

Understanding to love

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Introduction

Islam is a growing faith. Those of us who work in Islamic areas know this already, but the figures, however cynical we might be about them, are telling us a story of growth:-

“The Christian faith appears to be fairly stable, in the light of the whole world population. In 1970, 33.7% of the world were Christians, and in 1996, 33.9% The annual growth rate appears to be about 2.3%. Islam is growing faster – 2.9% If this carries on, then Islam will overtake Christianity in the not too distant future.” (U.S. Centre for Worlds Mission)

So is this a time to give up and go home? To settle for what we have got? If we take either of these ways, then we are denying:-

The love of Jesus for all people

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:35-36)

The sacrifice of Jesus for all people

“Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognising him. He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?” They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, “Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?” “What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what

is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." (Luke 24:13-27)

The commission of Jesus to HIS people

"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

I believe that this course will give God's people more understanding about Islam, and with understanding will come a deeper love for Muslim people, and with that love will come the release of the Spirit to help Muslim people come to a full understanding of Isa, who they already regard highly.

Fundamental principles

When discussing Islam, and working with Islamic people, there are fundamental principles which I think are very important:-

1. Love is the key. Arrogance is not the key.
2. Service is the key. Triumphalism is not the key.
3. Honesty is the key. Compromise is not the key.

Jesus set this pattern clearly. Let this be our attitude:-

"whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

Some, sadly some of them Christians – have attacked Islam in an aggressive way. This has never been my way. We will never attack or argue Muslims into the arms of Jesus. Only love can do it.

This course

Islam is a works based faith. Islam teaches that at the last judgment, the scales will come out, and if good deeds exceed bad deeds, the Muslim goes to heaven, and if the reverse happens, they go to hell. (Sura 21:47)

With this simple truth, we can enter the world of Islam, and gain understanding. That's not so easy at first, as we find many of the words, names and characters we already know from the Bible, but they don't mean what we believe them to mean.

So in this course, we will start by trying to gain understanding.

We will look at evangelism and follow up.

We will consider long term strategy

The course is called "Understanding to love", and this title means just what it says. We are not "Understanding to destroy", or "Understanding to hurt", or "Understanding to ridicule". We are seeking understanding, so that we can have love and compassion for those who do not yet know the fullness of Jesus.

Let this attitude fill our lives, our hearts and our prayers.

Basic beliefs

Islam has a number of basic beliefs. Understanding them will help us understand how to love, how to serve, and how to present our beliefs.

**** Throughout this material, I will refer to the God of the Old Testament by his Hebrew name YAHWEH. This will help me distinguish between him and Allah. "Yahweh" is our translation of the Hebrew YHWH, the name the Jewish people used when they wanted to speak about God. Hebrew has no vowels, so "a" and "e" were added, to help us read the word. The word is often translated "Jehovah".**

1. The Kalima or Shahada

Islam has a basic statement of belief. It is not a direct quote from the Quran, but it reflects what the Quran teaches. This is the statement:-

There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.

So let's begin by looking at the two names quoted here:-

Allah

The Quran says:

"This is the true account: There is no god except Allah; and Allah—he is indeed the Exalted in Power, the Wise." (Sura 3:62)

According to Muslim faith, Allah (God) is beyond all description and knowledge. However, the Quran gives him many titles, traditionally numbering 99.

He is first the Creator, the Judge, the Rewarder of good and evil. He is unique, He has no partner or equal, He is all-powerful and merciful. He is the one who does whatever he pleases and gives no account of his actions to anyone.

He exercises justice towards those he approves, and shows himself ready to pardon *those who do what is needed to obtain pardon.*

In Muslim faith Allah is regarded as the Master, and believers are his servants or slaves. These terms emphasize the greatness of God, and the humility and obedience which man must display in Allah's presence. The Muslim feels it a position of great honour to be a "slave of God". Muslims reject the idea that God is Father, out of fear that this would diminish the greatness of God. They suspect that those who call themselves "sons of God" are proudly exalting themselves as God's favourites.

The Quran calls God "the loving" (Al Wadud), but the meaning is rather different from the Christian idea of God's love. It implies "approval." The Quran says that God loves (approves of) the good, but does not love (approve of) the evil-doers. The Quran speaks much of God's goodness in creation and in sending prophets, but nowhere says that God loves the world, nor that God loves sinners, nor that "God is love" (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8).

Allah is not compassionate and merciful. He demands submission from those who believe in him, and is vengeful and harsh towards those who are unbelievers, and towards any who turn away from him. See for example:-

"Before thee We sent (apostles) to many nations, and We afflicted the nations with suffering and adversity, that they might learn humility." (6:42)

"We send the apostles only to give good news and to warn: So those who believe and mend (their lives), —upon them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. But those who reject Our Signs, —them shall punishment touch, for that they ceased not from transgressing." (6:48-49)

He does not seek the lost, but waits until people seek him. Then he "loves" those who love him, but hates those who hate him. Allah is dominating, aggressive, bearing down, demanding, and yet does not reveal anything of himself.

He is described as the God of Abraham, Isaac, Joseph and many other Old Testament people. Christians can be misled into thinking that Allah and Yahweh, (the Hebrew name for God) are the same.

