

Major Viewpoints of Islam

The Beginning of the Movement

seventh century A.D. Muhammad founded a strict, monotheistic religion in reaction to the polytheism and lawlessness of the existing Arab culture.

The Koran, for the most part a series of short teachings, is intensely revered by Muslims as the final word of God, the culmination of what was only begun in the Bible.

The word "Islam" refers to the peace that comes from surrender to God.

Shi'ites believe that religious leaders should also be political rulers.

Sunnites believe in a separation of the two realms.

Sufis, the mystical branch of Islam, teaches self-denial culminating in union with God.

God

Allah means "the God" -- indicating the radical monotheism of Islam.

"We shall not serve anyone but God, and we shall associate none with Him" (Koran 3.64).

Justice is Allah's most important feature for Muslims.

Man and the Universe

The universe was created by the deliberate act of a personal, omnipresent God.

It is not an illusion, it is basically good and is given for the benefit of man.

The presence of God in the world is seen not through supernatural signs but through the wonderful order of nature and the one great miracle, the Koran.

Man is a "vice-regent" in charge of creation under the authority of God for the purpose to make moral order in the world.

Man is endowed with **taqwa**, a divine spark manifested in his conscience that enables him to perceive the truth and to act on it. Conscience is thus of the greatest value in Islam.

Man may cultivate his **taqwa** and so live according to the way of Allah, or he may suppress it. Man thus deserves or is undeserving of God's guidance.

Salvation and the Afterlife

Salvation depends on a man's actions and attitudes.

Tauba ("repentance") can quickly turn an evil man toward the virtue that will save him.

On that last day every man will account for what he has done, and his eternal existence will be determined on that basis:

"Every man's actions have we hung around his neck, and on the last day shall be laid before him a wide-open book" (17.13).

Each man will be judged according to his situation, and every man who lives according to the truth to the best of his abilities will achieve heaven. Infidels who reject Islam will be given no mercy.

Heaven is depicted in terms of worldly delights, and the torments of hell are shown in lurid detail.

Muslims disagree as to whether those descriptions are to be taken literally or not.

Morals

Islam presents a "straight path" of clear-cut duties and commands. Islamic morals are a combination of genuine acts of love and justice on the one hand and legalistic performances on the other.

The firm belief that Muslims possess the one truth has led to much violence on the behalf of Allah through the ages.

Women continue to be regarded more as possible temptations to sin for men than as human beings with their own responsibilities before God.

Worship

Muhammad is not worshiped: only God is.

Because of strict rules against depictions of human forms in art there is a strong impetus against idolatry or saint-worshiping in Islam.

The Koran is revered as perhaps no other book. It is probably the most memorized book in the world.

Acts of worship in Islam are embodied in the "five pillars": A Muslim must:

- (1) recite the basic creed, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet"
- (2) recite prayers in praise of Allah five times daily while facing Mecca
- (3) give money to the poor
- (4) fast for one month a year
- (5) make a pilgrimage at least once during his lifetime to Mecca,

What beliefs do we hold in common? Where would we disagree?

What words of Jesus would be the largest stumbling blocks for them?

Talking Points:

Who is God?

Who is Jesus?

What is the problem?

What's the solution?

What's the rewards/punishment?

Every faith system answers these questions.

Why is it that every religion/faith system has an explanation for Jesus? Not every religion deals with Mohammed, Joseph Smith, etc...

Our foundational assumption of God colors every other discussion we have. If God = Justice, read OT very differently than someone who thinks God = Love.

Islam is a peaceful religion - agree/disagree? Why?

Christianity is a peaceful religion - agree/disagree? Why?

Crusades, Inquisition, Protestant Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Moral Majority - "we" have had our extremes define the movement as well. Some good, some not so good.

The Sunnites and Sufis were forced to make a choice between the lesser of two evils - the "infidel" West or the extreme Islamic leader. "Better to dance with the Devil you know than the one you don't." The West's relationship with the Middle East has never been good or well thought out. It is hard to forgive and overlook thousands of years of arrogance and hurt.

The West compromised the very fabric of their culture and understanding of God. Hard to look at images of West given to world by Hollywood & TV and not be disgusted. Muslim world wants NO part of that. More confusing to hear our leaders use "God" and "God bless." We hear those words and pawn them off as hypocritical politicians trying to get votes. East hears those words and believes they represent what we think about God and morality.

Bible vs. Koran - not accurate. For Islam Koran has the same place in their faith as Jesus does in ours. We interpret everything - life/OT - in light of Jesus. They interpret life in light of Koran.

Islam - God has revealed himself through the "book." The miracle/marvel is the book. It "co-existed" with God. Jesus was/is completely misunderstood by Christianity. Jesus was another prophet in the line leading up to Mohammed. Judas was crucified but the disciples mistook him as Jesus.

Christianity - God has revealed himself ultimately (best) through a person - Jesus Christ. He is the marvel/miracle. He co-existed with God and is God.

God is ONE.

Problem for Islam - how can God be one yet Koran be "co-existent" with God? If it is eternal as God is - does it not elevate the book to the level of God? How Muslims deal with this is the same way Christians deal with Jesus.

Problem for Christianity - Trinity. How can God be both ONE and Three? Does the Trinity compromise the Oneness of God? How did we come up with this idea of Three as One?

Much damage and confusion has been done by well-intentioned people in trying to explain Trinity. It is the greatest mystery of our faith. Our uncomfortableness with mystery has forced us to do bad theology AND bad explanation.

Bottom line: I don't necessarily have to understand something to accept it. I accept Trinity because this is how God has chosen to reveal himself - Gen 1, John 13-17, et al. My inability to explain it or describe shouldn't (and doesn't) compromise its truth.

It's probably a sign of immaturity if we think we must explain mysteries and "difficult" passages of scripture. Jesus did not do this, in fact, he created a few of his own. As we are talking at the core about issues of faith, mysticism, religion, and the supernatural. We ought to be somewhat comfortable with the unexplainable.

Revelation

Koran is literal, it says what it says and means what it means. God spoke it to Mohammed and he was God's 'puppet' - her verbatim recorded the word of the Lord.

First problem - discrepancies and contradictions.

Second problem - not consistent with OT practicum.

We see Bible as inspired (breathed) by God using the context, circumstances, personality, and style of the individual author. He spoke to specific people in specific circumstances in specific ways to communicate larger, foundational principles based upon his personhood. 1 Cor 11-12; Levitical law, Matthew 19 (example of Jesus correcting bad hermeneutics. Pharisees translating scripture "it says what it says, it means what it means. Jesus - it means what it meant to them in their context, this is what their context was, this is the principle behind it - OT legal concept of concession.)

Major difference in how we read scripture flows out of how we foundationally understand God. Is God just with love or is God love with justice?