

"PRIMER ON ISLAM"

ELLIOTT THINKSHEETS 3019
309 L. Ellz. Dr., Craigville, MA 02636
Phone/Fax 508.775.8008 9.30.00
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The title is in "" because it was assigned to me to speak on tomorrow.

What to do? Surely not distribute my seven Thinksheets on the subject!

A lecture on the origin/teaching/history? No, enough of that will emerge as I listen to them & answer informatively (supplying any "basics" they aren't aware of) & correctively (helping them unknow what they "know" that isn't so or isn't fair).

Give a primer only by way of presenting a polemic on the superiority of Christianity (the reverse of Islamic polemic)? No, but of course each of the West's three monotheistic faiths--Judaism, Christianity, & Islam--considers itself superior to the others, with a more cogent, comprehensive, & convincing intellectual construct (theology). And I will mention, for Christianity in this cultic competition, a work (SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH A MUSLIM [Bethany House/80]) by an excellent scholar-evangelist (Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqg--fluent in Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, & English--able to read Arabic, Greek, & Persian) whose father was a convert to Christianity from Islam.

Instead, after hearing them on their **major impressions of Islam** & briefly responding, I'll present this Thinksheet of **quotations from the Qur'an** (drawn from the extensive index I made to that religion's holiest book). (My rendering varies little [in the interest of clarity] from Arthur J. Arberry's translation [Mac/55].)

But 1st, a thumbnail of the religion: Founded by Muhammad (AD/CE 570-632), an Arab mystic of the priestly family in charge of Mecca's sacred shrine, the Ka'bah (Arabic for "cube"), a pagan center he never attacked but rather built into his new religion, which preaches (as one of its "pillars") that at least once in one's lifetime every Muslim should make a pilgrimage ("hajj") to. (The other pillars? [1] "kalima," the obligatory creedal utterance "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet"; [2] "salat," prayer-facing-Mecca five times daily; [3] "takat," almsgiving; & [4] fasting, esp. during holy-month Ramadan.).... M. claimed revelations (gathered as the Qur'an) offering a far superior way of worship ("Islam," submission to the one God against polytheism & idolatry), of politics (loyalty to one community, the "ummah" of the faithful "submitters" [Arabic, "Muslims"]), & of morals (e.g., reducing the number of wives a man may have, all the way down to four).... The Muslim calendar dates from 622, when Mecca's wealthy merchants forced M. to flee (the "hijrah") to Medinah, 200 miles to the north.... M.'s ministry (10 years in each of the two cities) spectacularly combined the skills of prophet, diplomat, & military commander. In that brief time, he propagated a new worldview & a fast-spreading faith-community of universal potential.

1 "Sent down" is a pervasive verb in the Q. Perhaps it reflects the ancient memory of a meteorite that was "sent down" & became the Black Stone in the Ka'bah. "Sent down" appears four times in the five verses beginning chapter ("sura") 3: "God, there is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. He has **sent down** on you the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it [chiefly, Judaism & Christianity, for M., though he built into his religion such elements of pre-Islamic Arab piety as were not contradicted by his revelations], and He **sent down** the Torah and the Gospel [Arab., "Injil"] earlier, as guidance for the people, & he **sent down** the Salvation.... It is He who **sent down** on you the Book, in which some verses are clear & others ambiguous--of the latter, only God knows the interpretation."

The notion that "down" requires a flat earth is false. Since heaven surrounds earth, every place on earth is down vis-a-vis heaven. Further, "up" is where, when you're little, you look to see your parents, your first authorities. And when your awareness expands to your understanding that you are a child of God, you look "up" to God, "our Father...in heaven." Up is the direction of awe, adoration, submission (Arab., "islam"). In the church I designed & saw built $\frac{1}{2}$ c. ago, the altar was seven steps above nave level: it was & is really up, & some folks (only a very few) thought I as priest was being uppity. We never outgrow our need for up as we, our bodies, gradually or suddenly sink down into the earth (or sea: some folks like to have their ashes spread upon beloved waters).

2 Islam shares with Judaism & Christianity a very high view of humanity. God asked Satan to bow down to Adam, but S. refused, saying (Sura 7.12) "I am better than he. You created me out of fire, but you created him only out of mud." So S. was expelled from paradise, where the submissive angels (i.e., those who bowed down to Adam) still reside: fire has no more dignity than has mud. Besides, God's Spirit is in humanity (blown in: Gn.2.7), which is therefore more than mud or fire.

