

Understanding Islamic Society

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Declare God's glory among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all peoples.
(I Chronicles 16:24)

As believers we are under mandate to express our faith to all peoples. We can do this best when we have an enlightened understanding of the peoples around us with whom we work and live. This three-part lecture series is meant to be a brief introduction to the religion of Islam including a history and understanding of Islamic society.

"Muslims would say that in one sense Islam is the oldest of the major religions. It was the religion of Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus, because they all submitted to God's will rather than their own. In a more particular sense, they would say Islam began with Muhammad in the seventh century A.D. Therefore it is the youngest of the major religions."
Don Tingle, Handbook on Islam, Published by the Author for Christians serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Introduction: Please realize that not all Muslims are alike any more than all Christians are alike. Islamic society differs from country to country and person to person. In this lesson we want to look at some things which seem to be characteristic of the majority of Muslims with whom we have come in contact.

Don Tingle writes, "Although the following list is incomplete and terribly simplistic, perhaps it will help you understand some differences within the Islamic community.

1. *Secular Muslims* make religion more of a private matter. The state would protect the right to practice religion, but religion would not dominate affairs of state. Those who stress nationalism above pan-Islamic unity are often secularists.
2. *Nominal Muslims* claim Islam as their ethnic or national heritage, but they know little about it and do not observe most of the religious duties.
3. *Traditionalists* focus on the way things have been taught in their particular legal school for the past thousand years. Change is viewed with suspicion.
4. *Modernists* choose to look at the old faith from new perspectives (without abandoning the basic principles of the faith), because today's Muslims face questions and challenges that were not addressed in the beginning of Islam.
5. *Revivalists* attempt to restore the original, pure form of Islam as taught by Muhammad and his companions. They want to remove the centuries of layers of Islamic thought and practice preserved by the traditionalists and recover the vitality of Islam as it was experienced in the beginning.
6. *Mystics* move beyond the literal meaning of passages in the Qur'an and choose to find deeper spiritual meanings in the text. They seek union with the Divine. *Sufis* are mystics, though not all mystics are *Sufis*.

I. Three Important Muslim World-View Concepts

A. Holism Muslims tend to see life as "a whole piece of cloth". Generally they do not divide life into categories such as "secular" and "sacred"

B. Umma A word which means "community" from *Umm*, "mother".

1. Islam teaches that God is One, therefore, the Community is also One.
2. The individual is not as important as the family. The nuclear family is not as important as the extended family. The extended family is not as important as Umma.
3. Consider these factors, and others, which reinforce the idea of community:
The Quran is memorized and recited in Arabic universally; the community meets together (especially on Friday) to pray in the Mosque; Ramadan is a world-wide fast; the Hajj brings together people of various races and nationalities who all dress alike and perform the same rituals year after year.
4. There is a universal prohibition of eating pork and drinking alcohol.

C. Family

1. The Umma is composed of extended families or clans who have a strong network of identity.
2. Look at the chart on the following page concerning the family.

II. Themes in Tension (From: Bill A. Musk, Touching The Soul of Islam, MARC)

- A. Male and Female
- B. Family and Individuals
- C. Honor and Shame
- D. Hospitality and Violence
- E. Time and Space
- F. Language and Silence
- G. Brotherhood and Rivalry
- H. Resignation and Manipulation

Conclusion: How do we as a Christians properly relate to our Muslim neighbor?

Don Tingle cautions that "Your actions will be noticed before your speech. By word and behavior try to convey the following impressions:

1. You believe in only one God, and you pray to God regularly.
2. You are a person of honor. Try to live by the same high standard whether you are alone or with a group, whether things are going well or badly.
3. You believe people should treat each other justly.