



Other Paths to God?

Comparison of Christianity and World Religions
Lesson 02: Islam Origins and History

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Importance of understanding the beliefs and faiths of non-Christians:

- Strengthen and verify within us the truth our faith
- Being prepared to address the logical issues and inconsistencies in the beliefs of non-Christians
- Being prepared to provide God's answers to the very questions their belief system fails to answer

Christian groups and/or individuals' response to the diversity of religions

- Universalism - All religions are more or less equal, with no one religion able to claim supremacy
- Relativism - All religions have their own truths. There is no universal truth by which to judge the truths of the various religions
- Inclusivism - Christianity is the supreme religion, but other religions have “truths” that will ultimately lead them to God
- **Exclusivism - One true religion and only one way of salvation**

Why should we care about Islam?

- Second only to Christianity in “worldly importance”
- From its inception, Islam has and continues to be militarily aggressive not only in the name of religion, but, importantly, for personal gain
- Females are suppressed and have few, if any, rights
- Islam is forcefully antagonistic to all other religions
 - Believe in forced conversion to Islam
 - When in power, individuals of any other faith have few or no rights
- **Muslims represent sinful, mislead, and uninformed souls for whom Christ died**
 - **Such were we before we became Christians**

Approach to study

- We must understand Islam before we can effectively critique it to those that adhere to Islam
- This lesson will concentrate on understanding the origin, beliefs, and development of Islam
- With that background, we can then critique the erroneous assumptions, philosophes, and practices of Islam

Islam Terms

- Islam
 - Translates as “surrender to the will of God”
 - Rigorously monotheistic
- Muslims
 - Those that adhere to Islam
- Note:
 - Arab and Islam are not synonymous
 - Until Islam, Arabia was predominantly polytheistic
 - The monotheism of Islam was not accepted by most in the Arab world

Holy Books in Islam

- Tawrat (also known as Torah or Law)
 - According to the Quran, the Torah was revealed to Moses (Musa)
 - **Muslims argue that the current Torah has suffered corruption over the years, and is no longer reliable**
- Zabur (also known as Zaboor or Psalms)
 - Holy scripture revealed to King David (Dawad)
 - **Muslims generally believe that some of the current Psalms were written later and are not divinely revealed**

Injeel (Gospel)

- According to the Quran, it is a Holy book revealed to the “prophet” Jesus (Isa, Eesa)
- The Gospel was the message that Jesus, being divinely inspired, preached to the Children of Israel
- Muslims believe that it refers not to the New Testament, but to an original Gospel given to Jesus as the word of Allah
- Regarding the New Testament, Muslims believe:
 - “Unfortunately, Jesus’ pure message has been lost, mixed with others’ interpretations of his life and teachings. The current Bible has an unclear chain of transmission and no proven authorship. The actual words of Jesus were indeed Divinely inspired, yet they have not been preserved in writing.”

Quran (Koran)

- Word of God revealed to his prophet Muhammad
- Muhammad is the final and most perfect of God's prophets
- The Quran confirms and consummates earlier revealed books **and replaces them**

Quran vs other “Holy Books”

- To thee We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee.
[Qur'an, The Table Spread, 5:48]
- **From a Muslim apologist:**
“What is unique about Islam is that it is the last religion sent by the last prophet in a long chain of messengers – the Final Testament converging all walks of life. In addition, the Qur'an remains unchanged and in its original form. This is indeed a living Mercy and Miracle from God; a promise to be preserved by God forever and still stands today.”

Summary

- Quaran is the only book Muslims consider the **pure and unaltered word of God**
- The other holy books are:
 - Lost in their original, pure form
 - Have been altered with uninspired passages added
- So even though they consider the Old Testament, Psalms, and the New Testament as part of the Holy Books, anything that conflicts with the Quaran is “not inspired”

5 Articles of Faith

Belief in:

1. One God
2. Angels
3. The revealed books
4. Prophets
5. Day of judgement

5 Pillars of Islam

1. Recite the profession of faith at least once in one's lifetime
2. Observe the five daily public and collective prayers
3. Pay the zakat ("purification") tax for the support of the poor
4. Fast from daybreak to sunset during the entirety of the month of Ramadan
5. Perform the haji (pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca) if physically and financially possible

Life of Muhammad

- Born in Mecca in 570 A.D. His father died before his birth while his mother was pregnant
- Climate in Mecca was considered unhealthy, so he was initially placed under the care of a nomadic wet-nurse spending time in the desert
- His mother died when he was 6
- He was then placed under the care of his uncle who was the head of his clan
- His uncle was a trader in Mecca and Muhammad became a trader by profession

Khadijah, first wife

- Minors did not inherit by Arab custom at the time, so Muhammad received none of his father's inheritance
- In his role as a trader at age 25 , he oversaw the merchandise of a rich woman named Khadijah
- He so impressed her that she offered marriage, which he accepted. She was about 40 at the time
 - She bore him 2 sons that died young and 4 daughters
- He remained monogamous until her death

Importance of marrying Khadijah

- Until his marriage to Khadijah, Muhammad had limited means
- Marrying Khadijah was a turning point providing him with resources to engage in trade on a scale commiserate with his significant abilities

