

# The Catholic Response to Islam Between Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelization

André Villeneuve, Ph.D.

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## Contents

Introduction: Islam in the World.....	2
Islam in Numbers.....	2
Objective of the Present Article .....	3
The Catholic Approach to Islam since Vatican II .....	4
Traditional Catholic Responses to Islam.....	5
From Polemics to Interreligious Dialogue .....	8
Muslim Attitudes towards Christianity and the West.....	11
Islamic Da’wah in the West.....	14
Da’wah’s Successes: Conversions to Islam.....	17
Questioning the Catholic Approach to Dialogue with Islam .....	17
Evangelizing Muslims: Mission Impossible?.....	21
Muslims Encounter Jesus Christ.....	24
Summary and Conclusion.....	27
Appendices.....	28
Appendix 1: Some Major North-American Islamic Organizations.....	28
Appendix 2: Islamic Da’wah Websites and Resources .....	28
Appendix 3: Some Christian Apostolates to Muslims .....	30
Appendix 4: Mission to Muslims and Muslim Converts to Christianity (Select Bibliography) .....	30
Bibliography.....	32

## Introduction: Islam in the World

In the darkest days of Israel's history, sin and betrayal of God's covenant rarely occurred in a religious vacuum but usually coincided with a proliferation of cults to foreign gods. In tragically recurring episodes such as the golden calf incident, the anarchy of the time of the Judges, Solomon's fall from grace, and the Baal worship in the days of the prophets, devotion to foreign deities combined with moral abominations often turned out to be both the infraction and the very punishment for Israel's idolatry. Religious tepidity combined with the toleration of Canaanite gods meant that the same Canaanites would be as "pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides" who would trouble and plunder God's people in their own land (Num. 33:55; cf. Jdg. 2:14). Israel would find peace and security only by repenting and returning to the Lord.

This situation of widespread apostasy from God combined with a proliferation of various idols, religions and "alternate spiritualities" is not just a phenomenon of the past. It is perhaps not far-fetched to see some parallels in our own situation today, with the gradual abandonment of the Christian faith in the West and the rise of non-Christian religious affiliation. While some 40 million people globally are expected to convert to Christianity between 2010 and 2050, 106 million are projected to leave the faith, with most joining the ranks of the religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup> One religion, however, seems particularly intent on filling the void left by the decline of Christianity, and shows phenomenal growth despite the disturbing trend of global violence and terrorism that has become associated with its name in recent decades. This religion is Islam.

### Islam in Numbers

Islam is the fastest growing religion in both America and in the world.<sup>2</sup> According to a Pew Research Center report released in April 2015, while Christians will remain the largest religious group in the world over the next four decades, Islam will grow faster than any other major religion, nearly catching up to Christianity by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the Pew Research projections, Muslims will increase by 73 percent between 2010 and 2050, at more than double the rate of Christians (35 percent) and the overall global population (35 percent). By 2050, the number of Muslims will grow from 1.6 billion to 2.8 billion (from 23 to 30 percent of the world population), resulting in near parity between Muslims and Christians (2.9 billion or 31 percent of the world population), possibly for the first time in history.<sup>3</sup> At this rate, Muslims will outnumber Christians in the world by 2070.

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/> (accessed April 27, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Brian J. Grim, *The World's Religions in Figures: An Introduction to International Religious Demography* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 10. Cf. "Growth of Religion," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Growth\\_of\\_religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Growth_of_religion).

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>. The full report can be found at [http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF\\_15.04.02\\_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf](http://www.pewforum.org/files/2015/03/PF_15.04.02_ProjectionsFullReport.pdf).

Looking at the situation in the West, if current trends continue, the proportion of Muslims in Europe will nearly double by 2050, growing from 5.9 percent of the overall population in 2010 to 10 percent. In the United States, while Christians will decline from more than three-quarters of the population in 2010 to two-thirds in 2050, Muslims will grow from 0.9 to 2.1 percent, outnumbering Jews as the second largest religious group. While this percentage is small, compared to the numbers in Europe, it represents a 197 percent increase in the Muslim population — more than seven times the expected increase in the region’s overall population (26 percent).

