

The Mysterious World of Islam

The media today sends confusing signals about the true nature of the Islamic faith. We asked a panel of experts to help us understand what Muslims really believe.

Since the September 11 terrorist attacks, politicians and media pundits have tried to stay politically correct in their attempts to define the Islamic faith. The result has been confusing for most Americans who have been told that Islam is both a peaceful religion and one that aims to destroy Western civilization. The discussion became more perplexing when church leaders invited Muslim clerics to address their congregations—and church members were told that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

Things heated up in November when evangelist Franklin Graham described Islam as a “wicked and violent” religion, prompting President Bush to publicly disagree with him. A White House spokesman said the president views Islam as “a religion that preaches peace,” and Bush later hosted a group of Muslim dignitaries at an Islamic prayer ceremony.

To help Charisma’s readers sort through this complex issue, we invited a group of experts on Islam to answer the toughest questions about this misunderstood religion.

Charisma: Isn’t it true that many Muslims are peace-loving people?

Marvin Yakos: When there is a terrorist attack, there is a tendency to profile all Muslims as fanatical, machine gun-toting zealots engaged in jihad. But there are undoubtedly countless Muslims who do not fully comprehend the subtle

aspects and spiritual foundations of the Quran. Nor is every Muslim convinced of the Taliban's interpretation of Islam.

Undoubtedly, many Muslims truly seek love for themselves and their families. Many sincerely believe that the Quran teaches peace, justice and compassion toward all human beings and that killing innocent people is strictly forbidden. And undoubtedly there are Muslims who struggle between the distinction of peace and the fringe of active jihad. And there are moderate Muslims who interpret jihad to be a completely personal, spiritual struggle.

Charisma: Do most Muslims really even know what the Quran teaches?

Reza F. Safa: Since the revelations that Muhammad received were given to him in his native language, Arabic, it is considered essential that every Muslim should read and understand the Quran in Arabic. This is one reason there is very limited knowledge of the Quran among the 60 percent to 70 percent of the world's Muslims who are non-Arab.

I have more knowledge of the Quran now than I ever did as a fanatical Muslim. Of all the Muslims I knew, only a handful had some knowledge of the Quran. And when I confront fanatical Muslims with the strange revelations of Muhammad in the Quran, they are unaware of these verses.

Charisma: How do most Muslims view Christianity?

George W. Braswell Jr.: Beginning in 1099 and lasting into the 13th century, Christian armies under orders of the pope and European leaders launched wars against the Muslim peoples of

Palestine. The repercussions of these medieval Crusades are many.

Muslims have viewed Christianity as a warring religion. They have believed that Christianity is a colonialistic, imperialistic and political religion bent on dominating the world. Europe and the United States have been looked upon as Christian nations whose governments and foreign policies have been formulated to dominate Muslim societies.

Likewise, Muslims often view Christian missionaries as agents of Western imperialistic governments. There is great suspicion and mistrust. The nation of Israel is seen as a further extension of the crusading mentality of the "Christian West" with its support of the United States and some European nations. Muslims still remember the Crusades, and they still distrust Western nations, Western culture and Christianity.

Charisma: How do we respond to people who think Allah and the God of the Bible are the same?

Tom White: Across the United States Christian leaders are allowing representatives of the Islamic faith to freely speak in their pulpits. This happened at Willow Creek Community Church, the largest church in the United States, where a Muslim imam named Faisal Hammouda was allowed to share the pulpit on Oct. 7.

During the interview with pastor Bill Hybels, Hammouda claimed: "As a matter of fact, we, all of in Jesus. I believe in Jesus. I believe in Muhammad and all the prophets. So our mission here is to introduce people to God." He also stated, "We believe in Jesus more than you do, in fact."

But the Quran says Jesus was no more than a messenger of Allah. The Quran also claims that Jesus was never crucified. Muslims do not recognize the sovereignty of Jesus Christ or His sacrifice. So how could this be the same God?

Three Sundays after Hammouda gave his “enlightening” presentation, 16 Christians were gunned down in a church in Pakistan. You may blame this on the war on terrorism, but you would be mistaken. If it was against America, why did the gunmen target their own countrymen?

If Hammouda is right and Islam is “peace-loving,” why are our brothers and sisters in all Islamic-controlled countries facing severe persecution? The simple fact is: Muslims do not “peacefully coexist” with Christians. Hammouda did not speak for Islam. If he thought he did, he was deceived. Islamic teachings offer no tolerance for those who reject Muhammad for Christ.

Charisma: What is the spiritual force behind Islam?

