

August 12–21, 2007; Christ Church, Oxford
Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., Ph.D.
Professor of World Christianity
Asbury Seminary
Florida Campus

Theme of the Institute:

"TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE, OUR CALLING TO FULFILL"

Ecclesiology, Mission, and Vocation

Working Group

"Ecumenism and Other Faiths"

Islam and the Church, Any Hope for the Future?

Introduction and Outline:

I've been to the Middle East twice in the past year. Islam looms larger and larger both there and around the world. What do we as Christians think about Islam? What about the Qur'an? Can we as Christians understand the Muslim mindset? Where is the common ground? Can Muslims be reached for the Church of Jesus Christ? I read the Qur'an through at least once or twice a year and I honestly believe that in our attempts to reach the peoples of the world, if Muslims do what they do best and Christians do what they do best, Christians will win every time. Hamas (militant Islamists) won in the Palestinian Authority Election because they were the only ones caring for the people, feeding the hungry and educating the poor. We are told that the more moderate PLO (Fatah) was too busy stuffing its pockets with American money. What does that say to the Church of Jesus Christ?

- I. A Brief History of Islam.
- II. Muslim Ethos and Theology in Capsule.
- III. Areas of compatibility.
- IV. Areas of incompatibility.
- V. Rules of Engagement.
- VI. Is There Hope for the Future?



I. A Brief History of Islam:

Islam (as religions go) is a fairly late phenomenon. Hinduism dates to c. 3000 BC (the oldest of the so-called high religions).¹ Judaism dates to c. 2000. Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism date to c. 590 to 520 BC (roughly the 70 years of the Babylonian Exile). Islam then follows Christianity by some 600 years.

Muhammad (c. 570-632).

Muhammad was born in Mecca (Saudi Arabia). Deeply and sincerely religious, Muhammad knew a great deal about Judaism, something of Christianity, and was influenced by them both. By 610—through reported revelations from visions with the angel Gabriel—he believed himself to be the “mouthpiece of God.” The words received were then to be conveyed to the people. These messages, or revelations, were later collected in what Muslims call the Holy *Qur’an*. So, Islam—meaning submission—was founded. The followers, Muslims—meaning those who submit—believe that God—Allah—is one. Related to the Hebrew *El*, the greatest sin is to ascribe partners—*shirk*—to God.² Although some first believed that Islam was a Christian sect—or heresy—it soon became apparent that when *shirk* was applied to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Christians became the fundamental enemy. Islam’s understanding of Allah places great emphasis on God’s transcendence—thus the section in the *Qur’an*, “The Transcendent God of Islam.” The gulf between God and creation is too great to be bridged. Jesus, for example, was a prophet, but Muhammad emphatically denied that God could have a son. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God’s son incarnate—

¹ A “high” religion is a religion that has trans-cultural significance.

² Like the Hebrew Yahweh, Allah cannot be pluralized.

closing that gap—Muslims believe that Muhammad’s words were a fresh revelation, in effect, superseding such beliefs.

According to the *Qur’an*, Allah sent 124,000 prophets including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.³ Muslims believe that Muhammad was the last of these prophets and served as their seal.

The Five Pillars of Islam.

Islam’s understanding of truth consists of two fundamental affirmations: “I bear witness that there is no God but God; I bear witness that Muhammad is the Apostle—Prophet—of God.” The confession of these two affirmations (*Shahada*) is the first of the *Five Pillars of Islam*. The remaining four are: prayer five times a day (*Salat*)—preceded by ritual washing and facing Mecca; alms to the poor (*Zakat*)—especially during festivals and the Sabbath (sunset on Thursday to sunset on Friday); fasting (*Sawm*) in the month of Ramadan; a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*)—at least once in one’s lifetime. In addition, an optional sixth can be added, the holy war or *jihad*—meaning, “striving.”

Sources of Authority.

Apart from the *Qur’an*, the second most important source of authority is the *Sunna*—meaning, “trodden path.” The *Sunna* consists of the words and actions of Muhammad as recorded in the traditions of Hadith. A third source of authority, the *Shari’a*—meaning “the path”—is drawn from the *Qur’an* and the *Sunna*. The *Shari’a* is the body of law for the Muslim community. This community is of critical importance. Muslims will generally help each other in a crisis. They take pride in a lack of discrimination in this community, and thus, are growing among peoples who have experienced discrimination—especially from Christians. This is, no doubt, the reason for the rapid growth of Islam among African-Americans in North America. Again, it is interesting to note that Muslims growth in the United States has been the highest in 30 years—43,000—since the attacks on September 11, 2001 (most of that growth was in the first nine months).