But they are not. Yahweh wants to have a relationship with his creation. He makes himself known (Exodus 3:1-6); he provides for survival (Genesis 6:8); he wants relationships with people (Moses, Samuel, Isaiah); he loves with a deep compassion (Hosea 11:8), and he forgives sinners, not rejecting them. (Isaiah 1:18) Isa (the Arabic name for Jesus) continues these same loving characteristics in the New Testament. Isa cares (Matthew 9:36); sacrifices himself (Mark 10:45) and rescues us because he loves us. (1 John 4:10)

We must not confuse Allah with Yahweh. The Quran uses many of the same stories which we know from the Old Testament, and we can easily make the mistake of thinking Allah and Yahweh are the same. This is not true. Yahweh looks for people, longs to have a relationship with his creation, reveals himself, forgives, and goes on reaching out, being involved with us. He can be known as a close and intimate friend, who wants to share our lives. Isa reflects the same compassion and desire to reach out. Allah is none of these things.

Muhammad is his prophet

Muhammad (570-632 AD) is for the Muslims the last and most trustworthy prophet of Allah. Allah revealed the Quran to him in chapters or in strings of verses, between his fortieth year and his death. The revelation happened when a voice called Muhammad to recite (96:1-3). Receiving these revelations left Muhammad exhausted. There are a few allusions to visions (17:60; 53:5; 82:23) and two allusions to the 'night journey' and the journey to heaven or ascension during which Muhammad travelled through the skies (17:1; 53:5-18). Muhammad was *insan al-kamil*, "the perfect man", because he never lied. For if he lied just once, how could anyone believe whatever else he might have said? He was perfect because he was chosen by God to be his last prophet, to whom he entrusted his definitive revelation to mankind. An extensive biographical literature, the *hadith*, details every word of Muhammad that was remembered by his contemporaries.

In addition there is also an extensive popular tradition relating his numerous miracles. (*mawlid*)

The Quran says: **"Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah; and those who are with him are strong against Unbelievers, (but) compassionate amongst each other. Thou wilt see them bow and prostrate themselves (in prayer), seeking Grace from Allah and (His) Good Pleasure. On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Taurat; and their similitude in the Gospel is like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong; it then becomes thick, and it stands on its own stem, (filling) the sowers with wonder and delight. As a result, it fills the Unbelievers with rage at them. Allah has promised those among them who believe and do righteous deeds Forgiveness, and a great Reward.** (Sura 48:29)

Believing in this schema, belonging to the community, and exercising the 5 disciplines ("pillars") is the heart of Islam.

2. The Quran

The Quran is thought by Muslims to have come down to Muhammad in its entirety. There is a stream of thought which regards the Quran as in existence with Allah from the beginning.

It is written in Arabic, and is still chanted in that language, although translations in all languages are available.

It is divided up into 114 suras, or chapters, which were “sent down” at different times in Muhammad’s life. All the Suras have names. They were written down about 100 years after his death. (Muhammad lived from 570 AD to 632.) They are arranged in order of length, not by time. This explains why the Quran seems to jump around through history.

We meet many Old Testament people in its pages, but although the names are the same, many of the stories are changed. Most significantly, all these characters acknowledge Allah, not the God and Father of Jesus.

The Quran is seen as a “revealed book.” It is, in the eyes of the Muslims, totally accurate, and there can be no discussion about the words or the order of words. The Quran has not been subject to any textual or source criticism. This tends to result in it being locked in stone, and unable easily to reflect the changing intellectual disciplines which have helped illuminate the Bible. Errors have to be explained away, with no allowance for human transcription or translation errors. (For more discussion on this, see the “Quran” in the “Additional material” section at the end of this course.)

3. Umma

The expression of Islamic faith is to belong to *the community* (umma) of Islam

“Umma” describes a people or community, a powerful and sometimes a visionary concept of Islam. Although the word has various uses in the Quran, it principally designates social divisions of humanity:

“Mankind was but one nation, but differed (later). Had it not been for a Word that went forth before from thy Lord, their differences would have been settled between them..”(10:19)

Division is considered to be disunity, because it is in conflict with the unity of Allah.

To each umma a prophet was sent to recall them to Islam. Little success was achieved until the coming of Muhammad. *While the Quran required Muhammad to establish an Arab umma out of the squabbling tribes, it also taught the creation of a single umma transcending the further divisions in the world.*

“And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah’s favour on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided (re the community)” (3:103)

The umma is a strong uniting force for Islam, but it is also a prison for those who want to leave. There is seldom any way out. Those who leave are regarded as dead, and attempts are often made to kill them

“On the day when some faces will be (lit up with) white, and some faces will be (in the gloom of) black: To those whose faces will be black, (will be said): ‘Did ye reject Faith after accepting it? Taste then the Penalty for rejecting Faith.’” (re conversion) (3:106)

4. Sharia

Islam’s central effort is aimed at the establishment of an ethically based social world order, based on Sharia.

Sharia is often referred to as Islamic law, but only a small part is based on the core Islamic text, the Quran. A better definition might be “Islam –inspired,” or “Islam-derived,” or “the law system of the Muslims.”

Calling the Sharia the “Law” can be misleading, because Sharia extends beyond the law. Sharia is the totality of religious, political, social, domestic and private life. It is meant for Muslims, and applies to all those living in Muslim countries.

The regulations of the Sharia can be divided into two groups:

1. Regulations on worship and ritual duties
2. Regulations of juridical and political nature.

Sharia law is controlled by the **Ulama**, a term in Islam meaning the community of learned men.

