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THE STRANGER WITHIN YOUR GATES

Muslim Students in Adventist Schools and Islam in the Curriculum

BY BØRGE SCHANTZ

Islam and Christianity are today facing each other in a more hostile way than ever before. Recent events, including terrorist attacks, Western armies on Muslim soil, and the Israel/Palestinian conflict, have created a lot of enmity.

Much has been said about these serious confrontations in the press, on TV, and in other media. Most of this is negative and colored by suspicion and mistrust on both sides. Christians focus on Muslim terrorists, suicide bombers, and other misdeeds committed in the name of Islam; and accuse Muslims of resisting modernization

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and downgrading women. At the same time, Muslims accuse Christians of bad morals, neo-colonialism, selfish political interests, economic exploitation, and dominance, as well as abuse of military power.

In past history, tensions between Christians and Muslims were mostly confined to the various Crusades (1099-1270 A.D.) and to some incidents during the colonial conquests of European nations. For centuries, Muslims and Christians were separated by the Mediterranean Sea and huge deserts, and remained isolated in their own communities. Today,

however, thousands of people who pray toward Mecca live in our midst. This makes contact between the two groups more likely.

This new development also affects Seventh-day Adventist schools, which are spread all over the world, including Islamic states. Not only will teachers lecturing in many subjects need to discuss issues relating to Islam and Muslims, but there are also Muslim students on all educational levels in our classrooms. They often enroll in our schools because our diet is similar to theirs, and we have higher moral standards than many public schools.

For Adventist educational administrators and teachers, these facts demand careful, honest evaluation. This article represents an attempt to briefly address this challenge. It begins with several basic assumptions: that prejudice toward a person because he or she belongs to a different race, speaks another language, has a different skin color, or belongs to another religion is wrong. Also, that a witch-hunt against individual Muslims due to deeds committed in the name of Islam is un-Christian.

However, it is our duty and privilege to witness, explain, and even try to convince others to accept the teachings of the Bible and to point out false and dangerous teachings and beliefs. We should provide students with accurate information in our history and comparative religion courses. We must also speak out when extreme religious interpretation can lead to dangerous acts.

This article will deal briefly with some aspects of Islam that are relevant to Seventh-day Adventist educators. Readers will need to judiciously apply the advice to a variety of situations as they seek to deal Christianly with Muslims and to teach about Islam. Recent events have intensified the need to deal truthfully with these delicate and complex issues.

Christian and Muslim Beliefs

When Christians and Muslims meet, they naturally seek common ground before discussing diverging

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beliefs. In such dialogues, Christians must exercise care in their selection of subjects and presentation. Westerners are used to a theological and academic approach that deals openly and frankly with the issues. There are, however, subjects in Islam that Muslims have no right to discuss. In orthodox Islam, it is regarded as blasphemous and an indication of lack of faith for one to go into detail about or to analyze the existence and character of Allah, the veracity of the Koran, the prophet-hood of Mohammed, or the Five Pillars and the Five Articles of Faith. Teachers must keep this in mind as they discuss Islam when there are Muslim students in the classroom. These principles should also govern our personal conversations with Muslims.

Respect for each individual Muslim is an essential expression of biblical love. However, it is our Christian duty to witness and to point out erroneous doctrines or beliefs as we interact with other faiths.

When Christians interact with Muslims, they tend to talk about “building bridges,” “cultivating understanding,” and “seeking to reflect brotherhood.” These are significant concerns. However, there is a danger in these approaches. In ministering among Muslims on three continents, it has been my experience that when I stressed the points we had in common, the reaction would be, “Why are you not a Muslim? You speak like one.”

This raises the question, How much do we really have in common? On the surface, there are apparent similarities between Christianity and Islam. Both believe in one god, claim Abraham as the father of God’s chosen people, have prophets, and believe in angels

and the Day of Judgment. And these can be used as conversation starters. All religions have some truth in their teachings and practices.

There are, however, dangerous fallacies in the *what-we-have-in-common* approach. In many cases, only the names and terms of the doctrines are the same. The content, purpose, impact, and underlying theological meaning of the two groups’ beliefs are often vastly different, even contradictory. And persons who are eager to find commonalities, and build bridges between the two religions can be tempted to twist biblical truths. Let us briefly consider some points:

1. God and Allah

At a superficial glance, the Allah of the Koran and the God of the Bible appear to be the same, or at least similar. However, when Christians talk about God, they mean the Trinity, which includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To the Muslim, that is blasphemy and polytheism.¹ Muslims are monotheists; that is, they worship one god, Allah.

