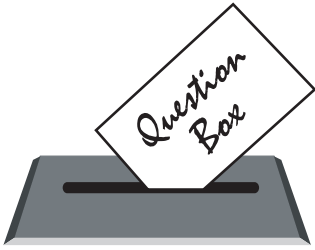


Christianity and Islam



Introduction



In recent months we have been made acutely aware of the existence of the Islamic religion. Every newspaper and almost every news-

bulletin has had something to say about certain individuals who have been called 'Islamic extremists', and the word 'Crusade' has frequently been heard – and always used by these same people.

It may be helpful to write something about the Islamic faith, so that we may remind ourselves of the situation with which we have to deal.

It was after the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire that, in 632 A.D., the Islamic armies launched the attack on the West. Their victorious advance westward was finally halted by Charles Martel, of France, at the battle of Poitiers in 732 A.D., but the conflict only ended 150 years after it had commenced, in 782 A.D., when the Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al Rashid, entered into friendly correspondence with the rulers of the Western world.

This did not mean that the threat of Islam was over. It was not over *then*. It is not over *today*, as people are beginning to realize; although it is amazing how little Christians – and indeed, Western nations generally - seem to know about the Moslem religion, which, at least in the Third World countries, is the fastest growing religion on earth.

Even in the United Kingdom it is gaining an increasingly stronger foothold, as people from the Middle East and Far Eastern countries arrive here. I do not think that anyone can object to an examination of the Islamic faith, because when committed, militant Moslems enter *any country*, they do so as missionaries for their faith whose aim is to bring it to submission to that faith. Indeed, the very word, 'Islam' means '*submission*', and the name 'Moslem' or 'Muslim' indicates '*one who surrenders*'.

You may have seen the headlines in a recent issue of one of our national daily newspapers, which showed young Moslem men displaying a banner that declared, "*Islam will rule the world*", and, as recently as February this year, 2004, Denmark granted visas to 200 Moslem 'missionaries' – this is the word actually used in the "Times" report; and the same report described about 30 of these new-comers as 'Imams'; that is, 'leaders'.

We, in this country, are such a hospitable people that the general public does not seem to be aware of the danger that this constitutes. For whatever reason, whether because of the sheer ignorance of those of our politicians who are not themselves religious, or for reasons of political expediency, the powers-that-be appear to be unconcerned.

The fact is that the freedom to build mosques and community-centres that is granted to Moslems in this country, is denied to Christians living in countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, that have Islamic governments or rulers. In such countries Christians are blatantly persecuted and even murdered by militant Moslems.

In a recent letter in the "Times", a businessman reported that, on his arrival in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, his Bible was taken from his luggage by Customs officials and torn up, and he was personally physically assaulted.

Islam's Origins

We tend to forget that the Arab tribes, who were used by Mohammed to fight his 'holy wars', had a form of religion even before he made his appearance. It was a religion, based on strange interpretations of familiar Old Testament stories, which later were woven into Islamic doctrine.

For instance, Moslem teachers claim that, after being banished from the Garden in Eden, Adam and Eve were separated. Adam found himself on a mountain in Ceylon, whilst Eve was in Arabia, on the borders of the Red Sea. They are said to have wandered the earth for 200 years before being allowed to meet up again on Mount Ararat, which, Moslem teachers claimed, is '*not far from the city of Mecca*', and, since many of their followers knew little about the world's geography, this obvious error was readily believed. Mecca is in Saudi Arabia, whilst Mt. Ararat is in Turkey, something like 1000 miles away to the Northwest.

Furthermore, Moslem teaching says that, in repentance, Adam pleaded with God for mercy and asked that he might be given a place in which he could worship Him, and his prayer was answered.

A Temple, like one which they claim exists in Heaven, was formed out of the clouds and lowered to earth by angels, and every day Adam walked around this Temple seven times, just as the angels walk around the heavenly Temple. When Adam died, this 'Temple of the Clouds' was drawn back up to Heaven, but Seth his son, built another just like it, made out of stone and clay. This temple, they claim, was washed away in the Flood.

