



(Muslim prayer beads)



(Qur'an)

ARE CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM
REALLY ARCHENEMIES?

ARE THERE COMMONALITIES AND
THEOLOGICAL/IDEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN
CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM?

ARE MUSLIMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY REALLY
SEEKING OUT A JIHAD AGAINST
CHRISTIANITY?

WHY IS THERE A CALL BY/WITHIN THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH FOR GREATER
INTERFAITH DIALOGUES BETWEEN
CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS?

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Dear Friends in Faith:

If any or all of the questions on the coversheet of this paper raised a level of interest within you to become more acquainted with the religion of Islam and the religious practices of Muslims around the world, then thank you for answering God's call to seek out a greater understanding of the "other" to gain knowledge and understanding of one of the remaining monotheistic religion in the world today (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

Much of what is mentioned in this presentation paper comes to us from our recent Christian-Muslim Dialogue on Friday, August 29, 2008, with Bishop Michael J. Sheridan (Bishop of the Diocese of Colorado Springs) and Imam Mohammed Samer Altab'aa (Islam Leader, Colorado Muslim Society). Additionally, information is included from a book written by Mr. Bill Baker entitled, "*More in Common Than You Think: The Bridge Between Islam and Christianity*", the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the New American Bible (NAB), and the Qur'an.

While not discussing the foundational history of Islam (which will be left to your own additional, related studies), I hope to present information here in this paper to help you gain a much better understanding of Islam and the faith struggle (or *jihad*) of Muslims today. In so doing, I will address and answer each of the four questions on the coversheet.

Respectfully,
Yours in Christ,

Fr. Bob Newbury
Parochial Vicar

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WHAT DOES THE WORD AND RELIGION “ISLAM” REALLY MEAN?

ISLAM means submission, obedience, or surrender. The literal definition of Islam is “*peace through submission to the will of Allah*”. Islam teaches that the individual, who approaches God as a Muslim is drawn to be at peace with God, themselves, and with their neighbor—much like the similar call for Christians and Jews.

The religion of Islam is based on the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. Never did Muhammad claim any form of deity, not did he ask for or command reverence or special recognition to himself. The message of Muhammad was, and remains today, a message of: *peace, mercy, and compassion*.

After reading the last paragraph, many a reader today might ask themselves, “What? With all the information relayed to us via the modern-day media about the violence amongst Muslims in the Middle East—Iran, Iraq, or Afghanistan, to name a few—how is it that the “fighters” in these countries are saying that Muslims or fulfilling their religion of Islam or the Qur’an? That is a good question and we’ll discuss this very topic area in more detail later in this paper.

The foundation of Islam is the uncompromising unity and oneness of God, called Allah. In fact, the Qur’an (much like the Hebrew Bible and New Testament) lists God in many names. The Qur’an lists ninety-nine “most beautiful names of God.” (Surah 7:180) For example, to note just a few: *Creator, All-Merciful, Guardian of Faith, All-Holy, All-Wise, Just, Beautiful, Loving, Compassionate, and Glorious*. (Surah 59:224 and 2:255).

Islam teaches that all people are members of one single family of God; hence all are related, since all are created by God and he alone, is the Provider for all of creation, the Judge and the Lord of all. Understanding the unity of God, helps us to understand how Islam seeks to transcend all diversity (including racial, ethnic, and nationality). Islam holds there are no distinctions or separations between church and state, economics and relation, or religion and politics.

WHAT DOES THE WORD “MUSLIM” REALLY MEAN?

Muslim means “*one surrendered or submitted to God*.” Any individual who is submitted and obedient to the will of God is considered a Muslim (Muslima for a female). Therefore, the religion of Islam considers Abraham and all the Prophets of the Bible as Muslims.

WHAT IS THE QUR’AN?

The word “Qur’an” (pronounced “core-an”) is Arabic meaning “recitation”. The Qur’an is believed to be a compiled, divinely inspired written revelations of the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad. These revelations were reportedly delivered to Muhammad, while residing in Medina and Mecca (modern day Saudi Arabia) spanning a period of 23 years (between 610-632 AD). Tradition records that Muhammad, who was illiterate and therefore, did

not write the Qur'an himself. The Qur'an was written within 20 years of Muhammad's death by successors (known as Caliphs) and was formally canonized then, into its present form. The Qur'an is comprised of chapters and verses. Each chapter is called a "Surah". Every chapter of the Qur'an, with the exception of Surah 9, begins with the "*Bismillah*," the core of the Islamic faith:

"Bismillah-ir-Raham-ir-Rahim" ...

