

Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations

The 219th General Assembly approved the report “Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations” and commended it to the church for study and guidance.

The report is intended to foster a process of engagement between Presbyterians (and other Christians) and their Muslim neighbors, and calls for further reflection on a number of theological issues. After describing the urgent need for honest and searching relations with Muslims, the study presents an initial exploration of some theological differences and similarities between the faiths, then looks at a number of areas of common concern in which collaboration might be developed.

It is to be hoped that congregations and individuals will find this paper helpful in their study of, and entry into Christian-Muslim relations. A very brief study guide is included here, following the text of the study.

Preface

The need to understand Islam and relate to Muslims has only increased since 1987, when the 199th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) adopted a Study on Islam and mandated the development of resources for the church to use in learning more. Since then, complex world events, including the terrorist attacks of 2001, and growing interaction among Presbyterians and Muslims in the United States and other parts of the world, have raised practical and theological questions that require careful consideration.

The 218th General Assembly (2008) instructed the Office of Interfaith Relations and the Office of Theology & Worship to “undertake a study of current and evolving Presbyterian theological understanding of our relationship with our Muslim sisters and brothers” and urged that “such a study be done in a context of relationships and dialogue” (07-07). In acting on a companion overture, the 218th General Assembly called for a study “that would have the same scope and authority as the 1987 study on Christian-Jewish relations.” (07-01)

In carrying out this mandate, careful attention was given to the earlier 1987 study of Christian-Muslim relations, conducted by an appointed task force over four years. That task force, its staff, and consultants included many who had significant experience living as confessing Christians among Muslims. They studied the issues carefully and created the book *Christians and Muslims Together: an Exploration by*

Presbyterians (edited by Byron Haines and Frank Cooley) for the use of the church. Long out of print, that volume described Islam and the Muslim community, and identified a number of issues and questions needing attention by Presbyterians. The task force made a brief summary report to the 199th General Assembly with a number of recommendations.¹

In response to the mandate from the 218th General Assembly, the Offices of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship held two consultations in 2009, bringing together a small group of Presbyterians, with Muslim consultants, to discuss the most significant issues. The Presbyterians involved were: Frances Adeney, Louisville Presbyterian Seminary; Marsha Snulligan Haney, Interdenominational Theological Center; Ben Campbell Johnson, emeritus, Columbia Theological Seminary; Damayanthi Niles, Eden Theological Seminary; Margaret Orr Thomas, New York City Presbytery; and J. Dudley Woodberry, Fuller Theological Seminary. Whitney Bodman, of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, also served as a consultant. Muslim consultants included Ghulam Haider Aasi, American Islamic College; Naeem Baig, Islamic Circle of North America; Farhanahz Ellis, All Dulles Area Muslim Society; Marcia Hermansen, Loyola University Chicago; and Ronald Shaheed, Masjid Sultan Mohammed of Milwaukee. Staff members to the consultative process were Jay T. Rock, Coordinator for Interfaith Relations; Victor Makari, Coordinator for the Middle East; E. Quinn Fox, Associate for Theology in the Office of Theology and Worship; Charles A. Wiley III, Coordinator for the Office of Theology and Worship; and Robina Winbush, Associate Stated Clerk and Director of Ecumenical and Agency Relations.

This document, written in the light of the rich interactions of those consultations, offers an initial response to the request for a new, theologically grounded study. It represents the beginning, rather than the end, of the longer process of reflection and ongoing engagement that is needed. It offers some initial theological understandings, and points of departure for further consideration. Additional study is needed in order to develop a resource that can adequately describe the changed contexts and dynamics within which Christians and Muslims interact in these early years of the 21st century, and that can deal clearly and at sufficient depth with the theological questions raised by the Christian-Muslim relationship.

What compels us toward understanding?

¹ See <http://www.pcusa.org/interfaith/pdf/islamicstudy.pdf>

For nearly 14 centuries, Christians and Muslims have lived together in many parts of the world. If Presbyterians could have ever imagined living separately from Muslims, that time has passed. In the United States, as in Europe, established and growing Muslim communities are our new neighbors, opening doors to relationships and raising questions in ways that cannot now be ignored. "If our immediate circle of neighbors or friends does not reveal the religious plurality of the world, we need look no further than our cities, our nation, and our globally-connected world to see the diverse religious traditions which increasingly intermingle there. In this environment, persons and communities affect one another even when they are unaware of doing so."²

There are an estimated 1.57 billion Muslims in the world today. Large Muslim populations are found in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with smaller Muslim communities in Europe, Australia and the Americas. Some 8-10 million people in the United States are Muslims.³ Whether through the presence of Muslim children attending local public schools with our children, through contact with Muslim men and women in medical practice, teaching, and other fields, or in other ways, Presbyterians in the United States find themselves living together with Muslims as never before.

Our Christian mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves impels us to seek greater understanding. The ground of our relationship with Muslims is not simply our common humanity; it is much more the commandment to love that is the basis of our relationships as it is the basis of our lives as disciples of Jesus. "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"(Matthew 22:37-39).

Because Muslims and Christians have lived side by side for many centuries in much of the world, the history of the interaction of the two religious traditions is long and varied. Both Muslims and Christians carry historical wounds that affect contemporary relationships. These need to be understood, and addressed. In addition, we as U.S. Christians know little about the Muslim communities that live on many continents, are of many cultures, and speak many languages, and little about their interactions with Christian neighbors. The history of Muslims in the United States, particularly among African Americans, is itself long and complex.⁴ If we are

² Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue, section 1, adopted by the 211th General Assembly (1999).

³ Global and national figures are from the Pew Mapping the Global Muslim Population survey of October, 2009.

⁴ Cf. Edward E. Curtis IV, Muslims in America: A Short History, Oxford University Press, 2009; Jane I Smith, Islam in America, Columbia University Press, 1999.

to understand the contours of today's "Muslim world," and learn how to engage with the wide variety of Muslims among us, we must seek a more accurate historical understanding.

