in Conflict:

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Life, through the lens of the Scriptures. Part I of this two-part series appeared in the January issue. Part II follows below and continues, without introductory comments, where the first article ended. It is the fastest-growing religion in the world, claiming up to one billion adherents worldwide. To put that in perspective, this figure indicates that one out of every five people is a Muslim. In the United States, there are now up to five million Muslims, and over 1, mosques or Islamic centers see Rood, ; Ahmad, Muslims, therefore, no longer are the vague features of geographically detached people, but could be among those whom we encounter in our daily routines. In light of these considerations, properly understanding, and responding to, Islam become increasingly apparent and personal. The Persian Gulf War, and other such conflicts involving the U. Often they are associated with the stubbled faces and cold stares of fanatical terrorists who, to advance their political agenda, bomb public facilities, snuffing out hundreds of innocent lives. While some militant Islamic sects have conducted terrorist activity in the U. Simply exposing the radical views held by violent sects would not be a responsible critique of Islam. First, as indicated in part one of this series, Islam is not a monolithic system, but contains several identifiable sects and movements Brantley, ; see Rood, Not all Muslims engage in, or support, the terrorist activity of fundamentalist Islamic sects. Thus, a Christian response to Islam must guard against stereotyping Muslims as blood-thirsty rogues with no regard for human life. Historically, Muslims have equated, and continue to equate, the West with Christianity. While Islamic countries have committed their share of atrocities against Christian nations, the former do have some legitimate grievances against the latter. In the Colonial period c. Perhaps the greatest blow to the Islamic ego was when, after thirteen hundred years of occupation, they lost possession of Jerusalem to the Jews in Though we might reasonably object that they have skewed history to a certain extent see van Ess, , pp. If we are to have any success in reaching Muslims with the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must approach them with sensitivities toward their, and our, past. Before offering such a critique, it will be both helpful and crucial to clarify the points of tension between Christianity and Islam. While on a superficial level it appears that Christianity and Islam share common theological ground in some particulars e. Monotheism of Islam At first glance, it appears that the rigid monotheism of Islam largely is compatible with Christian thought. Yet, the monotheism of Islam is so rigid and inflexible that it repudiates two crucial, and inextricably linked, doctrines of historic Christianity. Though questioned by some groups within the pale of Christianity, the concept of the trinity has strong biblical support see Bromling, This doctrine does not suggest, as is alleged by non-Trinitarians, a tri-theistic construct of God. It simply affirms that there are three distinct persons i. In other words, while the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sustain distinct relationships to one another, they share the same divine nature see Geisler and Saleeb, , p. In this regard, Christianity and Islam are firmly opposed to one another. Unlike the monotheism of Christianity that allows for a plurality within the divine essence, Islam condemns such a pluralistic concept of God see Kaleem, The Deity of Jesus. Rather than possessing the divine nature as in biblical Christology Philippians 2: And, far from being a peripheral issue, the deity of Jesus is an essential tenet of Christianity. Thus, while Christianity and Islam share a common monotheistic belief, there is no resolving their Christological differences as they stand. That Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and rose again from the grave according to the Scriptures is the thrust of the gospel message 1 Corinthians A denial of these core events is tantamount to rejecting the veracity of Christianity. Yet, Islam does deny these central Christian events, charging that Jesus actually did not die on the cross see Ijaz, n. And for saying [in boast]: Those who disagree in the matter are only lost in doubt. They have no knowledge about it other than conjecture, for surely they did not kill him, but God raised him up in position and closer to Himself; and God is all-mighty and all wise sura 4: This one reading has generated considerable debate among Islamic commentators. Generally, orthodox Muslims have interpreted this to mean that in some mysterious manner, God made another person so resemble Jesus that he was crucified by mistake. Of these possibilities, the latter