5. The 5 pillars of Islam

These “pillars” reflect the basic belief and lifestyle of Muslims.

- 1. Shahada** (creed). The Shahada is the verbal statement and a Muslim’s public witness saying, “There is only One God (Allah) and Muhammad is the Messenger of God (Allah).”
- 2. Salat** (prayers). The five prescribed daily prayers that a Muslim performs.
- 3. Saum** (fasting). Between sunrise and sunset during the entire month of Ramadan, a Muslim abstains from food, liquids, and sexual relations if married.
- 4. Zakat** (religious tax). This annual tax is collected to aid the poor and other beneficiaries.
- 5. Hajj** (pilgrimage to Mecca). This pilgrimage to Mecca is required once in a life time if there are adequate means and health to accomplish the journey.

6. Heaven

The Muslim view of the afterlife includes a future resurrection of the dead, a divine Day of Judgment, eternal punishment, and paradise for believers. Muslims believe that at the Day of Judgment, paradise will be the reward for those Muslims whose good deeds outweigh evil deeds.

Here is a brief description of what Muslims expect in heaven:-
Sura 37- (Saffat, or Those Ranged in Ranks)

- 41 For them is a Sustenance determined,
- 42 Fruits (Delights); and they (shall enjoy) honour and dignity,
- 43 In Gardens of Felicity,
- 44 Facing each other on Thrones (of dignity).
- 45 Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear flowing fountain,
- 46 Crystal white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof),
- 47 Free from headiness; nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom.
- 48 And besides them will be chaste women, restraining their glances, with big eyes (of wonder and beauty).
- 49 As if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded.

This heavenly dwelling is only accessible to those who, on the day of judgment, find their good deeds outweighing their bad deeds.

Compare this with the promise of Jesus:- **“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”** (John 14:1-3)

7. Works.

Islam is built on the principle of good works. This shows itself over and over again in the Quran. In Islam, a follower has to work his way past the judgment and in to the Islamic heaven. Here are a few of the many verses which make this clear:-

“The balance that day will be true (to a nicety): Those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper: Those whose scale will be light, will find their souls in perdition, for that they wrongfully treated Our Signs.” (7:8-9)

(Another translation reads:- “On that day, all shall be weighed with justice. Those whose scales are heavy will triumph, but those whose scales are light shall lose their souls because they have denied our revelations.”)

“If any do deeds of righteousness, —Be they male or female—and they have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them.” (4.124)

“But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad—for it is the Truth from their Lord, — He will remove from them their ills and improve their condition.” (47:2)

Works based faiths all suffer from the same problem – the believers have no certainty of salvation. So they are left to hope, and to try and heap up their good

works, in the hope that the scales will tip their way. Compare this with the words of Jesus to the thief on the cross:-

“Then he (the Thief) said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ Jesus answered him, ‘I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.’” (Luke 23: 42-43)

8. Jesus

The Quran mentions Jesus many times. In those passages, we learn that the Quran recognises the following:-

1. His conception was supernatural

“And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his Revelations, and was one of the devout.” (servants) (66:12)

2. He was faultless

“He said: “Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.” She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not Unchaste?” He said: “So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, ‘That is easy for Me: And (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us’: It is a matter (so) decreed.” (19:19-21)

3. He had supernatural power

“And (appoint him) an apostle to the Children of Israel, (with this message) “I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah’s leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe;”
(: 3:49)

4. He was the Word of God

“O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him.” (4:171)

5. He was endowed with Holy Spirit

“We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of Apostles; We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.” (2:87)

6. He was Messiah

“Behold! The angels said: “O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah;” (3:45)

7. He was a servant

“He said: ‘I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet;’” (19:30)

8. He creates

“Then will Allah say: ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the holy spirit, so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, and behold! Thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it, and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave.’” (5:113)

9. He heals and raises the dead

“And (appoint him) an apostle to the Children of Israel, (with this message): “I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah’s leave; and I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe;” (3:49)

10. He dies

Behold! Allah said: “O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.” (3:55)

11. He ascends and returns

“Behold! Allah said: “O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.” (3:55)

It is interesting that the Quran should say so much about Jesus, and know so much theologically, about him. What is missing is any concept of salvation. This is central to the Christian faith, and any presentation of Christianity without it is a distortion. On

the other hand, we should not regard Muslim people as without knowledge of Isa. They know a lot, and this should act as a foundation for us in our loving and sharing.

9. Conversion

Most Faiths have to accept that some people will reject one Faith in favour of another one. Most Faiths have to accept that some people will change their allegiance. Christians accept that everyone has the right to decide what he or she believes, and while regretting that anyone should abandon or reject Jesus, accept this as part of the freedom Jesus has given us.

Islam does not take this position. It welcomes converts, but the Quran is very aggressive towards those who choose another way:-

“If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to Allah), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).” (3:85)

“But those who reject Faith after they accepted it, and then go on adding to their defiance of Faith, —never will their repentance be accepted; for they are those who have (of set purpose) gone astray. (re conversion)” (3:90)

Why has the Quran taken this position? It reflects the “submission” concept of Islam, and the very tight and restrictive hold under which Muslims have to live. Compare this with the attitude of Jesus, who had compassion for the lost, made provision for them to return, but did not force belief, or judge rejection:-

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9:36-39)

10. Irja

Irja is the Muslim doctrine of predestination. It is often heard in the expression “it is the will of Allah.” This teaching leads to an extreme fatalism. For example, here is a story from a well known English Newspaper, dated Monday February 2nd, 2004. It was also seen on TV:-

“A stampede during the ritual stoning of pillars symbolising the devil left 244 worshippers trampled to death. In 2003 14 pilgrims were crushed there, and in 2001 35 were killed in a stampede.