In addition, Islam and Christianity each claim that the truth they affirm is universally valid and significant for all humankind. Both Muslims and Christians understand that part of their religious duty and privilege is to share the truth that they have received. Christian outreach and Muslim da'wah (invitation to belief and service of God) share many features; each is also a distinct and distinctive form of witness. In order to remain faithful in our Christian witness, we are impelled to know more than our own affirmations. We need to discover the seriousness of the spiritual quests and commitments of Muslims.

In many passages of the Qur'an, Christian readers encounter individuals, stories, and themes of the Old and New Testaments that are familiar to them, and yet not exactly the same as the Biblical accounts or formulations. In order to understand the distinctiveness of Islam and Christianity, as well as their inter-relatedness, Christians need a much clearer understanding of the Qur'an and of Islamic tradition. As we gain this understanding in our encounter with Muslims, we have an opportunity to come to a better understanding of our own faith, scripture and theological tradition.

Sadly, economic, political, and social factors have led to violent conflicts in many parts of the world in which Muslims live. In a few countries, radical groups that use violence in the name of Islam are active politically. At the same time, large-scale military interventions (from within or from outside) and other governmental actions often inflame and exacerbate local conflicts. Though the root issues of many conflicts are economic or social rather than religious in nature, religion is often used to express and manipulate emotions and to legitimate a wide variety of political and social agendas. The political issues are pressing and give greater impetus for us to seek Christian-Muslim understanding.

Understanding these political and social realities, often magnified and oversimplified in media presentations, requires study as well as honest and open exploration of such questions with Muslims themselves. It is urgent that we as Christians learn how to speak in an informed manner against the misuse of Islam, and of Christianity, in the service of extreme ideological ends, or as instruments of conflict. And it is important that we learn to work with Muslims in speaking out against abuse of religion, and in cooperating for justice and peace in our world.

In the United States, the events of 2001 and the years since have fostered a growing suspicion and antipathy toward Islam, and a readiness to accept stereotypes about Muslims in general. The media often use imprecise and sometimes inflammatory language regarding Muslims, and many books have been published painting an unrelievedly negative picture of Islam. Any instance of violence connected to Islam readily feeds fears and misunderstandings. Unfortunately, this reaction is common among Christians in the United States. Lacking a knowledge of the religion of Islam, and having little interaction with Muslims as persons, many Christians have not been able to distinguish false characterizations from accurate statements, or to replace superficial and sometimes biased impressions of Muslims, with informed, personal knowledge of them. In the place of ignorance, stereotypes and superficial knowledge about Islam and our Muslim neighbors, Presbyterians seek more accurate information and personal encounter with Muslims.

Many Presbyterians are already engaged in building relationships with Muslims in their local areas. In 1987, the 199th General Assembly recommended that Presbyterian congregations and individuals engage with Muslims for dialogue, cooperative service, and witness. That Assembly suggested that "as Christians and Muslims work together to discover new ways for the future and as Christians reflect theologically on the meaning of such experiences" clearer answers would emerge about "what faithfulness requires of the church" (1987 Study, 31.324). The fruits of such experience and interaction are yet to be fully considered. A new study is needed (as suggested in the recommendations of this document) that will explore the theological issues in depth, and develop a more substantial grounding for a faithful Presbyterian response in Christian-Muslim relations.

Faithful Engagement

A fuller understanding of Islam and Muslims will enable Presbyterians to enter more faithfully into the responsibilities, challenges and opportunities that are before us in living with our Muslim neighbors. Increased cooperation, open and probing dialogue, joint study and friendship with Muslims are needed and desirable avenues that can lead us into more knowledgeable, personal and responsible Christian-Muslim relationships. Members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are encouraged to engage with Muslims in a renewed process of learning and discernment, to discover more fully how we can live with Muslims as neighbors in faith.

Christian faith invites us into ever deeper relationship with God and with our neighbors. God's overflowing love, known by us in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit, draws us out of ourselves and into life in right relationship with God and others. To be made in the image of God is to be made for community. God became flesh and dwelt among us; God is present with us, and God's Spirit invites us into deeper engagement with our fellow human beings, each of whom is made in God's image as we are. "We are called to relate to people of other faiths in full humility, openness, honesty, and respect. We respect other's God-given humanity and the seriousness of their spiritual quests and commitments. It is our Christian faith in the Triune God and our intention to live like Jesus, not our cultural standards, that require this of us."⁵

Christianity and Islam are lived and living realities. Neither faith can be known fully through the study of ideas alone. We Christians embody our faith in worship, holy days, and practices of discipleship, as well as in our beliefs, spirituality and relationships. Islam likewise comes to life in prayer, holy days, acts of faith, thought, spiritual practices and relationships. Both religious traditions are communal in nature, and can be known more fully in community. Since we will not be able to understand one another unless we become personally acquainted, we need to spend time together, teaching each other who we are.

When Christians interact with Muslims, particular questions about our own faith are brought into focus. This encounter is a challenging opportunity to rediscover what we believe, particularly in relation to such issues as how we understand God and God's revelation, and what it means to live faithfully. Engagement with Muslims can help us learn more clearly how to articulate our Christian faith, both in our words and in our practice.

Toward Theological Understanding

Theological questions arise for us, and for the Muslims with whom we relate, clothed in issues of culture and context. Our encounters and our thinking are affected by many factors that originate in the realities of our living, and in inherited and culturally conditioned patterns of thought and practice. When we engage others,

⁵ Presbyterian Principles, section 5.

we learn about the limits of our own assumptions, and realize that our theological reflection is shaped by our own cultural backgrounds and inherited certainties.

For fruitful theological reflection, the integrity and diversity of both the Christian and the Muslim communities of faith will need our attention. Since both traditions are multi-vocal and multi-cultural, care will be needed to comprehend the richness of Muslim thinking as well as to articulate the fullness of Reformed theology. The task of reflecting theologically on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations is complex and challenging. We confess that we now see but dimly what "faithfulness requires of the church" in relation to Islam and Muslims.

There are many points at which Christian faith and practice is similar to Muslim faith and practice; these can be a basis for cooperation and provide a beginning point for reflection. There are also many points of difference, at which the Christian way and understanding is distinct from Islam. Awareness of such differences can be the basis for even deeper relationships and mutual learning, rooted in the integrity of our separate faith traditions. The following reflections are initial insights that may lead to theological understanding.