"In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful."

IS THE GOD OF THE QUR'AN THE SAME GOD OF THE BIBLE?

ALLAH is the Syriac and Arabic name of God. In ancient Babylon, the name for God was "il", and then with the Hebrews, became "El" (Elohim). El came into the Arabic form with the definite article (IL-ah) and then later into the English form as "Allah" with a literal meaning of "the God, one to be worshipped". Over the years however, distortions and accusations have arisen implying that Allah is only the God of Muslims or a false god of the old Babylonian era. This is false and without merit or truth.

The Qur'an and the Bible agree that "In the Beginning was God!" The God of the Qur'an and the Bible is acknowledged as the sole creator of all things.

Every Christian knows of the biblical account of creation in the Book of Genesis; that God is the author, creator, and sustainer of all that exists:

"In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth ... God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light ... He separated the light from the darkness. God call the light 'day' and the darkness, he called 'night'." (Genesis 1:1, 3-5) (NAB)

In the Qur'an we find a similar account of God's creation:

"As a matter of fact your Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six aeons [six days, then] ... He is well established on the Throne of authority. He covers the night with the day, each seek the other in rapid succession; which follows (the night) incessantly. He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, all subservient (to humankind) by His command. Is it not His to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, Lord of the worlds." (Surah 7:54)

A fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity however, lies in a mutual agreement that humanity was created in the image of God. In fact, Muslims reject the very suggestion that man is "made in the image of God", because God, for a Muslim, is a Spirit, not susceptible to the machinations and frailty of the human flesh. For Muslims, humankind is but a mere reflection of God in the gifts of will, intellect, and emotion.

God in both the Qur'an and the Bible is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is the un-created Creator; the Sovereign Ruler ruling; and the unparalleled Lord of All that was, is, and shall be.

LIKE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH, WHAT ARE THE 5 TENETS OR "PILLARS" OF ISLAM?

Islam's foundation is supported by five pillars:

a. Witnessing (or Shahadah):

Foundational to Islam is the belief and witnessing to: "*There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Prophet of God*". This phrase is one of the first new words whispered into the ear of a newborn baby, and the last words to be uttered from the lips of a dying Muslim.

Additionally, there are 5 main elements in Islamic faith, which are included in the Shahadah:

- (1) Belief in one God, who alone is worthy of worship.
- (2) Belief in angels, which do the will of God.
- (3) Belief in the sacred books (including the Torah and the Gospel), all of which are inspired by God.
- (4) Belief in the Prophets (as examples to follow and as spokesmen of God).
- (5) Belief in the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection.

b. Prayer (or Salah):

Muslims are required to pray 5 times daily. Prayer may be offered from any location (e.g., inside a mosque, workplace, etc) and are to be made at specific times of each day and are preceded by a call to prayer by someone, who calls to the faithful to remind them that the moment for prayer is at hand.

The purpose of prayer in Islam is to: increase one's consciousness of God; to purify the heart; to control temptation; and to inspire one another to a higher morality.

Before Salah (prayer) and Salat (worship) begin, ceremonial bathing or cleansing is required. Mosques around the world maintain circular fountains in the forecourt for this purpose. The purpose of the outward cleansing is to remind one of the serious nature of prayer before God. The bathing of the body implies the purity of the soul.

The five daily prayers are:

- (1) *Fajr*: Early morning prayer, before the sunrise.
- (2) *Zuhr*: Noon prayer, between mid-day and sunset.

- (3) *Asr*: Between 3 and 5 p.m. in the afternoon.
- (4) *Maghrib*: After sunset, before darkness.
- (5) *Isha*: Evening prayer, after hour of darkness.

c. Fasting (or Sawm):

Prayer and fasting are practiced in nearly every religion in the world today.

In Islam, unlike the teaching in Christianity, fasting is primarily reserved for the month of Ramadan. In the month of Ramadan, Muslims believe that Muhammad received the first revelations from God. Fasting during Ramadan requires the daily abstinence from all food, drink (including water), sexual activity, and all manner of pleasures to the senses (such as music, etc). The fast begins before the break of dawn and ends immediately after sunset.

