



editorial comment

For 500 years before Muhammad was born Christians speaking Arabic used "Allah" for God. It is not an ideal word for God except that no word in any language is ideal.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

Here are a few interesting questions. (This is not a quiz!)

1. Why did Muhammad reject the concept of the Trinity held by the Christians he knew?
2. Why did he come up with the idea that Jesus did not die on the Cross?
3. What person in the Qur'an has the attributes of Divinity?
4. Why do 30 million Christians in the world today pray to "Allah" and read that same word for God in their Bibles?
5. Why do some Muslims mutilate the genitals of young women?
6. Why do many Muslims pray five times a day?
7. Why is a world movement like Islam important just because within it families with six children are very common?

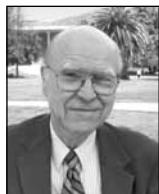
Okay,

1. *Why did Muhammad reject the concept of the Trinity held by the Christians he knew?*

Answer: Those particular Christians had the wrong view of the Trinity, one that Christians today would also reject.

2. *Why did he come up with the idea that Jesus did not die on the Cross?*

Many scholars believe that he was reacting against Jews who claimed Jesus was nobody because they were able to kill him.



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After the Crusades Muslims took that passage in the Qur'an to mean that Christians were wrong.

3. *What person in the Qur'an has the attributes of Divinity?*

Clearly, Jesus. That's why quite a few Muslims who understand the Qur'an have become full believers in Jesus. By the way, very, very few Muslims can understand it (even scholars) due to its ancient Arabic—and even if they memorize it in its entirety, which millions do!

4. *Why do 30 million Christians in the world today pray to "Allah" and read that same word for God in their Bibles?*

For 500 years before Muhammad was born Christians speaking Arabic used "Allah" for God. It is not an ideal word for God except that no word in any language is ideal. The English use of "GOD," which has a pagan background, turns out all right once it is in the Bible.

Missionaries have employed hundreds of words for God, all of them with original pagan meanings.

5. *Why do some Muslims mutilate the genitals of young women?*

One hundred and forty million women in Africa have suffered this barbarism. However, it is a grotesque, horrible custom that Islam *inherited* in one area, just as the even more horrible custom that Christians *inherited* was burning people tied to a stake—Christianity eventually eliminated it. (Note that a form of execution was more readily defeated than something that happens to every woman.)

There is nothing in the Qur'an or the Bible about either of these pagan customs.

6. *Why do many Muslims pray five times a day?*

Christians with whom Muhammad was in contact prayed six times a day, every four hours. Muhammad thought that was a good idea but eliminated the midnight prayer time.

7. *Why is a world movement like Islam important just because within it families with six children are very common?*

In the wealthier parts of the world new births alone do not usually maintain the population. It takes an average of 2.1 children per family to sustain a population even without any increase. In Japan, Germany, USA, etc., if it were not for constant immigration, the overall population would be shrinking.

Amazingly, in the USA, the Anglo population is way below the 2.1 level (which barely keeps up). It is only 1.6 children per family. Miami is now a largely Spanish-speaking city. Los Angeles is fast moving in that same direction. Other cities will follow.

Spiritual Indigestion?

Once before in history our country was deluged with newcomers who did not share the dominant spiritual values. That was roughly 1870-1920, when our population quintupled and cultural and spiritual indigestion resulted.

But within 50 years many of these newcomers were won to Christ through the ministry of D. L. Moody and other forces.

Today we are coping with millions of people crossing a border we cannot control, leaving their families behind, and becoming a USA sub-population far more difficult to assimilate.

Meanwhile the rest of the world is getting larger rapidly while the West is shrinking—apart from immigration.

Can We, Must We, Digest Islam?

Potentially a major counterforce on the global level is the ongoing winning to Christian faith of millions upon millions of people. This is clearly the last best hope. But, how likely will this work?

Much of contemporary Christianity—everywhere in the world—is disturbingly superficial. We have developed a simplification of the Gospel

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to the point where people are raising their hands to "get saved" without ever knowing much about Who is saving them, or for what God-honoring good works they are saved. This brings far less "salt and light" results than might be expected.

By contrast, and normally invisible to the eyes of Western Evangelicals, are the good works of Muslims (we tend to look for the bad). I think of the ambulance and school service for new mothers which is nationwide in Pakistan. I think of the superb small loan organization in Bangladesh that has brought a Nobel prize to the Muslim behind it.

In this issue of *Mission Frontiers* the concept is probed of "Christian faith" growing within Islam.

It is no more likely that huge percentages of Muslims will become known as "Christians" than huge

percentages of Greek Orthodox will become Evangelicals. And it is very obvious that Muslim countries are outgrowing Christian countries.

What we can at least work for, and hope for, is that Jesus will reign in the hearts of millions more Hindus and Muslims. That's right—whether we saw this coming or not—the number of devout, Bible-reading people who are still culturally Hindu and Muslim far exceeds the number of Hindus and Muslims who have opted out of their cultural background to take on a culturally Christian way of life. And those that do often regret it.

As we have been saying in issue after issue of *Mission Frontiers*, our calling is to preach Christ, not Christianity. Christianity can readily continue to absorb many of the world's poor and uneducated—those who have little to lose in giving up their way of life.

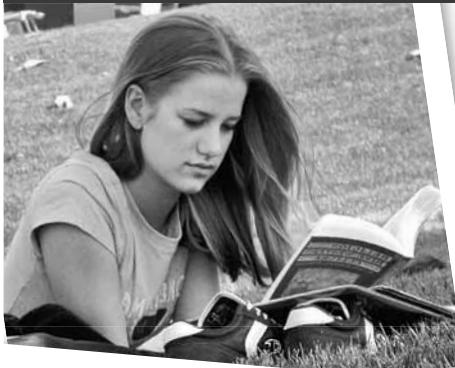
But when we run into stable, ordered ways of life like many of the huge varieties of Hindu and Muslim cultures we have to do like the Apostle Paul—we have to let Greek pagans become Greek followers of Jesus Christ. They don't have to wear our cultural clothing. They can believe while still wearing their own cultural clothing.

If you find that hard to understand, the true stories you will find in this issue of *Mission Frontiers* will be a big help.

The lead article this time comes from the book described on page 29. The editor of that book, Dudley Woodberry, Harvard Ph.D., former missionary in the Middle East, and former dean of the Fuller School of World Mission, is arguably the most highly qualified Evangelical scholar of Islam in the world today. f

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*John Piper
Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church*

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*Doug Birdsall
Executive Chair, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization*

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