God's Revelation

Christians and Muslims desire to know God. The idea of God's revelation to human beings is central to both Christianity and Islam. It is not unusual to hear Muslims describe Christians as *people of the Book*, a phrase from the Qur'an that refers primarily to Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The Arabic phrase ('Ahl al-Kitāb)⁶ is perhaps best understood as people of scripture.⁷ For both Christians and Muslims, faith rests in an affirmation that there is a God who reveals.

For Christians, "Revelation is self-disclosure of God. Thus God is both its source and its content."⁸ Revelation illumines our understanding of ourselves and others, but its primary content is knowledge of the one who is revealing. In the 1987 General Assembly theological statement, "Nature of Revelation," revelation is

divine self-disclosure that is analogous to the way human persons disclose themselves to one another by words and particular deeds.

⁶ Quran [3.64](#)

⁷ or as "people of revelation", as Dr. Ghulam Haider Aasi suggests.

⁸ The Nature of Revelation in the Christian Tradition from a Reformed Perspective (199th General Assembly, 1987)

People are disclosed to each other in their characteristic behavior. Such encounters give knowledge, though not total knowledge, of the self of the other person. In the same way, God's self is disclosed in God's dealing with human beings, but God is still more than what is revealed. Reformed views of revelation have emphasized that God's self-disclosure gives knowledge of God's will or disposition toward us, and not only (or even primarily) of God's inner nature, which remains mysterious and veiled in its revealedness. Through God's self-disclosing activity we learn God's purposes and precepts for our lives, God's judgments, and above all God's promises of grace. So understood, revelation is a personal meeting of God with human beings, the experience of which can be reported in language. It is given to bring us, both corporately and individually, into relationship with God, and to open to us a way of life, of reconciliation, peace, and joy, of worship and service, love and justice.

For Presbyterians, an affirmation of revelation is also an affirmation that God is "beyond anything we can ask or imagine" (Cf. Eph. 3:20). What we know of God through revelation is true knowledge, but it is not exhaustive. Revelation is an initiation into the mysteries of God, though, paradoxically, the more we (truly) know of God, the more we realize how much more there is to know. With real knowledge comes acknowledgement of the ultimate mystery of God.

Islam, like Christianity, affirms that revelation communicates the nature of God, and agrees that this nature is not fully communicable. Limited human intelligence cannot know God's essence fully. Though it can be glimpsed in God's attributes, contemplated in God's names, and is revealed in the Qur'an, God's nature is not revealed in its fullness. God is greater than what can be communicated to humanity in revelation. Thus both faiths affirm the human inability to express or understand the fullness of God.

Muslims also see God's revelation in creation, and through human conscience. Muslims see in creation a "text" that teaches the believer about the ways in which God has ordered, bestowed, and planted love and mercy within all of life. The revelation of the Qur'an is, however, the clearest revelation of God for Muslims, confirming human understanding, and providing definitive guidance for living. All signs and testimonies to God should be studied, but in the Qur'an, Muslims hold, God completes and corrects all earlier revelations, and uncovers the "straight path" which God has given humanity to walk (Quran 1.6).

The Qur'an for Muslims is the fullness of revelation. For Christians, the fullness of revelation is found in Christ Jesus. Christians are invited to “know the mystery of God, namely, Christ” (Col 2:1). Christians believe that “God was in Christ” (2 Cor 5:19) and “in [Jesus Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. The Confession of 1967 helps to clarify this:

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.⁹

It is in the person of Jesus Christ that we have the “one sufficient revelation of God.” The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are also revelation because through them, the Holy Spirit bears “unique and authoritative witness” to Jesus Christ. Through these writings, the church “hears the word of God.”

The Nature of God

Christians and Muslims together affirm that there is but one God, who is the Creator of all, and Sovereign over all. Nevertheless, there are important distinctions in how we understand God.

God is One

The Christian Church’s earliest statements of belief—the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds—begin with the affirmation of belief in the Almighty God who made heaven and earth. The Nicene Creed specifies that “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty” (1.1). Later, the Scots and Second Helvetic Confessions specifically state that “God is one”:

We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone

⁹ Confession of 1967 9.27

we put our trust. Who is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible (3.01)¹⁰

We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting in himself, all sufficient in himself, invisible, incorporeal, immense, eternal, Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the greatest good, living, quickening and preserving all things, omnipotent and supremely wise, kind and merciful, just and true. Truly we detest many gods because it is expressly written: “The Lord your God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4).¹¹

Muslim understanding of the oneness of God is expressed, for example, in the *Shahada* (testimony), or first “pillar” of Islam: “There is no deity but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God” (*la ilāha illā Allāh, Muḥammad(un) rasūl Allāh*). The Qur’an teaches that God is unique—a being of pure oneness and otherness:

Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him (Qur’an 112:1-4).

An essential affirmation of faith for Muslims is of God's oneness (*tawhid*). Associating anything or anyone else with God is *shirk*—an unforgivable sin:

God does not forgive anyone for associating something with Him, while He does forgive whomever He wishes to for anything else. Anyone who gives God associates (partners) has invented an awful sin (Qur’an 4:48).

In this assertion, Christians will see a concern similar to the first of the Ten Commandments:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; Do not have any other gods before me. (Exodus 20:2-3)

For both Christians and Muslims, each in our own way, God is one—unique, infinite, immutable, eternal, and omnipotent—and to deny this in any way is a grievous transgression.

God's Name

Both Muslims and Christians who speak Arabic call God *Allah*.¹² Christians who are not Arabic speakers often have assumed, wrongly, that because Muslims use the word “Allah”, it means they have a different name for God, or are referring to a

¹⁰ The Scots Confession (BoC 3.01)

¹¹ The Second Helvetic Confession (BoC 5.015)

¹² In Arabic the word *Allah* is a compound of *al-* (the definite article, “the”) and *ilah* (god, deity). Together they signify “God.”

different deity than Christians. But Arabic translations of the Bible use the word *Allah* for God.

