

What You Need To Know About Islam & Muslims
by George W. Braswell, Jr.
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Reviewed by Rev. Bassam M. Madany

One of the most discussed topics in the closing years of the twentieth-century was the soaring population of the world. At the dawn of the New Millennium, our planet is now the home of more than six billion people. An equally important phenomenon has been the migration to the Western countries of a great number of people from what used to be known as the missions fields of Asia and Africa. This fact demands our attention since some of our neighbors are followers of one of the major world religions. Lately, Muslims have become quite visible in our metropolitan areas due to a great influx of immigrants from S. E. Asia and the Middle East. Furthermore, they have gained quite a few converts, especially among African Americans. It won't be too long before they overtake the Jewish population and become the second largest religious community in the USA. While there is no dearth of literature in English on Islam, most of such works are written by secular authors who naturally have no interest in missions to Muslims.

This is why the appearance of this latest book of George W. Braswell, Jr. on Islam and Muslims is such a welcome event. In 1996, he published a similar work, ***Islam: Its Prophet, Peoples, Politics and Power***. The author is Professor of Missions and World Religions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

In the fourteen chapters of his book, Dr. Braswell treats the following topics: *The Muslims Are Coming!*; *Muhammad: Prophet, Ruler, Commander in Chief*; *Believe Correctly, for the Quran Says So*; *Living the Good Life: How to Get to Heaven*; *A Whirlwind Beginning: A Global Expansion*; *Are All Muslims Alike? Unity And Diversity*; *Sitting at Table with Muslims*; *Muslims and Some Big Issues*; *The Clash of Two Giants: Christianity and Islam*; *Islam's View of Jesus and Christians*; *Christian Responses to Muslim Denials*; *Jesus and Muhammad*; *The Christians Are Coming!*; *Muslims in the United States*.

So it is no exaggeration to say that the scope of this book is encyclopedic. Everything you need to know about Islam and Muslims is right here at your fingertip. The “**You**” in the title of the book, is obviously the American Christian who values his or her faith as based on the Holy Scriptures, and who needs help to properly engage in missions. In this age of globalization, Muslims and other followers of world religions, have become our new neighbors. We have a golden opportunity to meet Muslims and share with them the authentic Good News. But it is not an easy task, for unlike the followers of other religions, Muslims have come to reside among us accompanied by a religious and cultural baggage that is thoroughly antithetical to the Christian faith and life.

I totally agree with Braswell when he writes: *Christian witness to Muslims is based not only on understanding as much as possible about Muslim belief and practice but also on one's own preparation in Scripture and prayer.* (P. 7)

There are other quotable gems. Professor Braswell contrasts the different 'mandates' of Christianity and Islam in these words:

What does the future hold for relations between Christianity and Islam? That is uncertain, but one thing is clear: both religions have a message and a mandate. Christianity has a mandate to go into all the world and preach the gospel, a gospel of salvation and reconciliation in Jesus Christ. Islam has a mandate to practice jihad and to bring the non-Muslim world under the rule of Allah and the injunctions of the Quran. (P.8)

Another statement dealing with **Religious Liberty and Freedom of Religion** deserves a full quotation.

On one hand the Quran asserts, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." (2:256) On the other hand it states, "If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost." (3:85)

Islam has a history of ill treatment and at times death to those who leave it. The Quran speaks harshly of apostasy; an apostate will face the wrath of God in the hereafter. (47:25-28) Islamic law (sharia) often demanded the punishment of death for apostasy from Islam. Many traditions say of those who change their religion from Islam, "Let them be killed."

Christians have been placed in great danger in missionary efforts toward Muslims. Any convert from Islam to Christianity has also faced even greater risk. Thus, freedom of religion has not been a positive matter within Islam. Some Muslim nations prohibit missionary activity, restrict the religious freedom of minority religions, and place great obstacles in church building and growth.

The overarching worldview of Islam is that of Islam against the world. The world must be converted to Islam, or brought under its domination. The Muslim view has been "once a Muslim always a Muslim," thus the harsh treatment for apostasy. As Islam grows and multiplies in non-Muslim populations, it faces issues of separation of religion and state and religious liberty for all peoples. (P. 121)

While I have great appreciation for this book, I found certain mistakes that should be corrected in a future edition. They fall under two categories: some are in the area of transliteration of Arabic words, while others are important factual errors.