The purpose of the fasting is to practice self-denial, while at the same time, to learn anew an appreciation for the simple gifts from God (food, drink, etc). It is intended as a time when the spiritual values of love, honesty, devotion, generosity, and concern for the poorest and needy of society are heightened.

d. Almsgiving or Tithing (or Zakat):

The intent of almsgiving is to purify one's material possessions through a regular proportional giving or sharing with the poor. Zakat is required of every Muslim. As one gives of their possessions to others, the heart is purified from selfishness and greed for wealth and they are freed from a heart of envy or jealousy. Like Christianity, Islam teaches that believers own nothing in this life, but everything they possess has been given to them by God in trust; we are His trustees and entrusted to safeguard and care for his gifts.

e. Pilgrimage (or Hijj):

Every Muslim is required to make a pilgrimage to the sacred mountains of Mecca at least once in a lifetime, if they are physically and financially able to do so.

In summary, we have found that the first two pillars of Islam deal with daily duties; the second two refer to annual obligations; and the fifth pillar is considered the most noble and personal act of worship.

WHAT DOES ISLAM TEACH ABOUT THE BIBLE?

Sadly, few Christians today are aware that the Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of Islam, believed that Jesus and Moses were the most important bearers of God's revelation—the message enshrined in the Torah and New Testament.

“Say: ‘We believe in Allah, and in that which has been revealed to us and in which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and His children, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them.’”
(Surah 3:84)

Islam embraces both books’ writings and includes portions of both in the text of the Qur’an. As Christians believe that the New Testament was the completion or fulfillment of the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) of Judaism, so too Muslims believe that Islam and the Qur’an serve as the final completion of both books, and that Muhammad was the last Prophet or Messenger of God.

Both the Torah and the New Testament are revered by Islam as inspired revelations of God to humankind. Both Jews and Christians are referred to in the Qur’an as “*People of the Book*” (meaning the collective (Old and New Testament) Bible).

“He had ordained for you the same course of faith as he enjoyed on Noah (to adopt), and which We have revealed to you, and it is that (same faith) which We enjoyed on Abraham, Moses, Jesus, so keep the faith and do not differ in it. (He ordains you) to establish obedience (to Allah) and not to be divided (in sects) therein. Hard upon the polytheists is that (teaching) which you call them to. Allah draws (him) towards Himself who wishes (to be drawn to Him), and guides him to Himself who turns (towards Him with a sincere heart).” (Surah 42:13)

The Qur’an invites Muslims to sit down peacefully with the People of the Book in an effort to seek out and dialogue the common grounds between the religious groups.

Islam teaches that no prophet, apostle, saint or other human being is to be venerated or worshipped in any form or manner. Islam views the placing of any human being between God and mankind as wrong and misguided; including the intercessory positions of some saints as practiced by a variety of Christian churches and denominations. In other words, they would see and find no value, need, or basis for praying to the saints to intercede for one’s petitions or prayers.

ARE THERE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM REGARDING SIN?

Every religion, sooner or later, is involved in the controversy of free will versus determinism.

Like Christianity, in Islam, freedom of choice is at the center of human behavior and sin. Acknowledging that God knows all things before they occur and that the road which each human person is designed to travel is already known by God, in no way precludes the moral responsibility or capacity of individual choice. Life is indeed a series of choices—good and bad—based upon our own free will and decision making choices.

Basic differences arise between Christianity and Islam in the application and understanding of the relationship of God to mankind. For example, within Islam, God is never referred to as “Father”. For Muslims, the word “Father” incorrectly attributes human characteristics to God. Since God has no “wife”, therefore Muslims believe that human beings are not to be referred to as the “children of God”.

WHAT DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST?

Jesus (*Isa* in Arabic) is referred to by name more than 38 times in the Qur’an. The Qur’an refers to Jesus as Messiah, Servant, Son of Mary, Word of God, and Messenger. Even Jesus Himself is considered a revelation from God and, therefore, every mention of His name is followed by the reverential salutation and well wishing: “*Peace Be Upon Him*”.

The virgin birth of Jesus begins with the story of Zakariya (the same Zechariah, Christians find in the Gospel of Luke). In both books, Zakariya is an aged priest, pleading with God to give him a son, and in both accounts, God promises him a son and Zakariya is unable to speak as a sign from God. That son, in both books, is named Yahya or John, who later became known as the forerunner of Jesus and received the title of *John the Baptist*’.

