Adventist-Muslim Relations
Adventist–Muslim Relations is primarily concerned with helping Adventists build bridges of understanding that would bear the weight of truth with their Muslim neighbors, colleagues and friends. It is important to understand the common ground between these seemingly diverse perspectives—Islam and Adventism. Most Muslims do not know that there is a group of Christians, called Adventists, who don’t eat that which is unclean (haram) nor intoxicate themselves with any form of alcohol. Adventists are the end-time movement of the believers of God who are saved through the grace of Jesus Christ, worship on the Day of the Lord (Sabbath) and are aware of the Day of the Lord (Judgment day).

This is why, we, together with our Muslim friends can begin a journey of spiritual progression, which will lead to the straight path. We have to begin this journey from where they are, using their book and culture rather than our differences.
What is Islam?

The name of the religion is Islam, which comes from an Arabic root word meaning “peace” and “submission.” Islam teaches that one can only find peace in one’s life by submitting to Almighty God (Allah) in heart, soul and deed. The same Arabic root word gives us “Salaam alaykum,” (“Peace be upon you”), the universal Muslim greeting.

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, lived from 570 to 632 A.D. and Muslims believe that he received revelations from 610-632 A.D., which was compiled into a book, called the Qur’an, after his death.

A person who believes in and consciously follows Islam is called a Muslim. Muslim means ‘the one who is submitted to God.” So, the religion is called “Islam,” and the person who believes in and follows it is a “Muslim.”

A. Statistical Analysis?
Islam is a major world religion, with over 1.5 billion followers worldwide (nearly 1/4th of the world’s population).

Although usually associated with the Arabs of the Middle East, less than 10% of Muslims are in fact Arabs. Muslims are found all over the world, of every nation, color and race.
B. 2010 Estimated Muslim Populations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>204 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>177 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>172 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>145 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trans-European Division</td>
<td>411 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia-Pacific Division</td>
<td>378 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Euro-Africa Division</td>
<td>268 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Asia Division</td>
<td>174 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West-Central Africa Division</td>
<td>170 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-Asia Division</td>
<td>76.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-Central Africa Division</td>
<td>61 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Asia-Pacific Division</td>
<td>21.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division</td>
<td>9.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Division</td>
<td>7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American Division</td>
<td>1.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American Division</td>
<td>.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific Division</td>
<td>.5 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. What do Muslims believe?

There are five articles of faith in Islam. These are:

- Belief in the oneness of God
- Belief in Angels
- Belief in Allah’s books
- Belief in Prophets
- Belief in the Last Day (Resurrection)
D. The “Five Pillars” of Islam:

In Islam, faith and good works go hand-in-hand. A mere verbal declaration of faith is not enough, for belief in Allah makes obedience to Him a duty. The Muslim concept of worship is very broad. Muslims consider everything they do in life to be an act of worship, if it is done according to Allah’s guidance. There are also five formal acts of worship which help strengthen a Muslim’s faith and obedience.

They are often called the “Five Pillars of Islam.”

- Confession of Faith (Shahada, Kalima)
- Prayer (Salat)
- Almsgiving (Zakat)
- Fasting (Sawm)
- Pilgrimage (Hajj)

F. Two Main Sects of Islam

Sunni (83% of Muslims)
They follow the sayings and examples of Muhammad which are compiled in the books of Hadith (traditions). They believe the Traditions show how to practice the guidance given in the Qur’an.

