

Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue

WINTER/SPRING 2011 • ISSUE 2.1

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Contending FOR Europe's Soul

INTRODUCTION: MATTHEW KRABILL

One of the most critical issues facing Europe and its respective Muslim populations is the widespread fear that the practice of Islam threatens its secular values. Under the long shadow of Christendom, the presence and growth of Islam evokes age-old questions related to religion, its role in civil society, and its impact on national identity. Much of the discourse, however, is driven by a media that privileges secular assumptions and voices over religious ones. Thus news headlines are dominated by alarmist predictions that the continent is quickly undergoing a conversion or a hostile takeover to what will be called "Eurabia." That reality, it is argued, is further evidenced by the increased number of minarets dotting cities like Amsterdam and Geneva and by heated debates over the hijab in French schools.

From a missiological perspective, however, lost in the mix of these debates is the resurgence of the Christian faith in large part due to non-Western immigration—Muslims are not the only religious group moving en masse to Europe; there is a large number of Christians as well. The result is a dynamic Christianity and a vibrant Islam, both of which are emerging side by side. Thus one might make the case that the European continent is not a graveyard for religion but rather that it is a laboratory for new forms of faith, and for the developments of new structures of organization and interaction that can accommodate religious involvement in a dominant secular environment. As a result, Europe is a kind of "theater of Christian and Muslim engagement"—one that has numerous implications for interfaith dialogue.

In the featured article of the winter issue of this journal, Dr. Andrew Wingate describes the changing religious landscape in Western Europe, considers changes within the Christian and Muslim communities, and outlines important implications for Christian engagement in interfaith dialogue. **EIFD**

AT A GLANCE:

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ANDREW WINGATE explores Europe's changing landscape and considers the various factors that affect Muslim-Christian interaction both historically and today.

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CHAWKAT MOUCARRY, an Arab Christian from Syria, argues that the words *mission* and *dialogue* are intrinsically linked and must shape each other.

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VISION STATEMENT

This journal seeks to create space for Evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

DESIGN

Loren A. Roberts/Hearken Creative
Randy Cole

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Dialogue in Context: A Focused Exploration for 2011

In the first year of this journal's life, we concentrated on issues related to dialogue that were "supra" in nature. In the spring Dr. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen argued that the issue of religious plurality is the most urgent challenge the Church faces at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and as a result needs critical theological reflection. In the summer issue, we explored how Dr. Richard J. Mouw's notion of convicted civility can help Christians transcend the common polarization between evangelism and dialogue, and ground their interactions with people of other religions. The theme of our most recent fall issue was salvation and interfaith dialogue, and featured an article by Dr. Christopher J. H. Wright.

With our Winter/Spring 2011 issue we begin a year-long exploration of global perspectives on interfaith dialogue, addressing context-specific issues that drive the needs and opportunities for dialogue in contexts around the world. Broadly speaking, giving primacy to a specific context allows for a measure of concreteness, creates space for cultural diversity, enables both theology and missiology to be in conversation, and highlights the concerns of the practitioner. We hope that by rooting interfaith dialogue in a particular context, we will accomplish the following:

- Give voice to the daily experiences, issues faced, and struggles confronted around the world. No two contexts are alike.
- Religious plurality is part and parcel of the historic foundation and lived experience of many non-Western societies. Toward that end, insights from the non-Western world may help the global Church understand how to engage in mission in religiously plural contexts.
- Part of being a truly global Church means that we must listen to one another, acknowledging both the sufferings and gifts each member contributes to the wider body.

The Changing Face of Islam in Europe

BY ANDREW WINGATE, *Founder and former Director, St. Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multifaith Society*

Muslims are now part of the West, so the discussion is not between 'them' and 'us', but between 'us' and 'us', among ourselves, with our common humanity. Talk of 'clash of civilisations' in this context is not only dangerous and irresponsible (for the false line it perpetuates), it is also foolish.

-Dilwar Hussein

Introduction

This article looks historically at factors in Europe that affected Christian interaction with Muslims before 9/11. It then considers what has happened since, with the greatly increased profile of Islam caused by several factors outlined. It considers changes within Christian and Muslim communities, and to Christian responses to Islam. An extensive section considers contemporary approaches to mission with Muslims theologically and practically, in ten areas. The conclusion provides evidence for why Europe in general, and Britain in particular, are pivotal for the development of a constructive approach to Muslim-Christian relations, and a sensitive approach to mission.

Twentieth-Century Changes in Europe

The European context has changed drastically since the Edinburgh Conference of 1910. At that point, engagement with Islam was something happening elsewhere, within the old "mission field." This meant, in the main, the Middle East, parts of Africa, and the Asian subcontinent. Feelings about Islam or about Muslims were not to the fore as the previous millennium developed. There were few Muslims living in Western Europe, and issues within Europe were focused upon the Ottoman Empire, as it came to an end in the aftermath of the Second World War. The secularization of Turkey under Ataturk was aggressive in its impact, with Islamic practice officially removed from public life. In other parts of Southeast Europe, Orthodox Christians lived alongside Muslims in peace, provided each left the other alone.

This is largely how things remained through the ideological conflicts of the Fascist period and World War Two, and then through the confrontation between East and West during the Cold War. Questions related to Islam hardly met the public eye, either in media or

political circles. Exceptions included the turmoil caused by the partition of India in 1947, and the breakup of Pakistan in 1973. Amongst other significant events were the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, and consequent expulsion of the Palestinian majority into neighbouring Muslim countries; and the seemingly endless wars and violent incidents over the next 60 years, which have disturbed all attempts to broker any sort of permanent or even temporary peace in the so-called Holy Land. Also, led by the Middle East, there came the oil crisis of the early 1970s, with the formation of OPEC, and the realization of the economic power that part of the world could hold over the West. But this was not yet seen as a Muslim-Christian confrontation. Equally dramatic was the Islamic revolution in Shiite Iran in 1979, an event that casts its shadow over Europe and the U.S. until today.

It was likewise with other post-colonial conflicts in Malaysia, Indonesia, and several parts of Africa, where the rhetoric of Islam has been used within the power struggles of these areas. That dynamic can be seen in the radicalization of Muslims in Afghanistan and surrounding areas due to the Soviet invasion, and the simultaneous emergence of a Taliban ideology with an emphasis on Jihad to expel the Soviet invader, facilitated by weapons supplied by the U.S. Islam was brought directly onto the agenda by Pakistan, where its success in becoming a nuclear weapon state was abundantly heralded.

Mention should also be made of the breakup of Yugoslavia. This brought to the fore, for the first time in Europe in recent times, deadly examples of ethnic cleansing based upon religious labels, as Serbian Orthodox and Muslim groups confronted each other across new frontiers. The consequence was that large numbers of Muslims moved to Western Europe as refugees, and governments were forced to take into account religious



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A version of this paper was originally presented at the Bangalore Pre-Centenary Edinburgh 2010 Study Conference (July 17-19, 2009).

divides as a basis for state-making in modern Europe.

Another major event was the publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, and the subsequent *Fatwa* issued from Iran pronouncing the death penalty upon Salman Rushdie. This had a dramatic effect in Britain, where he is a citizen and is in residence, and more widely in Europe. One significant effect was the mobilization of Muslims as communities, focused around the burning of books in Bradford streets. There was a polarization amongst liberal opinion: between those who championed freedom of expression, and those who wanted to defend the vulnerabilities of a minority community. The most prominent Muslim leader of the time, the Egyptian Zaki Bedawi, said he might hate the book, but would invite Salman Rushdie to stay in his own house for protection. The long-term effects were considerable—was there an inevitable clash of values between Islam and those of liberal democracy? Crucially, the conscientization of British Muslims as a force to be reckoned with had begun. And had an external power any right to pronounce against a British citizen?

These are some of the external events that had a profound effect upon Europe during the century preceding what became known as 9/11.

Contemporary British and European Contexts

Equally significant to the changing European landscape in the twentieth century is the issue of migration. Millions of Muslims moved from Turkey to Germany, from North Africa to France, from Indonesia to Holland, and from the Asian subcontinent to Britain. More recently large numbers of Muslim refugees have come to more open societies, such as Scandinavia, from Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere. Estimates of population figures give up to 30 million Muslims within Western Europe. The expansion of the European Union (EU) has brought in more Muslims from Eastern Europe. The question of Turkey's application to the EU is seen not just as a political or economic question but as a religious challenge, affecting the demography of Europe radically, as 70 million Muslims would potentially have access to the EU in terms of movement of population. Another significant migration is that of Somalis, who have come in vast numbers because of its civil war, to Holland and Scandinavia. Many of these have then made a second migration, as EU citizens, to Britain, to cities such as London, Birmingham, and Leicester. For example, around 12,000 have come to Leicester, a city of 300,000, in the last few years, seeking an easier place to practice their faith and to learn English.

Since 1990, however, and even more since 2001, there has come the challenge of living together permanently. Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, has written a number of key prophetic books, the first being *The Dignity of Difference* in 2003. Faced with the challenge of living together as different faiths, religions can be either part of the problem, he suggests, or part of the solution of the problem. They can become the

second only if they recognize the dignity of difference—that difference is not something to be feared, but to be welcomed.²

Sacks's more recent book, entitled *The Home We Build Together* (Continuum, 2007), outlines three models of living in a religiously pluralistic society. In his first model, Britain or Europe is like a country house. There is a host and owner. Guests come for a weekend or so, and are treated well, but are then expected to go. The second model is that of a five-star hotel. Each culture or faith has a room. They are independent of each other, and are not expected to communicate with those in the next room. They may not speak each other's language, and there is no incentive to learn the language of the other. This is *multiculturalism* in its least attractive guise.

The third model is that of the "home." All who are part of a home contribute to the whole; each is valued for their own sake, and each needs the other. No one possesses the home; all possess it together. There is a common narrative which all own, and they suffer or rejoice together. But each person in the home is valued for his or her own sake. In terms of society, this model is of *integration without assimilation*.

