

Islam: The Next American Religion?

By: **Michael Wolfe**

The U.S. began as a haven for Christian outcasts. Americans tend to think of their country as, at the very least, a nominally Christian nation. Didn't the Pilgrims come here for freedom to practice their Christian religion? Don't Christian values of righteousness under God, and freedom, reinforce America's democratic, capitalist ideals?

True enough. But there's a new religion on the block now, one that fits the current zeitgeist nicely. It's Islam. Islam is the fastest growing religious community in the United States. This is not just because of immigration. More than 50% of America's six million Muslims were born here. Statistics like these imply some basic agreement between core American values and the beliefs that Muslims hold. Americans who make the effort to look beyond popular stereotypes to learn the truth of Islam are surprised to find themselves on familiar ground. Is America a Muslim nation? Here are seven reasons why the answer may be yes.

- **Islam is monotheistic:** Muslims worship the same God as Jews and Christians. They also revere the same prophets as Judaism and Christianity, from Abraham, the first monotheist, to Moses, the law giver and messenger of God, to Jesus--not leaving out Noah, Job, or Isaiah along the way.
- **Islam is democratic in spirit:** Islam advocates the right to vote and educate yourself and pursue a profession. The Qur'an, on which Islamic law is based, enjoins Muslims to govern themselves by discussion and consensus. In mosques, there is no particular priestly hierarchy. With Islam, each individual is responsible for the condition of her or his own soul. Everyone stands equal before God. Americans, who mostly associate Islamic government with a handful of tyrants, may find

this independent spirit surprising, supposing that Muslims are somehow predisposed to passive submission. Nothing could be further from the truth. The dictators reigning today in the Middle East are not the result of Islamic principles. They are more a result of global economics and the aftermath of European colonialism.

- **Islam is egalitarian:** From New York to California, the only houses of worship that are routinely integrated today are the approximately 4,000 Muslim mosques. That is because Islam is predicated on a level playing field, especially when it comes to standing before God. The Pledge of Allegiance (one nation, "under God") and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address (all people are "created equal") express themes that are also basic to Islam.
- **Islam shares America's new interest in food purity and diet:** Muslims conduct a month-long fast during the holy month of Ramadan, a practice that many Americans admire and even seek to emulate. Muslims observe dietary laws that restrict the kind of meat they can eat. These laws require that the permitted, or *halal*, meat is prepared in a manner that emphasizes cleanliness and a humane treatment of animals. These laws ride on the same trends that have made organic foods so popular.
- **Islam is tolerant of other faiths:** Like America, Islam has a history of respecting other religions. In Muhammad's day, Christians and Jews in Muslim lands retained their own courts and enjoyed considerable autonomy. The return of the Jews to Jerusalem, after centuries as outcasts, only came about after Muslims took the city in 638.

• **Islam encourages the pursuit of religious freedom:** The Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock is not the world's first story of religious emigration. Muhammad and his little band of 100 followers fled religious persecution, too, from *Mecca* in the year 622. They only survived by going to *Medina*, an oasis a few hundred miles north, where they established a new community based on a religion they could only practice secretly back home. In our own day, many Muslims have come to America as pilgrims from oppression, leaving places like Kashmir, Bosnia, and Kosovo, where being a Muslim may radically shorten your life span. When the 20th century's list of emigrant exiles is added up, it will prove to be heavy with Muslims, that's for sure.

All in all, there seems to be a deep resonance between Islam and the United States. Although one is a world religion and the other is a sovereign nation, both are traditionally very strong on individual responsibility. America is wedded to individual liberty and an ethic based on right action. For a Muslim, spiritual salvation depends on these. This is best expressed in a popular saying: Even when you think God isn't watching you, act as if He is.

Summarized from: beliefnet.com

Most surely the first house (of worship) appointed for men is the one at Mecca, blessed and a guidance for the nations.

In it are clear signs, the standing place of Ibrahim, and whoever enters it shall be secure, and pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men for the sake of God, (upon) every one who is able to undertake the journey to it; and whoever disbelieves, then surely God is Self-sufficient, above any need of the worlds.

Qur'an 3:96-97

This article is based on an article entitled "*Highlights of Human embryology in the Koran¹ and Hadith*" by Dr Keith Moore, Professor of Anatomy and Chairman of the Department, Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Toronto, 1982.

Dr. Moore points out that the study of how the human embryo develops in the mother's womb could not progress significantly without the use of microscopes. Microscopes were not invented until the 17th century C.E., and were not used in this field of study until the 18th century. Therefore, when Dr. Moore studied certain statements in the Qur'an on this subject, he remarked, "I was amazed at the scientific accuracy of these statements which were made in the 7th century C.E."

The Qur'an in 39:6 states that God made us in the wombs of our mothers in stages. Dr Moore comments: "The realization that the embryo develops in stages in the uterus was not proposed until 1940's, and the stages used nowadays were not adopted worldwide until the 15th century C.E." Furthermore, he says: "The idea that development results from a genetic plan contained in the chromosomes, of the zygote was not discovered until the end of the 19th century C.E. The verse from the Koran [80:18] clearly implies that the nutfa (i.e. the initial drop of fluid) contains the plan or blueprint for the future characteristics and features of the developing human being."