Allah’s attributes and character are revealed in his 99 names. He is called holy, merciful, gracious, forgiving, and protecting. However, some of the names also seem to indicate that Allah revenges, forces, diminishes, humiliates, and even causes damage.² Many incidents in the Old Testament also describe bloody battles and brutal confrontations, especially in connection with threats to Israel from neighboring nations. Some of these confrontations were God’s method of saving His people from enemies determined to wipe them out. However, such incidents do not characterize God’s basic attitude toward human beings or the way He wants His people to deal with unbelievers. They were isolated reactions to specific crises. In Islam, the violent attitudes toward non-Muslims are a theme that permeates the Koran and the Hadiths. Of the more than 100 names attributed to God in the Old Testament, not one suggests negative characteristics.³

Three very significant attributes that Christians ascribe to God are absent in Islam. Allah is never called Father, Love, or Spirit.

2. Jesus and Mohammed

Similarities between Jesus Christ and Mohammed will naturally be a theme in any dialogue. The divinity of Christ and the prophet-hood of Mohammed are sensitive areas. Muslims claim that Mohammed is the last in a long chain of prophets, the Seal of the Prophets.⁴ They insist that Christ was only one of the links in that chain.⁵

Muslims regard Mohammed as a true prophet. Therefore, understanding his life and influence is essential to understanding Islam. Rejection of his prophetic gift will create a serious obstacle to genuine dialogue, as the Muslim has no right to listen to such denials.

In Islam, Jesus is honored as one of the greatest of the prophets used by Allah. He is mentioned 93 times in the Koran, which refers to His virgin birth and many of the His miracles, including raising the dead.⁶ Christ is called Spirit, Word, and apostle,⁷ as well as the “prophet and witness of Allah.” Although Christ was honored by Mohammed, His divinity is completely denied in Islamic teachings.⁸

Muslims talk about the birth and life of Jesus, but none of His teachings or statements are quoted in the Koran or the Hadiths accounts compiled by the companions of Mohammed. The Hadiths strongly toned down the role, status, and importance of Christ. The Islamic doctrine of sin requires no atonement and therefore no savior.⁹

3. The Bible, the Koran, and the Hadiths

One of the first topics in Muslim/Christian dialogue will be comparisons between the Bible and the Koran. Such discussions can produce an unfortunate “battle of the books.” Muslims believe the Koran to be a perfect book, sent from heaven as the unadulterated words from Allah.

Muslims believe the Koran to be verbally inspired and consider all translations to be merely explanations. Only the original Arabic text constitutes the true Koran. Most Christians, on the other hand, accept the Bible as God’s inspired word and an important way used by Providence to communicate with human beings. However, the Bible, although a safe guide to salvation, is not perfect.

Thus, while Muslims claim that Allah revealed his will for humankind in a perfect book, Christians believe that the only perfect revelation from

God for humanity is found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In Islam, the *word of Allah became book*, namely the Koran. In Christianity, “*the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*” (John 1:14, NIV). Thus, the comparison is between the Koran and Christ, *not* between the Koran and the Bible. Islam doctrine makes it blasphemous to criticize the Koran, let alone to discuss its infallibility.¹⁰

Another source of Islamic doctrines and guidelines, in addition to the Koran, is accounts of what Mo-

Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND SPREAD OF ISLAM

Mohammed (570-632 A.D.), the founder of Islam, was orphaned at the age of 6. While still in his teens, he joined the traders who traversed the great caravan routes. His diligence landed him the position of caravan-master for a wealthy business woman. He subsequently married the widow, Khadija, 15 years his senior, and entered the business community of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. After her death, Mohammed had 12 wives. However, he had only four surviving children, all with his first wife.¹¹

At that time, in the center of Mecca was a shrine (Ka’bah) with 365 idols worshiped by the Bedouin tribes who came from all over the Arabian Peninsula. The pilgrims visiting the sacred shrine at Mecca provided its main source of commerce.