Shia (15% of Muslims)
They are mainly found in Iran and Iraq and follow a charismatic and infallible leader, the Imam. They have a non–literal interpretation of the Qur’an and have their own collection of Traditions (Khabar). Shias were divided from the Sunni on the main point that the succession of leadership should have been to the direct descendants of the Prophet of Islam, whereas Sunnis believed in the elected successors (Caliphs).
G. Expression of Islam in the World

Islam is found in many countries of the world and has taken a prominent place in global politics and news. Islam is not one monolithic entity, but divided into numerous sects as mentioned in the preceding section. There are several expressions of Islam, as well: Folk Islam, Orthodox Islam and Mystical Islam; and groups of Islam such as moderates, fundamentalists, terrorists, women, youth, rich, learned, poor, illiterate and atheists. This diversity suggests a variety of different approaches to Adventist–Muslim Relations, a fact which the General Conference’s Global Center for Adventist–Muslim Relations (GCAMR) is conscious of.
A. The Understanding of God

Muslims and Adventists believe there is only one God. The basic testimony of Islam is called the ‘shahada’, the first clause of which states that “la ilaha illa Allah”, “There is no god but God.” This is certainly a statement that Adventists would affirm.

But how the two Faiths conceptualize God in their respective theologies is actually quite different. The emphasis in the Islamic theology of God can be summarized by one word: ‘tawhid’, which means “absolute unity.” Muslims insist that there is no distinction within the Godhead. God is one.

Thus the Islamic polemic against Christianity has centered on the doctrine of Trinity. This is the central doctrine that causes problems for Muslims when they consider Christianity. Muslims have caricatured Christians as tri-theists guilty of “shirk”, that is, attributing an associate to God. By believing in the Trinity, Muslims say, Christians believe in three gods. This attitude is expressed in the Qur’an: Say not “trinity”, desist. It will be better for you. For God is One God (Qur’an 4:171).

They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity, for there is no God except One God (Qur’an 5:76).
Within the Christian theology the doctrine of the Trinity was articulated precisely to oppose the idea of believing in three gods! However, the understanding of the Trinity was very inadequate among the Christians with whom the earliest Muslims interacted. Some Christians gave the impression, at least, that they believed Mary was a part of the Trinity! This misunderstanding of the Trinity found expression in the Qur’an itself: And behold, God will say; “O Jesus the Son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, “Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God?” (Qur’an 5:119). No wonder the Qur’an and Muslims are opposed to that type of Trinity. So are Adventists!

Adventists affirm that there is only “one God.” As the Orthodox Christians in the Middle East say in Arabic: “Bismilabi wal-ibni war-ruhi-l-quddus, ALLAH WAHID!” (“In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ONE GOD!”)

B. The Understanding of Revelation:

Adventists believe that God revealed Himself in order to redeem us, to save us, that is to lead us to a fullness of life, free from the bonds of sin both in this world and in the world to come. According to Islam, on the other hand, revelation is not for the purpose of redemption, but for the sake of “guidance”. That is, God’s revelation is meant to provide guidance for living in this world.

Adventists believe revelation is mediated. They believe that the Bible is the Word of God, but do not believe that God mechanically transmitted it word for word. They hold that the Bible was written by human beings under divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
The divine revelation was thus “filtered” through a human lens and written in human words and within human history. That is why the scriptures refer to historical circumstances; it describes, not some mystical, non-historical revelation of God, but rather God’s wonderful intervention in human history.

In Islam, on the other hand, the Qur’an is considered the “unmediated” word of God. In other words, Islam stresses very strongly that in receiving his revelation Muhammad was illiterate and hence completely passive. He simply recited what was put into his mouth, without any input of his own. (“Qur’an” means “recitation.”) The Qur’an, which is seen as eternally existing in heaven, simply descended and was expressed through Muhammad as a passive instrument of revelation. In summary it could be said that in Islam, “…and the word became a book…” while Adventists would say, “…and the Word became flesh – Jesus Christ.”

C. The Understanding of Sin and Salvation:

Sin and salvation are central categories in the theology and spirituality of the Bible. Adventists teach that the effects of original sin has corrupted the world and the human beings who exist in it. In Islam, however, there is no such thing as original sin. The Qur’an does indeed state that Adam and Eve sinned, but according to Islamic belief, they repented and were fully forgiven so that their sin had no repercussions for the rest of human race.