George Otis Jr.: Islam’s spiritual DNA is both ancient and troubling. Its primary emblem, the crescent moon, is derived from the Babylonian moon god whose suggestive nickname, “The Controller of the Night,” is surpassed only by its formal appellation, “Sin.” The idol of another pre-Islamic god, Hubal, was erected atop the cubelike Ka’aba building that stands outside, surrounded by Mecca’s Grand Mosque.

One Islamic scholar believes that because the Quran calls God the “Lord of the Ka’aba” and the “Lord of the territory of Mecca,” it follows that Allah is in fact Hubal, the “god” of the Meccans.

Another connection between Islam and paganism is found in accounts of Muhammad's early revelations. Though he was opposed to the idolatry and divination that prevailed in western Arabia, there is striking evidence that Muhammad walked on the edge of the spirit world.

His first recorded encounter with the supernatural came in a cave on Mount Hara. After some days of meditating, Muhammad related that he suddenly became aware of a "presence." Moments later, he was caught up in a "revelation" that would prove to be the primal spark of the Islamic religion.

There are indications that at first he thought an evil spirit had enveloped him. He felt cold and shivery, and shaken by his experience, went home to his first wife, Khadija, who persuaded him that he had not been possessed.

Subsequent revelations were frequently accompanied by observable manifestations such as pain and sweating on cold days. Another scholar reports that Muhammad would "cover his head" and "rattle like a young camel."

Like the pagan priests called kahins, he frequently went into mystical trances, during which he would speak in a rhythmic, rhyming prose, precisely the style later manifested in the Quran. Hassan ibn Thabit, a close friend of Muhammad, admitted to writing under the influence of jinn, or demonic spirits. These "brothers," as he called them, supplied him with "weighty lines" from heaven.

Such claims might be dismissed as ancient superstition if not for the fact they continue to motivate battalions of terrorists from Palestine to Pakistan. They are the

inspiration of a master deceiver whose vengeful mandate is to destroy what is precious to God.

Chilling evidence of the enemy's influence on modern terrorist organizations is seen in the posters and murals that adorn buildings and alley walls in the slums of Beirut [Lebanon]. Many feature images of the Islamic Devourer, a being with glowing red eyes staring out from beneath a dark shroud. Its fangs drip with the blood of Christians, infidels and Jews who have been disemboweled or decapitated.

Other than demonic inspiration, how do we explain the actions of Pakistani radicals who recently gunned down a group of Christians while shouting, "God is great"? This frenzied chant is also heard on "Amputation Day" at Sudan's Kobar Prison, when orderlies wave the severed limbs of wrongdoers in front of crowds.

In Malaysia's Pahang State, legislators have legalized mandatory whippings and imprisonment for Muslims who leave Islam. In western China Christian converts from Islam have been tied to the ground while soapy water is poured down their throats in order to wash out evil spirits. In Sudan, kidnapped Christian children are indoctrinated as holy warriors and then sent to kill their infidel parents.

Muhammad wrote: "Declare war upon those to acknowledge the true religion [Islam]." That is enough proof that Islam is violent at its core. But consider this quote from the Muslim holy book: "The Christians say, 'the Messiah is a son of God'...How they are deluded." This is clear evidence that Islam is also anti-Christ.

Charisma: Is it true that Islam is a peaceful religion at its core?

Reza F. Safa: In the Quran, Allah commands Muslims to “kill those who join other gods” (see 9:5). The teachings of the Quran, the lifestyle of Muhammad and the history of Islam all prove that this is a violent religion. Throughout its history, all the nations that Islam invaded were given the choice—accept Islam or die.

Since its inception, Islam has shed much blood. With supposed divine approval, Muhammad fought against all the forces that resisted him. Muhammad was told: “O Prophet, strive hard against unbelievers and be firm against them” (see 9:73). Within one generation after Muhammad’s death, Islam became a vast Arab empire stretching across three continents.

Islam brought some of the greatest world powers to their knees. But Muslim armies not only waged war against the Christian and Jewish “infidels,” they also fought and killed one another. After the death of Muhammad, factions within Islam led to much bloodshed among Arabs.

The animosity between the Shiite and Sunni Muslims is still strong today. More than 1 million people died during the recent war between Iran—where the majority are Shiite—and Iraq, where the majority are Sunni.

When Ayatollah Khomeini came to power in Iran and raised havoc in the Middle East, every Western political analyst said: “This is Shiite Islam. They are the minority, and they are violent. Shiite Islam is not the real Islam.”