Applying this model historically to the multireligious context, Jews have spent centuries in Europe being accepted as a community who are integrated, but were not required to assimilate. There were deep traumas on the way. But, for example, in Britain, they became valued for what they contribute to the whole (society), and much of this comes from the nature of their community of faith.

Muslim communities are faced with similar challenges, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of responses to the Muslim-Christian statement *A Common Word* (see below) have come from a range of sources in Europe.³ The Mechelen Statement (2008) reflects the challenges of navigating religious identities in contemporary Europe:

Identity has many strands, of which religion is one. Strength in a rope comes from many strands being intertwined, including our identity as Europeans, as citizens of particular countries, and our ethnic background. We are challenged to build bridges across cultures and faiths. Europe is called to be a laboratory of learning for both Muslims and Christians.

As Christians and Muslims we believe in the principle of integration. This does not and must never carry with it the demand to forsake our religious identities. For example this may happen through prohibiting the wearing or display of religious symbols in public places or neutralising religious festivities with the pretext that their being allowed would harm the sensitivities of other believers or that they would go against the principles of the secular state.



The secularization of Turkey under Atatürk was aggressive in its impact, with Islamic practice officially removed from public life.



At the time of the Ottoman Empire's entrance into World War I there were very few Muslims living in Western Europe.

Muslims in Europe are on a journey, and one of the mission challenges for churches is how far they can provide them a helping hand on this journey. The journey is a different one in each country, and full of possibilities but also of pitfalls. *How can the churches become advocates for such a model of integration without assimilation, rather than one of the major obstacles to this?*

To take the example of Britain, the Muslim communities (note the plural communities, not community, since they are extremely varied) comprise about 2.5 million people⁴ out of a population of 55 million. More than half were born in Britain—if you ask them to go “home,” they would remain where they are since home is Britain. But incidents like 9/11, and 7/7 (the London bombing), and riots in northern cities in 2001 involving poor Muslims and poor whites, have led to negative stereotyping in the media and amongst the general public. The challenge for churches is how far they follow such negatives, or how far they can become advocates for a new way of thinking and behaving.

In my educational work with Christians, I have found that the kind of words used by many congregations mirror those of society. For example, the words “Muslim” or “Islam” are often synonymous with those of confrontation, fear, suspicion, rivalry, exclusivity, terrorist, and fundamentalist. Understandable. The key question, however, is to what extent is it the church’s role to speak prophetically against these attitudes of society and not simply mirror them? And how can the church enable (and not sideline) widespread Muslim integration and participation in British and European life as fellow citizens? Ethically, the church needs to take responsibility in not disseminating existing negative stereotypes of Muslims. In 2009, for example, Europol reported that there were 294 terrorist incidents in Europe, of which only one was suspected to be Islamic in origin.

The Changing Face of Islam in Europe?

Before exploring these questions, I outline here some pan-European realities and factors within which we need to consider mission with Muslims.⁵ An important assumption for this article is what Dilwar Hussein, a young Muslim leader and colleague from Leicester, articulates in the modern Muslim journal EMEL (July/Aug 2004):

Muslims are now part of the West, so the discussion is not between “them” and “us,” but between “us” and “us,” among ourselves, with our common humanity. Talk of “clash of civilizations” in this context is not only dangerous and irresponsible (for the false line it perpetuates), it is also foolish... Muslims living in the West may not agree with certain material motivations in the West or the way the family is being neglected, and on these issues they may stand together with many of their fellow citizens of Christian and other faiths and non-faith backgrounds. Muslims living in the West may take issue with the current state of

social and international justice, and they would again stand with the majority of their fellow citizens. On concerns about the environment, again Muslims would stand with the people.

Islamic issues. The following issues have become politicized in many European countries, including questions of the Hijab, style of marriage, call to prayer, faith schools, minarets, and Halal meat. The European Union has had to reflect, not least through the constitution debate, on the place of religion within the European Union and the Council of Europe. The place of modified *sharia* personal law within one legal system has also begun to be discussed and is highly controversial. So too is the building of mosques which has taken place in varying speeds in different countries; for example, there are many in Britain and France while fewer in Germany or Sweden.

International incidents. Events such as 9/11, the Madrid and London bombings, Mumbai, and Gaza are dramatic examples of how Islam has been profiled on an international stage. Closely linked is the response to what is commonly seen as Islamic terrorism, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and now potentially Iran. The continuing impasse in Israel/Palestine, increasing radicalization in Pakistan, and a range of issues involving Muslims across the continent of Africa are also contributing factors. These incidents have given rise to arguments like political scientist Samuel Huntington’s that posit that the Cold War has been replaced by a clash of civilizations between colliding Christian and Islamic worlds. But it is clear that most of these conflicts are about political power and economic resources, whatever the religious rhetoric might be.

The media. Some sections of the media have become somewhat obsessed with Islam, generating endless programs, books, films, and press articles about Muslims. But while these can be well produced, informative, and positive, they often have a negative spin. Furthermore, these media outlets are often also negative to churches and to Christians. The cartoon controversy begun in Denmark was a sign of both the sensitivity and the subsequent polarization between those for and those against publication. Clearly this becomes a confrontation between the right of freedom of expression and artistic license, as well as the need to consider religious feelings. Of course, the media ensure that what happens in one particular country is immediately internationalized. Well aware of this phenomenon, the BBC has recently appointed a Muslim as its Director of Religious Affairs for TV. What this will mean remains to be seen.

Islamophobia. All of the above have contributed to the documented growth in “Islamophobia” in some countries across Europe, as Muslims are demonized as a threat to European, Christian, or national ways of life. The entry of right-wing, explicitly anti-Muslim parties into parliament, and in some cases providing support to governments, has been seen in Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden—all traditionally tolerant countries. Some countries

“Opinions about Muslims in almost all of these countries are considerably more negative than are views of Jews. Fully half of Spanish (52%) and German respondents (50%) rate Muslims unfavorably. Opinions about Muslims are somewhat less negative in Poland (46%) and considerably less negative in France (38%). About one-in-four in Britain and the United States (23% each) also voice unfavorable views of Muslims.”

Kohut, Andrew. 2006. *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other.* Pew Research Center, page 4.

also report a phenomenon they name as “Christianophobia,” where Christians are mocked and denigrated.

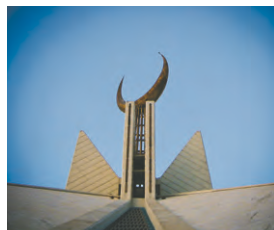
The Internet. Positively, the Internet enables dialogue and education: for example, the use of Facebook enables cross-religious conversation, and so do international programs through BBC, Doha Talks, and the Al Jazeera English channel. These programs often consist of challenging films of a social or documentary kind, though they are not marketed widely. At the same time there is a danger that Muslims in Europe (and, indeed, Christian immigrants from Africa and elsewhere) watch only or mainly satellite TV programs from their countries of origin. Doing this may be harmless, but it discourages integration and may create a linguistic and generational gap. Some programs also may not be fair about political developments in Europe. Worse, they can fire up radical movements, particularly amongst the young.

Schools and education. In some countries, schools now provide routine teaching about Muslims and Islam along with Christianity and other faiths. In other countries the school system divides religious teaching, or includes it in history or art or literature (e.g. France). In some countries there are government-financed Muslim schools (e.g. England, Sweden, Holland). In a range of countries in Europe there are private Muslim schools, some residential.

Changes within Muslim Communities

A number of important changes have taken place within Muslim communities across Europe over the last century. The following five areas are key to understanding these shifts.

1. Some have a growing self awareness and wish to identify with being European, French, British, Norwegian, etc., and to take part in local and national politics. They have been working at what it means to live as a minority Muslim community within a plural society. In general, and at differing speeds in various countries, Muslims have become more organized. This is partly their own wish, and partly responding to government needs for partners to work with. At the same time they remain diversified in culture, ethnic background, language, educational proficiency, Islamic tradition, and degree of identity with modern society. At times these can lead to significant divisions. A minority wish to have nothing to do with European life and values, though benefiting economically from living in Europe.
2. Probably the largest group of Muslims have adjusted to life in Europe, and are making their way as workers, shopkeepers, restaurant owners, etc. Their children are rising in the educational field, and the local language is now their first language. In some countries, such as Germany, France, Britain, there are a growing number of Muslim entrepreneurs, professionals, and attorneys. Also, financial capital from Muslim entrepreneurs does much to undergird the investment markets. They are beginning to be elected as members of local, regional, or national parliaments in Germany, France, Holland, Britain, and Denmark, and have taken up ministerial responsibilities in some cases.
3. Other Muslims feel marginalized, economically depressed,



“It should be remembered that Christianity, as Islam, was born into contexts where multiple religions existed. We need therefore to go back to our roots in reflecting theologially on how to relate to the Islamic presence in Europe.”

Response:
George Harinck

Can A Christian University Train Muslim Clerics?

George Harinck is a Professor and Director of the Historisch Documentatiecentrum at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

The Christian VU University (Vrije Universiteit) Amsterdam has a diverse theological department. It houses seminaries and institutions of several different Christian denominations and religious traditions: Reformed, Anabaptist, Pietist, Pentecostal, Eastern Orthodox, and also Islamic. Pietist, Reformed, and Islamic students take some of their classes together. Significantly, far from this being a perversion of the Christian tradition of VU University, this plurality has been its trademark since its inception in 1880. Originally, the ideal was to found an institution for higher education that was free from the state and its requirements and from the church and its confessional or church-political restrictions. Behind this was the Christian idea that academia would only flourish when different worldviews were accepted as a prerequisite for good science. In this view, academia was a sphere of its own, where all worldviews were welcome but at the same time debated. This idea was never fully realized in the history of the VU University, but the present theological department comes close.