is the most likely candidate. As already indicated, such a denial strikes at the very heart of the Christian system. Once again, any points of contact between Islam and Christianity are eclipsed by this fundamental difference. In the Christian system, all responsible human beings without Christ are powerless slaves to a ruthless taskmaster—sin Romans 5: Since there is no means of liberating ourselves from the bondage of sin, human beings desperately are in need of a savior. In response to this critical condition, God, motivated by His love, entered into human history as a man, and offered His sinless life for humanity. Through the cross, sinners are purchased 1 Corinthians 6: While scholars continue to debate the theological details of these images, it is clear from the New Testament that God took the initiative in the salvation of humanity. Islam, however, has no place for a suffering savior in its redemptive system. It does not view human beings as enslaved by sin without the ability of self-emancipation. On the Day of Judgment, according to Islam, those who have fulfilled their religious duties, and compensated for their altruistic deficiencies by performing additional good deeds, will attain salvation. To embrace Islam is to deny the essentials of the Christian faith; likewise, to espouse Christianity is to compromise seriously the core beliefs of Islam. Having laid out the basic practices and duties of Islam, and having highlighted the distinctions between Islam and Christianity, a Christian evaluation of Islam now is in order. Due to space restrictions, we will devote our attention to two crucial points of Islam: The Nature of God As already indicated, the stringent monotheism of Islam categorizes the Trinitarian concept of deity espoused by Christians as tri-theism. God is so transcendent and unified to Himself that He is dissociated totally from creation and, thus, acts impersonally McDowell, , p. To many Muslims, this implies that God is so detached from our human existence that He has no knowable essence; He is absolute Will. A God with no essence means a God with no essential characteristics. In short, in Islamic theology what God does determines who God is. Such a concept of God, however, involves a serious moral difficulty. In the final analysis, the God of Islam has no nature by which He is inherently prohibited from, or motivated toward, certain actions. The God of Christianity, however, has such a nature that self-limits His actions e. In addition, rather than being the products of His volition, the benevolent attributes of the Christian God e. These divergent concepts of God find practical expression in profoundly different ways. Consistent with Islamic theology, the concern of orthodox Muslims is not to know God in an intimate fashion, but simply to obey Him. The God of Islam does not reveal Himself; rather, He reveals only His will, to which Muslims are to submit in an external fashion. On the contrary, the God of Christianity has revealed not only His propositional truth in the Bible, but also His essence in the person of Jesus Christ. According to Muslim scholar, Yusuf K. For example, just as Jesus is the human manifestation of the eternal God in biblical Christology John 1: In short, while in Christianity the divine Word became a human being, in Islam the eternal Word became a book. In fact, as stated in part one of this series, it was the only miracle Muhammad offered when asked to display his prophetic credentials. Consider two of the most popular arguments, and a brief response. Further, determining the quality of a production introduces the dimension of subjectivity. Hence, the question is: Does eloquence indicate divine inspiration? If eloquence is strong evidence for divine inspiration, the works of Homer and Shakespeare are candidates for this exalted status as well. In short, the argument from eloquence is not a sufficient proof of inspiration. There are at least two points to make in response to this claim. First, it is questionable whether Muhammad actually was illiterate. Even if he could neither read nor write, Muhammad could have dictated his messages to a scribe who subsequently wrote them down. These evidences, however, similarly prove to be unconvincing see Geisler and Saleeb, , pp. Despite the centuries-long attacks against biblical credibility, the Bible has fared quite well. First we must extend the love of Christ to Muslims in concrete ways. Once they have seen tangible evidence of the risen Lord within our lives, we will be in a better position to discuss these more technical, yet vital, issues. This link no longer is active. An International Review, Rood, Rick , What Is Islam? Probe Ministries , URL [http: The State, Law, and Religion:](http://The State, Law, and Religion:)

**Chapter 4 : Five Christian Approaches to Islam: Another Look at Martin Accad's Proposal. | The Network**

*Several times the fate of Islam or Christianity has hung in the balance. The Battle of Obod, The Battle of Yarmuk, The Battle of Tours, The Siege Of Constantinople, Battle of Suleiman the Magnificent against Vienna, Battle of Mohammed IV against Vienna, The War Of.*