Major Divisions.

There are two major divisions within Islam, *Shi’ite* and *Sunnis*. Let me explain the difference. During the Umayyad Caliphate Dynasty the capital for the Umayyad Dynasty was moved from Baghdad to Damascus—where it remained for the next 90 years (661-750). During that time the *Sunnis* split—an argument over the succession to Muhammad—into *Sunnis* and *Shi’ites*. *Sunnis* still comprised the large majority and today are predominant in Africa, India, Pakistan and Indonesia. They are led by community consensus—*ijma’*—and accept the first four caliphs as the legitimate successors to Muhammad. The *Shi’ites*—or *Shi’a*—tend to look more to a specific spiritual leader or imam who is viewed as God’s representative on earth. They consider

³ Muslims sometimes refer to Adam, Abraham (the middle prophet) and Muhammad as the three major prophets.

Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, to be the first Imam. Unlike the *Sunnis*, the Shi'ites have an institutionalized clergy who exercise great authority—note the power of the Ayatollah Khomeini and the present leaders in Iran. Today the *Shi'ites* are predominant in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, and Azerbaijan. Then, when the Abbasid Dynasty replaced the Umayyad Dynasty and the capital was moved back to Baghdad, the *Shi'ites* split again, this time into Zaidis and Ismailis. Since the differences there are more political than religious, let me mention just one other group—the *Sufis*.

Sufism—*Sufi* means “mystic,”—is a mystical movement that began during the same period (c. 750).⁴ In contrast to the more fundamental branches of Islam where Allah is far removed, these Muslim ascetics sought direct personal contact with God. Interestingly, with the present day rise of Islamic fundamentalism, these mystics are becoming more and more difficult to identify.

Muslim Advances.

We now turn to a brief history of the Muslim advances. History teaches that the disintegration of the Roman Empire had seemingly been halted by the successes of Justinian. Not for long. Muhammad, though a mystic, was intensely practical and active.⁵ The elite of Mecca, however, took no more kindly to Muhammad than the elite of Jerusalem had taken to Jesus. Muslims reckon the beginning of the “Moslem Era” from July 16, 622, the date of Muhammad's flight—*hijira*—to Medina. In Medina he made some attempts to identify with the Jews, but in spite of common bonds—Abraham appears in 25 of the *suras* in the *Qur'an* as “Ibrahim”—the Jews refused his authority and Muhammad then turned the direction of Islamic prayer from Jerusalem to the still pagan temple of Mecca. With a harem of nine wives—becoming the elderly son-in-law of Abu Bakr and Omar, the first two caliphs to succeed him as God's supreme commander on earth—Muhammad was both father-in-law and cousin to the fourth, Ali. He bound his followers to himself and to each other by the closest possible ties. In December 623, Muhammad, with a band of 300, attacked a force of a thousand Meccans at a place called Badr. The *Qur'an* refers to it as the “Day of Deliverance.” This gave him control of the Red Sea from Jeddah to Yanbo. Within half a decade, the band of 300 had grown into an army of 30,000. Mecca fell to him in 629 and became the religious center of Islam—though the political power remained in Medina. It was now time to declare to the Arabs that God had completed a new religion that was destined to rule the world. At his death in 632, his followers controlled Arabia and his successor, Abu Bakr, was embarking on campaigns against Persians and Romans.

The questions now follows, how were these Muslims—before the ink had dried on the first copies of the *Qur'an*—able to sweep across Arabia, Palestine, Syria, and northern Africa in the East? How is it that Islam—like some gigantic earthwork—managed to divert the mainstream of Christendom to the dark recesses of barbaric Europe in the West? There are several reasons.

⁴ *Sufi* is from the word, *suf*, for “wool,” what the early Muslim ascetics wore.

⁵ A contemporary describes Muhammad as having “a large head, large eyes, heavy eyelashes, reddish tint in the eyes, thick-bearded, broad-shouldered, with thick hands and feet.” He was probably illiterate. *Encyclopedia Britannica* XV, p. 649.

