

# MUHAMMAD BOWS TO JESUS

"At the name of Jesus everyone will bow down,/ those in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.// And to the glory of God the Father everyone will openly agree,/ 'Jesus Christ is Lord!'"--Philippians 2.10-11 CEV

"This is eternal life, that they may know you ["Father"], the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."--John 17.3 NRSV

To befriend Muslim neighbors & foster friendly relations between Christians & Muslims is a Christian, indeed a human, obligation. We should make friends across this most crucial global divide of the 21st century, & love our friends. Also, in "Islam" (submission) to Jesus, we should love our enemies, including Muslims, who are among our intellectual enemies.

Since 9/11, Muslims in America have been at more pains to speak in churches, & churches have been more eager to have them speak. These occasions should be seized on as opportunities for mutual education, including intellectual clarity about the crucial differences between the two religions.

The occasion of this Thinksheet was my 12.2.01 experience, in a Portland-OR-area church, of a Muslim attack on Christianity, with no provision for rejoinder--so I yelled "Blasphemy!" & bespoke the Trinity. What had happened was a well-honed piece of polemic propaganda--propaganda, as promoting Islam at its best; polemic, in presenting Christianity as intellectually weak & historically vicious (esp. the Crusades). The effect on a Christian congregation? Preconversion: an exChristian gave her testimony, & a member of the congregation said she was observing Ramadan. But chiefly this: hit by such a skillful barrage, many will be confused about Christian missions to Muslims, & some will find their Christian faith eroded in the direction of a common world-faith (as in Harvard's Diana Eck's book & CD-ROM "On Common Ground," which give a rosy picture of the nonChristian religions).

That polemic propagandist? His card says "Wajdi A. Saïd, Executive Director, Muslim Educational Trust, 633 SW Montgomery St., Portland, OR 97201" (+ mailing address, phone, fax, email, website [www.metpdx.org](http://www.metpdx.org)), "Serving the Community through Education." Among the ten purposes on the card's reverse are "Workshops for education in the Public School System" and "Presenting the loving and open face of Islam to a fearful American Public." He's from Yemen, where Islam shades off easily into (radical) Islamism; & I was not surprised by his antisemitic trashtalk. He claims to have experience of interfaith dialog, but showed no evidence of having been seriously engaged with the Christian mind. He distributed "Why Islam? What Is Islam?" (a 15-p. propaganda piece).

1 Being polite, I did not yell "Blasphemy!" until he finished speaking & asked for responses. In the ensuing 1:1 conversation, he offered me his hand (& I reciprocated) seven times. A false civility would call my "Blasphemy!" nasty: a true scholarship recognizes that Judaism, Christianity, & Islam are mutually blasphemous (as in Martin S. Jaffee's "One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism [Dec/01 JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION 753-75, precised in my #3112]). It is misleading, & many-ways dangerous, to pretend that the three religions can be stirred into an Abrahamic meltingpot without their destruction: each one, being inclusive of cosmos-history-future without remainder, is exclusive of the others. To illustrate this in the case of Christianity, let's look at....

2 ....the two NT quotes to the right of this Thinksheet's title:

**Phil.2.10-11** has Moses & Muhammad (& everybody else) "bow[ing] down" to Jesus, future tense. How come the present tense, then, in the Thinksheet's title? Muhammad considered bowing down to Jesus (ie., becoming a Christian), but decided against it. Here, I use the present in the future-prophetic sense, meaning that eventually Muhammad will bow down to Jesus as "Lord" ("Emperor" in the contemporary political meaning of the Greek word "kurios"). This imperial claim has a curious Muslim parallel in Islam's claim that Jesus (and Abraham & all prophets in between) was a Muslim, having "submitted" in the manner of Muhammad's submission (the model for all submissions to God in human history). Note that Christians' bowing to Jesus is the cosmic (not just historical) model for submission to God. The fact that Muhammad follows Jesus is insignificant, as is the fact that Bahauallah (the 19th-century religions-synthesizer) follows Muhammad.

An old falsehood still common in the general culture is that Jesus was a Jew but Paul created Christianity. In a 1901 classic, Albert Schweitzer proved that "the historical Jesus" is unrecoverable from the materials we have to work with: the whole NT is permeated by the cosmic-historical Christ, a revelation Paul received ("as it was told to me," 1Cor.15.3 CEV). This Philippians passage, most scholars agree, is a quote from a hymn Paul learned (along with other earlier Christian materials: Ro.1.3-4; 3.24-25; 1Cor.15.3-5; 1Thes.1.9-10). Since Paul's conversion was within a few years (five at most) of Jesus' resurrection, how rapidly did christology (the doctrine of who Jesus was / is) develop!

