



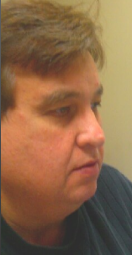
**CROSSWINDS**  
a foundation for faith and culture

# CrossingCurrents

**Crosswinds Foundation  
for Faith and Culture**

Volume 2, Issue 8  
September 29, 2009

## First Thoughts



This month marked the eighth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack by Islamic terrorists that took the lives of some 3,000 Americans. On the first anniversary of that event, I wrote an article addressing religious terrorism, for another publication. In the introduction I wrote:

"It is hard to believe we are at the one-year mark of the terrible events of last September 11. Without question it will be on the hearts and minds of all who lived through it, watched or heard it unfold through the media, or experienced it through the loss of someone they knew...and though much healing has taken place, ours is still a different day than it was on September 10, 2001. What was being recognized as an already slipping economy was dramatically impacted and we suddenly found ourselves involved in a military campaign that was quickly labeled 'The War on Terrorism'. The places we once thought safe became places of potential danger."

As I read these words I was reminded of the old adage, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." As was true then, this is a different day, but in many ways it is very much the same. We are again experiencing a shaky economy, it looks as if we will be involved in another extensive military campaign with additional troops being called for in Afghanistan, and, as I write this, the news is a flurry of reports of new terrorism acts expected in the U.S. as heightened security measures are being called for at railroad and bus terminals, entertainment venues, and large hotels.

What also remains unchanged is an interest in Islam and a desire by many Americans to truly understand what it teaches and what, if any, association it has with terrorism. As I wrote, regarding that 2002 article, "Islam also became a central issue after the events of September 11. The terrorists claimed the atrocities they committed were in the name of Allah (the god of Islam) and in accordance with the teachings of their prophet, Muhammad...Muslims in the West quickly decied this as untrue, as did many in the East. They began

to try and give instruction about what they believe Islam truly teaches."

This debate continues today, as evident in the emotions stirred by the release of Muslim terrorist Ali Mohmed al Megrahi, last month. Megrahi, who was convicted for the 1998 bombing of Pan AM Flight 103, killing 270 people, was released by the British for medical reasons (he is dying of cancer) and allowed to return to his home country of Libya. There, rather than being condemned as a terrorist, or murderer, he was welcomed as a hero. It is actions such as this that makes it difficult for non-Muslims to separate Islam and Muslims from terrorism.

Muslims in the West recognize this and continue to try and make the distinction by interacting with non-Muslims through public presentations and by invitations to visit a local Mosque; particularly, during the Muslim holy days of Ramadan. Muslims are hopeful that such interaction will allow one to see Islam in a different light than one, they believe to be, tainted by acts of terrorism and war.

So, what do Muslims really believe? In light of the recent anniversary of 9-11 and as Muslims have just completed the month of Ramadan, we thought this a good opportunity to address Islam for our readers.

Our feature article is a brief overview of Islam and the core beliefs and practices to which most Muslims adhere. This is based, not only upon the academic study of Islam but, also on over thirty years of personal interaction with Muslims in my own community.

This month's "Culture Tracks" contains recent statistical information related to Muslims in the West and how Americans view Islam. Our "In the News" feature can be read online this month.

We hope you find this issue helpful, and as always, we welcome your thoughts and/or questions on this or any other topics addressed in CrossingCurrents. Please let me know if we can be of help to you with any questions or information needs you might have.

Blessings,

## Inside this issue:

<i>First Thoughts from our President</i>	1
<i>Understanding Islam</i>	2
<i>Culture Tracks</i>	4
<i>Update from Afghanistan</i>	4
<i>In the News</i>	4



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## Understanding Islam by Bob Waldrep

Prior to September 11, 2001, most Americans were well aware of terrorist acts having been committed by Muslims in other countries. Some had even drawn the inference that this meant Islam was a terrorist religion and/or that Muslims are terrorists. Muslims in the West were very conscious of this. I know this to be true from personal experience.

I had my first encounter with Islam during the 1970s when I befriended two Muslim brothers from Iran who were in the United States pursuing college degrees. Through them, I met others in the Muslim community who were also from Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. All of them seemed sympathetic to the cause of the people of Iran who were trying to overthrow their ruler, the Shah, and replace him with a religious leader.