This model of education is unique in the world. There are no Islamic universities that train Christian clerics, and there are no Catholic universities that train Imams. Most Christian schools founded in the nineteenth century were set in opposition of—or were at least critical of—modern culture. But the VU University presented itself and its model of plurality as a fruit of modernity. The message was that religion had to be understood as part and parcel of modernity and that modernity had to learn to respect religion as belonging to its make-up. How did this come to be historical, especially since Christians have often struggled to come to terms with modernity?

Modernity is a lovely word. It is associated with the present, with dynamics, and with being at pace with the times. Although Christianity is

conservative by nature—the historical event has already happened—many churches proclaimed their aggiornamento and social gospel movement to stay in pace with modern times. We love or at least have got accustomed to the benefits (health care, communication, etc.) and dynamics that come with modernity. But when this modern idea of a world unfolding instead of a world as a given structure first got hold of Western culture at the end of the eighteenth century, many Christians did not accept it. That was all the more understandable when we realize that this idea was accompanied by a critique of the supernatural. The world as a creation of God was not compatible with the dynamics of reality, according to some Enlightenment thinkers. So, Christians often associated modernity with anti-supernaturalism and criticisms of the Church and the Bible. To them, modernity was not a lovely word at all.

Christians have been trapped by the anti-clericalism and naturalism of the Enlightenment—today this image of the movement is still present and communicated by historians like Jonathan Israel. But there have also been Christian thinkers who have welcomed modernity as a new opportunity for Christianity to present itself anew in Western culture—to them it was a lovely word after all. In their opinion those who depicted modernity as being set against Christianity were mistaken, misled by the warnings of their fellow believers or by the utterings of supporters of the anti-supernaturalist agenda of Enlightenment.

Modernity presented itself as a liberation movement. It would set you free from superstitions and from anything that was not compatible with reason. The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), and the neo-Calvinist movement to which he belonged, did disagree with this modernist drive and criticized it as being inconsequential. The liberal theologians, but also liberal politicians in the Netherlands, had decided that orthodox Christianity did not meet the standards of reason and therefore had to be ostracized. Bavinck objected to this limitation. Life could not be reduced to the intellectual. He defended that the importance of religion in human life could not be denied by modernity. If modernity really meant liberty, then by consequence it had to grant equal rights to everyone, and not only to those of their liking; so orthodox Christianity should also have its share of freedom.

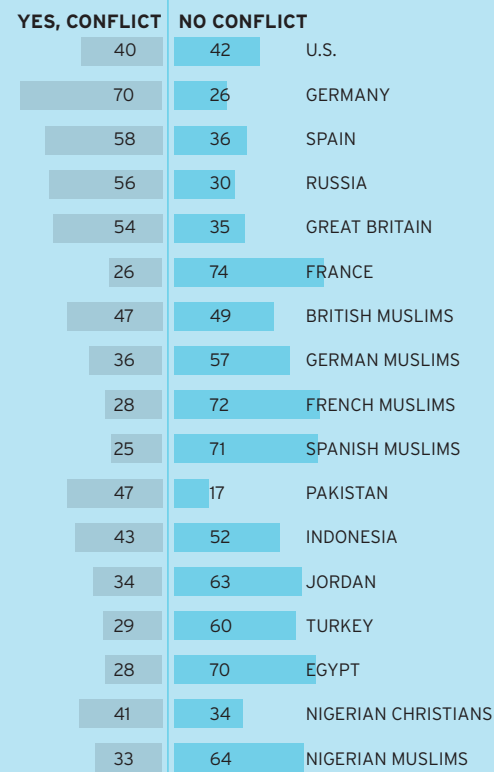
By nature the freedom of modernity could not exist without plurality. This did not mean

granting limited room for orthodox Christianity, but granting it full freedom to develop according to its own parameters, just like the freedom liberalism required for itself. The cultural change that liberalism had brought had been halted halfway according to Bavinck: liberalism simply had replaced Christianity as the ruling public opinion. Real freedom required the abolishment of a dominating liberal or Christian character of the public square, and instead required plurality. This radical idea showed that Bavinck had taken the modernist teachings to heart. Many of his fellow orthodox Christians did not accept such a self-confident kind of Christianity that would go out and claim its public place among many other opinions, and defend the right of other religious groups to do the same. They simply took the dominant presence of liberalism in state and church for granted and gave up in the public face of Christianity. But according to Bavinck, these Christians did not fully understand that the abolishment of the old order meant not only freedom of opinion or democracy, but also the obligation to engage in the public debate and make your opinion known. A proper development of modernity meant a radical inclusion of plurality that asked more from Christians than just relying on the existing order of society or the church, or rendering the public square to the liberals.

To guarantee that freedom, Bavinck and his colleagues recommended their neo-Calvinism as the safeguard for pluralism in the public square. Compared to the Calvinism of older days, it was “neo” in that it accepted modernity’s separation of church and state and full freedom of religion. Modernity had ended Constantinian domination of the Christian church over society and politics. Instead of a Christian society, there now was a religiously and ideologically diverse society in which Christians participated. Bavinck considered this a liberation, for now Christianity could present itself more independently of political authorities and develop more freely. In premodern times Christians could never have founded their own school and defined their own curriculum, but now, in 1880, the VU University Amsterdam was founded, where orthodox Christianity was not excluded from the faculty and curriculum—as was the case in the Dutch state universities.

Today this religious inclusion is still recognizable. Muslim students prefer the VU University to other Dutch and European universities, for they are accepted without being

Is there a conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society?



Kohut, Andrew, 2006. *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*. Pew Research Center, page 28.

and beliefs. At Dutch state universities, for example, the Muslim worldview and approach to science is rejected a-priori, and neither is space provided for Muslims to worship. This is in stark contrast to the Muslim experience at the VU University where both intellectual and physical space is provided for Muslim beliefs and practices. Modernity still copes with the consequence of its stance on freedom: true freedom must include religion, be it orthodox or modern, Muslim or Christian. And to the neo-Calvinists, freedom cannot do without religion. The VU University with its Christian roots at least tries to address this complex issue of religious pluralism. It may have failed many times, but it still has that potential of guaranteeing and safeguarding freedom today. More work needs to be done in terms of creating venues for engaging in interfaith dialogue and to ensure that we Christians and Muslims do not live together, separately. How can the VU University make the best use of these freedoms provided for by its heritage? Questions like these need to be explored as we explore the new realities of religious pluralism. As Christians and Muslims learn to respect each other, so too must modernity learn to respect religion. Modernity is a lovely word indeed. **EIFD**

and disaffected, as seen in the riots in France and in the North of England. Factors include failure in education, unemployment, and poor housing. For some this leads to drugs, violence, or crime; while for others increasing radicalization, particularly of young people.

4. Migrants often maintain strong links with their countries of origin. Ease of travel and information technology keep such engagement going. This is particularly the case in Germany, where the Turkish state has strong influence on the large Turkish population, especially through the Diyanet network of mosques whereby Turkish culture is deliberately maintained. Influence of other economic, social, and political links with Middle Eastern countries, including Saudi Arabia, and with groups in Pakistan, is found in several European countries, and is seen as a source of radicalization of young people.
5. There are major debates about the position of Muslim women. These have increased as women have become more educated, and in many cases now, more educated than men. Are they oppressed by social and cultural traditions, or free to choose their own path and identity?



“Dialogue is the means of authentic witness. It should be noted that witness is likely to be two-way, listening to the other, as well as proclaiming Christ. We must be ready to be transformed by the encounter. Dialogue with the unexpected and radically different other leads to ‘surprise and joy’, as we talk about what matters most—holiness, being at peace, and what truly is.”

Rowan Williams

Changes within Christian Communities

Twentieth-century changes are not limited to Muslim communities. Christian communities across Europe have also undergone significant shifts. It is important to understand both religious communities if we are to properly grasp the religious landscape in Europe today.

1. Increasing secularization in Western Europe has led to some marginalization of churches in public dialogue and reduction in Sunday attendance. At the same time, vast attendance at the German Kirchentag, the immense appeal of ecumenical centers such as Taize, and pilgrimage journeys to places such as Santiago di Compestella show continuing interest in spirituality in Europe.
2. There has been a growth in the relative importance of Eastern Orthodox churches. This is not only because of this church’s revival in Eastern Europe and conversions in the West, but also because of the migration of Orthodox Church members to such Western countries as Spain, Italy, and Sweden. Some of these, for example in Sweden, are often anti-Islamic.
3. Migration of Poles and others within the EU, and immigration from Africa, South America, and parts of Asia such as the Philippines, have increased the size of the Roman Catholic church in many countries. So also has there been a large increase of Protestant migrants from Africa, providing significant increases in church attendance within mainline churches, and the formation of many independent African churches.
4. Theological polarization between so-called liberals and conservative Evangelicals has increased in some churches, such as the Anglican Communion, and

attitudes to other faiths is often one of the places of divide. The ecumenical movement has receded in some places, with the weakening of churches leading to a withdrawal within themselves, and mission and ecumenism taking a secondary place.

Developments in Christian Response and Muslim-Christian Engagement

In the midst of these changes, however, we can see signs of hope and growth in the ways Muslim and Christian communities in Europe relate to and interact with one another.

Response to secularism. Secularism has become a central reality in most countries, and in some, such as France, it is enshrined in legislation. It is one of several influences affecting attendance at all religious places of worship, especially amongst the young. More aggressive attacks on religion and religious values have led to a coming together of some Muslims and Christians, in defense of the appropriate place of religion in public life. Various approaches to religious experience have found a following across a range of people, not all of them young, and some of these are linked with Sufism or spirit movements in Christianity.

Response to violent extremism. Fear of Islamic extremism has penetrated many Christian individuals and groups, and also affected moderate Muslims’ confidence in dealing with the issue.