The most important, it was entirely unexpected. Few imagined that what was thought of as religious wrangling in the East could give birth to such military power. Admittedly, the eastern Roman Empire was concerned with the Persians, but had fought them to a standstill—Jerusalem had been retaken. Little did they realize that they were now vulnerable to Arabs, who earlier were so dissipated by tribal feuds that they were capable of little more than an occasional *razzia*—the swift Bedouin raid. Who could predict that Muhammad and his new creed could unite these Arabs into a disciplined force that turned monks at night into soldiers by day, determined to take the world for Allah?

II. Muslim Ethos and Theology in capsule:

While there are areas where we share much in common with Islam, and there is much to be admired, there are also areas of incompatibility.

The *Qur'an* interprets the Old Testament.

Basically the *Qur'an*, like our New Testament, or the Jewish Mishnah and Talmud (or the Book of Mormon for that matter), is an interpretation of the Old Testament. If you do not understand the Old Testament you will never understand any of these texts.

A Growing Threat?

Many Christians find pause in the fact that hundreds of millions of perfectly wonderful peoples are faithful followers of other religions. Most of the time our questions are more philosophical. Who am I to say? These peoples are far removed. Most Hindus live in India. Most Buddhists live in Southeast Asia. Except for the lonely missionary in some far away land, rarely do we come head to head.

Now, however, things are different. Islam has brought some of the issues to the doorstep of Christendom. The photo at the head of the chapter (though not necessarily typical of Islam) was taken in London. How does Christianity compare with Islam? What about the authority of the Bible? How do we agree, or disagree, on the big questions of life and death?

If you want to make the August 1998 near-simultaneous attacks on the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam or the September 2001 destruction in the U.S., or the July 2005 bombings in London worse than they already are, just keep on believing that Babylon is still in Iraq. It is not. It moved west. Throughout the Old Testament the nation Israel was supposed to destroy the Asherah poles, those pagan totems that dotted the landscape in times of idolatry. One day it occurred to me that if you cut those poles down, burn them, bury the ashes and then leave them in the ground long enough, *they turn to oil*. We simply have different pagan gods. It concerns me that the U.S. has an oily tail wagging an oily dog. Other countries are not far behind. Since most of the oil is in the hands of the Muslim world, we had better learn how to get along.

The Muslim need for revenge:

It has been mentioned that many Muslims add an optional sixth pillar to their basic tenets of belief, the holy war or *jihad*. Remember that much of Islam must endure the desert and if you do not understand the desert you will never understand the *Qur'an* and its images of heaven as wonderfully green and replete with water (Surah 18:31 et.al.). Furthermore, life in the desert is always a struggle. One must strive to survive. Again, *jihad* is the Arabic word for striving. As Christians we need to take all of this into consideration.

If I had to name only a few of the driving forces that threaten people in this generation one would have to be our need to forgive. I've seen condemnation affect our attitudes toward God and our neighbors, not only when we fail to receive forgiveness, but when we fail to offer forgiveness. Many of us carry deep seeded resentments. They control us at every level of our lives. William Faulkner once said, "The past is never dead, it's not even past." I know a woman who was terribly abused by her now dead father. "How can I forgive someone already in the grave? He still controls my life."

How can any of us overcome such things? We live in a world where an "eye for an eye" seems to rule. Many of my Muslim friends have a need for revenge that never goes away until retribution is complete (Surah 2:194).⁶ The Bible says, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom. 12:19). Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit enables you to release such resentment so that you can get on with your life.

Just in the past week a Muslim friend reacted to my question about his need for revenge. I had just read an article sent to me from former students in the Indonesian province of Suwalesi.⁷ I had taught there some years ago. Although that province is evenly divided between Muslims and Christians, three Christian girls had just been beheaded. The Muslim suspect told the judge, "We are not cold-blooded killers.... We just wanted revenge." He then apologized to the girls' parents as if they were not to take it personally. "Family and friends are honor-bound to take revenge." I wondered aloud, "What if revenge goes on and on, until eventually no one can remember the original offense. Revenge is taken against those taking revenge and then revenge against them in turn. The cycle never seems to end."

My Muslim friend simply said, "It's about war and that's what *jihad* is all about. I could show you dozens of statements about war in your own Bible." I said, "The Old Testament speaks about war but the *Qur'an* is an interpretation of the Old Testament just as our New Testament is an interpretation of the Old Testament. You can never make a case for war (let alone revenge) from the mouth of Jesus. Jesus interprets the Old Testament in an entirely different way from Muhammad. Muhammad calls for war,

⁶ The *Qur'an* speaks of the Law of *Qisas* or retaliation. Surah 2:194 reads, "All sacred things are (under the law) retaliation; whoever acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you..." (Translated by M.H. Shakir, Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, Inc.). All subsequent quotations from the *Qur'an* are from this same translation.