It was a quite prevalent belief among Americans in that era that Iranian Muslims were at the center of numerous acts of terrorism. Politically, America was favorable to the Shah and opposed the efforts to overthrow his regime. Needless to say, there was considerable distrust among Americans, if not outright hatred, for Iran.

In this context, I noticed that whenever one of my Iranian friends was asked where he was from, the reply was Persia, which is where modern-day Iran is located. This answer was indicative of their fear of being "outed" as Iranians (When I asked why they did not identify themselves as Iranian, they candidly expressed it was from concern for their safety). They realized most Americans had no idea where or what Persia was and this provided them a better opportunity to avoid the issue of terrorism, or being labeled a terrorist because of their nationality, or religion.

In the early 1990s, I reconnected with some Muslims in my community and found that some twenty years later Muslims here still felt the need to try and distance themselves from being labeled terrorists. Many conversations began with their explaining Muslims are not terrorists or that Islam does not promote terrorism. Clearly, in their minds, Americans still held a false perception of Islam that needed to be corrected. As we entered a new Century, the events of September 11, 2001 again renewed, and broadened, the debate about Islam and terrorism.

In fact, after September 2001, there has been an effort to redefine the very meaning of the word Islam. It is not uncommon for Muslims in the West to promote the idea that "Islam" is the Arabic word for peace. Shortly after 9-11, President Bush even defined Islam



Muslim Dome of the Rock

in this manner after holding meetings with Muslim leaders. I find this interesting considering that, prior to 2001, every Muslims I ever dialogued with defined Islam as meaning "submission" or, more particularly, submission to the will of Allah. A Muslim was therefore, by definition, "one who submits."

So, what is Islam today and what does it really teach? The short answer is, Islam means many things to many people; it really depends on the Muslim with whom you are conversing (as is true of religions, in general) and, to some degree, the culture and era that has most shaped their theological understanding of Islam. A Muslim's beliefs will primarily depend upon which sect of Islam he belongs to and how knowledgeable or devout he is, to the beliefs and practices of that sect. And, while there are a number of sects in Islam, two of them, the Shi'a and the Sunni, comprise over 90% of Islam with the Sunni being the predominate of the two (some estimates place them as high as 80% of all Muslims). Today, the Shi'a are primarily in Iran and Iraq.

These two groups developed shortly after the death of Muhammad, in 632 A.D. They essentially parted over a disagreement as to who should be the new leader of Islam. The group that would become the Shi'a believed Muhammad's successor should be a descendant of Muhammad. The majority opinion was held by those who became the Sunnis. They favored a less restrictive criteria and chose Muhammad's close friend, Abu Bakr, as leader.

Each sect of Islam believes they alone represent "true" Islam and, since they developed independently of one another, they have developed divergent beliefs through the centuries. Thus, not all Muslims fully agree on the teachings of Islam. However, there are some basic beliefs and practices upon which most Muslims would agree.

### Beliefs and Practices of Islam

The essence of Islam is found in five practices known as the Five Pillars of Islam. There may be some variation among sects as to form but, generally, most Muslims embrace these:

**Shahada**—An Arabic phrase roughly translated to, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger". Saying this is equivalent to a profession of faith or belief in the truth of Islam. No one is a Muslim without reciting this. Recently, I spoke with a young man who said he converted to Islam while serving in the military, in the Middle East. When asked how this conversion occurred, he told me that Sunni Muslims, who had befriended him there, led him in reciting the shahada. He now attends a Mosque here in the States where his training in Islam continues.

**Salat**—The Muslim obligation to pray, at the appointed times, five times a day (some add

more prayers): at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset, and two hours after sunset. Each of these prayers are to be completed within a set block of time and should be done with the proper preparation and form, including: facing Mecca in the right posture, with ones shoes removed and having properly washed (ablutions). The prayers typically come from the Quran but may vary from Mosque to Mosque and sect to sect.

