

Culture and Communication

Dr. Scott Reitz

Martha Hache

Culture Study

Culture Study: Islam

America is the place where most cultures are found intermingling especially in New York City. One of these cultures that is often looked at as being strange and unliked in America is the culture that comes with the Islamic faith. America was founded on Christian principles and therefore when comparing and contrasting one of the most controversial religions according to Americans as Islam we can understand it better when being looked at from a Christian standpoint. There are two major aspects of Islam that to the Western culture perspective may seem bazaar. The first having to do with how they view one of the most famous religious figures to the Western world, Jesus and the way in which most Muslim women dress which has only brought discrimination upon Muslim women.

Islam like Christianity has a founder and its story traces its beginning before the creation of the world. In Islam Allah who is the only and true God created the earth and Adam. He made Adam from dust. "We created man from sounding clay, from mud molded into shape..." (15:26). And, "He began the creation of man from clay and made his progeny from a quintessence of fluid" (32:7-8). In Islam, Allah is in everything and nature is a reflection of Allah's great power, "Allah created all things, and he is the agent, upon which, all things depend" (Al-Qur'an 39:62).

Allah created the world in six days, which is somewhat similar to the six days God took to make the creation and the universe minus the seventh day He took to rest in Christianity. Islam means “surrender” and Muslim means “anyone or anything who has surrendered to God”. This goes hand in hand with one of Islam’s main beliefs. Allah created human beings in order for us to worship and serve him, similar to Christianity’s belief as to our purpose on earth. The main difference is that Allah’s purpose for creating us stops there, there are a slave and master relationship described in the Qu’ran. In Christianity, we are not only created to serve God but to have an intimate and loving relationship with Him like a father has with His child.

In regards to the beliefs of Islam, just like Christianity has The Ten Commandments, Islam has The Five Pillars. The Five Pillars of Islam must all be practiced in order to be considered a true Muslim. The Five Pillars of Islam must all be practiced in order to be considered a true Muslim. The first is the statement of faith that turns a person Muslim, which is a simple declaration that Allah is the only and true God and that Muhammad was the prophet of God in Arabic. This declaration is similar to the Christian declaration that states, Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world and has forgiven that person for all their sins and that He will come again and take those who are ready to be with God forever. The second Pillar, the person formally prays five times a day. In Christianity, there isn’t a specific number of times that a believer should pray, but it is encouraged to pray every day as many times in order to strengthen one’s relationship with Christ and ask God for strength in times of hardship. The third Pillar is to give 2.5% of one’s income every year to the needy. This is similar to what the Bible teaches on giving to the poor, “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:16). The fourth Pillar is to fast during the month of

Ramadan. Fasting is something that is commonly seen throughout the Bible, as Jesus himself fasted in the desert for 40 days, therefore in Christianity just like Islam, fasting is heavily encouraged, but without a specific time and day recommended. The fifth and final Pillar is to travel to Mecca at least once in one's life if they can financially afford it.

One of the ways that Islam and Christianity are very much alike is since Islam recognizes Jesus, but only as a messenger sent by Allah to tell others about Allah and the teachings of Islam. In the Qu'ran, Jesus is mentioned in 73 verses in the Qu'ran and Muhammad is only mentioned four times. Regardless of the number of times that Jesus is mentioned in the Qu'ran, he is viewed less than Muhammad. In the Qu'ran, Jesus is described as the only prophet to be born of a virgin mother, to have never sinned, as well as conduct multiple miracles. One of them being Jesus creating a bird from mud. In terms of Jesus' mother spoken about in the Qu'ran, Mary is the only woman in the Qu'ran to have chapters dedicated to her and mention her name.

Regardless of all this, Muhammad is known as the main prophet of Islam. This is due to the fact that in the Qu'ran Muhammad is given the words to write the Qu'ran by the angel Gabriel.

Although Muhammad is seen as the last and main prophet from Allah, Muslims do not pray or worship Muhammad. The only God they are allowed to worship is Allah. This is something that Muslims strongly adhere to and therefore Christain's main belief of God being three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit puts off Muslims. This is so because of the Trinity and it is such a confusing ideology to grasp, which can be seen as if Christians worship three different gods.

One of the ways people in Western countries tend to identify someone as a person who practices the Islamic faith is by if a woman is wearing a head wrap called hijab or a full body covering called burqa. Before going into detail on the difference between each type of head

covering seen in Islam as there are more than two types we need to remember that head coverings are also common within Orthodox Judaism and Catholicism. According to curator Miriam Goldmann, “Modesty is something that comes up in all religions. The idea behind it is that hair is something that can be seen as intimate and as such, should only be shown to a woman's husband and her family.” There are four different kinds of ways women cover their hair, the first and most common way seen in the West is the hijab. A hijab is usually one or two scarves that just cover the hair and neck. The second headscarves is the niqab which is most popular everywhere else in Muslim dominated countries, it covers the entire body and face, but leaves a special area for the eyes. Next is the chador which also covers the body and head except for the face. Lastly is the burqa which are usually only seen mostly in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, they cover the entire body and face and leave a mesh screen for the person to see through which are usually seen in the color black.

Modesty in women is a topic discussed in the Qu’ran, but it is often debated whether prophet Mohammed in terms of wearing a head wrap was talking about all women needing to do this or if he was just referring to his wives. Males are also encouraged to be modest, but there is a bigger shame that can be brought to the family especially on the males in a women’s family if a woman falsely to honor herself by not being modest in how she dresses. Today, the different ways Muslim woman dress modesty has to do mostly with the culture in their country as certain head scarves are more prominent to their culture as well as how that country interprets the Islamic requirements when it comes to modesty. For example, “Muslim women in France, therefore, exhibit a wide range of dress and head coverings. Many wear nothing that distinguishes them as Muslims. A number of immigrant women practice modesty, not by

donning traditional dress (i.e., the North African), but rather by wearing long-sleeved shirts and skirts that reach the ankles.” (Excerpted from “The Other Side of the Veil: North African Women in France Respond to the Headscarf Affair.”)

In conclusion, when living in a country such as America we have the advantage of experiencing hundreds of different cultures. Instead of judging them and distancing ourselves from those who are different from us we need to form relationships with them and ask questions so that we can broaden our intelligence on different cultures and religions. We can never be too knowledgeable about how others see the world. Instead of siding with most of America on viewing Muslim as terrorist because it might be more convenient we need to show them the same love we would our friends.

Work Cited

“A Brief History of the Veil in Islam.” Facing History and Ourselves,
www.facinghistory.org/civic-dilemmas/brief-history-veil-islam.

“BibleGateway.” Hebrews 13:16 NIV - - Bible Gateway,
www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+13:16&version=NIV.

Deutsche Welle. “Why Do Women Hide Their Hair?: DW: 31.03.2017.” DW.COM,
www.dw.com/en/why-do-women-hide-their-hair/a-38229158.

International, Minhaj-ul-Quran. “Believers Are Told in the Quran to Obey the Sunnah of the Prophet (S.A.A.S).” *Minhaj-Ul-Quran International*, 30 Nov. 2006,
www.minhaj.org/english/tid/638/Believers-are-told-in-the-Quran-to-obey-the-Sunnah-of-the-Prophet-saas.html.

“5 Ayahs Of Quran That Can Change The Life Of A Muslim.” *Islamic Articles*, 10 Aug. 2015, www.quranreading.com/blog/5-ayahs-of-quran-that-can-change-the-life-of-a-muslim-2/.