Mohammed, evidently a man of spiritual insight, was depressed by the commercial greed and rampant polytheism around him. He spent much time in seclusion and meditation. Muslims believe that while Mohammed was meditating in a cave, the archangel Gabriel appeared to him. The visions began in 610 A.D. and continued thereafter at intervals over the next 22 years, revealing the word of Allah. Mohammed remembered the visions and dictated them to his companions, who wrote them down. (Mohammed is believed to have been illiterate.) Thirty years later, the writings were collected in the Koran.¹²

Mohammed’s insights were rejected by the leaders of Mecca, and in 622 A.D., after severe persecution, he fled to Medina, some 250 miles (400 kilometers) to the north. This flight is called the *Hijra* and is the starting point for Islamic history. In Medina, Mohammed was well received and soon had a large group of followers. Here, he was not only prophet and law-giver; but he also became a political leader and commander of the army. These Medina Muslims later returned with military might to triumph over the Meccans and to make the Ka’bah, cleansed of its former idolatry, the center for Islamic worship. The black stone in the Ka’bah, probably a meteorite, was proclaimed a gift from heaven.¹³

The religion Mohammed founded is called Islam (submission to God). It united the divided Arab tribes socially, culturally, linguistically, and reli-

ammed and his first companions said and did, whom they met, and what they approved or condemned, even ignored. These are regarded as perfect examples of how to be a Muslim. This information was collected into the Hadiths, which means speech, report, or account.

The Hadiths provide additional revelations from Allah through the prophet; commentaries on the Koran; explanations of doctrines, religious, and social conditions; attacks on non-Muslims; and teachings about the last events of history and

the Day of Judgment. The Hadiths also offer detailed counsel concerning the Muslim's daily life, funeral rituals, diet regulations, and hospitality. There are even Hadiths on such trivial matters as how one should lace his sandals, sneeze, and dress! The Hadiths include much information about Mohammed's private life and marriages.¹⁶

4. Sin and Forgetfulness

Muslims agree that Adam and Eve were disobedient and left Eden. However, they do not believe that

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the Fall affected Adam and Eve's relationship to Allah. Islam has no doctrine of original sin. It regards humans as sinless at birth, and remaining thus¹⁷ until they make a mistake and become guilty. Islam considers human nature not to be sinful—merely weak, ignorant, and forgetful. When Muslims make the mistake of disobeying a divine command, Allah forgives, but requires the transgressor to get back into a state of obedience to the rules.

Salvation in Islam is obtained by (1) believing in Allah and obeying the teachings of Mohammed as expressed in the Shariah law; and (2) doing good deeds in accordance with the Five Pillars and Islamic laws.

In other words, Islam is a "salvation by works" religion.¹⁸ This is in sharp contrast to the Christian belief that salvation is a divine gift. God acting in Christ makes it possible. Humans are saved through faith, repentance, and acceptance of Christ as Saviour, rather than by works. These contrasting perceptions of sin and salvation are probably the greatest stumbling blocks for Muslims to overcome before they can accept Christianity.

5. The Second Coming of Christ

A foundational belief in Adventism is the second coming of Christ. Some claim that this could serve as an opening wedge in witnessing to Muslims. However, Muslim theologians have not created a coherent chronological order of end-time events. Still, many Muslim commen-

giously. The Arabs did not consider their religion exclusive but actively shared it with neighboring tribes and nations. Within a century, Islam had spread from Arabia to parts of Asia and India, and throughout North Africa. It had also crossed the Mediterranean to find a European foothold in Sicily and Spain. Later, through trade and conquest, Islam's influence spread as far as the lands in the Pacific Ocean.¹⁴

The Golden Age and the Decline of Islam

Muslims reached a cultural and scientific zenith during the time of the Abbassid caliphs (750-1258 A.D.). The ninth and 10th centuries marked a glorious age for Islam. The Arab elite kept the torch of knowledge burning. While Europeans were experiencing the Dark Ages, universities and libraries were founded in Islamic cities. Art, architecture, astronomy, medical science, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, and other branches of scholarship flourished among Islamic peoples.

Ironically, the sciences that blossomed among the Muslims were, to some extent, based on European (especially Greek) sources, though there were also Asian influences. Arab scholars translated scientific works from Greek to Arabic. After the Dark Ages, these works were "returned" to Europe, where they were further developed. Thus, the departments of sciences and medicine in institutions of higher learning, including our own, owe a debt to the contributions of Muslim scholarship.