**Sawm**—A fast required from sunup to sunset during each day of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This most holy month for Muslims celebrates the giving of the sacred scriptures of Islam, the Quran ("recitations") to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. Muslims believe the angel Gabriel recited the message of the Quran to Muhammad who, later, recited it to his followers. Muhammad, allegedly, did not know how to read and write so the "recitations" were not put into written form—the Quran—until after his death. The Quran is divided into chapters (surahs), but is not laid out chronologically.

Unlike our Western calendar, the calendar of Islam is based on a lunar calendar; therefore, the beginning of Ramadan varies from year to year. Muslims determine its starting point as the evening when the moon first enters the crescent phase during the ninth month. It seems likely this is the reason one of the most recognizable symbols for Islam is the crescent shaped moon.

I think it important to note that there are those who point to this symbol as proof that Muhammad worshipped the moon god; however, I think this is a bit of a reach. Even were it true, I see no real value in introducing a moon-god into a discussion of Islam with a Muslim, who will never accept it as being true.

**Zakat**—The responsibility of every Muslim to give alms, equal to 2.5% of their income, to the poor and needy. If one's finances do not allow for the giving of currency, he should give in some other way, as he is able. This is not an obligation, or tax paid to the Mosque; it is solely intended for the benefit of the poor.

**Hajj**—The obligation of every Muslim, who is able, to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his lifetime. While Muslims may go at other times, the hajj is officially to be made during the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar. It typically falls during the month of December; but on occasion is in late November.

There, dressed in the ihram (white garments), millions of Muslims—over 3 million in 2008—participate in the rituals associated with this week-long pilgrimage, including: marching around the large, black, cube-shaped structure known as the Ka'bah. This ritual that predates Muhammad to a time when it was believed the Ka'bah was home to hundreds of idols.



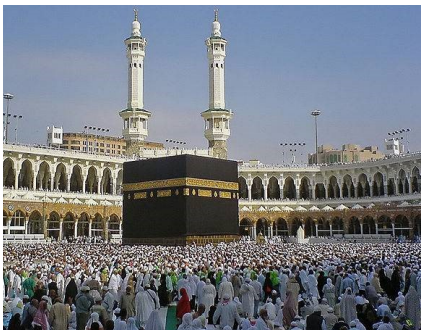
**The Question of Jihad**—Though not "officially" one of the Five Pillars, another important practice of Islam is jihad. Most non-Muslims and Westerners, in particular, have traditionally thought of jihad as a "holy" war. Muslims, however, tend to think of jihad as having two forms—a "lesser" and a "greater". This concept is especially verbalized by Muslims in the West when explaining jihad.

They would say the greater of the two jihads is the struggle everyman must wage to bring himself into submission to Allah. The lesser is the struggle to bring others into submission to Allah, or the teachings of Islam. Without question, it is this idea of lesser jihad that is used to fuel and justify terrorist activities related to Islam. I think it is for this reason that Muslims in the West generally steer any discussion of jihad away from the "lesser" and to the "greater"

In addition to these five common practices of Islam and jihad, there are certain beliefs Muslims generally hold in common. Following are a few of these that can be contrasted with beliefs commonly held by Christians.

**Concerning Scripture**—While Muslims accept certain portions of the Bible as being true, they believe that overall the Bible has been abrogated, or corrupted and therefore much of what it contains is an inaccurate account. The writings of the Apostle Paul are particularly distasteful to and discounted by Muslims. In Islam, the only truly authoritative scripture is the Quran.

**Concerning God**—In Islam, there is only one God - Allah. Like Jews and Christians, Muslims believe He is the God of Abraham. However, Muslims do not believe He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but, the God of Abraham and Ishmael—a major deviation from Judaism and Christianity. And, while the Bible presents God as a personal and relational being, even describing Him as a Father, the God of Islam is more akin to a task master. Muslims are quick to point out that God is not a father and does not have any sons.



The Ka'bah during the time of the Hajj

**Concerning Jesus**—Muslims have a very high regard for Jesus, whom they know as Isa. Though not on par with Muhammad, they believe Isa was a great prophet. They do not

believe he is God, as do Christians; nor, do they believe he died on the cross. Muslims do not discount the crucifixion occurred but that Jesus died and was, thus, resurrected. This makes it necessary for Muslims to come up with alternatives to Jesus dying on the cross.