On page 10, the author in referring to the controversies among Christian churches in the days of Muhammad (sixth and seventh centuries,) wrote: *"Also, within the Byzantine Empire, the Eastern Orthodox Christians had theological differences with the Roman Catholic papacy in Rome. There were disputes over the doctrine of the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ. These disputes were later to influence Muhammad and his understanding of Christianity."*

There is no doubt that the disputes among Christian churches before the days of Muhammad may have contributed to his misunderstanding of Christianity. However, these theological controversies beginning with Nicea in 325 AD, and culminating at Chalcedon in 451 AD, were not disputes between Rome and Constantinople. The controversies centered around the natures and wills of Jesus Christ. They occurred within Eastern Christianity and gave rise to the Monophysite and Nestorian Churches. The final rupture between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism did not take place until 1053 AD, four centuries after the rise of Islam!

On page 46, the author deals again with the divisions among Christians at the time of the rise of Islam. But he describes these controversies as having occurred between Rome and Constantinople. "*Christianity was engaged in internal struggles between the Roman Catholic Church headquartered in Rome and the Eastern Orthodox Church headquartered in Constantinople.*" But as I remarked in the previous paragraph, actually the theological and ecclesiastical divisions at that time occurred within the territory of Eastern Christianity. The Great Schism between East and West did not take place until early in the Second Millennium.

The real tragedy of Eastern Christianity is that the Orthodox party used the arm of the state to persecute the Monophysites in Egypt and the Nestorians in Mesopotamia. It was the followers of these non-Chalcedonian persecuted churches, that mistakenly welcomed the Arab-Muslim armies imagining that they were their liberators. Later on, they discovered to their dismay that the Muslim conquerors had imposed on them the harsh rules of the so-called "*Protected*" or "*Dhimmi*" status.

A similar confusion between Rome and Constantinople is found on page 95, in the fourth paragraph. Instead of reading it as "*the Church of Rome,*" it should read "*the Church of Constantinople.*"

On page 32, when transliterating the Arabic words of THE GREAT CREED OF ISLAM, an important word is omitted. The Arabic version "of the confession (shahada) of Muslims" is rendered: "*Ilaha illa Allah. Muhammad rasul Allah.*" The first Arabic word "*La*" of the confession is omitted. Without it (a negative particle,) the confession is meaningless. Usually, this brief Islamic credo is prefaced by the Arabic words: "*Ash-hadu anna,*" i.e., I bear witness. The complete Muslim confession states:

"La Ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah." ("I bear witness that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.")

On page 37, the Arabic name for the *Feast of Sacrifice* is "*Id al-Adha,*" and not "*Id Adhan,*" as printed. The latter spelling may be due to Dr. Braswell's great acquaintance with the Persian language that transliterates the Arabic original words differently.

On page 91, the name of the radical Muslim leader should be transliterated, "*Qutb,*" and not "*Qubt*" "*Qubt* is the Arabic spelling for a *Copt*, a Christian from Egypt.

On page 97, there is a great confusion regarding the exact identity of the Muslim rulers who persecuted Western Christian pilgrims coming to Jerusalem, thus paving

the way for the Crusades in 1096. The following episode is related by the author. *"In 1076 a Muslim Turkish emir who took control of Jerusalem under the authority of the Ottoman Empire placed extreme difficulties upon Christian pilgrims."* Actually, the first time the Ottoman Turks appeared on the horizon of world history was around 1280. The Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453, thus bringing to an end the Byzantine Empire. It was not until 1516 that they began the conquest of the Middle East, and getting control over Jerusalem. The *"Muslim Turkish emir"* belonged to the Seljuk Turks, who had wielded power in the Middle East centuries before the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

These suggested corrections are not meant at all to detract from the great value of this work. Braswell's WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ISLAM & MUSLIMS, has many excellent and helpful features. Any serious student of Islam will be greatly enriched by owning this book.

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