Why this growth? It is especially due to the young age and high fertility rate of Muslims relative to other religious groups.<sup>4</sup> Other factors driving Muslim population growth include life expectancy, age structure, migration, and “religious switching” or conversion.<sup>5</sup> The present article proposes to focus on this last point.

### **Objective of the Present Article**

The objective of this article is to examine the Catholic response to the growth of Islam in the West in recent decades in light of the Church’s vision for interreligious dialogue and evangelization, and the missionary mandate that Christ entrusted to her. This study will raise the following questions: Does the Catholic Church have a coherent strategy in respect to Islam? Is this strategy working? Is it realistic? Is it biblical?

The methodology will be the following: I will begin by examining the Catholic approach to Islam since Vatican II and compare it to traditional Catholic responses to Islam throughout history. Next, I will look more closely at the way interreligious dialogue with Islam has proceeded since the Council and evaluate the results of this approach. From there, I will examine the *other side’s* perspective on interreligious dialogue, namely, how Muslims view Christianity and the West. I will also consider Islamic missionary activity, or *dawa*,<sup>6</sup> as well as its degree of success in converting westerners to Islam, and present some critical views of the current Catholic approach to Islam. Finally, along with a brief survey of the growing movement of Muslims who have encountered Jesus Christ, I will propose that the evangelization of Muslims—which includes *both* dialogue and proclamation<sup>7</sup>—is the best, most biblical and most “Catholic” response to the rise of Islam in the West.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/muslims/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/main-factors-driving-population-growth/>

<sup>6</sup> Also spelled *da’wa* or *da’wah*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 55; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Dialogue and Proclamation,” 1991, 2, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html).

## The Catholic Approach to Islam since Vatican II

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has taken a conciliatory approach towards non-Christian religions in general and Islam in particular. This approach has taken the name of “interreligious dialogue,” which the Church defines as “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”<sup>8</sup> Interreligious dialogue has tended to focus on similarities rather than differences between Christianity and other religions, as seen in the Council’s statements on Islam in the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*:

The Church regards with esteem also the Moslems. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honor Mary, His virgin Mother; at times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom. (NA 3)

While the first paragraph of NA 3 focuses on commonalities between the two faiths, the second paragraph encourages reconciliation and mutual understanding between Christians and Muslims for the benefit of society and the world. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* also mentions Muslims in its second chapter on the people of God, declaring that:

the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. (LG 16; quoted in CCC 841)

The same conciliatory approach has continued since the Council up to the most recent magisterial statement on Islam, made by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013). Quoting *Lumen Gentium* 16, Francis acknowledges the basic commonalities between Muslims and Christians, stating that “the sacred writings of Islam have retained some

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<sup>8</sup> Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, “Dialogue in Truth and Charity,” 2014, 2, [http://pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-in-truth-and-charity\\_246.html](http://pcinterreligious.org/dialogue-in-truth-and-charity_246.html).

Christian teachings” and that “Jesus and Mary receive profound veneration” (EG 252). After praising the commitment to prayer, faith, devotion and ethical values of many Muslims, Francis encourages Christians to adopt a welcoming attitude towards the increasing number of Muslim immigrants in traditionally Christian countries, while asking for a reciprocal freedom of worship for Christians living in Muslim countries (EG 253). Finally, he states:

Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalisations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Koran are opposed to every form of violence. (EG 253)

This last statement suggesting that Islam is a peaceful religion stands in sharp contrast to a more controversial statement made seven years earlier by Pope Benedict XVI. In his *Regensburg Lecture* on the relationship between faith and reason (12 September 2006), Benedict quoted fourteenth century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus as having said the now infamous words: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.”<sup>9</sup> Although Benedict’s point was to argue that “violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul,” and “not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God’s nature,”<sup>10</sup> the point was lost on many Muslims, who vehemently protested the medieval emperor’s suggestion that Muhammad had founded a violent religion by means of threats, riots, and attacks throughout the Muslim world.<sup>11</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI’s citation of this medieval source—and the reactions that followed—demonstrates the importance of understanding the earlier history of relations between Catholics and Muslims.

