

Rivals of Christianity 2

Islam and the Sword

We are looking at the religions that may rival the authority of Christianity in the cultural marketplace. In our first study we drew a distinction between Judaism and the Jews. I claim that God has not forgotten the Jews nor is His covenant with them superseded. The Jews will be involved in God's judgement of the creation and His salvation work in history. Judaism may well be an attempt at self survival. Judaism is a portable culture (with its fixed prayers, dietary laws and observances) which may well harden their heart to what God is doing. I would claim that it is not Judaism that has saved the Jews but God who has saved the Jews and maintained His remnant.

Islam

Islam, as a religion, claims that it has superseded (abrogated) previous religions and revelations. Mohammed is the last prophet. Although the Koran (Islamic holy book) speaks, often favourably, of the Bible and such key figures as Abraham, Noah, Moses and Jesus, the Words of Allah to Mohammed (as recorded in the Koran in Arabic) are final and infallible. 'Islam' means 'submission' and the one who submits is called a 'Muslim'.

Islam commenced in Arabia in the life of Mohammed who was born about 570AD. He was an orphan brought up by relatives. He married at 25 to a wealthy widow (Khadijah) 15 years older than himself. At the age of 40 Mohammed started to have revelations, the reception of which his wife encouraged. Mohammed reacted against the degenerate polytheism that surrounded him. He gradually won a position of supremacy over the surrounding tribes and became established in Mecca and Medina. He had some relations with the Jews and the Christians in the area, which were initially favourable. However, he soon rejected the support and ideas of both groups. After his wife died, Mohammed took many wives and concubines. On June 5, 632AD, Mohammed suddenly died without selecting a successor. To the Arabian tribes, Mohammed brought a strong sense of social justice and cohesion, protecting the weaker parts of society (orphans, slaves) and creating a strong sense of brotherhood reinforced by 'jihad' or the moral force of the sword. Jihad is meant to gain control over societies so that they can be governed according to Islamic law. It was originally not war purely for the sake of conquest or accumulation of wealth. An original sect (the Kharijites) expounded continuous and relentless jihad but they lost influence. Jihad is now reactivated as an ideological tool of cultural and moral conquest as part of the Islamification of infidel cultures.

The Sunnis and the Shiites

Because Mohammed left no successor, two traditions developed for the expression of Islam. The Sunnis became the majority (80%) and the Shiites the minority (20%). The Sunnis developed the tradition of accommodation, catholicity and synthesis. It was the path of the consolidated majority. The Shiiah minority followed imams or infallible leaders who alone could rightly interpret the Koran. The Shiiah were more passionate and assertive in their belief. Since the 1500's they have been the main force in Iran and are the basis of the modern Islamic Republic of Iran. It is asserted that the Shiites (influenced by Iran) are attempting to foment civil war currently in Iraq by attacking Sunni neighbourhoods and targets such as Sunni mosques. The Sufis (or Sufism) are the expression of Islamic mysticism. This represents the experiential compensation for a strictly performance-based religion. They have

produced the phenomenon of the 'dancing dervisher' who rotates in dances of ecstatic trance.

Doctrines of Islam

Some of the characteristic doctrines of Islam are as follows:

1) God is one. Allah is creator, judge, rewarder, omnipotent and all-merciful. Every obligatory action is by invocation of the divine name. 'If God wills' reminds the speaker that every contemplated action and every hope is subject to the divine will. The personal attitude of the believer is and must be in a confiding submission to God (whom one does not question). God is the fair judge both formidable and benevolent and the supreme help. The 99 most beautiful names of God are objects of devotion and meditation. They include Allah is One and Only, the Living One, the Subsisting, the real Truth, the Sublime, the Wise, the Omnipotent, the Hearer, the Seer, the Omniscient, the Witness, the Protector, the Benefactor, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the constant Forgiver.

2) Mohammed is the last prophet and messenger. His message abrogates (supersedes) any earlier revelation which may have had its own truth, but is now no longer relevant.