Although Muslims most often refer to God as “Allah,” and Christians speak of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Islam and Christianity each have a tradition of using attributes of God as appellations. Christians are familiar with names for God such as “Almighty,” “Creator,” “Redeemer,” “Sovereign,” “Holy One” and “Sustainer.” The Westminster Confession expands the early creeds’ affirmation that God is “almighty” by giving a comprehensive statement of traditional characteristics of God’s nature:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty; most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them: . . . To him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience he is pleased to require of them.¹³

Muslims speak of the “Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names” of God, and are familiar with names of God such as “All Compassionate,” “All Merciful,” “Creator,” “Bountiful Bestower,” “Judge,” “All Knowing.” Exploration of the similarities and differences of understanding contained in these ways of speaking of God can benefit both Muslims and Christians.

The Three Persons of the One God

Christian faith has always been clear, and distinct from Islam, in affirming that within God’s unity there is a trinity or “tri-unity”-- God is simultaneously one and three. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three “persons” constitute the one God.

¹³ The Westminster Confession (BoC 6.011-012)

It is here, in the understanding of God's unity as Trinity, that Islam and Christianity are in serious disagreement. In the Second Helvetic Confession, written in the sixteenth century, we find these harsh words:

we condemn the Jews and Mohammedans[sic], and all those who blaspheme that sacred and adorable Trinity. We also condemn all heresies and heretics who teach that the Son and Holy Spirit are God in name only, and also that there is something created and subservient, or subordinate to another in the Trinity, and that there is something unequal in it, a greater or a less, something corporeal or corporeally conceived, something different with respect to character or will, something mixed or solitary, as if the Son and Holy Spirit were the affections and properties of one God the Father. ¹⁴

The Qur'an, in turn, rejects the Trinitarian understanding of God:

O people of the scripture, do not transgress the limits of your religion, and do not say about God except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, was a messenger of God, and His word that He had sent to Mary, and a revelation from Him. Therefore, you shall believe in God and His messengers. You shall not say, "Trinity." You shall refrain from this for your own good. God is only one god. Be He glorified; He is much too glorious to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. God suffices as Lord and Master. (Qur'an 4:171)

If the language of The Second Helvetic Confession appears indelicate, the language in the Qur'an can also be sharp:

Unbelievers indeed are those who say that God is a third of a trinity. There is no god except the one god. Unless they refrain from saying this, those who disbelieve among them will incur a painful retribution. (Qur'an 5:73)

According to the Qur'an, Christians are committing *shirk* (association of another being or thing with God) by referring to Jesus as the Son of God and believing in the Trinity.

¹⁵ For Muslims, such a confession constitutes a mistaken understanding of Jesus, and compromises the uniqueness and oneness of God.

Christians, on the other hand, affirm that God is known and experienced in the dynamism and inter-relatedness of Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. God's very being is found in the intimate communion of the three persons of the Trinity. "Trinity" is not simply how we speak of God, but who God is: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

¹⁴ The Second Helvetic Confession (BoC 5.019). It is important to note that the reference here to Muslims as "Mohammedans" is based on a (dated) misunderstanding of Islam and is no longer considered an appropriate, but an insulting, way of speaking.

¹⁵ Cf. Qur'an 5:72-75; 5:116.

Human Nature, Sin, and Wholeness

Both Christianity and Islam teach that God confers divine blessings upon human beings and all of creation. Each also, in very different ways, traces the history of God's seeking and guiding men and women through the figures of Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. However, the two faiths reflect quite different understandings of the human condition, and how God acts on behalf of humanity.

God's guidance of humanity in Islam

Like Christians, Muslims believe that human beings are responsible before God—humans are called to respond to God in love, worship and obedience. The purpose of life is to live in the way that pleases God, that is, to live in the way God wills, and for which the Divine has created humanity. Muslims believe that through the prophets and in revelation, God gives men and women what they need to awaken from forgetfulness, and to return to their created nature, which is to live in accordance with the will of their creator, who is sovereign over all. God forgives humanity's sins, and endows human beings with the ability to live in obedience. A *Muslim* is one who *is submitted* to God's will.

Those who acknowledge God as their sovereign, and stay on God's path through the guidance given in the Qur'an, enjoy peace and right relationship with God and neighbor in this life. Such obedience also leads to a life in paradise after death:

Those are limits set by Allah. Those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein (for ever) and that will be the supreme achievement. (4:13)¹⁶

Human beings, in the Islamic view, are created “in the best form/stature” (Qur'an Chapter 95) to recognize, serve, and worship God. Men and women do of course sin, and forget their purpose or lose their way, and therefore God has provided the reminder and guidance of revelation. Faithful humans who sincerely repent receive the forgiveness of their All-merciful Creator, as well as the ability to return to God's service.

God's Salvation in Christianity

¹⁶ Check translation

The Christian understanding is markedly different. Christians affirm Paul's statement, "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do... making me captive to the law of sin" (Romans, 7: 18-23). In Reformed Christian understanding, human nature is marked by an inclination to sin. Men and women are created in the image of God, but are fallen creatures, in need of rebirth. Human beings need the power of God to break into their lives, in order to free them for obedience to God, and to transform them for participation in the new creation that God is bringing into the world.

The gospels recount the good news of this freeing activity of God through Christ Jesus. For Christians, the salvation story is a Trinitarian drama:

According to the witness of scripture, God's love comes to us in a threefold way: God loved the world and gave the Son for our salvation (Jn 3:16); Jesus Christ, God's only Son our Lord, loved us and gave his life for us (Gal 2:20); the gift of God's love in Christ has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22). The church's confession and praise of the triune God is rooted in the threefold self-revelation of the one God who is our creator, our redeemer, and our sanctifier.¹⁷

The means of salvation is Christ's life, death and resurrection:

The cross of Christ is at the heart of our faith, for it is through the Lord's death that we receive new life.¹⁸

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.¹⁹

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

¹⁷ The Trinity: God's Love Overflowing

¹⁸ Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁹ Brief Statement of Faith.