## Traditional Catholic Responses to Islam

Paleologus’ polemical critique of Islam was by no means an isolated case in the history of Christian-Muslim relations, which were often marked by hostile confrontation. While some Christians initially saw the spread of Islam in the Middle East as the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham to make his first son Ishmael, father of the Arabs, a “great nation” (Gen 21:12-13, 18) who would come to know the God of Abraham through Muhammad, this positive assessment was short-lived. It soon became evident that the early Islamic community saw itself as providing a corrective to and even fulfillment of the Christian Gospel.<sup>12</sup> Non-Chalcedonian Christians in the East began to see the aggressive Islamic conquests as God’s judgment upon

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<sup>9</sup> T. Khoury, “Manuel II Paléologue, Entretiens avec un Musulman. 7e Controverse”, Sources Chrétiennes n. 115 (Paris 1966), pp. 142-143, as quoted in Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason, and the University: Memory and Reflections” (“Regensburg Lecture”), 12 September 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason, and the University”

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 166-170; “Regensburg Lecture,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regensburg\\_lecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regensburg_lecture) (accessed April 13, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 35-36.

Christians who had accepted the Christological definitions of the Council of Chalcedon,<sup>13</sup> while among Chalcedonian Christians, Islam began to be viewed as a Christian heresy. One of the pioneers of this position was St. John Damascene (c. 675-749), who called Muhammad a “false prophet” and his religion “the superstition of the Ishmaelites” that “keeps people in error, being a forerunner of the antichrist.”<sup>14</sup>

This negative view of Islam soon spread across the Christian world, and the Islamic conquest of Spain in 711 gave rise to a singularly apocalyptic view of the new religion. In the mid-ninth century, Christians in Cordoba under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate also became convinced that Islam was a “precursor of the antichrist”—the great beast and “abomination of desolation” spoken of by the prophet Daniel and by Jesus that was now taking over the earth and subjugating all powers and kingdoms.<sup>15</sup> This harsh assessment of Islam led to the execution of some fifty Spanish Christians by the Muslim authorities.<sup>16</sup>

Christian-Muslim relations reached an obvious low point during the Crusades, when European powers set out to militarily recapture the Holy Land from the Muslims, resulting in a bloody conflict that lasted for several centuries. Around the same time, Peter the Venerable (c. 1092-1156) engaged in a serious study of Islam and wrote two comprehensive works on the topic.<sup>17</sup> He saw Islam as the summation of Christian heresies and “part of a satanic scheme to harm the Christian church,” seeing the position of Muhammad as “somewhere between that of Arius and that of the Antichrist.”<sup>18</sup> Peter’s approach, however, was not all polemical, for he appealed to Christ’s love and human reason in order to call Muslims to salvation.

There is no evidence of any significant, organized missionary movement to Muslims<sup>19</sup>—and much less of movements of Muslim converts to Christianity—until the high Middle Ages.<sup>20</sup> When missionary movements finally emerged, they came from the West in the Mendicant orders of the thirteenth century. One of the earliest known encounters is perhaps also the most famous,

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<sup>13</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 36-38.

<sup>14</sup> St. John Damascene (d. 749), *On Heresies*, under the section “On the Heresy of the Ishmaelites” in *The Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 37, translated by the Catholic University of America (CUA Press, 1958), pp. 153-160 [http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn\\_islam.aspx](http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/stjohn_islam.aspx). See also Stefano Nikolaou, “A Survey of Byzantine Responses to Islam,” [http://www.answering-islam.org/history/byzantine\\_responses.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/history/byzantine_responses.html); Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 38-41; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Dan 7:19, 23-27; Mk 13:14; Rev 13.

<sup>16</sup> Among the martyrs of Cordoba were Sts. Habenus, Jeremiah, Peter, Sabinian, Walabonsus, and Wistremundus (d. 851). Reported in the *Memoriale Sanctorum* in response to Spanish Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd Ar-Rahman II’s ministers that they convert to Islam on pain of death. <http://www.onepeterfive.com/what-did-the-saints-say-about-islam/>; Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 81-83; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> *The Summa totius heresis Saracenorum* (The Summary of the Entire Heresy of the Saracens), and the *Liber contra sectam sive heresim Saracenorum* (The Refutation of the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens).