Life, through the lens of the Scriptures. President George Bush was faced with an international crisis that he felt warranted an immediate and decisive military response. Under the direction of Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded the small, bordering nation of Kuwait. The threat of destabilization in this oil-rich region prompted President Bush to dispatch thousands of troops into Saudi Arabia, which began Operation Desert Shield. During this conflict, which potentially threatened global peace, millions in the U. Technology and dauntless reporters kept us abreast of practically every frightening clash between Iraqi and allied forces. With the increasing awareness of our global society, and with the worldwide proliferation of this religion, it is important for Christians to understand and respond to Islam. The immensity of the subject and space restrictions preclude an exhaustive treatment of these points. Hence, only a broad survey of the origin and contours of Islamic thought and practices will be presented. Muhammed, Mohammed , who was born c. The early orphaned Muhammad was reared by his grandfather and uncle who, though disputed by some Western scholars, appear to have been prominent members of the Qurayah tribe. This Arabian clan was the guardian of the Kaabah var. According to Arabian tradition, the black stone fell from heaven in the time of Adam, a possible indication that it was a meteorite that landed in the sands of Arabia Humble, , 4: Muslims believe that, on his pilgrimage to Mecca with Ishmael, Abraham built the Kaabah and positioned the meteorite within its walls. Khadija was so impressed with his dependable and conscientious service that she married Muhammad, provided him with wealth and success, and encouraged his religious inclinations. During this process, Muhammad developed a passionate monotheistic belief, and became extremely frustrated with the polytheism and superstitions of his fellow Arabs. His first alleged encounter with the heavenly messenger was quite violent. While Muhammad was in a deep trance, Gabriel appeared to him and, either by choking or some other life-threatening gesture, forced Muhammad into submission. Since the encounter was both violent and accompanied by convulsions that sent him into an unconscious trance, Muhammad at first was unsure of the source of his vision. Khadija and others, however, assured Muhammad of the divine source of his visions. Since, as many Muslims argue, Muhammad was illiterate, he did not record these revelations personally. Koran , though many passages were preserved only in the memory of his followers and were committed to writing after his death Shorosh, , p. By emphasizing the resurrection of the dead, and the subsequent judgment of God, he challenged the populace to submit to the One Allah true God, and to show compassion to the poor. As might be expected, Muhammad met with considerable opposition, and succeeded in making only a few converts. Due to the increasingly aggressive hostility directed against him by the traders at Mecca, Muhammad and his small band of followers fled from Mecca to Medina on July 16, Unlike his experience in Mecca, where he was rejected as an eccentric purveyor of an unpopularâ€”and unprofitableâ€”religion, Muhammad enjoyed greater success in Medina. He particularly was disappointed at his lack of reception among the Jewish population. The Return to Mecca Once his relationship with the Jews was severed, Muhammad no longer looked to Jerusalem, but refocused on Mecca as the center of the Islamic religion. Mecca quickly was purged of all its polytheistic symbols, and the Kaabah became the focal point of the religion of the one true God. Naming such an individual proved to be a difficult and divisive task. Along with other issues of interpretation, the role of, and criteria for appointing, the Caliph eventually fragmented Islam into two major divisions that remain today: While there are subdivisions of this group, distinguished by specific points of interpretation, they all call themselves Sunni. Sufis Though more a movement within, rather than a sect of, Islam, a third identifiable group that should be mentioned is the Sufis. Reacting to the externally oriented, and legalistic disposition of the Islamic religious system, Sufis seek a mystical experience of God. Though there are differences of opinion surrounding their application, six articles of faith form the core of the Islamic religion. As indicated earlier, pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. Muslims believe in a well-structured

organization of angelic beings. After his first frightening encounter with Gabriel, Muhammad feared that he was possessed by one of these potentially fiendish beings. In Islamic angelology, each Muslim is accompanied by two angels—one on the right, the other on the left. This angelic pair is responsible for recording the good and evil deeds of the Muslim, respectively. Chief among these Islamic sacred texts are: Muslims believe that there has been a long succession of prophets through whom Allah revealed his will. While there is no consensus regarding the exact number of prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are considered the five prophetic predecessors to Muhammad. Similar to elements of Christian eschatology, Muslims believe in a general resurrection of humankind, followed by a final judgment. In this connection, human works are central. How successful a Muslim was at keeping the mandates of Islamic law determines his or her eternal fate. Those who have accomplished more good deeds than bad will be admitted into paradise, a place abounding with sensual pleasures e. Though not a mandatory doctrine, most Muslims accept a rigid form of predestination reflected in the comment made by the devout: This is the first duty of every Muslim, for it is necessary to recite this creed before at least two witnesses to become a Muslim. And, the faithful Muslim will repeat this creed constantly. Muslims, regardless of their social or economic status, submit to a rigorous daily regimen of prayer. They recite prescribed prayers together with the appropriate action of placing the forehead to the ground. Regardless of their geographic location, the faithful Muslim will face toward Mecca and perform this prayer ritual at the appropriate intervals. It is further incumbent on all adult male Muslims to gather each Friday at noon for community prayer, and to hear a weekly sermon. Orphaned himself at a young age, Muhammad was very sensitive to the plight of the destitute. Almsgiving is divided into two broad categories. Different percentages are assigned to agricultural produce and cattle. Historically, Muslims believe that during the ninth lunar month, Muhammad received the first revelations from God and that during this same month, he and his followers made their historic escape from Mecca to Medina. Every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. Since the rituals involved in the pilgrimage are physically demanding, the old or infirm can perform this duty by proxy. The State, Law, and Religion:

*Communicating the Gospel to Muslims. B. THE BIBLICAL APPROACH TO MUSLIMS. 1. Islam's Rejection of the Christian Gospel.. An eager young Christian, full of joy and the Spirit of God, sets out to make his first contact with a Muslim.*