The Saudi minister responsible for the hajj Iyad Madani said “All precautions were taken to prevent such an incident, but this is God’s will” he said. “Caution isn’t stronger than fate.” (The Guardian)

Irja is nowhere found in Christianity. While we accept that a sovereign God must know all things, we also understand that he is actively working with us to achieve those ends, and that our freedom to choose can often frustrate those ends. Ultimately, his purposes will work out, but it can be a bumpy ride, as his free born sons and daughters misunderstand or mis-apply his will.

In the Christian Faith, we have to accept our part in the errors and misjudgements, and not just dump them on the will of God. This breeds responsibility, maturity and durability. Irja breeds fatalism, and a lack of willingness to bear the consequences for actions.

The Bible says **“This is the way. Walk in it.”** (Isaiah 30:21). But our God does not insist that we do, and waits and longs for our return from false pathways. (Luke 15:20)

Theological reflections.

This section is a Christian theological reflection on the basic beliefs of Islam. Unlike the “basic beliefs” section, it is a little more critical of the doctrines and teachings of Islam. However, remember that the basic point of this course is “understanding to love.” That same principle still applies, even in a theological comparison.

“But verily thou callest them to the Straight Way; (36:4)

The Muslims believe that Islam is the “straight way.” This is true – it is a straight “works based” way. The Quran makes it clear that followers will only receive the reward of faith as long as their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds.

To arrive at this position, a Muslim must believe absolutely and completely in the Quran, in Muhammad, in the Sharia, and observe the 5 pillars. Even with all this, there is no certainty of salvation, only a hope that the scales will tip in the right direction.

No room is left for doubt or questioning. The Quran must be accepted without reservation as the absolute words which Muhammad received. No human error is possible. This tends to dull creative thought, but is totally in keeping with Allah, who demands submission, and absolute obedience, making no effort on his part to relate to the people he supposedly created. Unlike Yahweh, he does not use his position as creator to release creativity in his followers. There is no question of being changed from glory into glory, (2 Corinthians 3:18) or maturing into the stature of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13) What is demanded is “submission.”

Allah knows no compassion. He does not seek the lost, but waits for them to submit. Any backsliding provokes an immediate response – punishment and judgment. There is nothing of the prodigal father in Allah. Nor does Allah desire that all should be saved, but seems to exalt in the destruction of any opposition. There is nothing of the suffering servant in Allah.

In fact, after an exhaustive study of the Quran, a Muslim knows as much about the personality and character of Allah as he does when he starts- very little. Allah reveals little of himself, except his demand for submission, and the rules for staying submitted.

From this understanding flow many of the Islamic characteristics:-

1. The Muslim belief in the superiority of Islam over all other philosophy and religion.

The problem here is quite simple – how do Muslims live with the obvious failure of their faith to conquer the world? A superior attitude can only be justified by demonstrating the superiority in reality. When it doesn't happen, those who have such attitudes look for someone to blame.

We often hear this - "It's the fault of the West." "It's a conspiracy against us."

Fortunately, Christianity doesn't have a triumphalist mentality. We do believe that one day Jesus will take on the judgement of all humanity, a position he won at Calvary. But we have been instructed by him to live with servant and expectant hearts in the meantime. *We will triumph, but we are not triumphalist.* We can live with the situation we find ourselves in, serving, loving and waiting.

2. The harsh side of their faith, which quickly shows itself when things don't go their way.

This is a hard thing to say, but we see it again and again. I don't want to be too specific, but after the invasion of Iraq, signs were written and stuck to the doors of Churches, suggesting a most aggressive response.

Christians have been taught by Jesus to serve and love, whatever situation we may face.

3. A total inflexibility in the face of a complex world, and the desire to impose simple fundamentalist solutions.

We live in a most complex world, and there is no easy solution to the issues and problems we are facing. Islam's response is often an extreme conservatism. The hope of the Imams and teachers is that by returning to Quranic fundamentals, everything will be alright. So we see, for example, an Imam in Afghanistan sending all the women students home from college, where "they belong." I am not suggesting that such a return to extreme fundamentals is seen everywhere, but it is very much the general response of Islam to the modern world.

Christianity seeks Jesus for direction as to how to live in the modern world. We have learnt to adjust our presentation, although not our content, over the centuries. Monks may have been the expression of faith in the middle ages, but today we are

having to adjust to T.V., computers, websites and a rampant secularism. We are able to do so, because we have a living Word, both in the Bible and in the risen presence and power of Jesus. We are able to address the issues of secularism, abortion, euthanasia, and advances in medicine without panic. Jesus is with us always, even to the end of the age – a living reality, leading us to respond and adjust to the situations we find in the twenty first century.

This is not the surrender of our principles, but the development of our ability to respond to where we are today, not where we were 1400 years ago.