The next stage in this strange re-working of Bible history, says that many years later, when Hagar and Ishmael, her son, were dying of thirst after having run away from the camp of Abraham, an angel revealed a spring of water which saved their lives, and this Well, which they claim to have identified is regarded as sacred by the Moslems to this very day. It is claimed that where the well was discovered is where, shortly after the discovery, the city of Mecca was built.

Personally, I find this to be very strange, since, according to Gen.21: 14, Hagar the Egyptian and Ishmael her son had been expelled from Abraham's encampment at the insistence of Sarah, and had '*wandered in the Wilderness of Beersheba*'. They were clearly heading back to Egypt, from whence Hagar had originally come, and they were in need of water, because the water Hagar was carrying was used up. They

could not possibly have travelled very far from Abraham's encampment, which at that time was in Southern Canaan.

In fact, the last we read about Hagar is that she took a wife for Ishmael *from Egypt*, and that he '*lived in the wilderness of Paran*' (Gen.21: 21). How the well found its way from the Wilderness of Beersheba to Mecca needs to be explained!

Islamic teaching further claims that later, when Ishmael had grown to manhood, God commanded him to build the Kaaba – the most sacred building in the Islamic religion, and it was to be built on the *exact spot* where the Temple of the Clouds is said to have stood – in Mecca! The Kaaba is a foursquare building inside the Great Mosque in Mecca – actually in the centre of the Mosque, and Moslems regard it as '*the navel of the World*' - whatever this expression that may mean. It should be pointed out that many years later the Great Mosque itself was built *over* the Kaaba, and this is why the Kaaba is *inside* the Mosque.

In the work of building the Kaaba, Ishmael is said to have been helped by Abraham and, as Abraham worked, he stood on a stone that served as a building-scaffold that rose and sank in the air as he built. The Moslems believe this really happened, because they show a stone, which, they claim, has the *imprint* of the foot of Abraham.

Furthermore, as they were building, Abraham and Ishmael were visited by the Angel Gabriel who brought with him another very special stone. Moslems believe that this particular stone was originally the Angel who had been ordered to keep watch over Adam and Eve in the Garden, but who was *turned into stone* by Allah, as a punishment for not being sufficiently watchful. This stone, which was built into the Eastern corner of the Kaaba, is made of basalt, a black volcanic rock, but Moslems believe that it was originally a brilliant white stone, but it became blackened by the kisses of the pilgrims who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In fact, to kiss that stone is one of the most important reasons for going to Mecca. It is claimed that, on the Day of Judgment, the stone will turn back into the Angel, and the Angel will testify on behalf of those who have kept the faith. Every year millions of devout Moslems make the pilgrimage and no doubt you will have seen the impressive TV pictures of the vast crowds, all of whom move in the same direction around the Mosque. They do this seven times, because the Angels in Heaven are said to do this, and because Ishmael, the father of the tribes is also said to have done it. Then, they kiss the Black Stone and their pilgrimage is complete.

Conversion to Islam

Islam, like Christianity, is an evangelical religion; that is, it actively seeks to make converts. One does not need to know a great deal about the faith in order to become a Moslem. Initially, very little understanding is needed, and what is regarded as essential and imperative is really very simple. A prospective convert is required, once in his lifetime, to say with conviction; "*God is great. There is one God, Allah, and Mohammed is his Prophet*", and this statement is considered sufficient to make him

a Moslem.

There are then certain duties to be followed that will make the person a *good* Moslem.

1. Once in a lifetime the pilgrimage to Mecca must be made.
2. Prayer must be offered three times a day, facing Mecca.
3. There must be fasting from sunrise to sunset during the three principal periods of annual fasting. What is done *after* sunset and *before* sunrise is a person's own business.
4. There must be benevolence. This means that 1/40th of income must be given. If these things are done, a person will be a good Moslem.