⁷ Indonesia (presently the world's fourth most populated country) has the world's largest Muslim population.

'those who disbelieve, strike off their heads' (Surah VIII, 12-16); Jesus calls for peace, 'love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Matt. 5:44). Can you help me understand that? It seems to me that we may both be wrong, but we cannot both be right. We disagree." He shrugged and walked away.

Leon Uris' *The Haj* describes a chilling conversation between the leader of a Muslim village overlooking a Jewish kibbutz across the road between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (wars have been fought over this road). The Muslim leader's name is Ibrahim (what else) and the Jewish leader's name is Gideon (what else). At one point in the story Ibrahim confesses that Gideon is his worst enemy, but his only friend. Then this exchange ensues, beginning with Ibrahim,

"During the summer heat my people become frazzled. They worry about the autumn harvest. They are drained. They are pent up. They must explode. Nothing directs their frustration like Islam. Hatred is holy in this part of the world. It is also eternal. If they become inflamed, I am but a muktar. I cannot stand against a tide. You see, Gideon, that is why you are fooling yourselves. You do not know how to deal with us. For years, decades, we may seem to be at peace with you, but always in the back of our minds we keep up the hope of vengeance. No dispute is ever really settled in our world. The Jews give us a special reason to continue warring."

"Do we deal with the Arabs by thinking like Arabs ourselves?" Gideon mused...

"Aha!" Ibrahim said. "That proves you are weak and that will be your downfall. You are crazy to extend us a mercy that you will never receive in return."

"The Jews have asked for mercy a million times in a hundred lands. How can we now deny mercy to others who ask it from us?"

"Because this is not a land of mercy. Magnanimity has no part in our world. You Jews have come in and destroyed a system of order we created out of the desert. Perhaps the bazaar looks disorganized to you, but it works for us. Perhaps Islam looks fanatical to you, but it provides us with the means to survive the harshness of this life and prepares us for a better life hereafter."⁸

Some Added Perspective on Islam.

Last year I was on a panel in Chicago with Christians and Muslims. Since the intent was to encourage interfaith dialogue I came looking for ways of affirming what is good in Islam--**their faithfulness in prayer, their commitment to the poor, their level of fidelity in marriage, their sobriety.** These virtues would challenge any Christian. So, when my Muslim friend said that the *Qur'an* does not teach violence I did not object, though I could have quoted Surah 5:33,

⁸ Leon Uris, *The Haj*, pp. 60f.

The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His apostle [Mohammad] and strive to make mischief in the land [a most interesting phrase in light of the war in Iraq] is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned, this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement.

In fact, I could have cited dozens of similar passages but I simply listened, UNTIL he asked this question: "Have you read the *Qur'an* lately?" Since I read the *Qur'an* through carefully every year I was about to respond when he added this, "Christians do not have a reliable or authoritative Scripture [like the *Qur'an*]. The Christian Bible has been changed so many times since the King James Version was written in 1611 that no two versions are alike" (he apparently believed that the KJV was our original text and I must admit if that were true it would make some of my fundamentalist friends downright giddy). I said, "Sir, I must tell you that you have been misinformed. We do indeed have a reliable Scripture and since our Canon was established in the fourth century (which I might add predates the *Qur'an* by some hundreds of years) it has never been changed from the original texts."⁹ I then asked, "Where did you hear such a thing?" His reply left me nearly speechless, "From Christian seminary professors and from the books they recommend." These books apparently insisted that the Bible was simply a book of collected sayings, some fine poetry in some instances, but was certainly not believed to be the Word of God in any unique sense. My response was that your taking the word of those particular professors and books would be like me taking the word of Salman Rushdie (*Satanic Verses*).

You must know that I'm no fundamentalist (in fact I tend to make fundamentalists nervous) but may I say that when so-called Christian theologians give Islam reasons to reject the Christian faith and hold more firmly to what I believe to be a misguided (and dangerous) interpretation of the Old Testament (the *Qur'an*), I'm more than a little bit bewildered and disappointed.