Thus Christians embrace the good news of the love of God culminating in the transforming acts of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Our understanding of Jesus and his salvific role is very different from the Muslim understanding of Jesus as a prophet. Traditional Islamic teaching generally holds that Jesus did not die on the cross; the crucifixion is unimaginable for a true prophet of God. God would not subject a prophet to the passion, nor would God require it, since only God's constant and available forgiveness is necessary to restore the way to loving and obedient life.

This difference in understanding regarding human nature, redemption, and Jesus' salvific role, is at the heart of the most critical theological differences between Christianity and Islam. Christians and Muslims will continue to struggle to understand one another in relation to their different affirmations regarding what humanity requires, and what God has done for them.

Toward Faithful Life and Witness

Resting in the love of God, set free through the love and power of Christ Jesus, and led by the Holy Spirit, Christians respond in faith, hope and love. We journey in the way of Jesus, and seek to be transformed so that we might more closely live our lives as he did. In all that we do, we seek to be faithful followers of Jesus, who asked his disciples to be his "witnesses" to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). We give witness to what God has done and is doing in our lives, in the ways in which we live, and through the account we give for the hope that is in us. Witness is the expression of our Christian faith through worship, proclamation and service.

Stewardship of creation

Christians and Muslims share similar understandings of the human vocation in the world. Both the Bible and the Qur'an present a picture of the world as God wills it to be. Christians affirm that Jesus taught the Reign, or Kingdom, of God was breaking into the world, and invited his followers to behave as citizens of that Reign, caring for one another, healing, forgiving, praying, embracing those who had been excluded, and inviting others to join them in living life abundant. To live in the world in this way remains our Christian calling. The Qur'an portrays the world as fundamentally ordered by God, the merciful and gracious sovereign. Human beings have been created, in part, to be God's stewards on earth. Muslims are called to act as God's representatives (Arabic *khalifa*), working on God's behalf. Christians

understand that the goal of this calling is to build God's community of love and justice on earth. For Muslims, the goal is to be agents to promote the realization and practice of God's standards for a just and compassionate way of life. Though there are important differences in these understandings of the human role in God's work in the world, the parallels may be the basis for significant understanding and cooperation.

Agents of Justice and Peace

As part of their lives of faith, both Muslims and Christians are also deeply concerned that the societies in which they live should be just. For Christians, concerns regarding justice are rooted in the teaching and example of Jesus, as well as in the prophetic tradition which clearly shaped his understanding and announcement of the kingdom of God. In the Qur'an, God's concern for justice as well as compassion is stated repeatedly (cf. Qur'an 7:85, 5:8). Although inspired by different religious traditions, Christians and Muslims share many concerns for social justice. Poverty, homelessness, environmental degradation, and violence in media and society are all problems that Muslims and Christians can address together. "We are called to work with others in our pluralistic societies for the well-being of our world and for justice, peace, and the sustainability of creation."²⁰ In seeking justice, it is possible and becoming for Christians and Muslims to make a joint witness as religious persons. "When all inhabitants of the planet bear joint responsibility for its life (e.g., for the environment or the globalized economy), our role is to cooperate with others in seeking mutually acceptable ethical standards for behavior."²¹

Human rights and the rights of communities are among the concerns that Christians and Muslims share. In the light of global discussions of such rights, and the difficult situations in many countries, these issues are often sensitive, and entangled with particular historical and political struggles, or culturally specific claims. Christians and Muslims can make an important contribution by "affirming that the principles of human rights and religious freedom are indivisible.... Religious freedom does not only imply freedom of conscience but also the right to live in accord with religious values and the recognition of cultural and religious diversity as basic to human reality."²²

²⁰ Presbyterian Principles, section 3.

²¹ Presbyterian Principles for Interfaith Dialogue, 3

²² Striving Together in Dialogue, #31.

The rights of religious groups and of minority populations in societies are important topics for both Muslims and Christians, and an area in which conversation between the communities is needed in order to clarify misunderstandings, and explore shared concerns and possible areas for cooperation.

In such conversations, issues of history require attention. Many Muslims link Christianity and Christians with recent experiences of colonial power and control in various parts of the world, and these associations carry echoes of the Crusades for some. On the other hand, Christians often recall specific instances of violence against, or oppression of Christians in parts of the world in which Muslims are in the majority. Such wounds are a living factor in Christian-Muslim relations today.

Presbyterians and other Christians live in relation to Muslims here in the United States and in many other parts of the world. In some places those relationships are marked by conflict, mistrust, even violence; in other places by familiarity, understanding and shared community. Challenges and opportunities present in one place or time are different than those of another place or time, and it is important not to project one specific reality of Christian-Muslim interaction onto all Christian-Muslim relationships in all places.

An essential feature of Christian-Muslim encounter and engagement is the diversity of the communities involved. Muslims in the United States not only come from many different places in the world, but also reflect the diversity of thought that is characteristic of the Islamic tradition. There is significant diversity within Islam, which is manifest in the rich variety and differences in schools of thought, practices and legal interpretation which Muslims follow. There are lively debates within the Muslim community regarding how certain religious values and commitments can best be lived out, particularly in a country that is nominally secular and does not have a Muslim majority, such as the United States.

In addition, the history of particular groups raises important issues for reflection and possible joint action. For example, the history of African American Christians and Muslims underlines the ongoing need to address issues of racism and marginalization in our relationships. African American Muslims also practice and give voice to an understanding of Islam that is thoroughly rooted both in the essentials of the tradition and in a particular, and particularly important, American experience. Other Muslims in the U.S. come from South and South East Asian countries, from the Middle East, or from cultures of Africa, the Balkans or the former Soviet Union. Relations among all of these groups, like relations among the diverse ethnic and cultural groups in the church, are often a source of mutual enrichment, but

sometimes a source of difficulty. Racism is a reality within the Muslim community, as within the Christian. Perceptions of ethnic backgrounds and cultures, as well as racial prejudice and religious biases, come into play in Christian-Muslim relationships. Since both Christianity and Islam condemn denigration of others based on such factors, Christians and Muslims can work together to eradicate bias and foster reconciliation.