But consider this fact: Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda terrorist network are Sunni Muslims, so are the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt; the Egyptian Al-Takfir wal-Hijra, Palestinian HAMAS, Egyptian Al-Jihad, the National Islamic Front and many other terrorist groups.

And Saddam Hussein of Iraq is a Sunni Muslim. He has massacred thousands upon thousands of Kurds and all those who oppose his grim regime. Is he peaceful? If this religion is peaceful, how can it produce such a history of bloodshed? Where do these people get their hate from if Islam is a religion of peace?

Charisma: What are the goals of Muslims in the United States?

W.L. Cati: Once I asked my ex-Muslim husband why he and his two brothers came to this country and married American Christian women. He replied: "If we cannot take this country by force we will take our time—and we will take it by marriage."

Every year there are more than 7,000 marriages performed in this country between American Christian women and Muslim men. And that does not include the marriages that take place in the 1,000-plus mosques—marriages that are never recorded.

In an article titled "The Future Is for Islam," Shaykh Muhammad Qutb says that Islamic clerics are eager to spread their religion in the West. He writes: "Man longs to believe in a purpose behind existence. He is finally beginning to understand the real need for a belief in God, for nothing else can take place—not a belief of mere words and rituals or of spiritual disciplines that neglect human needs, but a religion which includes every aspect of humanity: the mind, the body

and the soul. And there is only one religion on earth that includes and satisfies all of .”

We must love Muslims. But we must seek to understand Islam. We are not fighting flesh and blood but a demonic spirit and a global principality.

Charisma: How do we respond to Muslims who say the Quran does not support violence?

Marvin Yakos: These verses from the Quran certainly do not endorse peace:

* “Say to the infidels: If they desist, what is now past shall be forgiven them; but if they return, they have already before them the doom of the ancients! Fight then against them till strife be at an end, and the religion be all of it Allah’s” (see 8:39-40).

* “Kill those who join other gods with Allah wherever you find them; besiege them, seize them, and lay in wait for them with every kind of ambush” (see 9:5).

* “Proclaim a grievous penalty to those who reject faith” (see 9:3).

It’s essential to understand the “two houses” of Islam, Dar ul-Islam (“World of Islam”) and Dar ul-Harb (“World of War”). Non-Muslim nations that have yet to be conquered are considered in the “House of War.” This gives Muslims the latitude to kill in the name of Allah.

In the law of Hudaibiya,, Muhammad permitted Muslims to lie and break personal, business and political agreements with non-Muslims. When Muslims speak of peace, the ideology is not what Westerners understand as peace. Islamic peace lasts only as long as the faithful are weaker than non-Muslims who do not embrace Allah and his prophet, Muhammad.

Nonbelievers who reject the Quran often face death. Initially, favorable Quranic verses were coined for nonbelievers, but after the Jews refused to fight with Muhammad and accept him as their prophet, he fashioned verses for their total annihilation.

Charisma: How should Christians in the United States respond to our Muslim neighbors?

Samuel Lee: We as born-again Christians have a message to preach. But we must preach it with love. We cannot scream out in anger or hatred. If we respond with revenge, or if we exhibit prejudice toward Muslims, then we are no better than they are.

As long as we consider Muslims our enemies, no Muslim will be interested in the message of Jesus Christ and His salvation. The Bible says our struggle is “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12, NIV). In other words our fight is not against the Muslims or Arabs; our fight is against dark demonic forces.

These dark powers push people to do things they do not want to do. These are the same powers that killed hundreds of Muslims

in the name of Christianity during the medieval Crusades. These are the same evil powers that have been at work in Northern Ireland for centuries to cause bloody conflicts between Catholics and Protestants. And these are the same forces that possessed the terrorists who hijacked those planes on September 11 and crashed them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Satan is playing games with us, killing innocent people and then labeling a group of people as the responsible ones for his demonic acts so that he may bring conflict. He rejoices when he sees Christians blame Muslims, Muslims blame the Jews and the Jews blame the Christians. He uses this to provoke war.

In times such as these we have to follow exactly the steps of Jesus Christ while He walked on earth. We must not forget that when Jesus started His ministry most of the people thought that Jesus came to start a military fight against the Roman Empire. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the majority of those who were welcoming Him thought He had come to fight the Romans and drive them out of Palestine. When they realized that the deliverance of Christ was not a matter of freedom from Romans, but from the powers of Satan and sin, they betrayed Him.