Of the nearly 45 verses of Surah mentioning Jesus, 19 are devoted to the story of Mary and Jesus.

“She said, ‘My Lord! How can I whence shall I have a child while no man has yet touched me (in conjugal relationship)?’ (The Lord) said, ‘Such are the ways of Allah, He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He simply commands it, “Be” and it comes to be.’” (Surah 3:47 ff)

“... “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, ‘The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’” (Luke 1:34-35)

“Behold the angels said: ‘O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus. The son of Mary, held in honor in this world, and the hereafter and of the company of those nearest to Allah.’” (Surah 3:45)

“... Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father ...” (Luke 1:30-32)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the only woman in the Qur’an called by her proper name, suggesting the very high regard Muslims have for her. However, their regard does not

evolve into any manner or form of veneration as found in Catholic Church. Mary is known in the Arabic and Qur'an as "*Maryam*".

Jesus' works and miracles are recorded in the Qur'an, although the list of His miracles is limited in number, when compared to that of the New Testament.

The Gospel message of Jesus and those to whom Jesus proclaimed the gospel were responsible to adhere to its teachings.

"[God] ... sent Jesus, son of Mary, in the footsteps of these (Prophets), fulfilling that which was (revealed) before him, or the Torah, and We gave him the Evangel which contained guidance and light, fulfilling that which was (revealed) before it, of the Torah, and was a (means of) guidance and an exhortation for those who guard against evil." (Surah 5:46-47)

While the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus are considered the bedrock of Christianity, Muslims however believe that Jesus was "raised" by God in some fashion, perhaps similar to Enoch (Hebrews 11:5), when he was "taken up". The Qur'an foretells of the raising of Jesus in the following text:

"(Recall the time) when Allah said, 'O Jesus! I will cause you to die a natural death, and will exalt you to Myself and I will clear you of the unchaste accusations of those who disbelieve. I am going to make your followers prevail over the disbelievers till the Day of Resurrection, then to Me (O people!) shall be your return, and I will judge all your differences..'" (Surah 3:55)

A clear reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ is found in the following text:

"And peace was upon me the day I was born, and (peace will be upon me) the day I die, and the day I shall be raised up to life (again)." (Surah 19:33)

DO MUSLIMS BELIEVE IN THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS CHRIST?

On this subject rests perhaps the single greatest difference between Islam and Christianity.

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ is not accepted as fact by Islam and the Qur'an. Indeed, the Qur'an clearly states that, although the Jews claimed to have crucified Jesus, they did not really crucify him, but either through trickery or some other manner of deception, substituted someone else on the cross, instead of Jesus.

To the Muslim religious community, it is beyond comprehension to believe that the God of the universe came to the earth in human form, was born of a woman, raised in obscurity, retained all His divine authority and power, while at the same time, permitted

evil men to carry out their plan to execute Him by crucifixion on a tree, between two common thieves. (Surah 4:157, 158; et al)

WHAT OTHER BIBLICAL SUBJECTS DOES THE QUR'AN ADDRESS?

Christians, in general, are quite surprised to learn of the extensive list of biblical subjects considered vital to the Christian faith, which are also of significance to the Muslim faith. These include:

a. Angels (or Malaik):

The Qur'an teaches that we all have "guardian angels" sent to protect us throughout our lives. (Memorial of the Guardian Angels, celebrated October 2nd)

"We are your Patron [protectors] in the present life and in the Hereafter ..." (Surah 41:31)

From the time of our birth, Muslims believe that every person is assigned two angels. The first to keep a record of the good deeds during our lifetime, and the second to record the evil or bad deeds. These angels accompany us throughout the journey of life and into eternity, where they stand with us before the Throne of Judgment, where we will account for our deeds before God.