III. Areas of compatibility.

We've stated that there are things to admire about Islam: their faithfulness in prayer, their commitment to the poor, their level of fidelity in marriage, their sobriety. We could also have mentioned their complete and utter reverence for Allah (their understanding of the O.T. Yahweh) and the *Qur'an* (in its original Arabic text). We Christians would do well to hold similar reverence for God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and for the Bible as the Word of God. It has been said that you will be heard with authority to the precise degree that you are willing to put your life on the line. Is it true that many Muslims seemingly understand sacrifice better than Christians?

⁹It should be noted that the *Qur'an* also went through the process of establishing a Canon of texts, which Muslims now believe to be authoritative. There is also a doctrine of "Abrogation" that is concerned with the modification of previous teaching contradicted by a new portion of teaching from Allah.

Reinhold Neibur once wrote, "In society the whole is less than the sum of it parts." That's because society tends to look after its own interests first. On the other hand, in the Church, the whole is (or should be) greater than the sum of her parts. That's because Jesus is the head of the Church and if you had to reduce the words of Jesus to one sentence it would have to be this (what I call *the first principle of Christianity*), "Whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk. 8:36), because the only way to be great is to be a servant and the only way to be first is to be last. For Jesus that principle was a constant theme.

I've forgotten who first said, "There is no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit," but that is the mind of Christ. The old adage, "When the team wins, we all eat well," really is true.

I received a letter recently from a friend who wrote that "God is preparing me for something really BIG." I could not help but wonder, what is BIG? How does one give up one's life for Jesus, really BIG? How does one be last, really BIG? How does one be a servant, really BIG? I wonder if my friend wants to be like St. Francis of Assisi or Mother Teresa. Now that's BIG! Read Ephesians 4:2-6,

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Sometimes my Muslim friends understand humility and sacrifice better than some of my Christian friends.

IV. Areas of incompatibility.

According to the *Qur'an*, the 99 names for Allah include divine attributes compatible with Christianity--all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-merciful, all-powerful.¹⁰ Unfortunately that same view leads to an understanding of Allah (except for the occasional Sufi) that is absolutely transcendent, totally other, unknown and unknowable by any of Allah's creation (even in Paradise). Furthermore, Allah is loved but apparently does not love us in any personal way. Allah is aloof and does not reveal his nature, only the divine will. Whereas the Bible insists that humanity was created in God's own image (Gen. 1:27) the *Qur'an* insists that "there is nothing like unto [Allah]" (Surah 42:11).

In spite of this, the *Qur'an's* view of creation is far more optimistic than the Bible's. Critical to any understanding of Islam is their understanding of sin. In effect,

¹⁰ Five key words summarize the Muslim view of Allah. *Takbiir* (making or declaring great), *Tawhiid* (making or declaring one), *Tanziil* (sending down a word from on High), *Taqdiir* (causing to take place), *Tanziih* (making pure or eliminating all anthropomorphisms).

since humans are basically good, there is no innate sin nature (no original sin) and no need for atonement (Surah 20:115-122; 30:30).

The concept of Trinity is incomprehensible for Muslims (Surah 4:171). As mentioned before *shirk* would seemingly attribute partners to God and this is the opposite of *Tawhiid* (the Oneness of Allah). There is a concept of Holy Spirit in Islam but that is always identified with the Archangel *Jibril* (Gabriel) and never with Allah. So you both can talk about the Holy Spirit and mean two totally different things. It is important to avoid words that can be misinterpreted. For example, know what Muslims mean by terms like sin (which is closer to mistake than to a moral transgression of a known law).

Even more important are the different concepts of salvation. Surah 4:122 reads, "But those who believe [in Allah and his Prophet] and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit them to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, to dwell therein forever." Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT) reads, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." Romans 8:1-2 (NIV) reads, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death is simply the law without the Spirit, without the power or the inclination to measure up. On the other hand, the law of the Spirit of life is the same law (Jesus did come to destroy the law but to fulfill the law) but empowered by the Spirit (grace) through faith and trust in Jesus Christ. The difference here is critical. So, how do we communicate?

V. Rules of Engagement.

In any culture, when competing for the hearts of people, if Christians do what they do best (treating people with love and respect, while serving, praying and forgiving), and the world does what it does best (accumulating money, power and status), Christians should win every time. I meet people all the time who make three/four times what I make and after 30 minutes they want to be me. You would love my life. Yet, I'm troubled as an American.

