

# Editorial: Proclaiming the Gospel to Islam

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In the context of North American Christianity, most churches have not thought deeply about Islam, its overall worldview, and how best to take the Gospel to the Islamic world. In fact, before September 11, 2001, unless one was training to go the Middle East as a missionary, Islam as an entire theology and worldview did not receive much attention in our churches and in our theological reflection. If polls were taken in our churches about the basic theology of Islam, most Christians would not know much about Islamic belief, the content of the Qur'an, and the challenge Islam poses to the Gospel. Instead, much of our attention in our churches and in our theological training has focused on how to address the growing secularism of Western societies, the influence of postmodern and pluralistic thought, and other challenges which have sought to undermine the Christian faith.

However, for a variety of reasons, probably driven by the larger geo-political developments with the rise of ISIS and other terrorist groups associated with Islam, rising immigration patterns in Europe and now in North America, and thus growing Muslim populations in the West, it is no longer an option to be

ignorant about Islam. As Christians we must know Islam's overall theological viewpoint and the challenge it poses to the Gospel. As the second largest religion in the world (and growing), the Church must address Islam not only in terms of growing in our understanding of it, but more importantly, in our evangelistic witness and gospel proclamation to Islam. Unfortunately, in addition to our poverty of knowing Islam's basic history, theology, and practices, it seems that much of our discussion about Islam is polarized in two main directions.

First, Islam is viewed solely through a geo-political lens and thus (with some merit), viewed as a threat to the West and its democratic forms of government. Yet, viewing Islam this way often leads to the Church retreating from engagement with Islam and carrying out loving Gospel proclamation. Individual Muslims, then, are viewed as our enemies—through a geo-political lens—and if the Church is not careful this leads to little or no engagement with Muslims in terms of faithful Gospel witness. Second, we are repeatedly told by those who tout the ideology of philosophical and religious pluralism that Islam is basically the same as Christianity in its overall outlook and message—with the conclusion that the Church should be more concerned about dialoguing with Muslims than evangelizing them.

From a Christian view, both of these options are false and should be avoided. How, then, should we, as Christians view Islam? One of the goals of this issue of *SBJT* is to help the church to think about Islam biblically, theologically, and apologetically. Given the enormity of the subject, we can only begin to scratch the surface. Islam is a complex and diverse religion with a long history and tradition. It is impossible in one issue to say all that needs to be said. However, we must begin somewhere. Islam and individual Muslims are too important to ignore and from the viewpoint of Scripture, Muslims require not only our love, understanding, and dialogue, but also gospel proclamation which calls them to faith and repentance in the triune Lord who alone is the true and living God. Although the pluralists of our day teach a false hope that all religions are basically the same, Scripture is clear: outside of explicit faith in the Jesus of the Bible as God the Son incarnate and Savior, there is no salvation in this life or the age to come. It is for this reason alone that it is vital for Christians to study Islam and to know what it teaches in terms of its basic theology and worldview outlook, but also to take the truth of the gospel to them. It is the aim of this issue of the journal to continue to equip the church to accomplish both of these tasks.

Rodney Stark begins our articles by clearing up a popular and dangerous re-writing of history in terms of the significance of the Crusades and its impact on Christian-Islamic interaction throughout the ages. Many today, including our government officials, believe that the Crusades were a crime against Islam and that some of the current terrorist attacks are somewhat justified, or at least beyond our strong condemnation. Often a moral equivalence is embraced between the Crusades and current terrorism, which is presently leading to dangerous political policies on the world scene. In response to this false historical narrative, Rodney Stark helps us recover what really happened in the past and helps us gain perspective on Christian-Islamic interaction which has been going on since the mid-seventh century.

Three articles then follow the historical article. All three of these articles offer important apologetic and theological thinking about Islam. James White challenges Christians to know what the Qur'an actually teaches in regard to Christian theology, specifically its understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. He demonstrates that as a post-Christian religion, Islam makes claims regarding Christian theology, but, for example, in regard to the Trinity, it is completely inaccurate. The point White makes is crucial: the Qur'an *on its own terms* does not give us a Jesus or doctrine of God which is remotely true to the Bible; instead, at point after point, the Qur'an is simply mistaken. In our witness to Muslims this truth is important to know, and it should stir us to proclaim the triune God of Scripture for who he truly is thus clearing up serious Muslim misunderstandings. In a similar way, Tony Costa writes two articles reflecting on how the Qur'an distorts who the Jesus of the Bible is and how, as with the doctrine of the Trinity, gets Christian theology wrong. In addition, he argues that Muslim claims that Muhammad is predicted in Scripture is simply false. These three articles are crucial in helping the church not only learn about Islamic theology, but also in equipping us to proclaim the truth of Scripture and the glory of Christ to our Muslim neighbors.

In the remaining articles, Scott Bridger and Ayman Ibrahim reflect on two important current discussions occurring within Christian missions and in our larger society. Scott Bridger reflects on what has been labeled the "Insider Movement" which has important implications for how we carry out our evangelistic witness and mission to Islam. He offers a critique of the movement by an evaluation of one of its key leader's view of the church. Lastly Ayman Ibrahim gives us a brief Forum reflection on the difference between

jihad in Islam and Christianity, which is so important given all the confusion and misunderstanding of what jihad is, both inside and outside the Church.

Islam as a religion, and individual Muslim believers, cannot be ignored by the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to take the Gospel to the nations, which includes our Muslim neighbors. It is my prayer that this issue of *SBJT* will help us not only better know and understand this world religion in terms of its basic content and theology, but also that it will stir us to pray for our Muslim neighbors, the Islamic world, and thus move us to action in terms of faithful gospel proclamation of the glory of the person of Christ and his all-sufficient work.