As we review this history, we can see that it is largely informed by the spirit of the times. We will look at the strengths and weaknesses of each of his categories and his overall recommendation. How he can say that Jesus is one, is sheer syncretism. This attitude often informs those who advocate inter-religion, and sometimes creeps into inter-religious dialogue. The areas of philosophical issues are put on the backburner to achieve this objective. A case in point might be for Christians and Muslims to cooperate in asking an increasingly secularized government to uphold moral codes in education. On the positive side, however, may consider deeply the contents of Islamic texts and the overall Islamic worldview as it presents Christianity as an alternative. An 8th century example was John of Damascus, and a contemporary example is Father Zacharia Botros with his exposing of Islam. Does Accad recommend only the kerygmatic approach? Whereas tackling such issues in public is often futile, it can be quite appropriate in conversation with a nondefensive Muslim friend who is genuinely seeking to understand. Finally I find myself leaning toward D2 in conversation with Muslim religious leaders, and more toward D4 in conversation with less prominent Muslims Accad, pp. He sees the weaknesses of the sociological approach which has begun to dominate mission theory. He knows how to use different approaches in different situations, and is able to differentiate between different Muslims and does not see them as a monolithic block. Here is a sample: In interacting with Muslims, the best methods are: As much as Accad subscribes to the power of the Word of God spoken, he does not seem to connect the fact that this Word also has the power to destroy anything set up against the rule of Christ. Case in point was Elijah with the Baal prophets. This did not lead to singing Kumbuya with them. Another time was Paul exposing the religious longings of the Athenians as leading to idolatry. He called people to repentance. It seems that Accad might think that this would happen automatically. For instance, if the objective is to avoid all offense, to remove any actual proclamation of the exclusiveness of Christ while showing respect, is this actually a fundamental disrespect for the King of Kings, under the rubric of congenial relations with humans? Jesus did not necessarily show mutual respect, love and humility of the soft-soled shoe, tender voice variety as he challenges the mercenary temple sellers' religious as they were. Paul did not first of all think about mutual respect' even though he knew his place' as he put the profligate Festus against the wall with talk of judgement. As much as there is some superficial truth here, I think that his starting point is wrong and logically so are the consequential steps. This is sheer humanism and resultantly cuts the optimism of his kerygmatic approach down to size. This informed his attitude towards the Athenians, and formed the basis for his approach. He spoke as a bold ambassador for His Majesty and the outcome was not his problem. Unfortunately Accad seems to be using some of the slippery stuff that those prone to syncretism like to use. Sure Muhammad might have been sincere and nice to use Arabic. His message, subverted, rather than supplied the essential elements of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures. Abraham was his model ancestor, Jesus functioned as his John the Baptist, and Mary was employed to mirror his miraculous reception of the word of Allah and her rejection and vindication were his as well. This raises an important issue. Paul at the Areopagus certainly did employ the Greek poets Aratus and Epimenides. But to what purpose? Accad would likely say to build bridges of respect. Paul actually used them strategically to explode their bridges to the gods of their own imagination. Yes, he used language they understood, but the end goal is what is important here. This is the Kerygma. Accad has provided an analytical tool, but his social science orientation has dulled the power of the very Kerygma he advocates. Essays in Honor of J. William Carey Library, , pp.

*Accad says: " Your view of Islam will affect your attitude to www.nxgvision.com attitude will, in turn influence your approach to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that approach will affect the ultimate outcome of your presence as a witness among Muslims."*

