

How to Think as a Christian in the 21st Century

Session 2: November 4, 2008
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Topic: Judaism and Islam with a concentration
On Islam

Part 1: A comparison chart of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.
(Please see handout)

Part 2: A more detailed Consideration of Islam:

2:1 Six Articles of Faith.

Muslim doctrine is often summarized in "Six Articles of Faith." According to this list, to be a Muslim one must believe in:

- a. One God;
- b. The angels of God;
- c. The books of God, especially the Qur'an;
- d. The prophets of God, especially Muhammad;
- e. The Day of Judgment (or the afterlife); and
- f. The supremacy of God's will (or predestination).

2:2 The Five Pillars of Islam :

a. The first of the Five Pillars of Islam is the *shahada*. *Shahada* is the Muslim profession of faith, expressing the two simple, fundamental beliefs that make one a Muslim:

"There is no god but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God."

Sincere recitation of this confession of faith before two Muslims is the sole requirement for those who wish to join the Muslim community. It represents acceptance not only of Allah and his prophet, but of the entirety of Islam. As one of the Pillars, the *shahada* must be recited correctly aloud with full understanding and internal assent at least once in every Muslim's lifetime.

b. Perhaps the most well-known Muslim practices among non-Muslims is ritual prayer, or *salat*, which is performed five times each day: at dawn (*al-fajr*), midday (*al-zuhr*), afternoon (*al-'asr*), sunset (*al-maghrib*) and evening (*al-'isha*).

Prayer is always directed in the direction (*qibla*) of the Ka'ba shrine in Mecca. A prayer mat, *sajjada*, is commonly used during *salat*. *Salat* may be performed individually, but it carries special merit when done with other Muslims. The focal prayer of the week is the midday prayer at the mosque on Fridays.

The Ka'ba is the holiest site in Islam; the Holy Mosque was built around it and because of it. The *qibla*, the direction Muslims face during prayer, is the direction facing the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba houses the mysterious Black Stone, which was revered in Mecca in pre-Islamic times as well. It became a Muslim relic in the time of the Prophet Muhammad and pilgrims to Mecca try to stop and kiss it while circumambulating the Ka'ba during the hajj.

Black Stone

The Black Stone (called الحجر الأسود *al-Hajar-ul-Aswad* in Arabic) is a Muslim object of reverence, which according to Islamic tradition dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. It is the eastern cornerstone of the Kaaba, the ancient sacred stone building towards which Muslims pray, in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.^[1] The Stone is roughly 30 cm (12 in.) in diameter, and 1.5 meters (5 ft.) above the ground.^[2]

When pilgrims circle the Kaaba as part of the Tawaf ritual of the Hajj, many of them try, if possible, to stop and kiss the Black Stone, emulating the kiss that it received from the Islamic prophet Muhammad.^[3] If they cannot reach it, they are to point to it on each of their seven circuits around the Kaaba.^[4]

The Stone is broken into a number of pieces from damage which was inflicted during the Middle Ages. It is now held together by a silver frame, which is fastened by silver nails to the Stone.

c. Ritual Almsgiving is the third pillar of Islam, known as *zakat*. Almsgiving is a central activity in Islam. The Qur'an explicitly requires it (9:60) and often places it alongside prayer when discussing a Muslim's duties. ("Perform the prayer and give the alms." 2:43, 110, 277)

For those who are greedy and use their money outside of the will of Allah, the Qur'an has harsh words: the fires of hell will heat up the coins and the greedy will be branded with it (9:34-35).

The *zakat* is an alms tax, required of every adult Muslim with sufficient means. In many ways it resembles the modern welfare state, in which the "haves" are taxed to help the "have-nots." For most of Islam's history, the tax was enforced by the state. Today it is mostly left up to the individual, except in Saudi Arabia where religious law (Shari'a) is strictly adhered to.

d. Sawm (also siyam), fasting, commemorates the revelation of the Qur'an to humanity during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic year. During Ramadan, all adult Muslims are required to abstain from food, drink and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. Exceptions are made for travelers, soldiers, menstruating women, and the ill, although such persons are expected to fast later when they become able.

e. At least once in his or her lifetime, each Muslim is expected to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca, the sacred city of Islam. This holy journey is called the *hajj* in Arabic. While a visit to Mecca is beneficial any time of the year, it must take place during the month of Dhu al-Hijja (the last month of the Islamic year) to fulfill the requirements of the hajj.

2. 3. Islamic Sects

Sects are not simply "denominations," if that word is understood to mean various valid approaches to the same religion. Members of one Islamic group do not usually recognize members of other groups as fellow Muslims, and open conflict between sects is not uncommon.