3 In & beyond Q., we know that M. was deeply distressed that Jews & Christians did not "submit" to his revelations, which he saw as "sent down" on the same trajectory as OT & NT: the Q. "attests the truth of what [in the Bible] preceded it" (35.31; also, 6.93 & 10.38). Some members of M.'s own family were Christians; & when he came to Medina to live, & had frequent conversations with Jews, he was highly appreciative of Judaism. Though himself illiterate, he encouraged his literate followers to study the Bible, which is extensively quoted in Q. Why, then, do Muslims not do so? Because they accept as authentic the unwittingly corrupt quotations (M. not having accurate copies of OT & NT), & conclude that what we know to be authentic texts must be Jewish & Christian corruptions. In the whole history

of literary transmission, this the saddest story.

4 Paradoxically, Jesus is both the dividing wall & the hopeful bridge between Christianity & Islam. To put a highly complex reality as simply as possible, J. & Q. have divine (& irreconcilable!) status--Q. as the Word (a perfect rendering of the Mother of the Book, which is in heaven) "**sent down**" with authority, J. as the Word **come down** (the incarnation, a doctrine abhorrent to Muslims as well as Jews) from heaven with "all authority" (Mt.28.18). For Muslims, Jesus falls short not only of deity but of a certain fellow human being, viz. M., last & highest of the prophets, of whom Jesus was the highest before him (Moses having a status only slightly lower than Jesus'). Making matters worse is the Muslim belief that M.'s coming as the final prophet is predicted in the Bible--so, to put it crudely, we Christians (1) don't believe the truth, that M. is in the Bible, & (2) do believe a blasphemous lie, viz., the Trinity (including Jesus as "Son of God," which he is not: 9.30).

By the 9th c., the liberals (who taught that the Q. was the created Word, reflecting the uncreated Word [which Islam had learned from Christianity's Logos doctrine, as at the beginning of the Gospel of Jn.]), had lost out to the conservatives, for whom Q. was the uncreated-sacred-infallible verbally-inspired truth--(& therefore "higher criticism" did not develop in Islam as it did first in Christianity & then in Judaism). For the past millenium, this anticritical spirit has crippled intellectual & scientific development wherever Islam has been dominant. (Of course all fundamentalisms have this anti-intellectual effect.)

5 Any good index to Q. will give these as prominent themes: Abraham,*angels, Book (& people of, viz. Jews & Christians), Christians, creation, Eden,^ogehenna, Israel, Jacob, Jesus (not crucified, not killed, but "God raised him up": 4.155), Jews, jinn, judgment day, Qur'an, Moses, Muhammad, Noah, Paradise, Pharaoh, prayer, prophets, Psalms, resurrection, Satan, signs, the Holy Spirit, Thamood (an ancient people, as also the Ad), Torah, the holy war, women. * +afterlife /^o+gardens

6 In addition to "sent down," I should mention two frequently used verbs: (1) "associate" (intransitive; what "unbelievers" do, in rejecting [as Christians, with the doctrine of the Trinity] the simple arithmetic monotheism of Allah-worship); (2) "re-turn" (to God, which all souls do, for reward/punishment; Islam has a much heavier afterlife emphasis than either Judaism or Christianity--esp. in warnings to those who "purchase the present life at the price of the world to come" [2.80]).

7 Q. does more than assume **slavery**, it supports it with the divine sanction. God "raises some above others in rank, that some may take others in servitude" (43.30). Slaves are to be sexually available to their "own"ers (70.30). God is "all-hearing" of husband/wife conversations; & if a husband insults his wife in a certain way, before they have further sexual intercourse he must punish himself by "setting free a slave" (beginning of 58). But "freewill offerings" can be used for "the ransoming of slaves" (9.60). Embarrassment: almost all of the world's present 27,000,000 slaves are owned by Muslims.

8 Again, Q. does more than assume violence, it supports it in holy war ("**jihad**") against Islam-resistant unbelievers & Muslims who convert to another religion. The latter cannot return: "their repentance will not be accepted" (3.84). As to the former, "whoever desires another religion than Islam will in the next world be among the losers" (3.79). "Slay the idolaters wherever you find them" (9.6). As for those who "fight against God & His Messenger" (i.e., actively oppose Islam), "they shall be slaughtered, or crucified, or their hands & feet shall be alternatively struck off [i.e., in the "x" pattern], or they shall be banished from the land" (5.36-38). As for evangelists, "slay them" (4.92: efforts to convert Muslims is absolutely forbidden in Islam-dominated countries; to hell with evangelists [18.100]). Kill "the unbelievers marching to battle," for "you do not kill them, God does" (8.15-18; compare the opening of the Gita). By massed cavalry, "terrify the enemy of God & your enemy" (8.63).

9 God "bequeathed" Jewish & Christian **land** to Islam (with death or slavery to the defeated in jihad). I've limited the quotes to Q.: the shari'ah (Islamic law) forbids yielding to "unbelievers" any land once Muslim (so Arafat has a sacred duty to deny the State of Israel the right to exist).