President George Bush was faced with an international crisis that he felt warranted an immediate and decisive military response. Under the direction of Saddam Hussein, Iraq invaded the small, bordering nation of Kuwait. The threat of destabilization in this oil-rich region prompted President Bush to dispatch thousands of troops into Saudi Arabia, which began Operation Desert Shield. In early , U. During this conflict, which potentially threatened global peace, millions in the U. Technology and dauntless reporters kept us abreast of practically every frightening clash between Iraqi and allied forces. With the increasing awareness of our global society, and with the worldwide proliferation of this religion, it is important for Christians to understand and respond to Islam. The immensity of the subject and space restrictions preclude an exhaustive treatment of these points. Hence, only a broad survey of the origin and contours of Islamic thought and practices will be presented. Muhammed, Mohammed , who was born c. The early orphaned Muhammad was reared by his grandfather and uncle who, though disputed by some Western scholars, appear to have been prominent members of the Qurayah tribe. This Arabian clan was the guardian of the Kaabah var. According to Arabian tradition, the black stone fell from heaven in the time of Adam, a possible indication that it was a meteorite that landed in the sands of Arabia Humble, , 4: Muslims believe that, on his pilgrimage to Mecca with Ishmael, Abraham built the Kaabah and positioned the meteorite within its walls. Khadija was so impressed with his dependable and conscientious service that she married Muhammad, provided him with wealth and success, and encouraged his religious inclinations. During this process, Muhammad developed a passionate monotheistic belief, and became extremely frustrated with the polytheism and superstitions of his fellow Arabs. His first alleged encounter with the heavenly messenger was quite violent. While Muhammad was in a deep trance, Gabriel appeared to him and, either by choking or some other life-threatening gesture, forced Muhammad into submission. Since the encounter was both violent and accompanied by convulsions that sent him into an unconscious trance, Muhammad at first was unsure of the source of his vision. He feared that he possessed one of the jinn demons commonly believed to inhabit Arab poets and soothsayers Anderson, , p. Khadija and others, however, assured Muhammad of the divine source of his visions. Since, as many Muslims argue, Muhammad was illiterate, he did not record these revelations personally. Koran , though many passages were preserved only in the memory of his followers and were committed to writing after his death Shorrosh, , p. By emphasizing the resurrection of the dead, and the subsequent judgment of God, he challenged the populace to submit to the One Allah true God, and to show compassion to the poor. As might be expected, Muhammad met with considerable opposition, and succeeded in making only a few converts. Due to the increasingly aggressive hostility directed against him by the traders at Mecca, Muhammad and his small band of followers fled from Mecca to Medina on July 16, Reflecting this point of origin, the Islamic calendar is calibrated to the Hijra. According to Islamic chronology, for example, A. Unlike his experience in Mecca, where he was rejected as an eccentric purveyor of an unpopular and unprofitable religion, Muhammad enjoyed greater success in Medina. He particularly was disappointed at his lack of reception among the Jewish population. The Return to Mecca Once his relationship with the Jews was severed, Muhammad no longer looked to Jerusalem, but refocused on Mecca as the center of the Islamic religion. Enlisting the help of nomadic Arab tribes, Muhammad led a series of armed raids on Mecca, and in A. Mecca quickly was purged of all its polytheistic symbols, and the Kaabah became the focal point of the religion of the one true God. Before his death in A. Naming such an individual proved to be a difficult and divisive task. Along with other issues of interpretation, the role of, and criteria for appointing, the Caliph eventually fragmented Islam into two major divisions that remain today: The Sunnis derive their name from this emphasis on the sunna. While there are subdivisions of this group, distinguished by specific points of interpretation, they all call themselves Sunni. They believe, however, that the ayatollahs senior experts in Islamic law have access to the hidden imam, and thus, have the

right to interpret Islamic law and make religious rulings Kerr, , p. Sufis Though more a movement within, rather than a sect of, Islam, a third identifiable group that should be mentioned is the Sufis. Reacting to the externally oriented, and legalistic disposition of the Islamic religious system, Sufis seek a mystical experience of God. Though there are differences of opinion surrounding their application, six articles of faith form the core of the Islamic religion. As indicated earlier, pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. Worshiping or attributing deity to any other being is considered by Muslims to be shirk, or blasphemy. Muslims believe in a well-structured organization of angelic beings. At the lowest level in the hierarchy of spirit beings in Islamic thought are the jinn, who are capable both of committing good and evil deeds, and of inhabiting human beings. After his first frightening encounter with Gabriel, Muhammad feared that he was possessed by one of these potentially fiendish beings. The angels of God are above the jinn in rank. In Islamic angelology, each Muslim is accompanied by two angels—one on the right, the other on the left. This angelic pair is responsible for recording the good and evil deeds of the Muslim, respectively. Chief among these Islamic sacred texts are: Muslims believe that there has been a long succession of prophets through whom Allah revealed his will. While there is no consensus regarding the exact number of prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus are considered the five prophetic predecessors to Muhammad. Similar to elements of Christian eschatology, Muslims believe in a general resurrection of humankind, followed by a final judgment. In this connection, human works are central. How successful a Muslim was at keeping the mandates of Islamic law determines his or her eternal fate. Those who have accomplished more good deeds than bad will be admitted into paradise, a place abounding with sensual pleasures e. Those who are deficient in good deeds will be consigned to hell in which, among other excruciating torments, they will be attired in fiery garments sura Though not a mandatory doctrine, most Muslims accept a rigid form of predestination reflected in the comment made by the devout: The creed kalima or shahada. This is the first duty of every Muslim, for it is necessary to recite this creed before at least two witnesses to become a Muslim. And, the faithful Muslim will repeat this creed constantly. Muslims, regardless of their social or economic status, submit to a rigorous daily regimen of prayer. They recite prescribed prayers together with the appropriate action of placing the forehead to the ground. Regardless of their geographic location, the faithful Muslim will face toward Mecca and perform this prayer ritual at the appropriate intervals. It is further incumbent on all adult male Muslims to gather each Friday at noon for community prayer, and to hear a weekly sermon. Almsgiving zakat and sadaqa. Orphaned himself at a young age, Muhammad was very sensitive to the plight of the destitute. Almsgiving is divided into two broad categories. The zakat are the legal alms, which require that Muslims allocate 2. Different percentages are assigned to agricultural produce and cattle. The sadaqa are free-will offerings that are above and beyond the legally binding proportion of almsgiving. During the month of Ramadan the ninth lunar month of the Islamic year , all healthy, adult Muslims except pregnant women, nursing mothers, and travelers are required to abstain from food, liquids, and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. There are both historical and theological reasons for Ramadan. Historically, Muslims believe that during the ninth lunar month, Muhammad received the first revelations from God and that during this same month, he and his followers made their historic escape from Mecca to Medina. Every Muslim is expected to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his or her lifetime. Since the rituals involved in the pilgrimage are physically demanding, the old or infirm can perform this duty by proxy. The Hajj serves to solidify Islamic faith, and to promote the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims Rood, ; McDowell, , p. The Holy War jihad. Though not a part of the Five Pillars, the jihad is a duty usually associated with them. Extremists interpret jihad as literal warfare against non-Muslims, and believe that Muslims who die in a holy war are assured of a place in paradise. In addition to these basic beliefs and practices, Muslims are guided by numerous laws and traditions contained in the hadith. The State, Law, and Religion: Rood, Rick , What Is Islam? This document may be copied, on the condition that it will not be republished in print unless otherwise stated below, and will not be used for any commercial purpose, as long as the following stipulations are observed: Further, documents may not be copied without source statements title, author, journal title , and the address of the publisher and owner of rights, as listed below. For catalog, samples, or further information, contact:

**Chapter 7 : The Christian Approach to Islam**

*A Christian Approach To Islam. Part I. by Garry K. Brantley, M.A., www.nxgvision.com In , U.S. President George Bush was faced with an international crisis that he felt warranted.*

More to be Desired than Gold, J. Christy Wilson Afghanistan, Iran, etc. Know of something that should be added here? Where is Islam found? Islam has spread across the entire globe. The rest are scattered through the world. When did Islam begin, and who founded it? Islam was founded in A. His people were worshipping multiple gods. Just as Christians have the Bible, Muslims have the Quran. They believe the Quran was dictated to Mohammed by God through the angel Gabriel. Muslims are also told in the Quran to read three other holy books: Where do they meet? Muslims around the world gather on Fridays in mosques. Mosques are buildings where men and sometimes women, depending upon the country pray to God. In a mosque during prayer time, all Muslims face toward Mecca, the birthplace of Islam, where Mohammed had his vision. Where men and women pray together, usually the men are in the front and women in the back. What do Muslims believe in? Alpha Books, , p. Muslims also believe in Satan and in a Day of Judgment on which God will send people to either heaven or hell. They also believe that Ishmael the father of the Arab world , not Isaac, received the promise from God through Abraham; this helps to explain why Arab Muslims feel that their claim to the Holy Land is a God-given right. Is it true that Islam is a lot like Christianity? Although the two religions share some terminology and even some theology monotheism, for instance , Islam is fundamentally different from Christianity. Islam is a works-oriented religion, while Christian faith is based on salvation by grace through faith as a result of the shed blood of Christ. All Muslims believe Jesus was born of a virgin and that he was a great prophet—yet he was only a man. They believe he was sent by God to help people obey God. Islam claims Jesus spoke as a baby, healed the sick, and raised the dead. Most Muslims do not think Jesus died on the cross see the Quran Sura 4: This text says that Allah took Jesus to heaven and that Jesus was not crucified or killed. Based on this text, most Muslims believe that someone else probably Judas replaced him on the cross. Some assume that God changed his appearance to match Christ. However, this false gospel book is not part of Scripture and is apparently a 16th century forgery. Muslims trust that Jesus will return to the Earth again to usher in the final judgment from God and confirm that Islam is the true and final religion for all mankind. Yes, Muslims believe in the second coming of Christ! This article is also available in: French , Indonesian , Portuguese For Christians: Indonesian , Portuguese , Spanish Recommended Web site: Muslims want the truth, and Isa al Masih. Various teachers who love Muslims team together to give the answers to the questions Muslims ask. Learn about Isa al Masih Jesus , the Holy Scriptures, proofs from archaeology, creation, and more! How do Muslims think they are saved? As a works-oriented religion, Islam requires that its adherents earn their way to heaven by performing the five pillars of the faith. Say the confession of faith. Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day: Muslims are to give about 2. For one lunar month, from sunrise to sunset, Muslims are not to allow anything to pass down their throat. Theoretically, a good Muslim would even spit out his or her saliva. Then from sunset to sunrise, they are permitted to eat as little or as much as they want. This is their way of developing discipline and relating to the poor. Travelers, young children and pregnant or nursing mothers do not need to keep the fast. Make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Every Muslim who is financially able is supposed to travel to the birthplace of Islam once in his or her lifetime. But do Muslims have any guarantee of salvation? Muslims have no guarantee of being saved. They believe that all their works will be accounted for and that on Judgment Day, if your bad works outweigh your good works, you are going to go to hell. Since God is all-powerful, they concede that He may do with you as He pleases, even if you have been very righteous. A third possibility is that you could go to hell and burn your sins off for a while and then be allowed into heaven. Yes, Islam is growing at an annual rate of about 3 percent. In Muslims comprised about This growth is largely due to biological expansion; Muslims usually have large families. Yes, Islam varies greatly around the world. The difference between these two major sects is that they disagree about the legitimate successors of Mohammed. The remaining 5 percent are affiliated with other, minor sects. Are all Muslims radicals? They know enough to call themselves Muslims, but basically they are materialistic, want a