Later, political disintegration of Islamic societies led to stagnation and decay in the cultural and scientific disciplines. Many, however, blame Islamic orthodoxy as the Koran began to be interpreted in a restrictive way, which crowded out science with religious injunctions.¹⁵

On the military front, the Muslim nations lost their earlier vigor and strength. As a result, by 1920, countries such as Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Russia, and Spain ruled the Islamic world. The "Christian" powers generally governed with a heavy hand and exploited the colonies' resources for their own selfish gain.

After World War II, most of the Islamic nations gained independence and had to find their way into the modern world. The discovery of immense oil deposits under the sands of Arabia close to Mecca strengthened both Muslims' confidence in their divine destiny and their resources for extending Islam to every part of the globe.

Today, about 20 percent of the world's population pray toward Mecca. Of the more than 1.2 billion Muslims, some 900 million live in about 50 Islamic nations, while 300 million live in non-Islamic areas. Some 35 million have settled in Europe and North America.

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tators write about a time when Christ will descend and destroy false religions, break the crucifixes, kill the pigs, and establish peace on Earth. Then He will die and be buried near Mohammed in Medina.¹⁹

Seventh-day Adventists see the Second Advent as Christ's triumphant return with His angels to resurrect the righteous, to bring an end to sin and suffering, and to establish His eternal kingdom of love.

6. Health and Dietary Rules

The greatest agreement and closest similarities between Adventism and Islam are probably found in dietary rules, as they are generally based on the Old Testament. However, Muslims allow camels and hares to be eaten, along with everything that can be drawn out of the water. Adventists and Muslims do take a common stand²⁰ against alcohol, tobacco, and harmful drugs.

7. The Sabbath and Friday

The Sabbath is mentioned at least

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five times in the Koran.²¹ Because Muslim scholars regard these references as disparaging the Sabbath, the day has generally been viewed unfavorably. Adventists could point out that deeper studies suggest that the Sabbath, the crown of Creation, was honored by the author of the Koran. However, the idea that "God rested" is discarded by Muslims, as it brings Allah down to a human level by suggesting that he requires rest. In Islamic theology, Friday,²² the "Day of

Assembly," is not a time to rest, but a day of prayer.²³ There is only one reference to Friday in the Koran (Surah [Chapter] 62:9-11).

Other Commonalities

Space will not allow us to deal with other seeming commonalities such as heaven and hell, angels, the Scriptures, the day of judgment, the state of the dead, etc. As with other doctrines, the only thing they really have in common is the titles. The deeper theological meaning, as well as the reasons for and purposes of each doctrine, are often not only different, but contradictory.²⁴

Bible incidents and personalities are also mentioned in the Koran. However, in many cases, they are distorted beyond recognition.

Principles for Approaching Muslims

In dealing with Muslims, both in the classroom and in private conversation, Christians should show sincere consideration, caution, and hu-

mility. The message, as the Bread of Life, should be shared from one “beggar” to another. Both the Christian and the one to whom he or she is witnessing have the same desperate need for the gospel. The only difference is that the Christian knows where to find it, while the Muslim does not. Therefore, for any meaningful evangelism to occur, the Christian must walk together with the Muslim as they both kneel at the cross to experience forgiveness.

Islam and Christianity hold contrasting views about divine plans and purposes. However, Muslims are not all alike theologically, anymore than Christians are. Both groups have adherents at varying positions on a theological scale, based on their dedication to their religion. Levels of orthodoxy are influenced by personal, cultural, and sectarian views and backgrounds.

Muslims vary from the ultra-orthodox, who take the words of the Koran literally, follow the traditions closely, and live according to Shariah law, to those who give nominal adherence to the faith and have abandoned most Islamic beliefs and practices. Between these positions, one can find varying interpretations of beliefs and practices. There are also many mystical and syncretistic ideas among Muslims that mix folk beliefs with Islamic tenets.

Some important points to consider in dialogues with Muslims:

Study Islam and Muslim Cultures

Despite the differences between Islamic and Christian doctrines, the similarity in concepts and names offers an excellent starting point for dialogue. However, Christians must be well versed in their own doctrines before engaging in such discussions. They should also study carefully Islam’s beliefs, special laws, and rituals, along with the national and cultural background of the Muslims with whom they plan to share the gospel.