Solidarity with the persecuted. Those working to highlight persecution of Christians in Muslim lands have gained a higher profile. Stories of persecution influence Christian congregations, whether through media coverage or because of the presence of refugees. This can lead to polarization, but also to joint statements by Muslims and Christians condemning such extremist actions.

Statements. Positively, there has been a wide range of statements by Christian churches in response to a number of issues and conflicts that have arisen. Lively intra-Christian debate has been taking place within churches in most countries, with the presence of Islam being an energizing factor in such discussions. More Christians are willing to engage with Muslims at all kinds of levels. There are events and demonstrations for peace, an increase in Muslim-Christian women’s interactions, and more individuals working together on issues in “the dialogue of life.”

Exchange programs. These have become more frequent. Examples are those between EKD (the German Evangelical church), Germany, and Iran, and between the Church of England and Iran. There are a range of joint programs related to Israel/Palestine. The Anglican Church has a joint program with Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Many groups have traveled to Turkey to visit holy sites, such as a Muslim-Christian group from Leicester. Indonesia has also been involved in such programs, and there have been student exchanges with Algeria. There are also university faculty contacts between countries.

Local and national forums. In some countries, Chris-

tian-Muslim forums have been established at a national or city level—for example, in Britain with the Christian-Muslim Forum, of which the Archbishop is president; in France with GAIC (Groupe d’Amitie Islamo-Chretien); and in Norway and Denmark. In Germany, the Christian-Muslim Working Group (ICA) was established on a national level as early as 1976. Also notable in Germany is the Christian/Jewish/Muslim initiative “Invite Your Neighbor” (1999-2003), followed by “Do you know where I am?” (since 2004). This has encouraged and supported hundreds of local initiatives. There are also many city level or local district initiatives such as those in Paris, Gothenburg, Leicester, Drammen, Aarhus, and in a number of German cities. Individual church leaders have been appointed with responsibility for Muslim-Christian relations in several countries.

Academic study. There has been a growth in academic interest in Islam and in Muslims in Europe—not primarily in textual work, but over a wide range of areas. “Scriptural reasoning” dialogue groups such as *A Common Word* (2007) have had a significant response. *A Common Word* was the remarkable letter of 138 Muslim scholars and religious leaders addressed to the Pope and other Christian leaders. The number of participants has since risen to around 400, with numerous Christian leader responses, and the initiative’s website can be read with great profit as an example of a major Muslim initiative in dialogue.

Christian Mission and Muslim Communities: Possibilities and Challenges

It should be remembered that Christianity, as Islam, was born into contexts where multiple religions existed. We need, therefore, to go back to our roots in reflecting theologically on how to relate to the Islamic presence in Europe. Change is not uniform, and there is enormous diversity across Europe. Attitudes need to be encouraged that are prepared to embrace change positively, and to trust in God to guide us to a way forward. For God embraces all humanity in the biblical creation stories, and we need not be afraid of working together with Muslim brothers and sisters.

Evangelism as two-way street. Pluralist, exclusivist, and inclusivist approaches to interfaith dialogue all have distinct implications in relating to Muslims, and Christians need to face the challenge of reflecting on these possibilities. For example, how should a church respond when a Muslim desires baptism? Is this what we seek? Conversely, Christians must also be prepared to be “evangelized” by Muslims (*da’wa*). The right to share one’s faith and the right to convert are part of human rights as they are enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter, and guaranteed in Europe by the Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe. This right is not fully accepted by all Muslims living in Europe. But we can see acceptance agreed to in the final declaration of the EU-sponsored Christian Muslim Conference in Mechelen, Belgium, in October 2008. The conference

was attended by 25 Muslims and 20 Christians from across Europe, organized by the Churches Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME).⁶

Mission and interfaith dialogue. There are various ways of analyzing dialogue between faiths. Two examples follow here. The Roman Catholic Church has distinguished between four levels of dialogue (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 1991): *dialogue of life, dialogue of engagement, dialogue of theology, and dialogue of the spirit/heart*. These are simple and self-explanatory, and provide a basis for a holistic approach to Muslim-Christian interaction. It is made clear in this model that dialogue is not opposed to proclamation. A parallel model, based upon the World Council of Churches (WCC) guidelines, also puts forth four principles: (a) dialogue begins when people meet



people; (b) dialogue depends upon understanding and trust; (c) dialogue leads to common action; (d) dialogue is the means of authentic witness. It should be noted that witness is likely to be two-way, listening to the other as well as proclaiming Christ. We must be ready to be transformed by the encounter. Dialogue with the unexpected and radically different other leads to “surprise and joy,” as we talk about what matters most—holiness, being at peace, and what truly is (Rowan Williams).

The Orthodox Church’s theology of dialogue centers upon its wide understanding of the place of the Holy Spirit in creation and redemption. It is assumed that the Muslim will fully understand the centrality of the search for holiness, peace, and truth in the dialogical encounter. Christians in Europe have usually made the first steps, which is not surprising, as they hold the historically powerful position and remain the main faith in Europe. Also, dialogue for a Christian is following in the steps of Jesus in his ministry, reaching out to others. The Trinity emphasizes dialogue within the heart of God (*intra*), and this flows outward (*ad extra*) (*missio Dei*). A significant minority of Muslims are now responding to the challenge of dialogue.

Mission and the Scriptures. There are differences in the approach to interpretation of Scripture found within

Based on the foundation of the Golden Commandments – Love of God and Love of Neighbor – *A Common Word* (www.acommonword.com) is an initiative that invites Muslims and Christians to join hands, for the sake of God and for the sake of world peace and harmony.

Response:
Sunday B. Agang

Insights from the Nigerian Experience

Reverend Sunday B. Agang is Academic Dean of ECWA Theological Seminary in Jos, Nigeria.

In the context of the triadic evils of racism, tribalism, and religious xenophobia in Rome, Paul pens these words: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. . . . Love does no harm to a neighbor [or the “other”]; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8, 10).

It is becoming increasingly clear that in a globalized world beset with violence, war, and a consequential struggle for economic resources, mass movement and migration across borders are inevitable. In such social and political settings, one of the critical challenges facing society and the Church is how to see each other as friends rather than foes. The Christmas and New Year’s Eve bomb blasts in Jos and Abuja, Nigeria, and attacks on Christians in Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey last year reveal the continuing tension between Muslims and Christians even as many quest for an integrated global community.

In a multireligious context, the temptation to see the “other” as a possible threat is a tempting initial impulse. Our worldviews of each other are distorted and flawed. Consequently, “People made in the image of God—intended to bring honor to the God of the universe, to give and receive love from others who bear that image, to have the capacity to think, dream, imagine, sing, hope—are not rightly valued.”¹ As a result of this, the propensity to perpetuate violence against each other is enormous. In such a situation, Andrew Wingate follows Paul’s advice to the church in Rome: “Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.” Wingate argues that one of the primary ways we can conquer evil in this world is by dialoguing with our neighbors. God, the creator of all the galaxies, is not only interacting with his creation but is also in dialogue with it. Therefore, God expects us to be in dialogue with one another.

The beauty of Wingate’s article is its

contribution to the present impasse posed by religious extremisms. Wingate convincingly points out the ideologies employed to defy the Christian tenet that all human beings are equally created in the Divine image and likeness. In a religious, ethnocentric, and xenophobic world, he proposes that churches should become advocates for a model of integration without assimilation, rather than being major obstacles to this. Given that the influx of Muslims into Britain and other cities of Europe is a permanent feature of the landscape, churches have to rise up to the challenge of enabling the integration of Muslims in Europe so as to enhance the possibility of them contributing to the common good.

Of all the options possible for evangelical mission in today’s global society, Wingate privileges dialogue as the optimal means for mission. “Dialogue can only happen through meeting. Meeting and encounter with Muslims can lead to friendship and friendship to honesty

Dialogue demands patience and a deeper grasp of our areas of shared values and understanding.

and trust. ‘Speaking the truth in love’ means also ‘hearing the truth in love.’ And through such encounter, we can reach the point of mutual witness to the distinctiveness of our faiths. And from that difference, acknowledged with mutual respect, we can get to the point of contributing together for the common good.”

Although Wingate’s thesis holds vital implications for mission and dialogue, his discussion of the European setting neglects the reality that in other parts of the world, Christianity holds a minority status. The situation in Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, and Northern Nigeria, for example, is very different than what is seemingly obtainable in Europe. Here in Nigeria, particularly in the core-North, Christians want to be integrated but they cannot fully do so because they are not Muslims. In fact, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims want them to integrate and assimilate before they can be considered true human beings. As long as they are not ready to become Muslims, they remain second-class citizens in their own motherland. Therefore, in Nigeria,

the society faces the continuing challenge of being divided along religious fault lines. This has made it extremely difficult for Christians and Muslims to meaningfully integrate and together contribute to the common good. What message does Wingate have for these churches in these contexts? How far can the Muslim majority go in advocating integration without assimilation for them? I think that Wingate will make a fundamental contribution if he also suggests ways Muslims in the West could help their fellow Muslims at home to foster mutual respect between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority in their home countries.

Having said this, I do believe that the idea of integration without assimilation is a welcome development, particularly in regions where Muslims are in the minority, such as certain areas in Nigeria. I come from Southern Kaduna, where we have minority Muslim communities. I remember how a non-governmental Christian foundation decided to work with Muslims to build an integrated community in Manchok, in the Kaura Local Government Area. The foundation reached out to the Muslim community by bringing both Christian and Muslim widows and orphans together and giving them revolving loans to create businesses of their choice. The widows were then able to engage in meaningful entrepreneurial activities together, thereby contributing to the economic development of the area. The move encouraged partnership and yielded greater cooperation and friendship instead of the usual paradigm of violence.