The experiences of women involved in Christian-Muslim relations also deserve careful attention. Historically and still in our own time, many women face difficult struggles in both traditions. It is important to note, however, that Christians often fault Islam about the treatment of women in ways that demonize Islam. A Muslim woman's covering of her head is assumed to be a sign of oppression, even when the situation of that woman is not known. Western Christian reactions may prevent our recognition of the power women may have in particular Muslim contexts. The ways in which Christians and Muslims imagine women and women's lives in each other's traditions needs to be replaced with real knowledge of their lives and of women's efforts to gain authority and voice in each tradition. Christian women may also need to listen with particular care and to consider the need to accommodate different standards and mores when engaging with women and others in the Muslim community.

Youth and young adults in both traditions bring concerns and experience that also deserve the attention of Christians and Muslims as relationships are being formed. These groups often encounter one another using patterns of interaction and ways of learning that are different from those found in more typical Christian-Muslim dialogues. The questions and concerns of youth and young adults are often distinctive, and can raise significant issues of justice.

Another concern for Christians and Muslims is the stereotypes, labels and terms we use about one another. Stereotyping of one another is a type of false witness; it should be replaced by interaction and knowledge of each other. Christians too often create images of Islam and Muslims out of fears, from scraps of information, or on the basis of simplistic and sensationalistic media presentations, without benefit of direct encounter with Muslim men and women. We inflict harm on one another through uninformed speech and insensitive actions, often without intent. In this relationship in particular, Christians learn, or re-learn, that we live in a society that tends to demonize those we fear or do not understand. We confess that this tendency is alive in our churches. Addressing these concerns is another area for Muslim-Christian cooperation.

Christians and Muslims also share a vocation to come to know neighbors and strangers with whom we live. The teaching and ministry of Jesus, and the witness of

the Old Testament, give clear guidance: for Christians love of God and love of neighbor are inseparable "Central to the ongoing story of the Bible is God's long-term, patient, merciful purpose of recreating a human community in which the love of God and neighbor becomes a fact of history."²³

We welcome the interaction between Muslims and Christians initiated by "A Common Word Between Us and You," an invitation to Christians from a diverse, international group of Muslim leaders issued in October, 2007. This letter has begun an exploration of how Muslims and Christians can come together for understanding and cooperation based on love of God and love of neighbor.²⁴ Response to "A Common Word" is one of many avenues that can be explored to forge ties between our communities without ignoring our real differences, and live our call to be peacemakers.

Respectful Outreach

Among all persons of whatever faith or none, Christians are "called to make joyous witness ... in a spirit of respect, openness, and honesty."²⁵ "Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way," adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991), elaborates on this calling:

As our Christian affirmation meets the faith of [others], we are not called to respond in judgment but in awareness of the limitless, saving presence, power, and grace of God. The spirit that is to inform our witness among them "presupposes our presence with them, sensitivity to their deepest faith commitments and experiences, willingness to be their servants for Christ's sake, affirmation of what God has done and is doing among them and love for them."²⁶

Our Christian witness should be done in the way of Jesus. It should be marked by a sharing of a people's hopes and suffering; open-hearted hospitality and acceptance; a servant love that renounces arrogance, domination or manipulation; healing; prayer

²³ "Building Community Among Strangers," a policy statement adopted by the 211th General Assembly (1999)

²⁴ Cf. <http://www.acommonword.com/>

²⁵ Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way, adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991), p. 19.

²⁶ Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way, adopted by the 203rd General Assembly (1991), p. 19. The document is quoting an earlier affirmation of the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism.

that leads to openness and builds bridges of love; urgency; shared ministry; proclamation in word and deed; and living, and calling others to live a holy life.

When God gives us courage to engage in the giving and receiving --the listening and the speaking-- of interfaith dialogue, Jesus is present. Through the power of his Spirit, we are enabled to be truly ourselves in authentic relationships. When we interact with others personally, Jesus offers reconciliation, healing, teaching. Through his body, the church, he extends his ministry of love."²⁷

Muslims are also called by their faith to extend a clear witness to the teaching of Islam (Qur'an 2:143; 3:64). Muslims are expected to make the message of Islam clear in the world, and to engage in outreach (*da'wah*) to share the message of God by word, worship, and deed. Both Christian and Muslim communities affirm the importance of making witness to God in the world, and both believe that their message is for all humankind. Muslims, like Christians, send missionaries. In both communities, the majority of missionaries serve among their own sisters and brothers to equip and renew them. In many situations of mission and *da'wah*, both Christians and Muslims recognize the fact that how one behaves or lives is the most appropriate and effective witness.²⁸

As Christians and Muslims witness to one another, we will learn about one another and one another's faith, enjoy occasions of life together, talk about a wide range of topics and concerns, and also share our faiths with one another. The intent among both Christians and Muslims should be to do this in ways that foster the peace and welfare of our life together, upholding the right of each community to exist and to conduct their religious life freely, and guarding against the denial of such freedom, and against harmful uses of the power of either community.

While recognizing that mission and *da'wa* are essential religious duties in both Christianity and Islam, Muslims and Christians need to uphold the spiritual and the material well-being of all. Many missionary activities, and the methods they use, arouse legitimate suspicions. There are situations where humanitarian service is undertaken for ulterior motives and takes advantage of the vulnerability of people. Thus the clear distinction between witness and proselytism becomes crucial. It is the basis for the recognition that people of faith can enjoy the liberty to convince and be convinced and at the same time,

²⁷ Presbyterian Principles, section 4.

²⁸ Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34f). See also Mark 1:44, where Jesus heals a leper and says, "See that you say nothing to any one."

respect each other's religious integrity, faithfulness to one's tradition and loyalty to one's community.²⁹

An important corollary to mutual witness is mutual correction. Though it may be difficult, the interaction of sharing our faiths with one another makes it possible to raise questions about perceived errors in thinking, and harmful attitudes or behaviors. Since mutual correction is also a two-way dynamic of Christian-Muslim relationships, Christians may receive critique as well as give it. This is a welcome, if sometimes uncomfortable, aspect of growing friendship.