good job, and hope to live a good comfortable life.

Chapter 8 : Comparative religion - Wikipedia

*Abdu Murray is North American director for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, an evangelical outreach group. But for most of his life Murray was a proud Muslim who studied the Quran and Islam diligently.*

In both cultures, the virtue of fair and honest trade was always highly coveted. Christian views were originally very harsh and critical against merchants, though over time they recognized the importance of trade to the economy, and accepted it as long as it was an honorable transaction. On the other hand, Muslims always accepted trade as long as both the merchant and consumer were both honest. The missing voice in the documents is both Muslim and Christian middle class. Having the view of an average class person would have helped me answer the question, more completely. The document can be classified into two groups. In both documents the fate of merchants, after death were very strong. The early Christian view was that no rich man could enter heaven doc 1. The muslim view was quite the contrary. D state that if two parties both are truthful, their deal with be blessed. They are implying that not only the seller has to be honest, but the buyer as well. The Muslim views change in the fourteenth century. They now regarded merchants seeking higher profits as expected. Even though tricks to gain more money was expected, cheating was still frowned upon. Muslims belief also implies that buyers have to be fair, for example one person can not buy up all the product. At first A. D , rich men such as merchants were highly shunned, and it was believed that rich men could not get into heaven. Centuries later , it was believed that becoming a merchant was a choice set in stone. However, it was seen that merchants who later used their wealth for charity and food and who devoted their life to God were seen to be washed of their sins. It was said that if the wealthy spent some of their money, and bought from poorer people, they were also buying prayers for their soul. Choose Type of service.

**Chapter 9 : The Biblical Approach to Muslims**

*If the Christians approach you seeking the help and assistance of the Muslims in order to repair their churches and their convents or to arrange matters pertaining to their affairs and religion, these must.*

