

God in Other Cultures: Islam

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Patti Duckworth
Associate Executive Minister
Mission Northwest

Overview

Basis for overview of religions:

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Christianity

Islam

Judaism

Abraham

Judaism (circa 600 AD)

- Temple had been destroyed
- Peoples were scattered
- The Pharisees became the dominate leaders, giving rise to a consolidation of writings, such as the Talmud.
- Though many Jews had left Palestine, there were still significant numbers who remained.

Christianity (circa 600 AD)

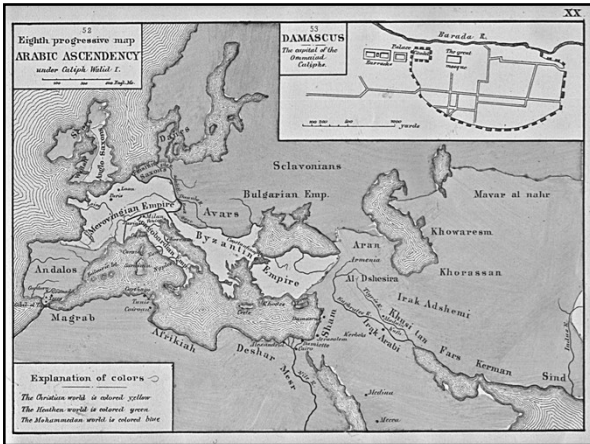
- The Church was working to consolidate its understanding of itself and the organization
- The church in the east was beginning to pull away from the church in the west
- The "Oriental" Church had already pulled away from western church

Rome and Europe

- Rome was assaulted by various groups around their borders
 - Now called the Byzantine Empire
 - East and West were splitting
- Weakened central government was under pressure to keep the borders in tact
- Turmoil was affecting economics and learning

The Arab World





Muhammad

- **Born 570 AD**
 - Parents died within years of his birth
 - Grandfather adopted him but also died
 - Adopted by an uncle
 - At 25, worked for Khadijah, a wealthy widow of 40, and eventually married her
- **610 AD – year of first revelation**
 - Uncertain about what happened at first
 - Converts soon came, wife was among the first

Muhammad

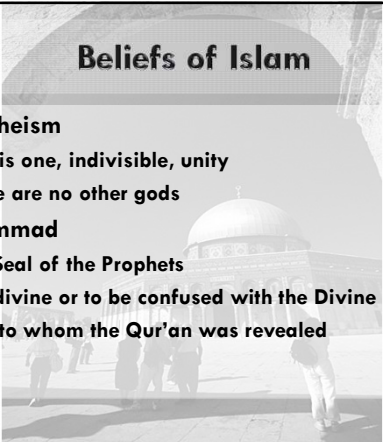
- **622 AD -- Hijrah -- the great migration**
 - Muhammad and his followers moved to Medina
 - Signaled a major split with family and clan
- **629 AD – year of Muhammad’s pilgrimage to Mecca in which Islam was finally accepted; peoples were united under his leadership**
- **632 AD – Muhammad died**

The Rupture from Judaism and Christianity

- **Rupture not wanted by Muhammad; was a great disappointment to him**
- **Came because of Christians declaration of Jesus as God**
 - Muslims accept Jesus as a great prophet
 - Some Shi’ite Muslims anticipate his return
- **Came because Jews refused to accept him as a prophet**

Beliefs of Islam

- **Monotheism**
 - God is one, indivisible, unity
 - There are no other gods
- **Muhammad**
 - The Seal of the Prophets
 - Not divine or to be confused with the Divine
 - One to whom the Qur'an was revealed



Qur'an

- Means "recitation" or "recite"
- Given to Muhammad as a result of time alone in the desert, seeking to know the truth
- Composed of 114 "surahs" or chapters
- Revealed to him via the angel Gabriel between 610 and 632 AD
- Nature of the Arabic writing is divine

The Five Pillars

- **Shahadah** – Profession of Faith
 - There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Prophet
- **Worship or prayer five times daily (salat)**
 - Dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, night
- **Observance of Ramadan (sawm)**
- **Alms-giving (zakat)**
- **Haji** – pilgrimage to Mecca

Hadith

- Collections of sayings and actions of Muhammad collected after his death
 - Collected by followers and verified in several ways – cross referenced
- Used to interpret or understand the Qur'an
- Used also to address situations which the Qur'an does not directly address

Other Holy Books

- The Scrolls (Suhuf) – revealed to Prophet Abraham
- The Torah (Tanurai) – revealed to Prophet Moses
- The Psalms (Zabur) – revealed to the Prophet David
- The Gospels (Injil) – revealed to the Prophet Jesus

Muhammad's death left a vacuum of leadership

- Rashidun ("rightly guided" – first four)
 - Four Caliphs (Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman, 'Ali/Mu'awiyah)
- Umayyad Dynasty 661-750
- 'Abbasid Dynasty 750-1258

Muhammad's death left a vacuum of leadership

- Split in the religion is over leadership as well as theology
 - Sunni Muslim believe in the "spiritual leader"
 - Shi'ite Muslims believe in hereditary leadership
 - Theological issues regarding the Qur'an
- The split was never resolved

Another group of Islam...

- Sufi Islam
 - Stresses the spiritual aspects of worship
 - Attempts to recreate the kind of attitude and mindset that Muhammad might have experienced as he received the Qur'an
 - Not generally well-thought of by other Muslims
 - too other-worldly
 - Sometimes characterized by trances or feverish dancing – "whirling dervishes"

Today's Situation

- Muslims make up about 1/6 to 1/5 of the world's population
- Fastest growing religion in US*
- Outnumber Catholics in France
- About 20% of Arab Muslims are Shi'ite
- Sunni Muslims are the majority, in Arab countries as well as world-wide

What is *jihad*?

- Classic definition: “holy war”
- “forcing people to believe Islam”
- War against non-Muslims

Muslims describe *jihad* as

“...the continual, inner spiritual struggle for submission to Allah, in which all people must engage in daily. It is a mistake to think that all Muslims are religious fanatics bent on terrorism.

Additional teachings ...

- Jihad is forbidden against countries in which Muslims are allowed to practice their religion freely.
- The only just war is the war of self-defense.
AND YET
- Jihad is such an important concept it is almost regarded as a sixth pillar.

Jihad should only be declared

- In defense of Allah, not for conquest;
- To restore peace and freedom of worship;
- For freedom from tyranny;
- When led by a spiritual leader;
- Until the enemy lays down arms.
- Women, children, the old and ill are not be harmed; crops and trees not to be damaged

Jihad does not include ...

- Wars of aggression or ambition;
- Border disputes or either national or tribal squabbles;
- The intent to conquer or suppress, colonize, exploit, etc.;
- Acts of terrorism, suicide bombings, etc.

One source concludes...

“Actual armed *jihad* is permissible under two conditions alone: one is for self-defense, and the other is for fighting against oppression.”

(Eck, p. 238)