4. Use of texts

Old Testament characters appear in the Quran, but they act and say things which do not appear in the Old testament texts, which are older. It is the responsibility of all theologians to quote, as accurately as possible, the source texts they are using. The origin of so much of our Old Testament study comes from the Massoretic texts, the Dead Sea scrolls, found at Qumran, and, less reliable but also useful the Septuagint and the Peshitta.(See “Additions – texts”) These combined sources give us a reasonable Old Testament translation. The Quran may have originated before the discovery of the texts at Qumran, but it is strange that a book which claimed to come down from heaven in its entirety should be apparently unaware of the original materials. One might ask how God has managed to corrupt his own texts. Please note that I am not attacking the Quran, but as a theologian, raising questions which should be raised.

5. Jesus, the Apocrypha and the Trinity

Jesus has a very high profile in the Quran, and he is treated with great respect. Some of the material is from apocryphal sources which Christians have known of and have rejected as unbiblical and unreliable. Some of it is aimed at denying a version of the Trinity which the Church has also rejected. What the Quran attacks is Tritheism, the belief in three Gods. Such a dogma is completely absent from the Christian Scriptures and from orthodox Christian tradition such as that stated at the Councils of Nicæa (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon. (451), before the arrival of the Quran. At these gatherings, the universal Church professed belief in the Triune nature of the Godhead, as opposed to any tritheistic ideas. Christians do not believe in three gods. They believe in three Persons sharing the same divine essence. Speaking as a theologian, it seems to me that the Muslim faith made no attempt to get at the heart of what it was opposing. If it had, then it too would have questioned the apocryphal material, as we have done, and it would have tried to get to the heart of the Trinitarian controversy, rather than accepting some deviant view, which the mainstream of Christianity had judged as heretical.

Of course, it takes a lot of effort to get to the heart of other Faiths, as I am finding out for myself! Did the Muslims just take the easy way out? It is a question which has to be answered. (I hope I haven't done that in this material. I can assure any readers of a great deal of research and thought.) Jesus has no “salvation” function in the Quran, which is to be expected, as Allah has no desire to save, only to see submission. The

only hope is that the scales balancing out the right way. Compare this with what Jesus offers:

Love:	1 John 4:10
Compassion:	Matthew 9:36
Forgiveness:	Mark 2:5
Healing:	Mark 2:12
New beginning:	2 Cor 5:17
Security:	Luke 12:7
Purpose to serve:	Luke 5:11
The certainty of heaven:	John 5:24

I believe that the Quran is asking the impossible. There is no one on the planet who can lead a good life. We are all corrupt, and no matter how hard we try, sin keeps intruding into our lives. The Christian faith, recognising this fact, teaches of a God who has made his own provision for salvation. To willing hearts, he offers this both freely and eternally. This produces men and women who want to serve freely.

6. The community

The community is the key to Islam. Everyone is a brother, following the same path of prayer, ritual cleanliness, alms, fasting and Hajj. So to convert to another faith is the equivalent of death. The Quran allows for no choice, just judgment for anyone steps out of Islam. There is no concept of free choice in Islam.

Compare this with the way Jesus treats this young man:-

“As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No-one is good, except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.’” “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Mark 10:17-22)

What is interesting is what happens next – nothing! Jesus does not try to force the young man to believe, or run after him to persuade him to believe. Nor does he utter extreme threats to the man if he doesn’t believe. Jesus allowed the man the freedom to choose what he wanted to believe, and then let him live with the consequences. He treats all people the same way. In fact he goes further, as the story of the Lost Son shows us. (Luke 15:11-23) Even when we fall away, he longs for our return, and waits hopefully for it.

Allah would condemn the lost son for his lack of submission. But this brings a problem with it. Those who submit unquestioningly have given up their responsibility to question and seek after truth, and to bear the moral consequences of the results of that questioning and searching. Total submission does not breed love and

commitment, but erases from the conscience any appreciation of the totality of God's creation, which expresses itself in free search and free response. Such an unquestioning slavish obedience, pushed to the limit, produces suicide bombers – people who have lost their moral obligation to analyse their actions in the light of their beliefs, and to respond to those who do not believe as they do with argument and compassion.

This is yet another demonstration of a principle which I have spoken of so much in my many writings and teachings – *bad theology leads to bad practice*. The “bad” theology of submission without love leads ultimately to terrorism with no conscience. Islam is, at its heart, bad theology. Beginning with the belief that man can, in effect, save himself by good works, it proceeds to deny the basic human blessing of free questioning and searching, replacing this with a text which has to be obeyed without question, and a text which claims to be without fault. It locks the human spirit into a series of rituals, in order to under gird a community existence to which there is no free exit.

Sharing our faith with Muslims

A Muslim recently sent this e mail to Christians:-

“First of all, our name is the Muslims, followers of God. Second, our saviour is our deeds, neither Jesus nor anybody. Third, there is no comparison between the wrong Christian religion and the God's religion (Islam). That's why no Muslim will follow your darkness. (They didn't even when you tortured them in Spain and Palestine.) So just save your time, breath and money .”

Problems to remember

I'm not suggesting that this e mail represents the whole of Islam, but it does alert us to certain problems we face when we come to evangelize Muslim people:-

1. The pull of the Umma.(community)

It is very hard for a Muslim to leave the community. It exercises a strong pull on his or her life. Leaving it is considered as bad as death, and efforts will be made to dissuade any who are thinking of converting to Christianity. We have to realise what a big step conversion is for a Muslim. It is powerfully life changing, and possibly life threatening.