"Verily, there are (appointed) guardians over you, noble (angel) recorders (of your commissions and omissions), who know (all) that you do." (Surah 82:10-12)

"Verily, those who say, 'Allah is our Lord,' and then remain steadfast (and follow the straight path), the angels will descend upon them (saying), 'Have no fear nor grieve rather rejoice at the glad tidings of receiving the Gardens (of Paradise) which you have been promised.'" (Surah 41:30)

Gabriel and Michael are the most two prominent angels who are given numerous missions in both the Old and New Testaments. The Angel Gabriel is considered the more prominent of all angels in both the Qur'an and the Bible.

b. Heaven, Hell, and Eternity:

Similar to Christianity and the Bible, Islam and the Qur'an depict a place of reward for the faithful, and a place of punishment for the disobedient. After standing judgment before God, the faithful arrive at the Garden of Bless, where they will enjoy flowing streams, a permanent oasis, rivers of milk that never sour, fountains of honey, and luscious fruit of every kind.

"Say: 'Shall I inform you of something better than these? There are with their Lord Gardens served with running streams for those who become secure against evil. There they shall abide forever, and ... companions

perfectly purified and ... the good pleasure of Allah. And Allah is Mindful of (His) servants ...” (Surah 3:15)

“(Here is) a description of the Garden promised to those who guard against evil. Therein are streams of water (which is) unstaling, and streams of milk, the taste and flavor of which does not change, and streams of juice extracted from grapes, a delight to the drinkers, and streams (too) of clarified honey, and they will have in it all kinds of fruit, and (a provision of) protection from their Lord” (Surah 47:15)

These Qur’an passages are compared to:

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and try me in this, says the Lord of Hosts, shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?” (Malachi 3:10)

The biblical Books of Daniel and Revelation make full use of numerous images and parables to illustrate heaven which parallel the aforementioned citations from the Qur’an, such as:

“Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the tree serve as medicine for the nations.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

Hell is portrayed by both the Qur’an and the Bible as a final abode for the wicked, the unrighteous, the immoral, and the skeptic. Both describe hell as a continual punishment, suffering from flame and fire, and other manner of pain and torment. (Surah 14:48-50; 76:4; et al)

c. Judgment Day:

A third common belief in Islam and Christianity rests in a final day of judgment or reckoning. Islam teaches that all of humanity will be raised from the dead and all will likewise stand before God to receive their judgment. This final act is referred to in the Qur’an as the *Day of Retribution, Day of Wrath, Day of Decision, Day of Truth, and Day of Muster*. On this day, the deeds of every person will be weighed by God and rewarded accordingly; with the righteous entering the Garden of Bliss and the wicked, the fire of hell. (Surah 82:13-16)

The Qur’an states that the Day of Judgment will be preceded by times of chaos, turbulence, and unnatural phenomena affecting all of creation and nature. These have strong parallels with the second coming of Jesus Christ in the Bible.

“When the sky will be cleft asunder, and when the planets will become dispersed. And when the rivers are widely split up and made to flow forth (into canals), and when the graves will be laid open, every person shall know (then) what (evil) actions (which he should not have done) he has committed, and when (good actions he should have done) he has omitted.” (Surah 82:1-5)

”Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will be born, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:29-30)

The Day of Judgment, to both Christian and Muslim, will be an accounting, where each person must answer for their own actions and deed while on this earth.

Christians find the message of final judgment for one’s own actions and deeds throughout the Book of Revelation. It is the only biblical book that is wholly composed of apocalyptic literature. Additionally, the first words of the book are effectively self-titled, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"—the Final Day of Judgment.

The Bible teaches that the return of Christ will precede the resurrection and final judgment, and even the Qur’an points to Jesus as a sign of the coming “Hour of Judgment”. As was noted earlier, Islam teaches that Jesus was a person to be revered.

“When (the case of Jesus), the son of Mary is cited ... lo, your people start raising a clamor at it. ... And indeed this (Qur’an) gives the knowledge of the (promised) hour. So have no doubt about it, rather you should follow me. This is the straight and right path.” (Surah 43:57-61)

For both Christian and Muslim, the Judgment of God awaits all mankind; all will account for their actions, thoughts, and deeds of this lifetime.

d. The Origin and Concept of Sin:

The theological view and beliefs of Islam regarding the origin and concept of sin is distinct from the biblical account in that man/woman is capable of choosing to do right or wrong, yet born into this life without original sin.

Islam teaches that all are born innocent, pure, true, free, and disposed towards worshipping God and doing good. To the Muslim, sin is not what or who we are, but rather what we do. Sin is a consequence of the influence from a wayward

world and society. Sin, like eternal reward, cannot be hereditary or inherited, but can only be achieved by the deliberate acts of the individual.