Francis Fitzgerald wrote, "Americans ignore history.... They believe in the future as if it were a religion; they believe that there is nothing they cannot accomplish, that solutions wait somewhere for all problems, like brides."¹¹ Manifest destiny is always putting on new dresses and we Americans are getting deeper and deeper into trouble. Without humility and global perspective it will always be We and They.

All good people agree,
And all good people say,
All nice people, like us, are We
And everyone else is They.
But if you cross over the sea,
Instead of over the way,
You may end by (think of it!)

¹¹ Francis Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake*.

Looking on We as only a sort of They!¹²

I might add, or, "Looking on They as only a sort of We."

So, having established the contrast between Islam and the Christian/Jewish tradition; let me give you some basic principles as rules of engagement.

First, earning credibility and trust, or the right to be heard, requires patience and understanding. Try never to react without asking the question, why? It is always important to understand the other person's point of view. It seems to me that if following the tragedies of 9/11 we Americans had paused just long enough to ask, why, rather than vowing revenge and preparing for war, we might have served the cause of peace and security far better. How can people possibly hate Americans that much? Is it simply a matter of envy or have we offended the rest of the world at some deeper level? Has our insatiable need for things driven the two-thirds world even deeper into poverty? Please don't write this off as liberal tripe. I'm a red blooded American. Democracy seems to work in America. I'm even a capitalist, but it seems to me that democracy and capitalism ought to produce better products and services, not avarice and greed.

Second, attentive listening, means being present and engaged. Francis of Assisi was known to say, "Preach at all times and when necessary use words."¹³ Sometimes we have to be silent to be heard. Many years ago I was sitting next to a woman on a long transcontinental flight. She was reading a current best selling book, *Looking Out for Number One*. Since I had just assigned that book in a class I was teaching, I was curious as to her impression. "Oh, it is one the best books I've ever read. The only way to get ahead is to look out for yourself, *first*. No one else really cares." She then told me that she was a buyer for a large department store in New York City. For some reason I asked, "Are there people work for you?" With some pride she announced that 30 people were directly responsible to her. My next question was nearly the last thing I said for the rest of the flight, "Of the people who are responsible to you, tell me about the ones who subscribe to the philosophy of that book." Over the next several hours she told me about how difficult it was to turn her back on any of them. They were making her life miserable, and she was making their lives miserable. By the time we were ready to land she had concluded that she no longer liked the philosophy of that book (she actually left it on the plane) and no longer wanted to be that kind of a person. I'm telling you the truth, all I did was ask the question and listen.

Third, sometimes prayer can lead to a timely, and sometimes surprising, word. I was sitting on an Elevated train in Chicago with my back to the window facing rows of seats not three feet away. There was no one else in this particular car except for an

¹² Rudyard Kipling, "We and They."

¹³ In the early 13th century Francis of Assisi joined the Fifth Crusade, not as a warrior but as a peacemaker. "Francis was not impressed by the Crusaders, whose sacrilegious brutality horrified him. They were entirely too fond of taunting and abusing their prisoners of war, who were often returned to their families minus nose, lips, ears or eyes." See, *Mysteries of the Middle Ages: The Rise of Feminism, Science and Art From the Cults of Catholic Europe*, by Thomas Cahill.

elderly couple, seated directly in front of me. At the next stop two young women entered the train and took the seat just behind the couple. One of the women was smoking a cigarette. The elderly gentleman simply turned around and said that he was allergic to smoke and since there was a no smoking sign on the window next to her would she mind extinguishing the cigarette. The woman reacted instantly. She blew smoke in the man's face and then, while cursing, slapped him on the back of his head dislodging a rather obvious toupee. When the woman saw the toupee she began laughing, snatched it off his head and began stomping it. At that point the train stopped at the next station. The elderly couple hurried off, pausing only long enough for the man's wife to grab the toupee on their way out.