2. The triumphalist heart of Islam.

Islam believes that it has the answer to the needs of the world, and it aims for social and religious domination in the world. Muslims do not see the need for any other faith, as theirs is, they believe, the strongest, and will triumph. So why should they bother with Jesus?

3. The misunderstanding of Jesus.

Muslims know so much about Jesus, but they do not have any understanding of the need for a sacrificial death. They are anti Trinitarian, do not accept the need for any atonement, and cannot grasp the resurrection. So when we speak the name of “Jesus”, it means different things to them than it means to us.

We must bear certain principles in mind:-

1. Only the Holy Spirit can bring understanding to a Muslim. (Romans 5:5)
2. We have to love those we want to share with. (Matthew 9:36)
3. Only prayer can open the way for us. (Acts 12:5)
4. There is much in Islam which we can use as bridges to sharing.
5. Evangelism is best done one to one. Big meetings do not usually tend to be the answer.
6. Yahweh longs for all men to be saved. We are working with God, not against him.(1 Timothy 2:4)

Our approach

1. Avoid argument.

2. Where possible always answer from the Bible.

The majority of converts from Islam testify that they were first attracted to Christianity by hearing or reading the Scripture, and in a great number of cases the Bible has been directly responsible for their conversion. This should add another point to our basic method. Increase in every possible way the circulation of the Scriptures.

3. Study and follow the method of Christ. Think about:-

The call of Peter. (Luke 5: 1-11)

The call of Bartimaeus.(Mark 10:46-52)

The call of Zacchaeus. (Luke 19:2-10)

The woman bent double. (Luke 13:10-13)

The call of Lydia.(Acts 16:14)

The challenge to the gaoler. (Acts 16:23-34)

Jesus speaks into needs, and we should not be afraid to share this truth. It stimulates interest, and provides explanation for our faith. Jesus is our Saviour - saving us from our circumstances, and bringing us to a better and fuller life. But Jesus is also Lord. We also have the responsibility to lead people to Jesus because he is the living word

of God, and we are responding to his position as Lord, as well as his position as saviour.

4. The use of our personal testimony.

Everyone likes stories, and our personal testimony of how we came to Jesus is our story. We should always try to use it when we share our faith. But many Christians have never thought about their personal testimony from an evangelistic point of view. There needs to be:

A section about what we were like before we came to Jesus.

A section about how we came to Jesus.

A section about the difference Jesus has made to our lives, and some examples from today about his acting in our lives.

This evangelistic testimony, supported with a few carefully chosen Bible verses makes a very effective evangelistic tool.

5. A very simple Gospel.

It is good to have a simple Gospel presentation in our minds. here is one, based on just one verse. Here is one I use.

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12)

Here are the simple themes which might be shared:

“Received him.” This word means “to take by the hand.” We receive Jesus by believing in what the Bible says about him, and then we reach out and take him by the hand. At the same time he takes hold of our hand. This is a feeling, which touches our heart

“who believed in his name.” We have to believe in the truths about his name – this is a response of our intellect and mind to the things of Jesus - that by his name all men can be saved. That by his name the barrier of sin has been destroyed, and we can turn back to God. That by his name every stronghold of the evil one in our lives can be destroyed. That by his name we are saved and restored.

“he gave the right.” We are free to make a decision to trust and believe in him. Nothing can stop us, once we decide to trust him. He has set us free to choose him. He made this possible by his sacrificial death at Calvary. We are also free to reject him. There is no force on his side, only love. The freedom to choose or reject is part of the Christian Gospel. It is freely our choice.

“to become children of God.” By his sacrifice, we can be a child of his heavenly Father, and enjoy all the rights and privileges of sonship, now and forever.

Muslims are not usually won by large evangelistic campaigns, but through love and simple honest personal sharing. Many Christians who used to be Muslims have said that the most convincing argument to follow Christ was the love shown them by Christians. A smile and warm handshake go a long way. Genuine interest, honesty, listening attentively, patience, faithfulness in friendship and sharing of time are love in action – these are all evangelistic tools. Remember:-

The first Gospel they probably will see is the one written in your life.

The Way Ahead

How can we go forward?

Having spent a lot of time looking at Islamic belief and practice, we have to work out a way forward in our ministry to the Muslims. Here are some areas for thought and prayer.

1. Prayer

“Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.”(Luke 18:1)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Phil 4:6)

“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”(Acts 12:5)

It is prayer which changes things. It is prayer which will help us “understand to love”, and it is prayer which will bring our Muslim friends to a full understanding of Jesus.

2. Lifestyle

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” (1 Cor.11:1)

Muslims will see Jesus in and through us. So it is vital that our lifestyle reflect the patterns and teachings of Jesus. We don't need to be perfect, but we do need to be seen to be trying to walk in the way of Jesus, to be husbands and wives living in the pattern of Jesus, to be families living in the way of Jesus, to be men and women of the King.

3. Spiritual warfare

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.(2 Cor 10:4)

Winning anybody to Jesus is a spiritual battle. We have to make war in the heavenly places; we have to intercede with tears; we have to call down the power of the sacrifice of Jesus; we have to break every barrier. We have to win the battle for the souls of men in the heavenly places. Then we will see the victory for those souls here on earth.

4. Evangelism

“Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9: 37-38)

In the end, we have to go out and gather the harvest – the whole harvest, and not just that among Muslims.