Dialogue cannot take place in an atmosphere of distrust. The only way the Church can overcome the temptation of distrust is faith in the God of dialogue. Interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria and in Europe can only happen when we take a step of faith to engage the “other” in talking about a way forward. Dialogue demands patience and a deeper grasp of our areas of shared values and understanding. In the midst of extremism, the Church needs to keep the door of world evangelization open. The key that keeps the door unlocked is dialogue. **EIFD**

Endnotes

- 1 Mark Labberton. 2010. *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor: Seeing Others Through the Eyes of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, page 64.

the Christian world. However, we should recognize that there is a growth in conservatism within some European churches, increased through the immigration of Africans to many European countries. Many of them have had difficulties with Muslims in their own country. There has also been a growth in Pentecostalism, with similar effects. Because of the rather tense religious circumstances in their home countries, most of these groups are very wary of those who make relationships with Muslims a priority. At the same time, others are finding a new excitement about reading the Bible in a multifaith world. For some this is found in a fresh discovery of the Old Testament and its commonalities with parts of the Qur'an. Reflection on a commonality between the values of the Kingdom of God and the ethics found in the Qur'an has proved fruitful. Comparison can be found between the stories of the Gospels and some of the traditions related to Mohammed in the Hadith. Christians have also been challenged to justify and indeed to rejoice in the diversity of our Gospels and the writings of Paul, in terms of their witness to Jesus Christ. Another layer of complexity is seen when we realize that Muslims will of course also vary in how they use the Qur'an in today's European world.

Mission and sharing of basic Christian convictions. By questioning from Muslims, Christians are challenged to explain how they can believe in Christ as more than a prophet. They are led to understand why Muslims reject the sonship of Christ through dialogue with Muslims. This forces Christians to explain in understandable terms what we mean by "Son of God." The same applies to the explanation of the Cross and Resurrection as being at the center of the Christian story, and the place of the suffering God (as per Bonhoeffer). God coming in the flesh is a deeply disturbing concept for Muslims but is the heart of Christian faith. The "second coming of Christ" is also a rather different concept in Islam, and Christians are led to think about their own understanding of this difficult but credal concept.

The paradox of the Trinity stems from the early Church as a picture or symbol of how Christians experience God. Muslims need to be reassured that affirmation of the Trinity does not mean we are dividing God, or believe in three gods. Christians are absolutely committed to the oneness of God, but this does not limit the language of how that oneness is experienced. Within the Trinity, the place of the Spirit needs to be emphasized, and the breadth of God's presence through history and in the wider world beyond the Church. The contribution of Eastern European and Syrian Orthodox churches, and of theologians such as Jurgen Moltmann, from Germany, and J. V. Taylor, from England, can be noted here. Here the concept of *logos spermatikos* ("without him was not anything made that was made") can be introduced as a potentially inclusive concept.

Mission and apologetics. Christians can learn from Muslims about the importance of defending their faith.

Many Muslims know about Christian beliefs only as taught by fellow Muslims, and the information they pass on is what Christians would view as misinformation or misinterpretation. Understanding the "other" is a vital challenge. But dialogue can no longer proceed with any benefit when it appears to be a dialogue of the deaf. Christians should be prepared to explain their faith or, as St. Paul puts it, to "confess the faith of Christ crucified,"



which was "foolishness to the Greeks and a scandal to Jews." They should be prepared for their words being radically unacceptable to Muslims. But they should also be prepared to listen to the Muslim and hear how they define themselves. Defending the faith does not mean defending everything that has happened in Church history or in the actions of the contemporary church, even less of so-called "Christian nations." This will help Muslims to feel they do not have to defend everything done in the name of Islam—"not in our name"!

Mission, ethics and social engagement. Both religions are concerned about how to live a good life under God. There is more than a human referent for ethical standards. There are important commonalities between Muslims and Christians. So also the general command to "love our neighbor as ourself," as highlighted in *A Common Word*. Both also have universal ethical norms, though with contextual working out of those norms in a given situation. In decision making, both involve reflection on scripture, tradition and reason. Christianity, however, should not revert to "proof texts" or simply referring to "God's law." Nor should Christians adopt an attitude that is confrontational to the secular or be over-ready to dismiss the "the enlightenment," which for all its problems has helped foster universal human rights, as is spelled out in UN Declaration on Human Rights.

Sensitive areas in ethical discussion are likely to include the relationship between the individual and society, the place of democracy and freedom of the individual, the ethics of conversion, and gender issues.

Due to labor recruitment agreements between West Germany and Turkey in the early 1960s, Turks comprise the largest ethnic minority in Germany today (est. 3.5 million).

Percentage of Population that is Muslim in European Countries

KOSOVO	89.6%
ALBANIA	79.9%
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	~40%*
REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA	33.3%
BULGARIA	12.2%
RUSSIA	11.7%
FRANCE	~6%
NETHERLANDS	5.7%
GERMANY	~5*
UNITED KINGDOM	2.7%
REST OF REGION	1.1%

*Data for Germany, France, and Bosnia-Herzegovina come primarily from general population surveys, which are less reliable than censuses or large-scale demographic and health surveys for estimating minority-majority ratios. As a result, the percentage of the population that is Muslim in these three countries is rounded to the nearest integer. Kohut, Andrew. 2006. *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*. Pew Research Center, page 3.

Perhaps most sensitive will be the approach to questions of human sexuality, including marriage and divorce, homosexuality, cohabitation, polygamy, sex education, etc. Included also will be questions of the role of gender as it relates to the upbringing of children and care of the elderly. All of these issues are seen by Muslims (and Christians) as being religious questions, even if the two faiths sometimes come to different conclusions.

Common approaches can be developed toward ecology and the environment, reverence for life, and preventing the breakdown of law and order. So also there can be common approaches to the evil of racism and the rise of the far right in several European countries. Responsibility for the use of money and God's gifts on the earth can center around the common concept of stewardship given to human beings. Consideration of waste, litter, and conservation can be approached together to "save the earth." There needs to be reflection upon the place of personal responsibility and conscience in ethical decision making.

Mission and spirituality. Spirituality is at the heart of both Muslim and Christian faiths. Both center upon public times of worship (*salat* for a Muslim), the daily offices, and the eucharist (e.g. mass, divine liturgy, Holy Communion). These can be observed but are not normally participated in by the other faith, which can lead to confusion. But the intention behind both is the praise of God, the acknowledgement of our dependence upon Almighty God, our prayers for others, the expression of solidarity with our fellow believers, and the sense of being protected by others. Alongside these times, through dialogue, there can arise times of mutual spirituality. These may be controversial, and not acceptable to all for theological reasons. No one should be forced to join anything they are not comfortable with. Examples of prayer alongside each other include famous public occasions such as prayers for peace at Assisi (1986), attended by Pope John Paul II, and the regular prayers held by the Christian community Sant'Egidio ever since; the Commonwealth service held every year in Westminster Abbey, attended by the Queen of England; prayers held in many places after disasters such as the tsunami in 2005; or prayers before the Iraq war. In Holland there have been Assisi-style prayers for the opening of parliament since 1986 and annual prayers in Leeuwarden. Some such prayer events are civic, some are within churches. But all include many faiths, and prayer is alongside, and not mixed together.

Leadership structures. Muslims have often gone through major challenges in coming to Europe. In some contexts they are used to tribal or family leadership, in others to the dominance of the state authorities, as in Turkey or Iran. Leadership in religion and within the state are not separate in various places. Muslims in Europe are faced with the challenge of being a Muslim in a state without an "all embracing" Islamic framework. The Imam is traditionally a teacher and leader of prayer.



"Increasing secularisation in Western Europe has led to some marginalisation of churches in public dialogue, and reduction in Sunday attendance. At the same time, the vast attendance at the German Kirchentag, and the immense appeal of ecumenical centres such as Taize, and pilgrimage journeys to places as Santiago di Compostella, shows continuing interest in spirituality in Europe."

Andrew Wingate

**Response:
Matthew Krabill**

The Long Shadow of Christendom

Matthew is a PhD student in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Seminary and is a co-founder of Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue.

Andrew Wingate points out several significant religious trends in Western Europe. The first is that, in the last 100 years, the presence of Muslims on the European continent has dramatically increased both in demographic scale and in social impact. A century ago, European Christendom was at its height, not only evidenced by the expanse of the worldwide reach of its colonial territories, but also because of the bountiful optimism that characterized its outlook. France controlled Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, and Lebanon and Syria; Britain controlled an empire unparalleled in history.

The second significant trend Wingate identifies is that of secularization. The prevailing thesis since the Enlightenment—that religion faces certain extinction at all levels of European society—has long been an enchanting one. That narrative, however, was undermined by Europe's colonial links, which proved to have unforeseen consequences on the religious landscape of the continent as reverse migration from the former colonies brought waves of migrants seeking a better life. The link with these colonies is one of the main reasons why Europe's migrants are predominantly Muslim while the waves of migration to the U.S. are predominantly Christian.¹

But the point here is that Europe's "newer" migrants are religious and that their Hindu, Muslim, and Christian religiosity has triggered a continent-wide crisis of cultural, religious, and national identity.

As is evident from the discourse in secular media, the growth and presence of Islam and Christianity pose a challenge to widely held secular European values. However, not only does it question issues of national and cultural identity—whether a grandson of Turkish immigrants is "really" German or whether the granddaughter of Algerian immigrants is "truly" Parisian—it also poses the question of how the dynamic religiosity of new immigrants will impact the trajectory of European societies.

Wingate's focus on Europe's changing context raises important missiological implications for the future of interfaith dialogue in Europe. From a mis-

siological perspective, the resurgence of the Christian faith due in large part to non-Western immigration is of critical importance. The result is a dynamic Christianity and a vibrant Islam, both of which are emerging side-by-side. Thus one might make the case that the European continent is not a graveyard for religion but rather a laboratory for new forms of faith, new structures of organization, and interaction that can accommodate religious involvement in a dominant secular environment.²



The London Central Mosque holds weekly services for over 5,000 Muslim worshippers. About 15% of residents in London in 2011 claim the Muslim faith.