3) The Koran was verbally dictated by God in Arabic through the archangel Gabriel. It is believed to be the earthly reproduction of an uncreated and eternal heavenly original. It is infallible in all respects. Its Arabic language is thought to be unsurpassed in purity and beauty. It is a miracle and it is a sacrilege to imitate its style. The Koran is always held above the waist and is always kept in the highest place in the house. The theology is totally predestinarian: God decides who believes. Translations are only paraphrases and are not used for ritual purposes. Revelation has come through Moses (Torah), David (Psalms), Jesus (Gospels) and Mohammad (Koran). Only the Koran is uncorrupted.

4) The Day of Judgement is when there is a resurrection of all for the weighing of each person's deeds. If the good outweighs the evil the person goes to Paradise. If the evil deeds outweigh the good the person goes to hell and eternal fire. Paradise is a place where men are waited upon by boys and ever-virgin women. Men are granted accelerated sexual prowess (S 56 p108). Alternatively, Allah cries 'cast into hell every hardened unbeliever, every opponent of good works, and every doubting transgressor who has set up another god besides Allah. Hurl him into the fierce, tormenting flames' (Koran p120, S 50).

The Obligations of Islam

1) Recite the Shahadah. 'I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed is his Prophet'. Bearing this witness makes one a Muslim.

2) Pray (Salat). The Muslim prays 5 times a day: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, dusk and 2 hours after dusk. They wash before praying and face toward Mecca. Friday noon prayer is in the mosque.

3) Fast (Sawm). In commemoration of Mohammed receiving the Koran in the 9th month of Ramadhan, Muslims are expected to fast (during daylight hours for that month) from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual relations. There is no fast between dusk and dawn.

4) Give Alms (Zakat). Muslims are commanded to give 1/40 (2.5%) of their income to the poor and needy.

5) Make Pilgrimage (Hajj). It is expected that a Muslim make pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their life, if finances and health permit. Wearing white covering (ihram) makes everyone equal.

Shariah Law

Shariah Law is a system of duties incumbent upon a Muslim by virtue of his religious belief. Total and unqualified submission

to the Will of Allah is the fundamental tenet of Islam. Islamic law is God's will for society. It keeps the believer/performer safe and ready for Paradise. The Law is revealed, literal and unchanging. The Muslim makes no distinction between religious and non-religious (temporal) spheres of life. The Muslim state is by definition a religious or theocratic state. Some Muslim countries are secular: Turkey is secular; Iran is theocratic. A theocratic state will not be democratic or tolerant of other beliefs. (This also applied in Calvin's Geneva and to the Maccabean resistance in Palestine.) There are real moral issues with the tolerant society.

Perceived Differences between Islam and Christianity

- 1) God is One Versus the Trinity. Islam majors on the Oneness of God, as does Judaism. This makes God remote and abstract but more plausibly a God of fire. Christians also believe that God is One but express the Oneness as one Substance and Three Persons. This makes God near and personal. God is understandable (Col 2:9).
- 2) The Koran in Arabic versus the Bible in the native tongue. As with Judaism and Islam the holy book is best studied and recited in the original tongue (Hebrew for Jews and Arabic for Muslims). Both Hebrew and Arabic are current languages. As an Incarnational religion, Christianity translates its scriptures and there is no particular virtue in reciting the Bible in its original tongue. (But there is virtue in reciting it in one's own tongue!) Releasing the Bible to the vernacular opens up the scripture to every believer and cuts across ecclesiastical controls. To perform one's religion in one's own tongue is a basic democratic release.
- 3) Muslim: Man is good by nature; Christian: Man is sinful by nature. Both Judaism and Islam are performance based religions. This implies that Man has the capacity to do good naturally. In a religion we can treat the flesh as inherently good or evil. Gnostic religions treated the flesh as evil. Christianity treats the flesh as created (and therefore originally good) but now (after the Fall) as sinful or capable of evil. By teaching the fallen state of Man, Christianity implies the predisposition to evil (sin, disobedience) and the necessity for redemption. For the Jew and the Muslim repentance is the only way to handle sin: repentance is all that is required (or is possible). But Christians teach atonement as well as repentance. The Christian has the sacrifice of Christ. Through the substitutionary theory of the atonement, Jesus Christ makes atonement for our sins (and our sin nature) by breaking the power of sin in our life so that we can repent (2Cor 5:21; 1John 1:7).
- 4) Salvation for the Muslim is when the good deeds outweigh the bad deeds. Salvation for the Christian is a gift given by God's grace and received (or appropriated) by faith (Eph 2:8). To the Muslim salvation is by human effort; to the Christian, salvation is by faith in the finished work of Christ and by our cooperation with the gift of holiness.
- 5) The Muslim regards Jesus as one of God's prophets, as were Abraham, Noah and Moses. Muslims affirm the Virgin Birth and the miracles of Jesus but claim that God has no Son. Jesus did not die on the Cross: Judas died in His place. There can be no resurrection of Christ. The only resurrection is on the Day of Judgement. Christians claim that Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:1). The Muslims claim no divinity for Mohammed nor are any miracles stated about him in the Koran. Mohammed is a human messenger with an infallible word.
- 6) The Muslim believes the Koran is uncorrupted but the Bible is corrupted. A religion based on, or appealing to, infallibility requires an infallible text. It is interesting that the NT has