The Qur'an 23:12-16 indicates that there is a lag or a gap between two of the early stages of growth. How does that compare with modern scientific knowledge? Remarkably! Says Dr. Moore: "It is well established that there is a lag or a delay in the development of the embryo during the implantation... The agreement between the lag or gap in development mentioned in the Qur'an and the slow rate of change occurring during the second or third weeks is amazing. These details of human development were not described until about 40 years ago."

Finally, Dr. Moore concludes by saying that the agreement he has found in the Qur'anic statements 'may help to close the gap between science and religion which has existed for so many years.'

The above evidence shows that Qur'an must be from God as it claims. The Qur'an says that every human being should consider this book with care. Had it been from anyone other than God, you would have found much discrepancy in it. Qur'an 4:82.

(1) Qur'an

He Has Come to You all to Teach You your religion

Omar Bin Al-Khattab, a companion of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), said: Once we were sitting in the company of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) when there appeared a man dressed in very white clothes and having extraordinary black hair. No signs of journey appeared on him and he was known to none of us. He sat down facing the Prophet (peace be upon him) placing his knees against the knees of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and placing both of his palms on his two thighs said: "O Muhammad! Tell me about Islam." He replied: "*Islam is to testify that none has the right to be worshiped but God, and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God; that you observe prayers, pay obligatory charity, observe fasting of the month of Ramadan and perform the pilgrimage of the House, provided you have resources of making the journey to it.*" The man replied "You have said the truth." We were surprised to see that he had asked him and confirmed the correctness of the answers.

He then enquired: "Tell me about *Iman*." The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: "*It is believe in God, and His Angels, and His Books, and His Messengers and the Last Day and that you believe in bad and good consequences.*" The man again said: "You have spoken the truth."

He then enquired: "Tell me about *Ihsan*." He replied: "*It is to worship God as if you are seeing Him; and although you do not see Him, He sees you*".

The man enquired: "Tell me about the Hour" (i.e Judgment Day) He replied: "*I have no more knowledge thereof than you*". He said: "Tell me about its signs". He replied: "*That the servant girl gives birth to her own mistress, and that you will find the barefooted, naked, poor shepherds competing with one another in the construction of tall buildings*".

Then the Man departed. So I stayed there for a while until the Prophet (peace be upon him) asked me "O Omar! Do you know who the questioner was?" I said: "God and His Messenger know better". He said: "*He was Angel Gabriel; he has come to you all to teach you your religion*".

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) said :

" There are two blessings in which many people incur loss, health and free time."

Video Review, *Inside Islam* (1 hour 40 minutes)

This documentary, originally seen on the History Channel, takes viewers on a sweeping journey from the beginnings of Islam through the current day. Along the way, we visit the holiest sites of the faith, join pilgrims on the Hajj, talk with American and European Muslims, and consider the role of women in Islam. Inside Islam also discusses the controversial Nation of Islam and Malcolm X, and the relationship between Islam and the September 11th tragedy.

Inside Islam is beautifully photographed and well researched. What sets this program apart from other documentaries on Islam is its exploration of Islam and current events. Inside Islam is a fascinating look at this dynamic religion, from its beginning to modern times.

Inside Islam is available on videocassette at Alden Library.

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For further readings about Islam we suggest:
www.themodernreligion.com

Children

Children, according to Islam, are entitled to various rights. The first and foremost of these rights is the right to be properly brought up, raised and educated. God, the Almighty stated in the Glorious Qur'an: **"O ye who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones."** Qur'an 66:6

Children, therefore are a trust given to the parents. Parents will be responsible for this trust on the Day of Judgment. Parents are essentially responsible for the moral, ethical and the basic and essential religious teachings of their children.

If parents fulfill this responsibility, they will be free of the consequences on the Day of Judgment. The children will become better citizens and a pleasure to the eyes of their parents, first in this life, and in the hereafter.

Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *"Upon death, man's deeds will (definitely) stop except for three deeds, namely: a continuous charitable fund, endowment or goodwill; knowledge left for people to benefit from; and pious righteous and God-fearing child who continuously prays God, the Almighty, for the soul of his parents."*

In fact, such a statement reflects the value of the proper upbringing of children. It has an everlasting effect, even after death. In Islam, the rights of the child begin before he or she is even born. The child has the right to be conceived within wedlock, so Islam encourages marriage to avoid illegitimate children. The child has the right to life, and Islam forbids abortion except when the mother's life is in danger. The child also has the right to inherit from the father if he dies before the child is born.

Islam gives children of both sexes the equal right to be breast-fed, and to be provided for, supported, and educated. Even if the parents divorce, the children have the right to support from the father.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a father, stepfather and grandfather who showed us by his words and deeds how to treat children. He held small children on his lap and hugged and kissed them. He never hit or verbally abused a child, but taught and disciplined children with kind words, gentle guidance, and teaching such as turning their heads away from evil sights.

Islam teaches that strong families are the basis of a strong society. That is why it forbids pre- and extramarital sex and discourages divorce. Adolescents are not encouraged to grow up too soon or pushed into relationships with the opposite sex.

Young children as well as teenagers continue to receive love and guidance at home. In families and societies with strong Islamic foundations, it is rare to see the problems with rebellious teenagers.

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<http://www.ohiou.edu/~muslimst>

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