So, there I was, not three feet from these two women. In a matter of seconds I had watched this abuse unfold in front of me and if I said nothing I would explode. I remember praying, "God give me a word, I cannot sit and remain silent." At that moment the abusive woman looked at me and I heard something come out of my mouth that absolutely astounded me. It felt almost out of body. "You have incredibly beautiful hair" (which she did; it was braided and beaded and seemed to cascade down her back like waterfalls). Instantly her entire countenance changed from a grimacing snarl to a radiant smile, at which point her companion poked her in the ribs saying, "See, see, see how good that makes you feel. Why were you so mean to that old man. Why didn't you say something nice to him so that he could feel good too? You got an attitude girl. You my best friend but you embarrass me." At that the woman hung her head obviously ashamed. Since we then arrived at my stop I nodded at the woman's friend, mouthed the words, "Thank you," and exited being utterly amazed. The woman's friend had said all the things that I had wanted to say, and more. There has to be a moral there somewhere.

Fourth, no one should ever think that you think they are stupid because they disagree with you. I was a boy Ph.D. When I returned to the U.S. after completing that degree abroad I honestly believed that I was the Church's favorite son. This was during the middle '60's and when I was assigned a church in the rural South I soon realized that the most segregated hour of the week was between 11:00 and 12:00 o'clock on Sunday morning. I decided to act. A local radio station was looking for public opinion and offered me a slot. I begged the people of that particular county to integrate their churches. When I walked out of the station they were waiting for me. They did not have on their hoods and gowns but I knew who they were (half of them were members of my church). Before I could open my mouth they dragged me by the tie under an old oak tree and proceeded to beat the "mischief" out of me (to this day I still have lumps on the back of my head and scar tissue on the inside of my lip). I recall that my first reaction was utter confusion. How could they do this to me? I was their pastor. Then, sometime later I realized what I had done. *I had gone into a community with the answers before I knew what the questions were.* I probably had about half of that beating coming. Though my opinions on justice issues have never wavered, I'm now hopefully a whole lot wiser. Even when I'm wrong my wife has a way of disarming me with the occasional compliment. I then spend the rest of my life trying to live up to it.

Fifth, my sphere of influence relates to people I like. The more people I like, the greater my sphere of influence. When I find that I like people I begin to pay closer attention to the opportunities for ministry. Wonderful things are about to happen. Similarly, when I find that I do not like people, I'm in trouble. In the church mentioned

above someone was programmed every Sunday to stand and grumble the moment I "got off text" that they were not going to listen to that bull **** any longer. I cannot tell you how disconcerting that was for a young minister of the gospel.

Once while standing in the pulpit, just before I was to preach, I realized that I really disliked about half the people in the congregation. Suddenly, I simply excused myself saying that I had something I needed to do. I would probably return. At that point I went back into my office, shut myself in the closet, sat on the floor with my head on my knees and prayed, "God I can't do this anymore. I'm not going back out there if you don't give me a love for the people." I cannot adequately explain what happened next. Within moments I sensed God saying, "I give you the same love I will one day give you for your own children." Boom, my life was changed. I felt I did love the people and when I returned to the pulpit, miraculously no one had left. They tell me that was the best sermon I ever preached. My ministry has been different ever since.

VI. Is There Hope for the Future?

It should be fairly obvious that no one wins the war against Islam (especially on the ground). Christians have been battling with crusade vigor for well over a thousand years. Neither will Islam win the war against Christianity. Historically, when Christians are persecuted for being Christian the nail is simply driven deeper. So how do we get along?

First, we determine to do what we do best according to Christian principle, we love and forgive, maybe *one Muslim at a time*.

Second, we feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick and imprisoned. May I remind you again that the radical Hamas (Sunni) won the elections in the Palestinian Authority because they were the ones most effective at feeding the hungry and educating the children?

Third, we learn to get along with other Christians. The greatest threat to Islam is not American bombs. It is war among themselves.¹⁴ The same could be said for Christianity. Let me illustrate.

I was recently in several of the Balkan countries: Croatia, Montenegro, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Slovenia, and Serbia. Those who understand the Slavic peoples know that the conflicts there (especially during the "recent" war of 1991 to 1995) go back literally a thousand years. This was the epicenter of the fight between Christian (eastern) Constantinople and Christian (western) Rome that split the Slavic people into two groups--the Serbs (eastern) and Croats (western). Both speak a similar language and both are basically the same ethnically (albeit with some Turkish intermixing with the Serbs and some German intermixing with the Croats). Slobodan Milosevic's uncle was killed in WW 2 by the Ustashe (the Croat Nazi collaborators under the leadership of the Bosnian Croat, Ante Pavedlic) hence, his hatred for the Croats was established because of the holocaust in his own family (nearly 600,000 Serbs were killed in WW 2, largely by Nazi collaborators). So there are demonic strongholds of ethnic hatred in the Balkans! Furthermore, historically Bosnian Muslims were once Christians who followed a heretic