Prophetic Call

- Muhammad was reflective by nature and had a habit of spending nights in a hill cave near Mecca
- In about 610 A.D., he had a vision of a majestic being (later associated with Gabriel) and was told “You are the Messenger of God”
- He was at first disturbed by the vision, but was reassured by his wife, Khadijah, and her Christian cousin, Waraqah
- He came to interpret the vision as identical with those sent by God through other Jewish and Christian prophets
- He believed he had been commissioned by God as a prophet to communicate his visions to fellow citizens and other Arabs

Early Ministry

- He soon gathered a group of sympathetic friends who accepted his claim to be a prophet
- They began to have common worship and prayers
- The practice of prostration where they touched the ground with their heads as an acknowledgement of God's majesty began with these sessions
- These were initially private activities

Public preaching leads to persecution

- In about 613 A.D., Muhammad began preaching the oneness of God to the general public
- Arabia was polytheistic at the time
- Muhammad's preaching of a single god brought him into conflict with the Meccans whose economy relied on polytheism (merchants sold statues, figurines, and charms of the various gods) and the social stratification it supported
 - Compare to the story in Acts 19:21-41
- This resulted in persecution of Muhammad and his followers
- In 621 A.D. citizens of Medina who had accepted Islam, invited the Prophet and his companions to come to their city
- He then moved Medina to escape persecution
 - About 270 miles, a day's journey in ancient times is estimated at about 24 miles

Medina

- Muhammad and Islam thrived in Medina
- Muhammad became the mediator of feuds amongst the tribes in Medina
- Muslims grew in the city due to conversion and immigration of his followers from Mecca
- Muhammad started taking on multiple wives
- He began to raid caravans and, as his power grew, to conquer other tribes
- His followers were enriched by the raids and conquests, providing an additional incentive to become Muslim

Continued conflict with Mecca

- Mecca was suffering from the caravan raids and attacked Medina. Several battles ensued, with neither side having a clear victory
- In 627, Mecca definitively attacked Medina with about 10,000 men
- In preparation, Muhammad had all the crops harvested and a trench built to defend against Mecca cavalry
- A siege was started, but the Meccans were unable to cross the trench and fodder for horses was scarce
- After 2 weeks, the Meccans left. After exerting their utmost might, they had failed to dislodge Muhammad and his status increased
- After the siege, a local Jewish clan not supporting Muhammad was attacked
 - When they surrendered, all the men were executed and the women and children sold as slaves

Pilgrimage to Mecca and peace

- The Kaaba in Mecca was a holy site for the various Bedouin tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula
- Once every lunar year, Bedouin people would make a pilgrimage to Mecca. Setting aside any tribal feuds, they would worship their gods in the Kaaba and trade with each other in the city
- In a dream, Muhammad saw himself making the annual pilgrimage to Mecca
- In 628 A.D., he set out to do so with about 1600 of his followers and driving sacrificial animals with them
- The Meccans were determined to prevent the Muslims from entering, but Muhammad stopped short of the city and negotiated a treaty to end hostilities between Medina and Mecca
- Muslims were allowed to enter the city and peace ensued

Conquest of Mecca

- A couple of years after the peace treaty, some allies of Mecca attacked Muhammad
- He denounced the treaty and marched on Mecca
- Leaders of Mecca went out to meet him and formally surrendered
- Mohammed promised a general amnesty which he honored and gained the support of Mecca
- He had left Mecca in persecution, re-entered it in triumph, and, in the process, gained the allegiance of most Meccans

Muhammad's Closing Years

- He continued expand his territory by conquests and alliances
- Initially these were non-aggression pacts, but once he was strong enough to offer protection, a condition of the alliance was that the tribe had to convert to Islam
- He became the strongest religious and military leader in Arabia
- He died as a result of poor health in 632 A.D.
- His death caused a major crisis for his followers since no arrangement had been made for his succession
- Dispute over the leadership resulted in the most significance schism in the history of Islam – Sunni vs Shia

After Mohammad

- The Arabs were originally tribal in nature and lacked unity. These tribes needed to be united in the interests of stability, and Islam became the means of binding them together.
- Leadership was taken by Abu Bakr, who assumed the title of caliph (successor of the Prophet)
- Abu Bakr united all the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula under the banner of Islam and then sent armies to expand his dominion over the Arabian tribes who lived under Byzantine and Sassanian rule

Continued Military Expansion

- By the time of the third caliph, Uthman, the whole of Egypt, Syria, Levant, and what was once the major part of the Sassanian Persian Empire now rested in Muslim hands
- Umayyad Dynasty then continued military expansion with modern-day Pakistan, the entirety of North Africa, and the Iberian Peninsula were added to the empire
- Although the empire had decreased, the Ottomans controlled much of Southeast Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa between the 14th and until the early 20th century



The expansion of Islam in the Middle Ages



Modern Day

- Most modern growth of Islam has been through proselytizing
- Military subjection and forced conversion remain a core belief

Approach to critique

1. Existential relevancy. How does Islam answer the following?:
 1. Origin – where did we come from?
 2. Ethics – how should we live?
 3. Meaning – what is the purpose for life?
 4. Destiny – where is mankind heading?
2. Logical consistency—the claims of a belief system must logically cohere to each other and not contradict in any way
3. Empirical adequacy—is there evidence to support the belief system?

Next week:
Critique of Islam



How to view the slides



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