In Islam, a sin is any act, thought or will that is: (1) deliberate; (2) defies the unequivocal law of God; (3) violates the right of God or the right of man; (4) is harmful to the soul or body; (5) is committed repeatedly, and is; (6) normally avoidable.

Compared to Catholicism, we find in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that *“Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love of God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as ‘an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.’ ... Sin is an offense against God ... Sin sets itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from it. ... it is disobedience, a revolt against God.”* (CCC, 1849-1850)

DOES ISLAM SHARE THE SAME OR SIMILAR VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE?

Yes. As noted in the post dialogue conversations with our distinguished guest, Imam Mohammed Samer Altab’aa, he noted that Christianity and Islam share a view of the sanctity and respect of human life: from conception to natural death.

Historically, however, some pagan Arabs hated to have daughters, since at that time, they were in a perpetual state of war, and in need of warrior sons to help fight their enemies. Thus, the murderous act of burying female children quickly became widespread. Taking the situation one step further into the modern-day moral crime of abortion, we find that the Qur’an reminds readers that although the innocent child may have no voice to oppose its own murder, when the Day of Judgment occurs, they will then testify against their murder and justice will prevail.

“And when the rivers will be drained away, and when (various) people will be united together, and when the baby girl who is buried alive will be questioned about; for what offense was she killed? Every soul will know then what (store of deeds) it has brought forward..” (Surah 81:6-9, 14)

DOES THE QUR’AN TEACH A “JIHAD” OR HOLY WAR AGAINST THE WEST, CHRISTIANS, AND ALL NON-MUSLIMS?

No. First, we must strive to discover the essential meaning of the Arabic word “jihad”. The word “jihad” means to strive or struggle. The usage in the Qur’an generally refers to any spiritual, psychological or physical effort made by a Muslim to get closer to God by making the message of Qur’an supreme in their life, and as a by-product, promote a just and harmonious society.

To promote and establish the message of Islam in society through one's personal words and actions is the mission of a Muslim. Commitment to God involves commitment to sacrifice one's time, energy, and wealth in order to promote the cause of truth and justice. Like Jesus' message in the gospels, such commitment may even require the giving of one's life in order to preserve the "truth".

In short, the larger and more prevalent meaning of "jihad" is an individual Muslim believer's spiritual struggle of the soul. In Christian terms, perhaps what Jesus reminds us of as "the crosses" we are called to bear in our journey in this life. The struggle to gain control of one's fleshly nature and desires, and to replace those desires with the higher and more noble spiritual desires, is common to the true Christian believer as well. Consider the teaching of Jesus Christ who, when addressing His disciples concerning the high cost of following His teachings, warned that they all must willingly exchange their physical goals, wants, and desires for eternal ones. Such a dramatic change—within Christianity and Islam—can only be accomplished through discipline and self-denial.

The Muslim—like the Christian—is expected to make their own "jihad", to so live their life that their society and environment are affected to the point of positive change. St Paul repeated the theme of Jesus in Calling for Christians to symbolically kill their physical and carnal desires in his letter to the early Christian community in Galatians:

"For those who belong to Christ [Jesus] have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit."
(Galatians 5:24-25)

It is indeed unfortunate that Islam has been stereotyped, via the mass media, as the "religion of the sword". Followers of Islam, as indeed the followers of true Christianity, Judaism, and any other world religion, are totally without justification for any use of force, coercion, threat, or compulsion in promulgating or proselytizing their religious beliefs.

"There is no compulsion of any sort in religion (as) the right way does stand obviously distinguished from the way of error. Now he that shall reject the transgressor and accepts Allah (let such know that he) has laid hold of a support firm and strong which knows no breaking. Allah is All-Hearing. All-Knowing.." (Surah 2:256)

Distortions and misconceptions concerning the true teachings and tenets of Islam, the "Holy War" must be examined and understood within the boundary of the historical context.

"... fight in the cause of Allah those who fight and persecute you, but commit no aggression. Surely, Allah does not love the aggressors."
(Surah 2:190)

Based on history and records, the final phase or level of “jihad”, popularly known as a “Holy War”, began as a direct and last result of the persecution of Muslims. The key Qur’anic passages clearly indicate that such warfare was, and is, to be purely defensive—not offensive—in nature.