four Gospels or four different accounts of the ministry of Jesus. Is there only one correct account? Why this variety? For instance, what was actually written on the Cross (Mtt 27:37, Mk 15:26, Lk 23:38, John 19:9)? There is also the vain search for 'the historical Jesus'. The truth of Christianity lies in the declaration of the Christ on the basis of historical events which can be received in various ways. We also assert the Christ over our own historical events. Christianity is an historical religion and asserts the historic base of revelation: real events and real people - not just private words uttered to a select person. But it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. (See Lk 1:1-4). Christianity is history based rather than wisdom based. We trust a real person in real events not only a moral interpretation of reality.

7) The Muslim Paradise appears to be a place of male privilege. 'They shall recline on jewelled couches face to face, and there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls and pitchers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason); with fruits of their own choice and flesh of fowls that they relish. And theirs shall be the dark-eyed houris (voluptuous, beautiful women, nymphs), chaste as hidden pearls: a reward for their deeds' (Koran pl08, S 56). Alternatively, Christians reign on a new earth with a new heaven in the holy worship of the eternal God, where they are like angels (Mtt 22:30).

8) Jesus had a ministry and new attitude to women. Jesus valued women. Women are co-heirs with men in Christ (Gal 3:28). The natural and created distinctions between men and women are bridged (not removed) in Jesus Christ. In Muslim society (influenced by Hadith teaching based on the interpretation of the Koran) men can readily divorce a wife, have up to four wives (and many slave-girls), beat and sexually desert his wife and have custody privileges over the children.

9) Muslim society is, at least, an attempt at a moral society where some behaviours are not tolerated. Christianity has developed freedom as expressed in democracy and freedom of worship. However, this has become freedom from restraint rather than freedom to conform. The tolerant society where everybody is right (and permitted to do their own thing) creates a value-neutral place which is a marketplace for every attraction and perversion of the human spirit.

10) No love for the Sinner. Islam has a strong sense of sin which is dealt with by repentance. Allah is compassionate to the repentant. Christianity teaches about repentance but also claims that God loves the sinner and comes seeking the lost before they are repentant or even before they know what repentance is. Christianity teaches what God has done for us while we were still sinners, while we were, technically, unholy and unacceptable to a holy God. 'For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8). God, indeed, has prepared the way for us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). God has gone before us; He has created salvation; He has ordained the Way and the means to come to Him. This is all the work of Grace, amazing Grace. We take hold of all these benefits by faith. Faith immerses us in the real world of salvation. Faith places within us redemption and all the authority of heaven. By faith we enter into what God has ordained for us (Eph 2:10). If we do not believe we will not be established (Is 7:9). God loves the sinner even before they have returned from their sin, or they are even aware that they are sinners. This is the demonstration of God's love, which is totally undeserved. As humans we can hardly