From a Christian perspective, the growth of some 250 Congolese and Haitian congregations in greater Paris, the presence of Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic churches in London, and the expansive

impact of congregations like “The Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations” founded by Nigerian-born pastor Sunday Adelaja in Kiev, Ukraine—are indicators of the renewal of the Christian faith. Missiologically these phenomena remain largely ignored, even though they represent some of the most unexpected and promising changes in the permutation of Christianity on the continent.

Given these changing realities, the following are some reflections on the implications for interfaith relations:

First, Christians seeking dialogue with Muslims (and vice-versa) will have to take into account the heterogeneity that is part and parcel of each respective community. Pakistani Sunnis, Saudi Wahhabis and Iranian Shiites are likely to share different “Islamic” worldviews which in turn will affect how they relate to one another as well as how they engage and adapt to the societies in which they find themselves. The same is true of the historical experiences of Church of Pentecost members from Ghana or, as fellow responder Sunday Agang notes, Christians from the contentious Jos region of Nigeria.

Second, European governments differ greatly in their approach to religion. As Wingate correctly notes, secularization has become a central reality in national life in most countries, and in some, such as France, it is enshrined in legislation. Even though the right to share one’s faith and the right to convert are part of the human rights protected in the European Convention of Human Rights, how those laws are applied on the ground depends significantly on where one lives. Missiologist Lamin Sanneh makes the case that secular Europe would sooner make its peace with Muslims than with its new Christians.³ This he derives from numerous cases in which political leaders were quicker to extend legal protection and political recognition to Muslim immigrants. By contrast, Sanneh argues, immigrant churches are subject to cultural hostility as illegitimate cults. African Pentecostal groups, for example, are typically blamed for witchcraft and human sacrifice, their rituals condemned as voodoo magic.⁴ Consequently, these kinds of encounters may signal that Christianity in its new immigrant expressions

may face as strong (and perhaps stronger) resistance as Islam in its quest for acceptance in society.

Third, a crucial issue requiring discernment is to what extent Christians and Muslims can cooperate on a wide range of social issues. More aggressive attacks on religion and religious values have led to the collaboration of some Muslims and Christians in order to defend the appropriate place of religion in public life.

Fourth, in a recent study by the Pew Research Center and the Pew Global Attitudes Project, researchers found that ethnocentrism, xenophobia, and racist attitudes are on the rise in Europe.⁵ Opinions about Muslims in almost all of the countries surveyed were considerably more negative than are views of Jews. Half of Spanish (52%) and German respondents (50%) rate Muslims unfavorably. Opinions about Muslims are somewhat less negative in Poland (46%) and even less so in France (38%). About one in four surveyed in Britain also voice unfavorable views of Muslims. The rise-in-tide of such negative opinions toward the Muslim community has direct implications for how local churches reach out to their Muslim neighbors. The kind of mission and pastoral care Wingate calls for will ring hollow if these negative attitudes are also shared by Christian communities.

In the final analysis, the nature and scope of the issues facing the church in Europe necessitate a holistic approach to mission and dialogue—one that, as Chawkat Moucarray notes, is “incarnational, compassionate and critical.”

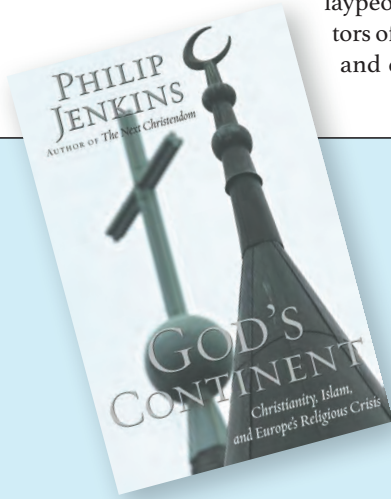
Endnotes

- 1 See Chapter 5 in Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2008).
- 2 Philip Jenkins, “Godless Europe?,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31, no. 3 (2007): 1.
- 3 Lamin Sanneh, “Can Europe Be Saved? A Review Essay,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31, no. 3 (2007): 125.
- 4 Sanneh, 125.
- 5 For the full report, see “Unfavorable Views of Jews and Muslims on the Rise in Europe”: <http://pewglobal.org/2008/09/17/unfavorable-views-of-jews-and-muslims-on-the-increase-in-europe/>.

In Europe, there is a pressure for him to become like a Christian priest or pastor. Christian clergy can assist Imams in their development to a wider role, but should not impose their own models. The movement toward chaplaincy has also led to some Imams, as well as laypeople (including women), becoming facilitators of pastoral care within a range of institutions and communities. This role requires training

that is different from the old purely scholarly schools of training, and Christians can assist in this.

Mission as pastoral care. Muslims often come with structures of family that include a community of care. They have not had the experience of pastoral care in Western society, where life tends to be individualistic and the young see themselves as independent and autonomous. Where the family structures hold together



BOOK REVIEW

God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis

by Philip Jenkins, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Book Review by Melody Wachsmuth

Melody holds an MA in Theology and Cross-Cultural Studies from Fuller Seminary and she is part of the founding of Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue.

The dominant media message regarding the political and religious landscape of Western Europe seemingly declares: Christianity is dying while the number of Muslims rapidly grows; therefore, Europe is destined to become Eurabia. Philip Jenkins, professor of humanities at Penn State University, confronts these messages through this carefully researched book. In doing so, he attempts to separate media mythology from the actual complex reality, looking at factors specific to each religious group, the wider socioreligious context, and their relationship to the dominant secular society. Jenkins does not deny that Western European governments are facing sizable challenges in relation to assimilating Muslim immigrants who possess vastly different cultural, political, and social perspectives. However, he reframes the issue from being a "Muslim problem" to describing it as a "systematic failure by European elites to understand religious thought and motivation" (259). The results of his discussion highlight perhaps surprising and unexpected insights: facets of Christianity in Europe are very much alive and are being dynamically restructured in accordance with the changing European world, secular Europe is being forced to revisit the role of religion and its own value system in conjunction with the state, and the complex realities of Muslim immigration and habitation in Western Europe sharply defy easy stereotypes and glib generalizations.

Jenkins begins by exploring the current

state of Christianity in Europe, from the dissolving traditional expressions to highlighting the somewhat ignored influence of new Christian immigrants. Next, Jenkins explores European fears regarding the rapid growth of Muslims through birth and immigration. Following, the bulk of the book considers the multifaceted dimensions of "Europe's Muslims," belying this label as painting a false impression of a monolithic entity. Instead, he deepens the discussion by looking at differences found intergenerationally, economically, culturally, and in expressions of spiritual devotion. He intertwines this discussion with an exploration of secular European attitudes and policies, probing potential pitfalls and possibilities.

Jenkins's argument for this view of Muslim identity in Europe, however, in no way demeans the seriousness of the radicalism that has wrought havoc in various places throughout Europe. In fact, he challenges the reader from all perspectives—from those who do not take religious devotion seriously and believe that Islam's only safe recourse is to move it towards what Jenkins describes as a "pallid liberal Islam" (272), to those who believe all Muslims share a tendency toward radicalism.

Although Jenkins strives to write objectively as possible, several times he alludes to an assumption that cultures travel the same historical path in a predictable sequence of footsteps. For example, he points to differences in gender issues as not being

a "clash of civilizations" but a "time lag of a generation or two," pointing to how much such views have changed in Western civilization in the last century (210). Whether this is true or not will only be revealed by time, but one must be careful in assuming that a different culture will come to the same conclusions in the same way.

Jenkins does not offer any radical solutions, nor is that the point of the book. His careful research, however, allows the nuances and complexities of the situation to emerge, and his final two chapters probe potentialities, both good and problematic, for the present situation. His analysis offers a rich perspective for those engaging in interfaith dialogue. As Christians in Europe wrestle with pertinent questions regarding how to relate to Muslims and how to understand the Qur'an and Muhammad in relation to their own beliefs, Jenkins unravels the various factors surrounding the issues, allowing for a both deeper and broader discussion. Although there is much to soberly ponder in this book, his closing thoughts on Christianity in Europe are hopeful. Speculating that continued contact of Christians with Islam will probably inspire reactionary religion that defines itself simply against Islam, he reiterates that it these interactions will continue to encourage fresh expressions of Christianity. When we take into consideration the stream of Christian immigrants from the global South, Christianity may be turning to a brand new page in Europe.

the problems may be lessened, though those who opt out of this can be very lonely. Another area of challenge is the nature of marriage, particularly for societies that are used to arranged marriages. Bringing brides from home countries leads to significant problems if they are not educated and do not know the European languages—factor that may contribute to increased divorce rates.

How are Christian and Muslim care structures responding? One way is clearly through the role of chaplains in institutions, whether clergy or lay. Christian chaplains and pastors find themselves responding to a range of these problems—in prisons, hospitals, and universities. For example, in the Netherlands (as also in Britain) there are official army, hospital, and prison Imams paid for by the government. Christian care of immigrants is a major calling in many countries. How to provide relevant advice and counsel in cases of interfaith marriage, particularly when children come, is a delicate ministry. The convert coming from Islam needs special care not just from the priest but from the congregation, which becomes his or her new “family.” The convert away from Christianity needs to know that he or she is still loved, and his or her family must be reassured that they are not “responsible” for what they see as apostasy. Still another challenge for a Christian pastor is how to pray with the bereaved or sick from another faith. How do Christians offer new hope to those without hope through alcohol or drug addiction, or through long years of imprisonment? Likewise, how to show love in a way that “sets people free”? This may include affirming them as Muslims and introducing them to appropriate pastoral or community care; it may on occasions be to respond to their request to know more about the Christian faith. These situations must never be exploited in the quest for converts.