Shame Versus Guilt Religions

It can roughly be stated that whereas Islam is a “shame religion,”

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Christianity is a “guilt religion.” Briefly, this means that for a Christian, committing a sinful or illegal act causes inner feelings of guilt, regardless of whether the action is known to others. The Muslim, on the other hand, will generally feel shame rather than guilt when he or she has “forgotten the rules.” This is especially true if the behavior is public knowledge and will bring humiliation and embarrassment to the family and community. Consequently, Muslims find it humiliating to lose face. In dialogue between Christians and Muslims, confrontations about doctrinal issues will come up sooner or later. However, winning an argument can mean losing a friend. Avoid this kind of dialogue until you have established a meaningful and trusting friendship.

Secure Places and Persons

Be sure to conduct more intense discussions one on one without witnesses. Group discussions can be productive. However, Muslims generally do not enjoy the same level of personal liberty as Christians do. They are often under observation by family and friends. For that reason, they will not usually agree publicly on a controversial point if other Muslims are present.

Comparing Islam and Christianity

Another pitfall is comparisons between the two religions. Here, both Christians and Muslims are inclined to compare the ideal in their own religion with the reality of the other religion. Muslims contrast the Islamic ideal of complete abstinence from alcohol with the excessive use of liquor by many Christians. They compare the immodest and frivolous

clothing worn by many women in Christian countries with the modest apparel (*hijab*) required of Muslim women when they appear in public.

Christians draw attention to Muslim hijackers and suicide bombers, comparing this to the ideal for human behavior set forth in the Golden Rule. They talk about how Muslim sects fight violent and protracted battles with one another, and decry Islam’s denial of equality for women in the areas of education, marriage, and divorce.

In such discussions, we must seek to compare the ideal with the ideal. We will then be able to agree that although the two religions differ considerably about divinity and salvation, their ethics and moral teachings are somewhat similar. Also in real life, no religion has been able to fully implement its moral teachings. Bad behavior by the followers of a religious leader does not negate that religion’s moral teachings.

Hospitality and Friendship

Be sure to relate to Muslims as persons, not just as prospects for conversion. Establish mutual trust and understanding before engaging in direct witnessing. A trusting relationship should be a goal in itself, not just a means of evangelism.

Keep in mind that Muslims are people like us. They have similar joys and sorrows, and experience joy, fear, hope, and failure. They have their weaknesses, just as we do. In this connection, the spiritual gift of hospitality (1 Peter 4:9, 10) is probably the most effective and convincing means of establishing contact. Hospitality is of extreme importance in most Islamic cultures, since accepting an invitation to eat together indicates true friendship. A genuine gesture of friendship and hospitality is the most efficient tool for breaking down prejudice. But hospitality must be reciprocated: The Christian invites a Muslim friend to his or her home, respecting Islamic dietary rules; the Christian must likewise accept hospitality from the Muslim friend.

Listen and Learn

Engage your Muslim friends in conversation about Islam. As you listen, you will learn, not only about their personal viewpoints, but also about their beliefs and dedication to Islam. Be both a good listener and a completely honest one. Be willing to condemn immoral and uncharitable behavior wherever it occurs. Muslims often have problems with the way Christians live, rather than with their religious beliefs. Moral decadence in “Christian” countries is seen as evidence that as a way of life, Christianity has failed. In all honesty, we must admit that Muslims have a legitimate point. However, the fault is not with Christianity but with its followers. While upholding the ideal, we must admit that bad examples are invariably more visible than good ones.

Relationships Between the Sexes

Western openness in relationships between women and men—even the most innocent interactions—can easily be misunderstood by Muslims and viewed as frivolous and immoral. There must be a careful, yet friendly reserve between Christians and Muslims of the opposite sex. In some Islamic countries, women are veiled to protect them from strangers. Although many Muslim women in the West do not follow this custom, it is still expected that the sexes will not intermingle casually. In public places such as classrooms and offices, teachers, staff, and students should maintain a respectful distance from the opposite sex. There should be no touching, even shaking hands, and minimal eye contact. There are, of course, female Muslim students with a more liberal attitude, who come from more open-minded families.

