

## Comparing Islam With Christianity

by Shirley W. Madany

People are searching for materials to help them understand Islam. A Canadian friend sent us a copy of an article that he had recently written which related to this subject. After summing up his conclusion that in Islam "there is neither grace nor mercy for the one who steps out of line" he deduced correctly that salvation had to be earned by works. Then came his comments: "Compare that with the Gospel contained in the Bible. God comes to us in the person of Christ who has lived the life of perfect obedience, something we could never do. In addition, he took the burden of our sins and gave his life as an atonement for our sins. Salvation is by grace alone. Because God is love, he calls us to love one another, even our enemies. What a difference between these two ways of believing. (For an excellent comparison of Christianity and Islam, see Bassam M. Madany, *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word with a Muslim*, (1979) *The Back to God Hour*, 6555 West College Drive, Palos Heights, IL 60463)"

In his accompanying letter he explained how the events of the past few months have led him to take a more careful look at Islam. He turned to Bassam's book and found it helpful for two reasons. "You mince no words about the fact that Islam is anti-Christian. But you also stress that we are to treat Muslims not with hatred but with the gospel of love."

He surmised that we would be receiving a lot of letters asking for information about this topic, as indeed we are. And how we thank God that He has allowed this humble contribution to continue to be useful to many, many people.

As wife, secretary, and colleague, I may be permitted to have a special interest in this instructive book. During the seventies, my husband would set off for the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, Michigan to participate in a two-week spring seminar on missions to Islam. One of those years, I persuaded him to take along a tape recorder so that I could share in the lectures upon his return. (I did have a sanctified ulterior motive). The book grew out of those lectures. So that when ministers, and lay people, would write to ask us for something they could use as a study guide-we directed them to our book *The Bible and Islam*. Later on in retirement, the entire book was put on our web site [www.levant.info](http://www.levant.info) where it is available for anyone to download.

I could tell so many stories of how the book has been used far beyond anything we could have dreamt. In those early days we used small classified ads in Christian magazines and these bore remarkable fruit. One such makes quite a tale. An organization called Mission Tatarstan contacted us in 1994 - just six months before our retirement. They had purchased copies of *The Bible and Islam* to use at a Muslim Awareness Seminar and considered it "an excellent work!" Could they have permission to have it translated into Russian, simply for distribution to the local pastors with whom they were working. "The greatest problem they are currently having is that there are so few reference and resource works for these pastors."

Naturally we agreed. Within two months we had our own copy of the Russian translation in our hands-ours to do with as we wanted. Providentially a group of Christians under the name, Christ for Russia, were quite eager to see the Russian version published for their own use. This was done in 1996 in the amount of 10,000 copies. Early in 2001, through some remarkable contacts in the Crimea and Ukraine, we learned that it was no longer available and began a little enquiry as to the possibility of the Christian Reformed World Literature Ministries standing behind a second printing.

Precisely at this time a young Canadian, Gary Timmerman, was in charge of the Moscow office and the idea appealed to him greatly. Then the events of September 11th . Mr. Timmerman felt that it could not be just a second printing-there had to be an added chapter dealing with the new worldwide mood of alertness and challenge. Gifted in such matters, he used our web site as his resource and prepared this extra chapter. The book has just come off the press and is definitely an improvement over the previous versions. We praise God for this unusual happening.

Long before the Russian copy was printed we were able to see our book published in South Africa and in East Africa. We are aware that it is still on the tables of Christian book fairs, as was evidenced recently in Nairobi, Kenya.

This is not the only way in which the Lord has expanded what started in such a small way. In the early 90's, The Bible and Islam, was at the heart of a unique prison ministry. We still have a file full of letters from prisoners all over the USA and we will never forget the words of the prison chaplain who told us how he had seen men brought into the Christian fold through reading it, as well as strengthened and thus prevented from converting to Islam. He would order copies by the hundreds and was enormously grateful that we could subsidize them and provide without any cost. That was something which truly frustrated him. Islamic literature flowed into the prison but he was unable to get good Christian literature without having to put up some money for it. He described what a captive reading audience it was-they were eager for anything they could get their hands on. It was again through classified ads that we heard from the prisoners themselves.

Let me share the words of one prisoner on death row.

"I am in prison, on death row, and I am a Christian. We don't have many Christians here, but more and more it seems we are having Muslims. A lot of the men are bitter, angry at God, angry at 'the system', so instead of facing their problems and admitting their own shortcomings, needs, failures and sins, they turn away from the true God and look for other things. Islam is something they seem to like; I think it allows them a way to avoid certain moral choices, and it seems that in Islam they can hold onto their anger and bitterness. A false god doesn't require a true accounting and spiritual vision as does facing the Lord."

We have a need here. I am confined to my cell because of security....I want to study your book so that I can know more about how to deal with the Muslims, and there are some others here that I would like to have read it.

I am concerned because all of us here face death. It is hard sometimes, but I am reminded that Christ died for even these bitter and angry souls. I feel I must try to reach these people, and I need some help. Please pray for me, and please pray for the men here. Thank you and God bless you."

After considerable correspondence we learned from his chaplain that he had shared the book with him. And we were aware of the day when his last appeal was turned down and he was executed. Not exactly what you envision when you hear the word "tentmaker." But most of those who wrote to ask for our book talked about the need to share the Gospel with Muslims within the prison walls.

Time has brought some drastic changes to American prisons. The chaplain who ordered large quantities reported that eventually he had to cover our book with a blank paper jacket and be careful about having it on his desk. Prisoners of Muslim persuasion were being given their own chaplains. Hatred could be preached and fostered unhindered from that time on.

We can therefore, without hesitation, recommend our own book for anyone who is desirous of starting a study of Islam with a group in their church. That is one of the most frequent requests. Do we have a study guide? Going through the book chapter by chapter, it would not be hard to arrange a group of questions for each session.

We'll close this article by going back to our Canadian friend. In his letter he said: "There is so much to learn about this large subject. If you have the time to respond, what sources would you recommend that would be helpful for a beginning student of Islam?"

In our reply we suggest that he read and study our web site, as well as many of the fine books on the Middle East, specially by such authors as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Tom Friedman, V. S. Naipaul, etc. Many of these are spelled out in our Bibliography. Judith Miller's book, *The Ninety-Nine Names of God*, is a good example of how clearly these Middle Eastern journalists have captured the total picture of the global Islamic challenge.

Note: If you want to enquire about getting hold of a Russian copy for yourself or a friend, write to <GTimmerman@racu.ru>