Mission and the education of children and young people. The situation of education varies from country to country. Secularism has led to ignorance in understanding religious facts and cultures throughout Western Europe and in several East European countries. Some countries such as France include the teaching of religious facts in various disciplines, such as history, literature, or art. The purpose is to understand the cultural heritage of Europe as well as of France, of the world as well as the local. In France, confessional teaching is given in private schools or in chaplaincy within public schools. In Norway, about 50 percent of the emphasis is placed on Christianity, while the other half is on other faiths, philosophies, and ethics. In Britain, the government is encouraging the opening of many more faith schools, whether Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Jewish or Sikh. However, there is a clear distinction between Anglican schools, which cater for the whole community, and Muslim, Catholic, or Jewish schools, which are largely or completely confessional. Religious education is broad, as in Norway, and is required in all schools. Confessional teaching has been compulsory in Romania since 1990. There are

significant developments in Germany, where the partnership between religious organizations and state religious education has a firm place in the public educational system. Efforts are being made to include Islam within this system, and there are now established professional training programs for future Muslim religious teachers at

Turkey's application to accede to the European Union began in 1987. In recent years, its membership bid has been the subject of intense debate.



several German universities. The syllabus in Madrasahs is under scrutiny in several places, with an encouragement or requirement to include citizenship education as well as traditional subjects.

Conclusion

Europe has become a key area for Muslim-Christian relations and, within Europe, Britain is at the forefront of most issues, with its variety of communities, and British Commonwealth connections focused upon the vast number of Muslims living in the Indian subcontinent. For Holland the connections with Indonesia are central; for Germany, Turkey; and for France the Magrib. Recent asylum movements have brought the whole world to Europe, with Scandinavia at the fore in receiving Muslim refugees. Freedom of movement within the EU has led to migration across the EU, regardless of the original point of entry. Europe is also the continent where Muslim scholars, as mentioned above, are struggling toward new European interpretations of Islam, which work at making it compatible with liberal democracy and with living as a minority within a multifaith society where Christianity is main partner or protagonist. The challenge for Christians is which of these they are to be. An Indian Christian I met on a train in South India not

“Despite the limitations of the underlying data for Europe, it appears that Germany is home to more than 4 million Muslims – almost as many as North and South America combined. This means that Germany has more Muslims than Lebanon (between 2 million and 3 million) and more than any other country in western Europe.”

Logo, Luis. 2009. *Mapping Global Islam: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population.* Washington DC Pew Research Center, page 26.



Praxis: Andrew Smith

Engaging Teenagers in Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Andrew Smith is director of Youth Encounter for Scripture Union UK, a program that seeks to help Christian young people live out their faith amongst their Muslim friends.

When is someone ready to participate in Christian-Muslim dialogue? Is this the sole responsibility of adults or the spiritually mature (however one might define that), or is it preferable for it to be left to faith leaders or academics? I have been running Christian-Muslim dialogue events for teenagers since 2000, all the while

Muslims have the youngest age profile of all the religious groups in Great Britain—about a third of Muslims (34 per cent) are currently under 16 years of age, as are a quarter (25 per cent) of Sikhs and a fifth (21 per cent) of Hindus. Muslims are the largest religious group in Britain after Christians.



working as director of Youth Encounter for Scripture Union England and Wales, an evangelical mission agency. Consequently, the questions with which this journal wrestles have formed the backdrop to my work in developing dialogue with teenagers, along with a serious consideration of the contribution that teenagers might bring and the challenges working with that age group raises in relation to this work.

The events we've developed through the Youth Encounter project combine good youth work practice with good dialogue practice. At the same time, they bring a perspective that takes evangelism seriously and wrestles

with the tensions between dialogue and evangelism. The events tend to be quite small—less than 20 young people—as this has been shown to have a far greater impact on the participants. At each meeting we take a topic or activity of interest to young people and, through games and activities, explore what Christianity and Islam have to say on the issue, highlighting similarities and differences. In doing this, we encourage the teenagers to speak of their faith to one another rather than having adults teach them the “right things.”

By creating “safe spaces” where everyone feels equal, we facilitate discussions that draw on the participants' own experiences and beliefs, thus enabling positive and deep conversations. One of the simplest yet most profound questions we ask is, “What's the best thing about being a Christian or a Muslim?” This unassuming question is rarely asked, yet it encourages discussion about the positive characteristics of one's own faith rather than a critical deconstruction of the faith of others. Over the 16 years I've been working with Muslim young people, I've met very few who want to engage in polemical debate, and the few who do only want to ask questions and become defensive when questions are asked of them. The model of dialogue we have developed removes the feelings of defensiveness and creates opportunities for meaningful discussion, one where the Christians have the opportunity to give the reason for the hope they have within them . . . with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). To facilitate constructive discussion we have developed a series of “Guidelines for Dialogue,” which can be downloaded at <http://tiny.cc/yeguide>.

Over the years, I have encountered many adults who question whether it's appropriate to involve young people in this work. Such people might be nervous parents, uncertain church leaders, unconvinced evangelists, or interfaith practitioners who are not used to working with young people. The reticence to allow them to enter into dialogue with Muslims comes from two main concerns: first, that they are not strong enough in their own faith and will get confused; second, that they will convert to Islam.

These concerns reflect a broad attitude amongst many adults that the faith of young people is fragile and needs to be protected from harmful influences.¹ Yet this protection of young disciples—“young” in terms of both age and spirituality—seems inconsistent with Jesus's

long ago wished me well on my return to Britain, saying, “You are going back to the most important country in the most important continent for the future of the world. If religions and cultures cannot live together there, they cannot do this anywhere.”

A last word from Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, about dialogue:

The Christian is struck and challenged by the fact that outside the visible fellowship of faith, lives are lived which look as though they are in

harmony with the Christian Universe . . . We have to see how very “other” our universes are; and only then do we find dialogue a surprise and joy as we also discover where and how we can still talk about what matters most—holiness, being at peace, and what truly is.

A joint commitment to holiness, peace, and truth: Where better to end this study of mission amongst Muslims in the contemporary British and European context. And how central this is in light of the economic and political

model of discipleship. During the brief time his disciples were with him, their experience was one of engagement and withdrawal. Time after time they found themselves in situations that challenged their attitudes—situations that others might question as “safe” for a new disciple. One could cite, for example:

1. Matthew 9:9-13, where the disciples are with Jesus mixing with tax collectors and “sinners”;
2. Matthew 10:1-42, where Jesus sends out the 72 on a mission we would spend many years preparing people for;
3. Matthew 15:21-28, where Jesus takes his disciples to Tyre and Sidon;
4. Luke 17:11-19, where Jesus deliberately walks on the road near Samaria, and consequently one of the men with leprosy they meet is a Samaritan;
5. Luke 9: 51-56 and John 4, where Jesus takes his disciples into Samaria. Paul also took his young followers into situations many today would consider far too risky for Christian young people (see, for example, Acts 19:29). Alongside these encounters, Jesus (and Paul) spent time alone with his disciples teaching, nurturing, and praying with them. Engagement and withdrawal is the pattern he establishes.

Clearly, protecting young people in Christian enclaves until they are ready to face the world runs counter to Jesus’s example. For many adults, entering into dialogue with Muslims feels risky, yet creating the opportunity for Christian young people to meet, build friendships, and share their faith with Muslims fits with Jesus’s pattern for discipleship: engagement accompanied by opportunities for reflection following the encounters.

Many of the young Christians we work with have a desire to share their faith with their friends, and some feel under pressure to do this, but many are unsure how to undertake this task amongst their Muslim peers. Not

wishing to cause offense or fearing an outcome of fruitless arguments often stifle their desire to witness. This reticence reflects the fact that almost all evangelism or mission training for young people in the U.K. presumes that they will be sharing their faith with secular friends, and doesn’t engage seriously with the multi-faith context of many U.K. localities. Most of the evangelism resources consider questions such as “Is there a God?” and propose a spiritual journey that starts from no knowledge of God and moves toward conversion and discipleship. These resources do not equip young people for conversations with peers who are adherents of faiths other than Christianity and who may claim to have found spiritual fulfilment within that faith. By engaging in dialogue, young people find a secure place where they can meet Muslims and be equipped to be faithful to the two commands of loving God and loving their neighbor. The friendships they build and understanding they develop transform their attitudes towards Muslims, and through structured discussion they have opportunity to share their faith in a deep and profound way. Furthermore, it equips them for a different engagement with Muslims outside the formal events that we run.

While this kind of work raises frequently asked questions about the connection between dialogue and mission, by taking the faith of young people seriously, it creates the space for them to fully engage in creative and fruitful dialogue. **EIFD**

Endnotes

A version of this paper was originally written and presented to the pre Edinburgh Conference mission consultation on inter faith relations in Bangalore, 17th-19th July 2009.

- 1 This theme is explored in Pete Ward, *Growing up Evangelical: Youthwork and the Making of a Subculture* (London: SPCK, 1996), and Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry: Practicing the Presence of Jesus with Young People* (London: SPCK, 2006).



“Being a Muslim and a Westerner are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The problem is: we need more middle-class Muslims in the West. Successful middle-class Muslims should be winning the respect of other Westerners, but instead their accomplishments compete in shaping public opinion against violence, honor killings and forced marriages, which is how Islam is often portrayed in Western countries. The negative, inaccurate stereotypes of Islam overwhelm the positive opinions other Westerners should be forming about their everyday Muslim neighbors, like the other parents at the kindergarten, the local banker, policeman or shopkeeper.”

Cem Ozdemir, 40, member of European Parliament for Germany’s Green party. Kohut, Andrew. 2006. *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*. Pew Research Center, page 29.

uncertainties we live under in Europe. **EIFD**

Endnotes

- 1 This paper is published with permission from Regnum Books International.
- 2 See my own book, *Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful—How to Live in a Multifaith World* (DLT, 2005). [o]
- 3 For the full text of the letter and subsequent responses to it, see www.acommonword.com.
- 4 Estimate of 2010, census figure of 2001 is 1.6 million.
- 5 Here I am drawing on a document for which I was chief editor:

Embracing a New Reality: Muslims in Europe and Training of Clergy and Lay People (prepared for the Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe, of the Conference of European Churches and Catholic Bishop’s Conferences).