In Christian-Muslim relationships in our time, it is clear in new ways that, as human beings, we often fail one another. Muslims and Christians fail to understand one another, and often do not make the effort to do so. Commanded by our faith to love our neighbors as ourselves, and committed to do all in our power to do so, Presbyterians seek fuller understanding of Islam, relationships with Muslim communities, and discernment of what God requires of us in Christian-Muslim relations.

The "Study Catechism" (1998) gives us guidance on interaction with people of other faiths:

As much as I can, [with Muslims] I should meet friendship with friendship, hostility with kindness, generosity with gratitude, persecution with forbearance, truth with agreement, and error with truth. I should express my faith with humility and devotion as the occasion requires, whether silently or openly, boldly or meekly, by word or by deed. I should avoid compromising the truth on the one hand and being narrow minded on the other. In short, I should always welcome and accept these others in a way that honors and reflects the Lord's welcome and acceptance of me.³⁰

The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.³¹

²⁹ "Striving Together in Dialogue: a Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action" commended for study and by the 214th General Assembly (2002), #32. It is important to note that in Islam "da'wa" or outreach is not a legal requirement for a Muslim that is "essential" in the way in which other practices, like the five daily prayers, or the fast of Ramadan, are. Making Islam clear and present in the public sphere, revival or renewal of the Muslim community, and outreach are all part of the Muslim parallels to Christian witness.

³⁰ Study Catechism, #52.

³¹ *ibid*, #49.

In acting on this report, the 219th General Assembly adopted the following Recommendations. The Assembly voted to:

1. Approve the report “Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations” and commend it to the church for study and guidance.

2. In consideration of the need for a more intentional and engaged approach to Christian-Muslim relations, call upon the church, through its agencies and governing bodies, to support education for Christian-Muslim relations among Presbyterians, by

a. developing and making available updated resources for study and reflection on Islam and Muslim life, including case studies of Muslims and Christian-Muslim relationships in a variety of countries of the world, and especially in the United States;

b. urging presbyteries and seminaries to hold training events in partnership with the Offices of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship of the denomination regarding Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, in order to equip congregational leaders and interested Presbyterians to teach others;

c. continuing to monitor the church’s own educational materials for sensitivity and accuracy regarding Muslims and Islam, and to encourage the inclusion of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in curricular materials of the church;

d. encouraging Presbyterians to come to know and befriend their Muslim neighbors, and to talk in-depth with them about matters of shared concern, life and faith, and the questions each has about the other, *to implement a program of shared community experiences that might include sharing meals, cultural events, and activities in mosques and churches together, and to develop an educational program that includes inviting a Muslim leader to offer instruction in a church and a Christian leader to offer instruction in a mosque.*

3. Call upon the church, through its agencies and governing bodies, to support further theological reflection regarding Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, in company with Muslims and within the Christian family, by

a. providing for a series of consultations between Presbyterians and Muslims to be facilitated by the Offices of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship;

b. learning more about Islam and Christian-Muslim relations in various areas of the world through interaction with partner churches and institutions, study centers, mission personnel; and

c. calling for the development, through this process, of a fuller study articulating a theological understanding of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to be presented for consideration of the 221st General Assembly (2014). This process shall include broad consultation including representatives of the national Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus and partner churches in majority Muslim countries and other significant bodies both Muslim and Christian.

4. Call upon the church, through its agencies and governing bodies, to support Presbyterians in the practice of faithful witness with Muslims, by

a. encouraging presbyteries, congregations, and individual Presbyterians to engage with Muslims and to explore ways by which common concerns for justice and community development can be addressed through cooperation between Christians and Muslims;

b. asking appropriate bodies of the church, and individual Presbyterians, to identify and speak out against bigotry, prejudice, discrimination, and violence against Islam and Muslim peoples of all cultures, especially in the United States;”

c. continuing to work with Christian churches in areas of Muslim majority in their efforts to live freely and openly as Christians, and to work for full religious freedom (including the right to change one’s religion) and for equal citizenship for all persons in their societies;

d. continuing to monitor the use of religion in the service of power, in the undergirding of systems of oppression, and in legitimating extreme political agendas, and to act as peacemakers and peacekeepers;

e. exploring missiological issues and the forms of Christian witness in use among Presbyterians, and the forms of Muslim da’wah (invitation, call), in the United States and in other parts of the world, in order to discern and practice respectful, open and honest ways to share faith in word and deed;

f. supporting and doing this work through ecumenical and interfaith partnerships and organizations whenever possible;

g. providing, through a continuing Office on Interfaith Relations, for maintenance and strengthening of relations, formal and informal, with persons and organizations of other faith communities, and in particular with Muslim organizations on behalf of the church, and for support of Presbyterians as they become involved, or continue to work, in building Christian-Muslim relations and other interfaith relationships.

Suggestions for Study of this Paper

1. A Four-Session Study

Use the text of "Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations," along with a visit to a mosque or with a Muslim leader, to create a short course to explore Christian-Muslim Relations.

As you begin the first session, ground your study in prayer or song, and provide a way for participants to introduce themselves briefly. Then read the sections of the paper entitled "What Compels Us Toward Understanding" and "Faithful Engagement" (pp. 2-6). Discuss these reasons for wanting to know more about Islam and Muslims, and help the group identify what questions are most important to them. Does "faithful engagement" adequately describe what is needed to reach understanding and build relationships? In preparation for the next sessions, ask participants to read the section "Toward Theological Understanding" (pp. 6-14). Discuss the plans for the mosque visit or conversation with Muslim leader.

As a second step in your study, arrange for the group to visit a mosque and talk with a Muslim leader who can answer questions about Islam and Muslim practice. Or, if this is not possible, arrange for a Muslim leader to come to meet with you for a conversation. Consult guides in the Interfaith Toolkit about such visits, especially "Visiting the Other Children of Abraham" (<http://www.pcusa.org/resource/visiting-other-children-abraham/>), and "Getting Started in Interfaith Relations". If you are visiting, expect a tour of the facility, and/or some hospitality. Plan for a 15-20 minute presentation on the basic practice of Islam by your Muslim hosts, or the Muslim guest you have invited, with time for respectful questions and conversation to follow. (A focus on how Islam is lived will help focus the session on more concrete and less abstract matters.) The aim is not confrontation, nor argument, but listening, inquiry, and learning what you can.