Family History

The family from which Mohammed came was responsible for guarding these sacred places in Mecca and this was considered a position of great honour and privilege. His father, Abdallah, was said to possess all the virtues and qualities that a Moslem woman wishes to find in a man, and it is claimed that the night he married Amina, 200 maidens in Mecca died of a broken heart!

Mohammed was the only child of that marriage, but we are assured that all kinds of wonderful things happened when he was born.

1. His mother experienced no discomfort or pain whatsoever at his birth.
2. The country was bathed in a brilliant heavenly light.
3. The River Tigris burst its banks and overflowed into neighbouring lands.
4. Lake Sawa drained back to its original secret spring.
5. The palace of the King of Persia was shaken to its foundations and some of its towers fell to the ground.
6. The so-called 'sacred flame of the Zoroastrians', kept by the wise men, was extinguished.
7. Evil spirits, who they claim inhabit the stars and the signs of the zodiac, were cast out by good angels, along with Lucifer their leader, and thrown into the depths of the sea.
8. And the newly born child opened his eyes, looked up to heaven and cried aloud, "*God is great. There is no god but God, and I am his Prophet.*"

Later, they say, when Mohammed was just three years old, he was playing in a field with his foster-brother when two angels came and laid him on the ground. Gabriel, who was one of the two angels, opened up the boy's chest and took out his heart and cleansed it, wringing out the '*black drops of original sin*', which, Moslem teachers believe, even the best of humans inherit from Adam. Gabriel then filled the heart of Mohammed with faith, knowledge and prophetic inspiration, and put it back again, and from that time his face was lit up with the same mysterious light that had been seen in the patriarchs, from Adam down to Isaac and Ishmael. We are told that, after thousands of years, that sacred light was seen on the face of Mohammed.

His mother eventually decided to visit her relatives in Medina, but she died on the way and Mohammed was taken into care by his uncle, who had become the guardian

of the Kaaba. This uncle was also a wealthy merchant and he took the young Mohammed with him on his travels. It was in the course of these journeys, that, from the Nestorians, the young man learned about the Jewish and Christian scriptures. The Nestorians were followers of Nestorius of Constantinople who lived about 450 A.D., and who taught that in Christ there were *two* persons – one human and one divine.

Because he did not accept that Jesus was both human and divine *at the same time*, he was excommunicated and settled with his followers in Syria. This is where Mohammed came into contact with his followers. Mohammed returned to Mecca with his mind full of the strange things he had heard during his travels and out of them he formed what was to become the Islamic Faith. To the versions of the stories from the Old and New Testament scriptures were added numerous superstitious Arabian tales and legends. Historians acknowledge that, like millions of his followers, Mohammed, was not taught to read or write. Consequently, he was just as open to superstitious beliefs as the rest of his original followers.

Christianity and Islam

As already stated, the two faiths are evangelistic in that they both proclaim a message and seek to gain converts, and with the two major 'articles of faith' of Islam, Christians would have no argument. '*Allah Akbar*', which literally means '*God is great!*', and, '*Islam*', which means '*Submission*'.

However, one of the major differences between the Islamic and Christian faiths has to do with the way in which converts are gained. Islam has historically shown itself prepared to resort to force to achieve its aims.

For instance, some 1400 years ago, when its armies over-ran countries which, at that time were at least *nominally* Christian, those whom they defeated were offered three choices.

- 1st. Submission – (i.e. conversion to Islam).
- 2nd. Slavery.
- 3rd. Death.

Although it is usually claimed that the Koran forbids killing, it was argued that if a captive refused the first two options he was *personally responsible* for his own death.

In contrast, Christianity preaches a gospel of Love and seeks to win the hearts of men by means of a message that tells of a Christ who was willing to die for all mankind, regardless of their nationality or colour or language.

What is gained by Violence, sooner or late is inevitably lost.
What is truly won by Love can never be lost.