The vast majority of the world's Muslims are Sunnis. And Sufism is a mystical approach to Islam that is approved as orthodox by nearly all Muslims.

a. Sunni Islam: With 940 million adherents out of about 1.1 billion Muslims, **Sunni Islam** is the largest Islamic sect. Followers of the Sunni tradition are known as **Sunnis** or **Sunnites**; they sometimes refer to themselves as *Ahlus Sunnah wal-Jamaa'h*, "adherents to the Sunnah and the assembly."

Sunnis have their historical roots in the majority group who followed Abu Bakr, an effective leader, as Muhammad's successor instead of the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali. The Sunnis are so named because they believe themselves to follow the *sunnah* ("custom" or "tradition") of the Prophet.

b. Shia Islam encompasses most Muslims who are not counted among the Sunni. The division between Sunni and Shi'a, dates to the death of the Prophet Muhammad when his followers were faced with the decision of who would be his successor as the leader of Islam. Shi'ites are those who followed Ali, the closest relative of Muhammad, as Muhammad's successor. Today there are approximately 120 million Shi'ite Muslims in the world.

The Shia consist of one major school of thought known as the Jafaryia or the "Twelvers," and a few minor schools of thought, as the "Sevens" or the "Fivers." These names all refer to the number of imams they recognize after the death of Muhammad. The term Shi'a is usually meant to be synonymous with the Jafaryia/Twelvers

The distinctive dogma and institution of Shia Islam is the Imamate, which includes the idea that the successor of Muhammad be more than merely a political leader. The Imam must also be a spiritual leader, which means that he must have the ability to interpret the inner mysteries of the Quran and the sharia. The Twelver Shias further believe that the Twelve Imams who succeeded the Prophet were sinless and free from error and had been chosen by God through Muhammad.

The Imamate began with Ali, who is also accepted by Sunni Muslims as the fourth of the "rightly guided caliphs" to succeed the Prophet. Shias revere Ali as the First Imam, and his descendants, beginning with his sons Hasan and Husayn (also seen as Hosein), continue the line of the Imams until the Twelfth, who is believed to have ascended into a supernatural state to return to earth on judgment day.

Shias point to the close lifetime association of Muhammad with Ali. When Ali was six years old, he was invited by the Prophet to live with him, and Shias believe Ali was the first person to make the declaration of faith in Islam. Ali also slept in Muhammad's bed on the night of the hijra, or migration from Mecca to Medina, when it was feared that the house would be attacked by unbelievers and the Prophet stabbed to death. He fought in all the battles Muhammad did except one, and the Prophet chose him to be the husband of his favorite daughter, Fatima.

2.4: Jihad:

According to scholar John Esposito, Jihad requires Muslims to "struggle in the way of God" or "to struggle to improve one's self and/or society." Jihad is directed against Satan's inducements, aspects of one's own self, or against a visible enemy. The four major categories of jihad that are recognized are Jihad against one's self (*Jihad al-Nafs*), Jihad of the tongue (*Jihad al-lisan*), Jihad of the hand (*Jihad al-yad*), and Jihad of the sword (which involves combat against the non-Muslims)(*Jihad as-sayf*). Islamic military jurisprudence focuses on regulating the conditions and practice of Jihad as-sayf, the only form of warfare permissible under Islamic law, and thus the term Jihad is usually used in *fiqh* manuals in reference to military combat.

Part 3: A reading of Verses from the Qur'an:

3.1: Overview:

The final revelation of God to all of mankind given through the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad over a 23 year period. It is without error and guarded from error by Allah. The Qur'an, also spelled "Quran" or "Koran", is the holy book of Islam. Its title means "Recitation" or "Reading". It consists of 114 chapters or Surahs laid out roughly in order of size, the largest being near the front, the smallest near the back. It describes the origins of the Universe, Man, and their relationship to

each other and their Creator. It sets out rules for society, morality, economics and many other topics. It is intended for recitation and memorization. The Qur'an is primarily taught from one generation to the next this way. Muslims regard the Qur'an as sacred and inviolable.

3:2: How Jesus is understood according to the Qur'an.

- a. As a Prophet
- b. Place of Special Honour
- c. His Death
- d. Blasphemy to claim that Jesus is more than a great prophet

3:3 The Quranic teaching of Salvation

- a. The Centrality of Works
- b. There is Grace in Islam
- c. The Nature of Paradise

3.4 Distinction Between Islam and Christianity