5. Follow up

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” (John 19:26-27)

Jesus never abandoned people. Just as he made provision for his mother, so we must make provision for those we lead to him. In the Muslim world, we have to consider not just spiritual follow up, but physical follow up as well. Muslims who convert will have a hard time from the Umma, and from their families.

We will have to take great care of those who come to Jesus – even more than we would for those who are from any other background.

Additional material

Mistakes in the Quran

Bible texts

The Bible says

Mistakes and imperfections in the Quran

Any book making the claim to be God’s Word ought therefore to be free from demonstratable error. The Bible has withstood every test of literary, logical, historical, archaeological, and scientific truth and accuracy brought against it by sceptics and unbelievers. Can the same be said for the Quran?

The Quran contains numerous scientific errors:

In Sura 23:14, the embryo is said to be formed from a joining of the sperm with a clot of blood. This incorrect view entirely ignores the equally important presence of

the female ovum (egg), and the process of fertilisation which occurs between the egg and the sperm. **In Sura 18:86**, the Quran says that a traveller sees the sun sets in a spring of murky water, and in 18:90 this same traveller finds the specific point at which the sun rises. We know, of course, that the sun does not set into a murky spring of water, and further that the earth is not flat, which is presupposed by the finding of specific places where it rises and sets. **In Sura 51:49**, the Quran claims that Allah made everything in pairs. However, we know that there are several species of plants and animals, which reproduce asexually through parthenogenesis, and which have only one gender, or really no gender at all. **Suras 21:31 and 31:10** both seem to claim that mountains exist to prevent earthquakes, something which both science and simple observation demonstrate to be false.

The Quran holds within its pages many historical inaccuracies, as well:

In Sura 28:38, Pharaoh (the king of Egypt) orders Haman to begin making baked bricks in a kiln out of clay, this during the time of Moses. Historical evidence demonstrates that the Egyptians at this time built their buildings out of two materials: cut stone and sun-dried bricks. The Egyptians would not have baked their bricks (a practice not introduced to Egypt until the Roman era), but made them and dried them in the heat of the sun. **In Sura 20:87 and 20:95**, the Jews are said to have made the golden calf idol at the behest of the Samaritans, a group of people who did not exist until around the time of the Hellenistic period, nearly a thousand years after the Exodus. **In Sura 18:89-98**, the orthodox Islamic interpretation states that this passage refers to Alexander the Great, and that he was a Muslim who lived to an old age. Historical records tell us, however, that Alexander was a pagan homosexual idol-worshipper who died at the age of 32, and who lived nearly a thousand years before Mohammed introduced Islam.

The Quran in several points also makes mistakes regarding the beliefs of non-Muslims groups with whom Mohammed had contact. One example which was discussed above is the Quran's erroneous teaching on the Trinity, or more properly, what Christian beliefs about the Trinity supposedly are. The Quran says that Christians join two gods with Allah, and that the Trinity is composed of God, Jesus, and Mary. This composition is not the historic Trinity which was accepted by the vast bulk of Christendom. Instead, this "Trinity" which Mohammed railed against in the Quran was a heretical construction of a group of Arabian pseudo-Christians who were known as Collyridians, and who were steeped in Mariolatry. The historical Trinitarian understanding of the Trinity (as was later defined in the Athanasian Creed) was quite broadly established throughout the church at least two centuries before Mohammed, and evidence for the Trinitarian belief exists from the very start of the church. However, Allah somehow missed the teaching of the vast bulk of the early church, which was that the Trinity is God being ONE in essence while THREE in persons, and instead revealed to Mohammed that Christians believed the Trinity to be God, Jesus, and Mary. In other words, Allah apparently made a mistake, and didn't understand what was the true teaching of the church, and what was the false teaching of heretics.

The Quran also contains many internal self-contradictions:

The heavens and the earth were created by Allah in six days, according to Suras 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, and 25:59; but it took eight days, according to Sura 41:9-12. In Sura 22:47, **Allah's day equals** 1000 human years, but in Sura 70:4, a day to Allah is reckoned as 50,000 human years. **Evil that befalls** human beings is alternatively viewed to be from Allah (Sura 4:7, from ourselves (Sura 4:79), and from Satan (Sura 38:41), with two of these contradictions occurring side by side!

The punishment for adultery is flogging with 100 stripes for both sexes in Sura 24:2, versus lifelong house arrest for the woman and no punishment upon repentance for the man in Sura 4:15-16. **Satan is viewed** as misleading and misguiding people in Sura 4:119-120, but Allah is said to perform this in Sura 16:93. **Sura 2:256** claims that there must be no compulsion in religion, yet Sura 8:38-39 commands Muslims to fight until all religion but Islam is done away with. Similarly, Sura 45:14 tells Muslims to forgive unbelievers, while Sura 9:29 commands them to fight unbelievers.

Bible texts

The Old Testament

For both Old and New Testaments, the crucial question is: "Not having any original copies or scraps of the Bible, can we reconstruct them well enough from the oldest manuscript evidence we *do* have so they give us a true, undistorted view of actual people, places and events?"

The Scribe

The scribe was considered a professional person in antiquity. No printing presses existed, so people were trained to copy documents. The task was usually undertaken by a devout Jew. The Scribes believed they were dealing with the very Word of God and were therefore extremely careful in copying. They did not just hastily write things down. The earliest complete copy of the Hebrew Old Testament dated from c. 900 A.D. before the discoveries at Qumran.