- 6 A key statement emerging from the CRME meeting: “As Christians and Muslims (of Europe) we acknowledge the right of freedom of conscience, of changing one’s religion or deciding to live without a religion, the right to demonstrate publicly and to voice one’s religious convictions without being ridiculed or intimidated into silence by prejudice or stereotyping intentionally or through lack of knowledge.”



Chawkat Moucarray

A Plea for Dialogue Between Muslims and Christians

Chawkat Moucarray serves with World Vision International as the director for interfaith relations. An Arab Christian from Syria, he currently lives in the U.K.

I have never really understood why some people look at dialogue and mission in terms of either/or. Evangelical Christians in particular (whose theology I share) have shown an unwarranted suspicion of dialogue simply because it has been used by some as a substitute for mission. These words should never be divorced: not only are the two words compatible, but they must shape each other.

A Lifelong Journey

Growing up in a Muslim-majority society as a believer in God and Jesus Christ, I knew that I was different and gradually realized that I have something very precious to share with my Muslim friends.

I first had the opportunity to discuss religion with my Muslim peers at school. I was surprised that many Muslim schoolmates were very interested to know more about Christianity and Christians. I, too, wanted to get a better understanding of Islam. A unique opportunity presented itself when the teacher of Islamic religious education accepted my request to attend his class. He would regularly ask me to give my views as a Christian on certain topics, and the discussions often extended beyond the classroom.

In Paris, after I completed a degree in Christian theology, as an Arab Christian I felt a compelling need to relate my faith to Islam. This was reinforced when I worked for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES) amongst Arab and Muslim students. They would ask me challenging questions that I had not seriously considered as a theological student. Hence it wasn't difficult for me to find research topics for my Islamic Studies dissertations at the Sorbonne. Studying Islam made me re-examine my major Christian beliefs, which I had often taken for granted.

For 12 years I worked for the mission-oriented All Nations Christian College, in England. I was in charge of its Islamic course to which I invited a Muslim lecturer to contribute each year. His or her talks provided opportunities for genuine and often animated interaction between students, the speaker, and me.

For three years now I have been working for World Vision, whose mission statement echoes what Jesus proclaimed at the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:17-19)¹. This Christian aid organization operates in 20 Muslim-majority countries, with majority Muslim staff in places like Afghanistan, Mauritania, and Somalia. Providing orientation on Christianity and Islam to all our staff has been a fascinating experience, as we engage on faith

issues and learn from each other about our respective faiths and often about our own! Without ignoring the distinctive beliefs of each tradition, the common ground we have enhances our work for the good of the communities we serve.

What Is Dialogue?

I take dialogue to mean a deliberate effort to engage genuinely and respectfully with each other; a willingness to listen and understand; a readiness to learn and be challenged; a desire to relate to, communicate with, and be understood by one another. In Christian-Muslim dialogue, the focus is the Christian and Muslim faiths and their implications for individuals and communities in this life and the next.

For many centuries Western Christians have ignored or confronted the Muslim world. Ignoring Muslims is no longer an option in our "global village" where Muslims and Christians live next to each other. Some Christians seek to reach out to Muslims in confrontation, attacking Islam in a war of words. This approach is counterproductive as it usually inspires Muslims to become more radical in their beliefs, and often provokes an offensive reaction, too—Muslims attacking Christianity even more vehemently. A polemical engagement with Islam is also incompatible with "the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15), which is about love, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

Christian-Muslim dialogue often takes the form of apologetics for at least two reasons. First, Christianity and Islam make conflicting truth claims about God's revelation, which for Christians reached its climax in Jesus Christ, and for Muslims, in the Qur'an. Second, Islam acknowledges Christianity as a God-given religion; at the same time, it rejects the core of the gospel (the divinity of Christ, his crucifixion, and resurrection). Christian apologetics is about giving a "defense" of the Christian faith to those who attack it (see 1 Peter 3:15). This, however, should be done with "gentleness and respect." Even in a heated debate the Christian apologist must refrain from polemics, personal attacks, and derisive arguments about Muslims and their religion.

Scope and Outcomes of Dialogue

Dialogue should be understood more broadly than verbal engagement. It is a way of life: an open attitude toward others, seeking to reach out and to welcome people, including those who are different or even antagonistic. Understood this way, Christian-Muslim dialogue is an encounter at three levels, like Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26).

First, Christians and Muslims meet each other as human beings, with common needs and aspirations, joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles.



"My perception is that when you get down and talk to people there isn't a great clash of civilizations. Particularly from a women's point of view. I have just come back from Saudi Arabia and I was struck by the fact that women have so much in common in what they want to change.... In my early twenties I simply blamed the West for dividing countries against each other, but in my thirties and forties I have seen more about the reality of government and I now feel that these countries haven't done themselves many favors."

Baroness Pola Uddin, 46, born in what is now Bangladesh and the first Muslim woman member of the House of Lords

Second, they meet as monotheistic believers, sharing many beliefs and ethical values, despite differing understanding of these.

Finally, Christians and Muslims claim to be God's witnesses. An integral part of dialogue is removing the huge misunderstandings we have about each other's faith, so bearing witness.

A fruitful dialogue is measured by its outcomes: a better understanding of each other's faith and of one's own. It should also lead to better relationships between the two communities, strengthening their social commitment. Dialogue is also an excellent school for tolerance. It helps us overcome our ignorance, our prejudice, our self-centeredness, our fanaticism, and our spiritual pride.

Is conversion a legitimate outcome to dialogue? Yes: it is perfectly legitimate for believers, who take seriously the exclusive claims of their religion, to try to persuade others. There is nothing wrong with hoping, and even expecting, that some people, having carefully examined these claims, will make a life-changing decision as a result of a transparent and free dialogue. Unless we accept conversion as a possible outcome for dialogue, our claim to be tolerant remains unproven.

Relating to Muslims Christ's Way

Muslims find in their scriptures a lot about Christianity and Christians, while there is nothing in the Bible about Islam. However, Jesus gave us a clear and helpful command about how we should relate to people in general: "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). How do we want Muslims to relate to us and to our faith? I would like here to highlight some implications for us Christians who want to engage misisialogically with Islam and Muslims.

First, as an expression of loving our neighbors, we must show respect to Muslims and to what is at the heart of their identity, i.e. their Prophet, their religion, and their scriptures. This attitude requires avoiding catch questions, derogatory comments, and inflammatory language. True: some Muslims do not comply with the Qur'anic recommendation to argue with Jews and Christians "in the best possible way" (Qur'an 29:46). But this is no excuse for Christians to indulge in vitriolic criticism of Islam.

This does not mean abstaining from any criticism of Islam, but we can put critical comments in the least offensive language and substantiate them. Jesus enjoins his disciples to look critically at self-proclaimed prophets (Matthew 7:15-20); in the same breath he also commands them to take a long and critical look at themselves (Matthew 7:1-5, 21-23).

Second, we should do our best to be fair. This means,

for instance, when comparing Christianity and Islam, having a right balance between highlighting similarities and pointing out differences, so that our picture is not distorted. Fairness also requires comparing like with like: not comparing moderate Christians with extremist Muslims, ideal Christianity with popular Islam, beautiful texts in the Bible with problematic passages in the Qur'an, and vice versa. In this, Christians must not ignore the Old Testament when looking at issues such as holy war, polygamy, penal code, prophethood, and theocracy.

Finally, we need to study Islam and befriend Muslims. In interacting with Islam, it is critically important



that we use Islamic material in an appropriate way. We should adopt a learning and humble attitude. We need to acknowledge that the Muslim community is the custodian of its own tradition: they are the authoritative interpreters of their scriptures. Some approaches tend to christianize Islam, others to demonize it; neither does justice to Islamic teaching, which should be considered on its own merits.

A Christian perspective on Islam ought to be incarnational, sympathetic, and critical. It should be concerned more with Muslim people than with Islam. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are under a double obligation to love our Muslim neighbors as ourselves and to share the good news with them. Not only do the two commands go hand in hand, but the second is best carried out as an expression of the first. Dialogue is indeed the privileged way of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) to Muslims as well as to other religious communities. EIFD

A version of this paper first appeared as a part of the Lausanne Movement Global Conversation, April 3, 2010.

Endnotes

- 1 World Vision defines itself as "an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God."

Part of relating to Muslims in a Christ-like way means using Islamic material appropriately—adopting a learning and humbling attitude acknowledging that the Muslim community is the custodian of its own tradition.



Jonathan Anderson, *Theoria*, 2009, oil on canvas, 79" x 93"

Jonathan Anderson

Impasse: A Meditation on Representational Painting

In this issue we have explored a religious impasse of sorts—one that affirms that the European continent is both a graveyard for religion and a laboratory for new forms of faith. That emerging reality evokes questions about the future of two global faiths in this context, particularly the space—geographic, political, social and sacred—shared with one another.

I think about painting in construction terms. Paintings are ‘buildings’; they are structures that are designed to provide support and containment for ways of orienting oneself toward the world. The construction of a painting—particularly a representational painting—is the process of taking up common materials (wood, fabric, oily mud) and reconfiguring them into spaces: visual spaces for the housing of stories, the sheltering of questions, and the structuring of concepts and trains of thought. It’s not only that a painting might be an image of a building; it always already is itself a ‘building,’ providing space for a distinct kind of human dwelling.

Yet, there is an impasse that occurs in such paintings and, ultimately, all representations. The construction of visual space has a dual action to it: the same structure that affords us a space to enter, consider, and temporarily indwell is also an obstruction, a barricade. The painting draws us into a space but also withholds it—and it is the paint itself that serves both functions: it is simultaneously an image (a chapel) and an object (mud on stretched woven canvas).

To see other images in this body of work, and for information about the artist, visit www.jonathanandersonpaintings.com.

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