understand undeserved love. It is something out of our control. We cannot trade love packages with God. God out-loves us which ever way we look at it. God is the great Lover of our soul (and body and spirit). In the game of life, God's move is Love; we are trumped by the Great Lover. So the whole way and mechanism of salvation is laid out before us; prepared, finished, offered, and waiting. And this is done even before I recognise that God even exists. But once I do recognise that God exists and that salvation is possible, even desirable, then I grasp it by faith. The Christian lives by faith; we walk by faith not by sight (2Cor 5:7). The finished Work of Christ stands before us in all its glory.

11) Another word I do not hear in Islam is the word 'holy'. God is holy. The implication is that we are to be holy also (Lev 19:2). Holiness is the lifestyle of the Christian. Holiness expresses our deep moral and behavioural involvement with God. Associated with the word 'holy' is the word 'sanctification', which is the process of becoming holy or being made holy. To be holy is to be set aside for the purposes of God. Sanctification is the process of being set aside for the purposes of God. We grow in sanctification:

Jn 17:17, 19 sanctified by the truth

Acts 20:32 an inheritance among those who are sanctified

Acts 26:18 those who are sanctified by faith in Christ

Rom 15:16 sanctified by the Holy Spirit

1Cor 7:14 unbelieving wife sanctified by the believing husband

1Tim 4:5 it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer

2Tim 2:21 sanctified and useful to the Master, prepared for every good work

Heb 10:10 sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all.

Holiness also means victory over the sin nature. The sin nature is the nature within us that corrupts (distorts, violates, is confused and lost). That which is of God is incorruptible (not distorted, not violated or able to be violated, not confused but totally redeemed and redeemable). The Christian is described as 'having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible [seed], through the word of God which lives and abides forever' (1Pet 1:23). 'Put off the old man which grows corrupt according to deceitful lusts, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man which was [already] created according to God in true righteousness and holiness' (Eph 4:22-24). We cannot earn this for it is already created by God, once and for all. Earlier in Rom 5:1-5 a process of sanctification is outlined: faith → peace → grace → hope → glory [:1-:2]. We have another sequence in :3-:5, glory → tribulation (distresses, pressures) → perseverance, endurance → character → hope → no disappointment → love of God → hearts → Holy Spirit. All this is not only reward for repentance but a free gift from God already prepared for those who will walk in it by faith.

12) Morality-based versus Grace-based. Islam is a morality-based religion with black and white rewards for legally determined behaviour. It has the advantages of a strong moral punishment system. Christianity is Grace-base, wherein God loves and approaches the sinner while he is still in his sin. Wesley's conversion hymn says 'Outcasts of men, to you I call/ harlots and publicans and thieves/ He spreads his arms to embrace you all/ sinners alone His grace receives/ No need of Him the righteous have/ He came the lost to seek and save'. Both religions have a Day of Judgement: to the Muslim a Day of pleasure; to the

Christian a Day of glory. Both teach a Day of rewards for good deeds (Mtt 6:19-21; Mtt 25:21, 23; Mk 10:21).

Christian Principles

- 1) God loves the world (John 3:16)
- 2) We are not to love the world (1John 2:15)
- 3) We are to love God and get His love for the world (2Cor 5:18)
- 4) Human nature is created good but fallen (Rom 3:23)
- 5) Human nature is corrupted by sin (Eph 4:22)
- 6) God is a God of grace expressed by love (2John 1:3)
- 7) God has totally revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (2Cor 5:19)
- 8) Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6)
- 9) The death of Christ is the propitiation for our sins (1Jn 4:10)
- 10) The Holy Spirit convicts us and ministers to us (John 16:8)
- 11) The way for the Christian is already prepared (Eph 2:10)
- 12) This is good news (evangel) for, not condemnation of, the sinner (Rom 8:1)

(The Koran, Penguin Classics, trans NJ Dawood, 1964)