They could not grasp that Jesus' love was not only for the Jews but also for their Roman oppressors. They also could not understand that Jesus loves sinners but hates sin. He loves even their oppressor, yet He hates the oppression. If Jesus' message was for the Romans as well as the Jews, so His love is also for Muslims.

Although Saul of Tarsus hated Christians, witnessed and approved of the stoning of Stephen, even held official papers

with which to persecute Christians, something happened on his way to Damascus. Jesus saved him. As a result, he became a preacher of the same gospel he had tried to destroy.

Do you know why Saul experienced that supernatural conversion? Because Christians were praying for their “enemy” named Saul! That is why God saved Saul and made him a great apostle.

Instead of blaming a group of people for the crimes of others, let’s pray more effectively for Muslims.

Charisma: What is the most important key to leading a Muslim to Christ?

Reza F. Safa: There is no greater experience for a Muslim than tasting the agape love of God. To know God as a loving and caring Father is a foreign concept to a Muslim. They know God as an awesome, all-powerful deity who cannot be approached by men. They fear Him and His wrath. But they have never felt or experienced the love of God in a personal way.

As a Muslim, I used to make an 18-hour pilgrimage to the shrine of a dead imam. I believed that somehow through this dead imam I could draw near to God, whom I did not know. I prayed five times a day. I fasted 30 days consecutively every year during the month of Ramadan.

I kept the laws and traditions of Islam so God could accept me—not so God would love me, because in Islam that concept is unknown. I longed to please God, but with all of that effort I did not experience the presence of God one time! It was only when I called upon Jesus that I could feel Him and that warmth of God’s love.

It was this love shown to me by Christians that drew me to Jesus. My family and friends always loved me, but the love I experienced from these believers was different. So let the love of God go out from you to your Muslim friends. If you can love them, you can win them.

When Faith Disrupts a Family

Samuel Lee's conversion to Christ created uncomfortable tensions among his Middle Eastern relatives.

As a child Samuel Lee had an unusual desire to learn about Jesus. That was strange because at the time he lived in a Middle Eastern country surrounded by Muslim culture.

His journey to Christ began one day in 1976 when Samuel, who was only 6 at the time, was driving with his father through a downtown market. At one point Samuel spotted a painting of a man hanging on a cross. The image immediately caught the boy's imagination.

Curiosity compelled him to begin peeking inside church windows and buying books about Christianity. And it eventually led him to a boy who was an Orthodox Christian. After the two became best friends, the boy explained to Samuel how Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead.

Samuel never forgot the story.

When civil unrest erupted in 1978, Samuel's friend fled the country. Before leaving he took off his cross necklace and

handed it to Samuel.

“That’s my favorite childhood memory,” says Samuel, who is now an international Christian evangelist based in Amsterdam. “Even though I was surrounded by Islam, Christ still found me and planted the seed of His gospel in my little heart.”

Samuel and his two sisters grew up in a wealthy family that did not practice Islam as devotedly as most people around them. When he was 13 his parents sold everything and moved to Holland—out of fear that Samuel’s political and intellectual interests could lead to his arrest or expulsion from school.

While studying sociology at a state university, Samuel met a devoted Christian named Sarah from South Korea. Sarah began sharing with Samuel about Jesus when he was 20.

The two fell in love and got married even though Sarah’s mother preferred they wait until Samuel became a Christian. That happened during their honeymoon in Spain when Samuel had a profound encounter with God and surrendered his life to Christ.

Samuel’s mother-in-law was delighted, but he got a different reaction from his Middle Eastern family. “As soon as my parents, relatives and family friends heard about my conversion,” Samuel says, “they suddenly became so-called Muslims.”

Many of his relatives consider him a traitor, he says. Yet two years after his conversion, both his sisters also became Christians.

Since then, Samuel's faith has spread more rapidly. In 1995 he started JCF World Evangelism, which spreads the gospel by providing training materials, preaching tapes and study books to poor Christians around the world. He also shares his testimony in his new book, *Soldier of the Cross* (Creation House Press).

"Not only did I become a Christian, but I became a preacher. So my problem with my parents is doubly hard. They ask me, 'We sold everything we had and brought you to Europe to become a preacher?'"

"But despite all this," Samuel says, "they still love me, and a gradual respect and understanding toward my ministry is growing in their heart. I pray that one day they too will decide to follow Jesus."

-Nancy Justice

Escape From the Fear of Allah

Reza F. Safa, today a Christian evangelist, was plagued by nightmares before he left Islam.