Witnessing, Not Criticism

Avoid controversy wherever possible. Although presenting biblical truth will often create tension and resistance, we must be “wise as serpents” in our witness. Any unguarded conversation with a Muslim is likely to degenerate into an argu-

ment about the relative merits of belief in Christ or Mohammed, the Bible or the Koran. This is usually futile. Our Christian duty is to proclaim the “everlasting gospel,” not to comment on or criticize Islamic matters, such as the life of their prophet, the morals of individual Muslims, or their religious practices.

In all our communications with Muslims, we should follow the biblical principle set forth by the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:23—to avoid foolish arguments, not be quarrelsome, to be kind, able to teach and gently instruct opposers; so that God can thereby lead them to a knowledge of truth.

Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?

The Arabic words *Islam* and *Muslim* literally mean “surrender” and “reconciliation” and have their roots in the words “peace” and “salvation.” However, most Westerners do not think of peace or reconciliation in connection with the Muslim issues that dominate the press nowadays.

How do we deal with these topics? How do we explain them to our students?

The humiliating realities many Muslims experience, such as poverty and oppression, combined with political and military defeats, have awakened in some a militant attitude that is expressed in a call to jihad, or holy war, and accompanying terrorist attacks, suicide bombings, and kidnappings.

To fully grasp the complicated background of these brutal actions, one needs an in-depth understanding of the Muslim worldview, which includes many factors that are foreign to Christianity. These include the following beliefs: (1) Islam is the only true religion, and all others, including Christianity, are false; (2) The world consists only of two regions, namely the “abode of Islam” (territories where Islam and the Shariah law prevail), and the “abode of war” (the rest of the world, where Islam does not dominate).²⁵ In Islamic societies, all aspects of life are ruled by the strict demands of the Shariah law.

There are no clear lines of division between religion, government, politics, or morals. They all fit together like the bricks in a building, with religion as the cement that keeps things in their place.

The Koran and Islamic traditions are employed to defend jihad, or religious war, against infidels. There are many texts calling for war against those who oppose Islam, although there are also texts that promote peace and understanding. It depends on which texts or passages an Islamic group emphasizes and which they choose to ignore.

In Surah 9:5, we read:

“But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem [of war]; but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and pay Zakat, open the way for them: For Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.”

The same text, however, in the next verse expresses a positive side to Islam:

“If one amongst the pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men without knowledge.”

In an attempt to be on positive terms with Christians, Muslims will often quote the words in Surah 2:256:

“Let there be no compulsion in religion: truth stands out clear from error: whoever rejects Tagut [anything worshipped beside Allah] and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks.”

The killing of innocent people and suicide are forbidden in the Koran and the prophetic traditions (Hadiths). However, when as a result of offensive warfare for Islam, innocent people lose their freedom or even their lives, extremist Muslims regard such “martyr actions” as a regrettable but necessary sacrifice for the noble cause of Allah. In contrast to Christianity, where martyrs are murdered because of their beliefs, in Islam,

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martyrs generally get this honorable title when they take up arms and are killed while fighting for or defending their faith.

Radical Mullahs promise the suicide attackers who are killed in action a divine acquittal of all transgression of the Shariah and unconditional access to Paradise, where the male martyr will be rewarded with some fairly sensual relationships,²⁶ often described vividly in erotic language.²⁷

Conclusion

Islam is not just a religion with creeds and rituals. It is a total way of life that encompasses not only religious practices, but also business, politics, law, education, human relationships, and the family. Individualism as defined by Western society is un-Islamic and not appreciated. The Muslim worldview is based on an integrated concept of society.

In teaching Muslims and witnessing to them, utmost care must be taken. They are very sensitive about their beliefs and rituals and how others approach them. We should always keep in mind that there are more similarities than dissimilarities between the cultures of the world. Concern, honesty, and love will help

to overcome obstacles in a cross-cultural Christian witness. Should you inadvertently transgress their rules of acceptable behavior, you will find that love and mutual respect are great reconcilers of cultural misunderstandings.

Sharing our faith with Muslims used to be an expensive affair, requiring overseas travel and a dangerous crossing of oceans and deserts. Now, the *strangers are within our gates*. They are even in Adventist classrooms and dormitories. This is a grand opportunity. However, we should always remember that witnessing to Muslims demands understanding and perseverance. In the 21st century, "the patience of the saints" is not just a holy phrase. It is also a methodology. ✍



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