One popular explanation offered is the "substitution theory", which maintains someone other than Jesus was crucified (a widely held view is that Judas was mistakenly taken during the confusion of the arrest). Probably even more popular is the so-called "swoon theory" in which Jesus only appeared to have died and recovered in the tomb, removed the stone, overcame the guards and escaped (often, in the story, he goes to Egypt).

**Concerning Sin/Future Judgment**—Islam does not really have a concept of sin, as understood in Judaism and Christianity. For the Muslim, the real issue is how one chooses to live their life. If one follows his own way his life will have no meaning and in the end he will have Allah's disapproval in the judgment. However, if one follows the way of Allah, he may, perhaps, gain Allah's approval.

As in Judaism and Christianity, Islam teaches the final destination of a person is heaven or hell; the former being described as a place of unimaginable delight and the latter a place of unimaginable suffering. The determining factor as to which of these one will find himself, at the end of his life, depends upon the degree to which he was submitted to Allah.

However, even if ones good deeds outweigh the bad, Allah may yet reject him. Thus, according to Islam, no matter how numerous ones good works, there is no assurance of being permitted into heaven—with the notable exception of those who die in the name of and for the cause of Islam. This promise is one of the appeals for those who give their lives in acts of terrorism which they have been convinced are committed for the cause of Islam.

This stands in stark contrast to the Christian message that a person's ultimate destination is not determined by how good, or bad, they are; but, whether or not they have accepted Christ's saving work on their behalf. The gospel of Jesus teaches that all have sinned - there is none that are "good" enough to earn their way into heaven, or to tip the scales in their favor through their good works. So, our hope is not placed upon what we can do but, upon what Christ has done on our behalf. He shed his blood on the cross as an atonement for our sins that we might be forgiven and enter into a restored relationship with the Father.

Now that is good news, and news worth sharing. Christians must not let their fears of terrorism, or the prejudices they hold toward Muslims, that have come about from a lack of understanding, keep them from sharing this good news with their Muslim friends and

neighbors. The Christian message is one of hope; hope for the present, and hope in the future. It is a sure and certain hope.

So, go ahead - engage in dawah. Extend the "invitation" to enter into a relationship with the God who loves them through the person and work of His son, Isa.

[For general tips and ideas on sharing with Muslims, including answering their objections to the Bible and their view of the crucifixion, email us at [info@crosswindsfoundation.org](mailto:info@crosswindsfoundation.org). Put "Tips for Sharing with Muslims" in the subject line. Please include your first and last name in the message.]

### Islam in the United States

There are no hard and fast figures regarding the number of Muslims in the U.S. Estimates are as high as 10 million, plus. Conservative estimates are 1.5 to 3 million. Considering there are only some 3,000 Mosques, or centers of worship, in the U.S., the lower estimates do not seem unreasonable. These numbers include immigrants and converts.

Concerning converts, Carl Ellis and Larry Poston, in their book *The Changing face of Islam in America*, estimate the African-American community comprises some 40% of the converts to Islam. Many of these belong to the American Society of Muslims, a primarily African-American segment of Islam, founded by Warith Deen Muhammad. Deen is the son of Elijah Muhammad, who led the Nation of Islam (NOI) until his death in 1975. After replacing his father as leader of the NOI, which is regarded by Muslims as a cult, Deen gradually moved the group into mainstream Islam. Eventually, morphing into the American Society for Muslims. Some members, not liking these changes, reconstituted the old Nation of Islam under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan.

Muslims in the West seem especially interested in engaging non-Muslims in dialogue. This is often done through an open house at the Mosque (particularly during Ramadan) and through public presentations, generally held on a "neutral" site. Known as dawah (literally, "invitation"), this practice is, in a sense, what Christians refer to as evangelism.

The purpose of dawah in the West seems to be two-fold: First, to acquaint the non-Muslim with Islam in a way that will break down any misconceptions they might have about Islam; particularly as relates to terrorism (In recent years, I have noticed attention also being given to address concerns that Islam denigrates women—probably brought on by the Taliban's treatment of women in Afghanistan). Secondly, to convince the person to convert to Islam through ongoing discussions.