In the third session, begin by reflecting on the Christian-Muslim conversation that you had. What did you hear that surprised you about Muslim life? What ideas or practices seemed similar to those of Christianity? What seemed different? Continue your study by discussing the section of the paper on points of theological similarity and difference ("Toward Theological Understanding, pp. 6-14). How are the two religions most distinct? At what points do you think they are most similar? What theological questions remain unanswered for you?

In the final session, talk about "Faithful Life and Witness" with Muslims (pp. 14-21). Ask the group to read this section of the paper ahead of your meeting. In what ways, and in what areas of life, might Christians and Muslims cooperate effectively? How do you think Christians are called to live with Muslims? What makes for faithful Christian living, and for faithful Christian witness, with and among Muslims? Remember to respect the diversities of viewpoints in the group on this topic; try to identify as wide a range of possibilities for our practice of discipleship with Muslim neighbors as you can. Before you end, take a moment to identify what more you would like to know about Islam and Muslims, and how you might go about learning more.

2. A Study as Part of a Retreat or Conference

Use the 1st, 3rd and 4th sessions above as part of your event, alternating with other activities, or as the study portion of your time together as a congregation, session, board, etc. These could also be used as one three-part educational "track" in an event in which a number of different topics are offered. If you are doing this, consider inviting a leader with some knowledge of Islam and of Muslim life, who is also able to facilitate the conversation.

3. Four-Session Study with Muslims

If you already have a relationship with a Muslim group, or want to begin one, you might consider studying this paper with Muslim neighbors. Such a joint study should be jointly planned by a small group of the Christians and Muslims who will be involved. The planning group can consider whether to meet in one another's places of worship, in homes, or in another location, and develop plans from the simple ideas presented here.

In this sort of study, it will be important to acknowledge that "Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations" was written by Christians for Christians, although the writing benefited from consultation with Muslims. The Muslim participants may need to add clarification, or question certain descriptions of Muslim ideas and practices in the study; a good facilitator, or team of leaders, can help these contributions add depth to the conversation.

In the first session, be sure that hospitality is provided. Be sensitive to issues of appropriate foods and drinks, and to any hesitations regarding the participation of men and women. Ask participants to spend some time with a person from the other community - that is, a Muslim with a Christian. Ask each pair to learn 1) one another's name, and the meaning of that name; 2) what it is to which they devote the most time and energy ; and 3) the title of a favorite book, movie or television program. Invite each person to introduce their conversation partner. Then begin group conversation by asking participants to identify briefly one thing that they treasure in their own tradition. (This could be an idea, a time of year, or a practice of the faith; it could be individual or communal; the more concrete the better). Finally, invite participants to talk about what they want to know about one another's religions and lives.

Focus the second session on the sections of the paper entitled "What Compels Us Toward Understanding" and "Faithful Engagement "(pp. 2-6). Ask everyone to read this ahead of time. Are the motivations for Christian-Muslim understanding the same for Muslims as for Christians? Are there other motivations that should be added to those described in the paper? Is "engagement" with one another an adequate way to describe what is needed to build relationship and cultivate understanding?

To the third session, invite an articulate teacher or leader from both the Christian and Muslim communities. Ask these presenters to talk about the section of the paper on points of theological similarity and difference ("Toward Theological Understanding, pp. 6-14). Ask each of them to speak for no more than 15 minutes on the similarities and differences presented there, and what else should be said about the theological questions that arise in Muslim-Christian relationship. Invite further discussion in the time remaining.

In the fourth session, discuss the ideas presented in "Faithful Life and Witness" (pp. 14-21). Are there other areas that deserve attention as Christians and Muslims talk together about what their two faiths call them to do in the world? Is anything important left out of this discussion? What about outreach toward one another's community (evangelism/ da'wa)- how should this be done? What seem to be the most important areas for possible collaboration for this group in this place? End with some appreciative evaluation of the time spent together.

For Further Study / Bibliography

Introductions to Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations

Brown, Stuart. *The Nearest in Affection: Toward a Christian Understanding of Islam*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994. A very good introduction that is out of print, but findable!

Ernst, Carl W., *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*. Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 2003. Looking at Islam, and how Western Christians have viewed it.

Esposito, John. *Islam: The Straight Path, updated 3rd Ed.* London: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004.

_____. *What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam*. London: Oxford Univ Press, 2002.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Islam: Religion, History, Civilization*. San Francisco, Harper Collins, 2003.

A readable, short introduction from a Muslim scholar.

Schimmel, Annemarie. *Islam: An Introduction*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992. By a scholar of the Islamic mystical and poetic traditions.

Speight, Marston. *God Is One: The Way of Islam, 2nd Ed.* New York: Friendship Press, 2002.

Written for Christians, this explores Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

On the Qur'an

Esack, Farid. *The Qur'an: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2002.

Lawrence, Bruce. *The Qur'an: a Biography*. New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2007. A quick survey of the book and major interpreters, in a popular idiom.

Mattson, Ingrid. *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. Mattson was President of the Islamic Society of North America, and an excellent and readable scholar.

Sells, Michael. *Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations, 2nd ed.* Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 2007. Captivating and informative, with a CD of texts as recited.

(For "translations" of the Qur'an, try A.J Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (1955); M.S.A. Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*; Kenneth Cragg, *Readings in the Qur'an*.)

The Prophet Muhammad

Ramadan, Tariq. *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad.* Oxford and New York, Oxford Univ. Press, 2007.

Other Topics

Abou El Fadl, Khaled M. *The Place of Tolerance in Islam.* Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Ali, Kecia. *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith and Jurisprudence.* Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.

Khalidi, Tarif. *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature.* Cambridge, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 2002.

Mamdani, Mahmood. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror.* New York: Pantheon Books, 2004. A provocative and complex look at the rise of political Islam.

Smith, Jane. *Islam in America.* New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999.