Copyright c by Abdu H. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P. In the years of my life when I followed Islam, two special Arabic words were so important that they almost appeared to take on a physical form when spoken. When the resonant voice of the muezzin said the words in the not-quite-musical, not-quite-atonal call to prayer, the words seemed to hang in the air like smoky vapors in the serpentine Arabic script. Upon hearing the words, Muslims who take their devotions seriously stop what they are doing, look toward the sound, rise and begin washing themselves for the ritual prayer. To me, the sound of those words was haunting and inspiring. Many Westerners have heard these words uttered, especially since September 11, What was once unheard to Western ears has now become familiar. Perhaps there is no religious verbal expression that creates such opposite reactions. For many non-Muslims, the words have become associated with violence and acts of terrorism, shouted by robed men with long, straggly beards who shoot bullets in the air to proclaim their intentions to dominate the West. And save for a few exceptions, the media has not worked hard to disabuse us of the association. It is true that some Muslims use those words as a battle cry. But for many other Muslims, the words have a far different association. They do not inspire dread, fear, rage or violence. For most but not all Muslims, the words inspire reverence, awe and humility. Many Muslims I know and love use the words to express delight when surprised by a pleasant turn of events. And when told of bad news, perhaps that they or a loved one are facing a grave illness, they say Allahu Akbar as a declaration that God is greater than their daunting circumstances. So to most Muslims, the Takbir, the proclamation that God is greater, is both an expression of praise and a short prayer. Those words express the most elemental beliefs of every Muslim, not just that God is great but that he is greater—“he is greater than anything we can conceive. He is the Greatest Possible Being. But to the Muslim mind, the Islamic version of monotheism is what distinguishes it from all other such faiths. In Islam, God is an absolute oneness in his nature and in his personhood. His mind, will and actions have no separation or differentiation. This is the purest form of monotheism, i. Islam teaches this in the most unequivocal terms. God is one and only one, and that oneness is an element of his majesty. As one Muslim scholar puts it: His Arabic name is Allah. He is the First and the Last. He is unique and nothing resembles Him in any respect. He is One and The One. He is self-sustained, does not need anything but everything needs Him. He is Allah, the One, the Only. The Eternal, the Absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him. It declares that God is an absolute, un- differentiated unity. And it declares that God, in his unity, is utterly independent of anything; he is self-subsisting and self-sufficient. But Takbir is the foundation for all of this: The unequalled greatness of Allah becomes the linchpin of all further considerations of his nature. Anything that could conceivably be construed as detracting from his greatness must be considered to be false, or even offensive. Shirk means to conjoin Allah with any of his creatures, to ascribe a partner to him, or to understand him to possess limitations that are characteristic of his creatures but not of him. These names are meant to approximate in the mind of the believer who God is and what he does. High is He above the partners they attribute to Him. To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. To recite a list of his great attributes is tantamount to achieving everlasting life in paradise. For the devout Muslim, even to say the word for God in Arabic—“Allah—“requires reverence and ritual. For Muslims, God is above everything we can think about him, and Muslims are reminded of that every time they say the Arabic word for God. Islamic classical theology holds that God is so great that it is impossible for the human heart and mind to grasp anything about him beyond the superficial. This makes it impossible to have a relationship with him. Although God is personal in that he is conscious and expresses a will, no one can know his personality to any meaningful degree. In that way, we can know about God. But in no real sense can we know God. This fact may trouble some Muslims who feel that they have a relationship with God to some degree. In Christianity, God is transcendent and above humanity in infinite ways that make it impossible to ever know him in an exhaustive sense. So great, so incomprehensible is God that should

anyone see God in his full glory, he would die, because the infinite glory is simply too much for the finite mind to grasp Exodus For Christians, this gives a picture of our existence in heaven, where we will have eternity to learn new things about the infinitely searchable God. That never-ending exploration of the divine fulfills the very purpose of our existence. But there will be more on that later. In orthodox Islam, however, God does not condescend so that we can encounter him personally. Duncan Black McDonald sums it up well: This is one of the most fundamental and characteristic points in Muslim theology. Though in Islam God is a personal being, he is not worshiped and obeyed with any personal interaction. He is more of a will to be followed, a master to serve. In Islam, law is more central, broadly speaking, than theology, and knowledge of the divine will and our obedience more crucial than knowledge of the divine nature and our experience. They pray at specified times of the day five, to be exact. And they perform those prayers ritualistically, prostrating, kneeling and bowing a certain number of times, placing their hands in certain places when they say certain phrases. Even the content of their words is prescribed with limited room for deviation. There is an interesting fact about Islamic prayer that harkens back to the Mosaic laws of physical purification and uncleanness. Muslims must cleanse themselves in a specifically prescribed manner before praying and submitting to God. In a way, the humility is admirable. But there is a strange paradox that diminishes the worship experience, is there not? A person is penitent before God and humble in supplication because he recognizes his uncleanness—a state that only God can fix. Yet in Islam, Muslims bear the responsibility of cleaning themselves up to approach the great God, even in a state of abject humility. In the Old Testament, the faithful had to purify themselves before they could come to God to sacrifice animals to atone for sin. But those purification laws served to foreshadow a time when God himself would provide a lasting sacrifice that would wash sin away. Now the follower of Christ enjoying the grace of the new covenant comes to prayer realizing her sullied state and realizing that God makes her clean spiritually rather than physically. When accused of irreverence for not washing his hands before a meal, Jesus responded that the physical does not defile the spiritual. Rather, it is the other way around Matthew Greatness Incarnate Jesus and the religious authorities of his day clashed quite often. John the apostle records a particularly noisy incident in which Jesus faces off with the Pharisees in the temple treasury. The ubiquitous Pharisees pounce on his claim, chiding his testimony as self-serving. The noise increases as Jesus gets bolder. And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be? Finally, the Jews see where this is going. Jesus responds with a trumpet blast: His accusers are incensed. They pick up stones to kill him for the blasphemy. They understand that Jesus is equating himself with deity—and not just any deity, mind you. He claims to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed, Jesus was claiming to be greater than Abraham. He was claiming to be the incarnation of the Greatest Possible Being. Muslims deny that Jesus ever claimed to be God. Those exact words do not exist in the ink of holy writ. And in John 8: He claims to be the God. A careful reading of the Synoptic Gospels, from Mark to Luke, shows that this is just not the case.