**Culture Tracks**  
 Statistical data reflecting the cultural footprints of Americans.



### Crosswinds in the World Report

#### "Cultural Trends Related to Religion in America"

##### Statistical Data Regarding Muslims in America

The following information is from "Muslim Americans: A National Portrait" published by Gallup in 2009.

- 35% of Muslims in the United States identify themselves as African Americans, which represents the largest racial group within the community.
- Eight in 10 Muslim Americans say religion is an important part of their daily lives; only Mormon Americans (85%) are more likely to say this.
- 41% of Muslim Americans are classified as "thriving," which is a lower percentage than what is found among other religious groups.
- Nearly one-half of Muslim Americans (49%) identify themselves as Democrats, 37% say they're independents, and 8% say they're Republicans.
- 73% of the Muslim population are under age 45 (36% are in the 18-29; 37% are 30-44)
- 66% of Muslims in America say they feel safe where they live (that figure is 70% for the general population)
- 51% of Muslim Americans are married
- 51% of young Muslim Americans say they are registered to vote (one of the lowest percentages among all youth groups surveyed)
- Muslim American women are roughly equal to Muslim men in frequent mosque attendance, in sharp contrast to women in many majority Muslim countries who are generally less likely than men to report attending a religious service in the last week.
- Muslim women and Mormon women are the only female groups in which fewer women than men report being treated with respect.

<http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/mwf/116074/Muslim-Americans-National-Portrait.aspx>

The following information is from the Pew Report, "Views of Religious Similarities and Differences" released in 2009.

- 58% of Americans believe Muslims face great discrimination
  - 45% of Americans say they know a Muslim personally.
  - 38% say Islam encourages violence (down from 45% in 2007, but up from a low of 25% in 2002)
  - 53% can correctly identify Allah as the Muslim name for God
  - 52% can correctly identify the Koran as the Islamic equivalent to the Bible
  - 27% of the population is basically unfamiliar with the religion of Islam
- The greater one's familiarity with Islam the less likely they are to view it as violent

<http://pewforum.org/newassets/images/reports/summer09/survey0909.pdf>

AFGHANISTAN—In a couple of months, Crosswinds associate staff member, Don Malin will have completed his tour of duty in Afghanistan, where he has served as a military chaplain. While there, Don has not only represented his country well, but has also been a shining light for Christ. In past issues, we have shared with our readers about two ministries he has established while there. The first was Table of Grace which provided our men and women who serve in that area with needed supplies. Like God's grace, they are provided at no cost to the soldiers. Another ministry Don took on was providing much needed school supplies to Muslim children.



Don distributes supplies to schoolchildren

Of this he wrote: "We started asking for school supplies many months ago. The boxes continue to come in. We will give them to an orphanage and school in the local area in the next month. If you are interested please feel free to send boxes of supplies. We will get them out to the needed places. The Taliban has been known to intimidate schools and close them down. We need to encourage resisting them and helping in this way."

After Don's departure, I am confident that these ministries will continue. I also know that Don has ideas for ways he can still be of help. He has already shared one of them. Please consider his plans for a new ministry that Crosswinds will be actively helping with: "I plan on starting another Phase of this ministry. What do we do to help veterans who are back home and have problems? Mild Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are more common than we think. Active duty soldiers have all the resources on base. National Guard and Reservists go back home into civilian life with help but they usually forget because they are home...and of course home fixes everything...NOT.

That is where real problems can occur. I want to focus in Mississippi since that is where I live, but much of the information I will put out can be found in other states. So I would like to consider starting a Veterans ministry back home. Bible Studies, fellowships would be a key...so anyone in Mississippi who would like to do this please get on board via Face Book. Be in prayer about it. I will add more information about resources later on."

When Don gets home he will have completed his second tour of duty in the Middle East. I know from talking with him after his first tour, he has seen the problems he writes about and has previously helped returning soldiers deal with some of these issues. I am grateful to so many of you who have helped with Table of Grace and providing school supplies. Now I am asking you to consider helping out in this new phase of ministry Don will begin stateside. As he develops more details, we'll be giving you more



#### Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture

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For additional information on this or other topics contact us for a free information packet.

#### In the News

Can be read online this month. It includes articles related to Islam. If you do not have Internet access, we will send you a copy of these articles on request.