Christians and Christianity have long held the belief that they are justified in participating in warfare, as long as it can be considered valid in light of the “just war theory”. Likewise, Islam contains very specific rules and criteria in order for a true jihad to be declared. A Muslim may engage in an act of jihad of the sword only when defending himself, his family or country, his faith, and in defense of his fellow Muslims, who are truly helpless and oppressed.

In conclusion, history reveals that all of the major religions engaged in “Holy Wars” in one shape, form or another against their fellow human beings. The claims in modern-day media about Muslims declaring “Holy Wars” or “jihad” against Christianity or Christians is nothing short of a scare tactic and sadly intentionally false, unfounded journalism.

Both Christians and Muslims are under the authority of God and both are prohibited from waging war against the innocent civilian population. Both are however, permitted to defend themselves and their loved ones, as well as the helpless and the truly oppressed. Unfortunately, however, both have sadly through history and today, permitted the politicization of their religions. Through the illumination of historical truths, there is hope of a mutual tolerance and respect between Islam and Christianity of the other—despite the renewed anti-Muslim activities arising from the armed conflicts in the Middle East which continue to be headline news throughout the world.

WHY IS THERE A CONTINUED CALL WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUES?

In its wisdom, the Second Vatican Council in its 1964 published document *Lumen Gentium: “The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church”*, and Pope John Paul II in his subsequent publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, noted that in the Catholic Church’s relationship with Muslims, “*The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.*” (CCC #841)

The time is upon us to build upon the elementary foundations of existing Islam-Christian coalitions and cooperation, to continue to teach all Muslims and Christians about the common ground and commonalities they share:

1. Common Origin: Both religions find their roots in biblical Judaism and both place great importance on the Torah or Pentateuch.
2. Common Patriarch: Both religions consider themselves “sons and daughters of Abraham”.

3. Common and One God: Both religions are monotheistic religions and ascribe to similar attributes of the One and Only God.
4. Common Theological Belief Regarding Evangelization: Both believe in a Divine command to spread their faith to the entire world.
5. Common Believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus and a high esteem for Mary (Maryam).
6. Common Eschatology: Both religions believe that the world and human life will end with the consummation of the ages and that Jesus Christ will return in what both call the “last day”.
7. Common Belief in a Last Judgment: Both religions believe that all who have lived, will stand in a final judgment before God to answer for their deeds.
8. Common Belief in the Resurrection from the Dead.
9. Common Belief in an Eternal After Life in Heaven or Hell.
10. Common call for believers to make their faith a living faith by uniting faith and life, prayer and action: Both Christians and Muslims must actively care for the truth, stand for the innocent, and the helpless and the oppressed, while oppressing the aggressor, evil, and injustice.

ARE CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM REALLY ARCHENEMIES?

No and I earnestly hope and pray that the information contained in this informational paper has helped you, the reader, gain a greater understanding, respect, and need for continued interfaith dialogues with Muslims, as we continue to seek out our commonalities—as People of the Book.

ARE THERE COMMONALITIES AND THEOLOGICAL/IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM?

Yes. While there are still areas of diverse and significant differences between our respective religious theologies, ideologies, and practices, the commonalities and similar interests should not be discarded, ignored, or overlooked. It is these commonalities that continue to bring us together at table for meaningful and productive interfaith dialogues.

ARE MUSLIMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY REALLY SEEKING OUT A JIHAD AGAINST CHRISTIANITY?

No. As discussed in this informational paper and presented by Imam Mohammed Samer Altab'aa in the parish's Christian-Muslim Interfaith Dialogue, Muslims are not in a Holy War or "jihad" (recognizing that the word itself is incorrectly and inappropriately used at times in the media) with Christianity. Instead, Muslims are called to respect and recognize other religions, not to proselytize, and to sit down and discuss issues with other religions in a peaceful and respectful manner.

WHY IS THERE A CALL BY/WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FOR GREATER INTERFAITH DIALOGUES BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS?

Pope Benedict XVI has recently urged Catholics around the world to "dialogue" between Christians and Muslims. After many years of misunderstandings and lack of meaningful communications between both religious groups, Pope Benedict XVI stated, "The best way forward is via authentic dialogue between Christians and Muslims, based on truth and inspired by a sincere wish to know one another better, respecting differences and recognizing what we have in common."

Only if we honestly and earnestly wish to learn from the "other", can we continue to have interfaith dialogues with Muslims and Jews alike.

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