Reza F. Safa grew up in a devout Muslim home in Tehran, Iran, and eventually became a practicing Shiite, the branch of Islam that is dominant in Iran. His mother and six sisters wore the traditional chador head coverings, which hid everything except their faces. The family observed all laws and regulations of Islam, fasting during the month of Ramadan and praying five times daily.

At one point, Safa says, his father turned briefly from the Islamic faith and began partying and drinking with some poet

friends. When he re-embraced Islamic radicalism he became even more religious than he had been before and began attending meetings with Islamic scholars.

“But even with all of his religious activities, Dad was still the same man,” Safa says. “The outside was changed, but not the inside.”

Seeing these contradictions in his home caused Safa to question his faith. “I felt an emptiness nagging me,” he writes in his book *Inside Islam*. In 1981 some American Christians shared the gospel with him. For the first time in his life, at age 19, he learned about Christianity.

But Safa was gripped by a fear that he must face Allah’s wrath if he ever left Islam. He began having nightmares.

“To turn away from the Islamic faith means damnation from Allah,” he told *Charisma*. “Islam has a strong spirit of fear, and it’s that fear of the wrath of Allah that dominates Muslims.”

The next year Safa moved to Sweden where he met believers who led him to Christ. “It was the love of God in them—and their purity—that touched my heart and opened my eyes to the truth,” he says.

That was only the first miracle. He later married an American woman, and they began an evangelistic ministry that moved them to Tulsa, Oklahoma—where Safa pastors Fishermen’s House Church and hosts a weekly TV program, *Day of Salvation*, seen on the Sky Angel network. Safa also directs an evangelistic ministry, *Harvesters World Outreach*, which has sent him to many nations

to preach the gospel.

Safa encourages Christians who want to evangelize Muslims to do so by telling them how much God loves them—since Muslims have no concept of an intimate, loving God.

“And pray for miracles to take place in their lives,” Safa adds. “The supernatural is the key because Muslims do not have that in their Islamic faith. Muhammad did not do any miracles. Muslims have to see the power of God. Otherwise it’s your religion against theirs.”

–Nancy Justice

A Muslim Who Dared to Doubt

While a professor in Egypt, Mark Gabriel’s questions about Islam led him to faith in Christ.

When Mark Gabriel was born, his Egyptian family gave him a Muslim name and quickly pushed him to study Islam. They did everything possible to guarantee that this sixth son of a wealthy Cairo businessman would become a devout follower of Muhammad’s teachings.

Mark began reciting the Quran at age 6. He memorized the entire book by age 12. After studying Islam at the University of Cairo he graduated second in a class of 6,000. He was named an imam, a title of honor for a Muslim leader, and he soon became a professor of Islamic history and culture at the most prestigious Muslim institution in the world—Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

But Mark's scrutiny of his faith led him to discover the dark underside of Islam. He didn't understand why Islamic nations had been so violent toward one another throughout history. And he wrestled with the many contradictions in the Quran.

"I became very confused between the teachings of Islam and the Muslim practice of Islam," he told Charisma. "This was a very big issue to me, but I was not allowed to question anything. No one is."

His questioning led to his suspension from the school and eventual imprisonment. "I didn't know where to turn," he says. "I had always been told that Christianity is the wrong faith because they believe in three gods. So for one year I was without a god."

While working for his father, Mark got a chronic headache and started frequenting a local pharmacy for drugs to cure it. The pharmacist, who was a Christian, finally asked him what was wrong because she thought he was becoming addicted to the medication.

Mark admitted how he had been searching for a year for the one true God. "She smiled and said, 'I don't think this is something you can deal with by taking tablets,'" he says. "She handed me her Bible and made me promise not to take any more tablets until I had at least read some of it."

He began reading the book of Luke when he got home. "I lost track of all time," he says. "It felt like I was sitting on a cloud above a hill, and in front of me was the greatest Teacher telling me about the secrets of heaven and the heart of God."

The next morning Mark gave his life to Christ. He tried to keep his conversion a secret, but his father found out and tried to shoot him. With the help of his sister and mother, Mark fled Egypt and made a harrowing journey by truck to South Africa—where he received discipleship training at a Youth With a Mission base.

Because of continued murder attempts on his life, he was forced to move to the United States last year to seek religious asylum. His background as a former professor of Islam has put him in a risky position today, but he has decided not to be intimidated by those who would try to silence him. In early 2002 he is releasing a book, *Islam and Terrorism* (Charisma House), which analyzes Islamic history and the roots of violence in the Quran.

—Nancy Justice

Tom White's comments are used by permission of Voice of the Martyrs. For the full version of his message, go to The Voice of the Martyrs' Web site at .