The Massoretic Text

During the early part of the tenth century (916 A.D.), there was a group of Jews called the Massoretes. These Jews were meticulous in their copying. The texts they had were all in capital letters, and there was no punctuation or paragraphs. The Massoretes would copy Isaiah, for example, and when they were through, they would total up the number of letters. Then they would find the middle letter of the book. If it was not the same, they made a new copy. All of the present copies of the Hebrew text which come from this period are in remarkable agreement. Comparisons of the Massoretic text with earlier Latin and Greek versions have also revealed careful copying and little deviation during the thousand years from 100 B.C. to 900 A.D. But until this century, there was scant material written in Hebrew from antiquity which could be compared to the Masoretic texts of the tenth century A.D.

The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, a young Bedouin goat herdsman found some strange clay jars in caves near the valley of the Dead Sea. Inside the jars were some leather scrolls. The discovery of these “Dead Sea Scrolls” at Qumran was one of the outstanding archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century. The scrolls have revealed that a community of monastic farmers flourished in the valley from 150 B.C. to 70 A.D. It is believed that when they saw the Romans invade the land they put their leather scrolls in the jars and hid them in the caves on the cliffs northwest of the Dead Sea.

The Dead Sea Scrolls include a complete copy of the Book of Isaiah, a fragmented copy of Isaiah, containing much of Isaiah 38-6, and fragments of almost every book in the Old Testament. The majority of the fragments are from Isaiah and the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). The books of Samuel, in a tattered copy, were also found and also two complete chapters of the book of Habakkuk. In addition, there were a number of non biblical scrolls related to the commune found.

These materials are dated around 100 B.C. The significance of the find, and particularly the copy of Isaiah, was recognized by Merrill F. Unger when he said, “This complete document of Isaiah quite understandably created a sensation since it was the first major Biblical manuscript of great antiquity ever to be recovered. Interest in it was especially keen since it antedates by more than a thousand years the oldest Hebrew texts preserved in the Massoretic tradition.”

The value of these Qumran documents lies in the ability of biblical scholars to compare them with the Massoretic Hebrew texts of the tenth century A.D. If, on examination, there were little or no textual changes in those Massoretic texts where comparisons were possible, an assumption could then be made that the Massoretic Scribes had probably been just as faithful in their copying of the other biblical texts which could not be compared with the Qumran material.

What was learned? A comparison of the Qumran manuscript of Isaiah with the Massoretic text revealed them to be extremely close in accuracy to each other: “A comparison of Isaiah 53 shows that only 17 letters differ from the Massoretic text. Ten of these are mere differences in spelling and produce no change in the meaning at all. Four more are very minor differences, such as the presence of a conjunction (and) which are stylistic rather than substantive. The other three letters are the Hebrew word for “light.” This word was added to the text by someone after “they shall see” in verse 11. Out of 166 words in this chapter, only this one word is really in question, and it does not at all change the meaning of the passage. We are told by biblical scholars that this is typical of the whole manuscript of Isaiah.

The Septuagint

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, also confirms the accuracy of the copyists who ultimately gave us the Massoretic text. The Septuagint is often referred to as the LXX because it was reputedly done by seventy Jewish

scholars in Alexandria around 200 B.C. The LXX appears to be a rather literal translation from the Hebrew, and the manuscripts we have are pretty good copies of the original translation.

“The Bible says...”

We need to have some Bible teaching to back up our testimony. It is the Bible which brings conviction. So what verses or parts of the Bible do we need to be able to use? Read and study these scripture passages. They are all very helpful when you want to speak about Jesus.

The thief on the cross. Luke 23:39-43

In this story, the Bible teaches us that men are helpless to save themselves. This thief could do nothing to earn his salvation. In this one story we see the clear difference between the Christian faith and all other religions. Other religions teach that we can earn our salvation by the quality of our good works. But we all know that this is impossible. It is impossible to lead a life good enough for God.

But Jesus showed that we are saved by his mercy and love. That’s what the thief on the cross saw, and reached out towards. He did not reach in vain.

Peter walking on the sea. Matthew 14: 22-33

The story of Peter walking on the water makes exactly the same point. Peter started off well, but as soon as he saw the wind and the waves, he began to drown. Then he had to cry out to Jesus “Lord, save me.” This is the biblical teaching on salvation. We have to reach out for the hands of Jesus if we are going to be saved. There is no other way.

By grace we are saved. Ephesians 2: 8

The Apostle Paul puts these things well. He says that we are saved by grace, and by grace alone. A good way to remember the meaning of grace is to say this:- “ Grace is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.” It is the goodness and mercy of God which sent his Son to be the way of our salvation. We cannot possibly buy our way into the presence of God, which is what other faiths are telling us we can do. We are saved by the precious blood of Jesus, which on the cross gave us what we most needed - forgiveness, hope and a new beginning. In other words - salvation.

By the cross of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19) we are set free.(Ephesians 2:8)

A man borrowed money for a project, and then found he could not pay it back. Day after day he worried about this, and day after day the one he had borrowed from would say “If you don’t pay, I will have you thrown into prison.” He tried everything he could think of, but still he could not repay. The one owed the money debt. You are free.” In the same way, Jesus has set us free from the debts of sin, and the power of

the enemy, that we might be free and live in joy. This has all been accomplished on the cross.