The Islamic rejection of original sin is really the rejection of a ‘specific understanding’ of original sin. Islam rejects the doctrine of original sin that
asserts that all human beings inherited the guilt, the culpability of the sin of Adam and Eve. This seems unfair to the Muslim: Why should we have to accept guilt for someone else’s disobedience? And Adventists would agree!

Because Muslims do not recognize the universal and corruptive power of sin, unleashed as a result of original sin, they see no need for salvation. If there is no sin that has hold on you, you do not need to be saved from it. What you should do, according to the Islamic view, is to live a good life, pleasing God in all that you do. Submit to God and follow His directives. Religion, to the Muslim, does not mean salvation from sin; it means following the right path, or the shari’a, mapped out by Islamic law. Adventists believe, also, that as people submitted to God, we should follow God’s will.

D. Belief in Allah’s Books

True Muslims are required to believe in four existing principle books revealed by God. There is a fifth book called the book of Abraham which was lost. The four books are:

The Torah through Moses, (Qur’an, 3:3, 5:44) or in Christian understanding, the Old Testament. The Psalms through David (Qur’an, 17:55) which represents wisdom books. The Gospel through Jesus (Qur’an, 5:46; 57:27) which is the New Testament. The Qur’an through Muhammad (Qur’an, 2: 1–4). We note that the first three books constitute what Adventists have—-the Bible.
The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur’an

- Qur’an states that his birth was pre-planned (decreed). (Qur’an 19:21; 3:47)
- Qur’an states that Jesus was sinless. (Qur’an 19:19)
- Qur’an says that Jesus was a Sign for the whole world and a Mercy from God. (Qur’an 19:21)
- Qur’an states that Jesus spoke in the cradle. (Quran 19:33)
- Qur’an states that Jesus does not need our peace on Him. He always has peace. (Qur’an 19:33)
- Qur’an states that the followers of Jesus are superior. (Qur’an 3:55)
- Qur’an states that Jesus created birds from clay. (Qur’an 3:49)
- Qur’an confirms that Jesus is the Word of God (Kalimatullah). (Qur’an 3.45)
- Qur’an confirms that Jesus is the Spirit of God (Ruhallah). (Qur’an 21.91)
1. Qur’an states that not all Christians are the same, thus distinguishing the true believers as those who follow the Bible rather than the tradition. (Qur’an 3:113–115).

2. Qur’an affirms that a true Muslim needs to believe in the Bible as well (Qur’an 5:84; 10:94).

3. There are various references that support the Sabbath. To the Arabs the term ‘Sabt’ (Sabbath) is not confused with any other day of the week. The Qur’an clearly mentions that the Sabbath was ordained as part of the covenant at Mt Sinai between God and the children of Israel (Qur’an 4:47). The Sabbath is a sign of accepting God as a creator (Qur’an 4:47–48, 4:154–155, 16:123–125).

4. In several verses, the Qur’an acknowledges God as our King by virtue of the fact that He created the heavens and earth in six days (Qur’an 7:54, 57:4, 25, 59, 11:7, 10:3, 32:4, 50:38): Adventists believe that God created this world in 6 literal days.

5. Adventists do not drink alcohol nor do they eat haram foods (such as pork).
SUGGESTED RESOURCES


ADVENTIST—MUSLIM RELATIONS

The Vision of AMR is:

1. To awaken the need for a personal relationship with God.
2. To lead people to recognise the value of understanding God’s Word.
3. To help Adventists learn how to build bridges of understanding with their Muslim neighbours, colleagues and friends.
4. To help Muslims see Adventists as the People of the Book who are submitting to God and obedient to Him, and to begin a spiritual journey with us.
5. To jointly engage in community projects with Muslims.

Please pray for God’s leading in this challenging ministry to our Muslim brothers and sisters.

The AMR Centers are engaging in consultation and training. Please contact us and let us know how we can be of assistance.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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OR

Your Division, Union, Conference or local Church AMR Leader