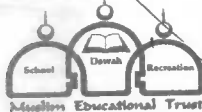
**John 17.3** makes affirmations with interesting subsequent Islamic parallels. (1) "Eternal life," God's life in the believer now & hereafter, has a parallel in the Qur'an's heavy accent on the afterlife (far heavier than in the Bible). (2) The double knowing--the Father & Jesus Christ--finds a parallel in the Muslim's central confession (parallel with Christianity's "Jesus is Lord") "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet." (3) In Christianity, a person (as here in Jn.) is "sent"; in Islam, it is (as often in the Qur'an) a book (at the beginning of Jn., Jesus as the Word is God: the Qur'an's words are, one by one, "sent" from God). (4) Jn.'s "the only true God" finds a parallel in the Islamic confession "There is no God but Allah."

In Afghanistan, Taliban shot people found to have a Bible in their home: Islam has no use for the Bible (which, if used, could correct many of the Qur'an's misunderstandings of Judaism & Christianity). (Contrast: An early-2nd-c. effort to keep the OT out of the Christian Bible failed, thank God.)

3 Saiid's roseate & triumphalistic view of his religion, in disparaging contrast to both Christianity & Judaism, did not surprise me: it's standard Muslim propaganda. With his mind-set, inflation (exaggeration) is to be expected. Though it has less than half the number of adherents Christianity has, he strove to give the impression that Islam is the world's major religion. Though it is growing more slowly than is Christianity, he affirmed the reverse. (A check on Islamic websites shows that he is not personally responsible for his phony stats. One says the USA has 10 million Muslims,\* & ends "Allah will overcome the religions.") He's a chemist, & didn't say why he emigrated to the USA, but said nothing of Islam's colossal failure--deepening through the past four centuries--to keep up with the West economically, politically, culturally, or technologically. From his claim that Christians live at peace in Muslim lands, you would not suspect the present efforts in some Muslim lands to eliminate Christians & destroy all church buildings (Virginia Stem Owens, "Forgotten Christians," May-June/02 BOOKS & CULTURE). His attack on the West for the Crusades gave no hint that they were reaction, not action: reaction for three centuries of Muslim armies overrunning Christian lands, Islamizing them.

4 While Saiid tried to dissociate Islam from the 9/11 horror, that religion, on the pattern of its founder, promotes itself both violently & verbally. Thirty years ago, a VP of the Bank of Iran visited me in my NYC office to try to get my support for setting up an Islamic mission on Manhattan. Soon thereafter he sent me a card of the World Org. For Islamic Services, with this qt. from The Commander of the Faithfuls, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib--Nahj al-balaghah: To disapprove of non-Islam with one's heart is good, with one's tongue is better, with one's sword is best "in order that the word of Allah may remain superior and the word of oppressors may remain inferior." Twenty-two years ago, a Christian missionary to Muslims, speaking of Islam's dream & plan of "the Islamization of the West," said "The time is not too far away when people on the American and European continents will be confronted with the challenge of Islam in a way unknown in history" (Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Hazz in the Preface of his Bethany House book, SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH A MUSLIM). Muslims are free to witness in lands of Christian culture, but Christians are radically unfree to witness in Muslim lands. In the US, Muslim missionaries such as Saiid seek, indirectly & subtly, to neutralize Christian witness to Muslims (obscuring the truth that the two religions, when each is true to itself, are intellectual enemies). Witness is an overflow from worship, which is primary. If we Christians are not mind-as-well-as-heart serious about the Faith, we shall not outpray, we cannot outlove & outlisten--& outwitness. And if we outwitness, we need not outfight: words, please God, not swords.

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The Muslim Educational Trust (MET) of Portland, Oregon, USA, was founded in August 6th, 1993. MET's unique mission in the community is to educate about Islam in an engaging fashion with audiences which have not typically been receptive to Islam's message. These outreach efforts include:

- Advocacy among local news organizations for non-biased news coverage.
- Workshops for educators in the Public School System.
- Establishing linkages with other faiths who are opening channels for communication.
- Presenting Public lectures featuring prominent national and international scholars which are of relevance to both Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Presenting the loving and open face of Islam to a fearful American Public.
- Serve as liaison between Muslim organizations, Islamic Centers, and the community.
- Operating an informal speaker's bureau of Muslims to speak to public and private schools, churches and other interested groups.
- Publishing a quarterly newsletter, AL-HEWAR.
- Operating a weekend Islamic school.
- Operating a full-time Islamic School, ISMET, grades K-6th.

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