¹⁴ It should be noted that the Sunni Hamas in the Palestinian Authority was in rare sympathy with the Shi'ite Hezbollah during the 2006 bombings in Lebanon.

named Bogomil and the so-called Bogomil heresy. Both Catholics and Orthodox slaughtered them like sheep; so, it is no surprise that they converted in mass to Islam when the Turks conquered the area in the early part of the 16th century. So, the recent war was not so much between Christians and Muslims (though Christian Serbs and Muslims eventually fought in Bosnia), it was between Christian Serbs and Christian Croats.

Like politicians slamming each other on the eve of an election, we tend to cancel each other out and undermine the people's confidence in the political (or religious) systems altogether. Both Christians and Muslims alike had best learn from the words of Thomas Paine, "If we don't learn to love each other, they will hang us one by one." We tend to be like two lawyers suing each other for malpractice, both win their case and both are disbarred.

Fourth, we learn to pray with authority. Jesus might well say, "This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting" (Mark 9:29). It is also good to remember that although both Christians and Muslims fight the demonic, we must never demonize each other. Although I, as a Christian, believe that it is faith in Jesus Christ alone that accesses the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the sin in my life, that does not make the rest of the world my enemy.

Lord, teach me to pray and empower me to be more like Jesus. Like Paul with regards to his Jewish kinsmen in Romans 9-11, my only hope for winning my Muslim friends is to make them jealous. Does my life demonstrate more compassion, more joy and more power than any other? Could faith in Jesus Christ empower the Muslim to measure up, even to the Islamic law? I once led a Muslim in London to faith in Jesus Christ by simply helping him realize that the only way he could measure up to the Islamic law was to access the power of the Holy Spirit through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, the only way he could become a true Muslim (he had struggled to be a faithful Muslim for years) was to become a Christian. There is something in me that believes that the only way to live up to any law, be it Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist is to access the power of the Holy Spirit. I sometimes say that true spirituality is not grunt and groan, it is repent and believe. I've found that *jihad* rules every aspect of Muslim existence. Our Muslim friends *strive* to be faithful to Allah and *strive* to obey the Muslim laws and *strive* to survive in a world that is never easy. So, how do we engage? First, we pray for ways of getting along. We really don't have to kill each other. Then, we make them jealous.

In the meantime, for those who are looking for hope among Muslims be encouraged by words from Wafa Sultan, an American-Syrian Muslim psychologist: "Jews do not go to Germany and blow up churches and massacre Christians, they build synagogues, businesses and factories. We Muslims must learn from the Jew."¹⁵ I might add that we Christians must learn from anyone who opts for peace and has the courage to take the words of Jesus seriously,

You have heard that it was said, "Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth."
But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you

¹⁵ Dr. Sultan's life has been threatened by several Muslim communities.

and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who want to borrow from you.

Need I say, that we who speak the name of Jesus Christ do not always do this well? Many peoples of the world hold Christians in utter contempt? *Too many on whatever side believe that if they are right that makes the rest of the world their enemy?* Once again I believe that Jesus says it best,

You have heard that it was said, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:44).¹⁶

Recently I was on a flight from Amman to New York. In the airport in Amman I had an opportunity to get acquainted with a Muslim Imam from India. We chatted for nearly an hour. Once the plane was in the air my Imam friend tapped me on the shoulder and asked if we could talk some more. I said, "Of course." We walked forward to where the flight attendants were taking a needed break. While I listened, for nearly half an hour my Muslim companion tried to convince me that there was no Trinity and that Jesus could not possibly be the incarnate Son of God. He was so adamant the flight attendants were getting a bit nervous so I decided to conclude the conversation by saying, "Sir, the day you can love me more than I can love you, or you can forgive me more than I can forgive you, I will become a Muslim." The attendants actually applauded.

So, is there hope for the future? There is if we believe that God is never without a witness. May I encourage you to do something in this very moment? Stop! Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and Gaza, and Cairo, and Damascus, and Amman, and Beirut, and Tehran, and Baghdad, and Kabul, and Caracas, and Delhi and Jakarta, and on and on until Jesus returns and establishes his peace on earth, once and for all. *Allah cum salaam!*

¹⁶ Cf. Luke 6:27, 35.