<sup>18</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 93; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>19</sup> Goddard (*Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 113) suggests that Eastern Christians would not have entertained this idea, partly because of their initial positive reaction towards the coming of Islam, and partly because mission to Muslims was impossible once they found themselves under Islamic rule.

<sup>20</sup> Garrison provides a good overview of Muslim movements to Christ through history, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (WIGTake Resources, 2014), Kindle edition, chapter 1 (loc. 130-328).

namely St. Francis of Assisi's journey to Damietta, Egypt in 1219, when he tried to persuade the Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil of the truth of the Christian faith in the midst of the Fifth Crusade.<sup>21</sup> A few decades later, the Majorcan Third Order Franciscan Ramon Llull (c. 1232-1315) spent nine years studying Arabic and then travelled to north Africa on a number of occasions to enter into debate with Muslims, which eventually cost him his life.<sup>22</sup> The early Dominicans were also involved in dialogue and mission to Muslims, often in the form of philosophical or polemical treatises.<sup>23</sup>

Despite these initial attempts at dialogue with Muslims, the Church largely maintained its polemical approach to Islam in subsequent centuries with—not surprisingly—little positive fruit. In 1434, the Council of Basel expressed the hope that “very many from the abominable sect of Mahomet will be converted to the Catholic faith,”<sup>24</sup> while Pope Callixtus III (1455-58) vowed to “exalt the true Faith, and to extirpate the diabolical sect of the reprobate and faithless Mahomet in the East.”<sup>25</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, the Jesuits sent missions to the court of the Moghul emperors, carrying out a dialogue over a number of years but which in the end was also largely unsuccessful.<sup>26</sup> The spectacular growth of Christian missions in the nineteenth century saw an increasing number of outreaches to the Muslim world, especially on the part of Protestant denominations and individuals, but these too had only limited success. On the Catholic side, worthy of note is the 1868 founding of the “Society of Missionaries of Africa” or “White Fathers” whose mission was to disseminate Christianity in the region of the Sahara desert.<sup>27</sup>

We may derive two main observations from this brief survey of Christian-Muslim relations: first, although there was certainly a missionary consciousness and a desire to see Muslims convert to Christianity from the seventh to the twentieth century, Catholic missionary outreach to Muslims has historically been very limited in scope. Second, this missionary outreach was often tainted by a confrontational, polemical approach. In light of these points, it is not particularly surprising that Christian mission to Muslims has yielded few results over the centuries.

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<sup>21</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 114; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>22</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 115-16; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 116-17; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, pp. 41-42. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, critiqued Muhammad as one who “seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh urges us... Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration... On the contrary, Muhammad said that he was sent in the power of his arms – which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants... Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Mohammed forced others to become his follower's by the violence of his arms.” (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 1, Chapter 6, Art. 4)

<sup>24</sup> Session 19 (7 September 1434) <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Councils/ecum17.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Von Pastor, *History of the Popes*, II, 346; quoted by Warren H. Carroll, *A History of Christendom*, Vol. 3 (*The Glory of Christendom*) (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press), p. 571.

<sup>26</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, pp. 120-22.

<sup>27</sup> Goddard, *Christian-Muslim Relations*, p. 125.

## From Polemics to Interreligious Dialogue

Since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has worked diligently to distance herself from the polemical approach, and we may be grateful for these efforts. As expressed in *Nostra Aetate*, the Church now exhorts both Christians and Muslims “to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom” (NA 3). This more irenic Catholic approach to Islam, however, had the side effect of the virtual disappearance of Catholic missionary outreach to Muslims—a consequence not intended by the Council.

The *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, published in 1981 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, provides a good example of the Catholic approach to Islam that has generally prevailed since the Council.<sup>28</sup> Even though this is not a magisterial document, and its level of authority is quite low, the approach to dialogue and evangelization that it advocates has been widespread among Catholics in the past two generations. On the one hand, the *Guidelines* do not attempt to downplay the differences between Christianity and Islam, seeking to avoid “the extremes, either of a facile syncretism which would make all religions alike, or an uncompromising polemic which would deny that different religions can ever meet each other.”<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the document rejects the very idea of trying to convert Muslims to Christianity—or even of encouraging them to question their own faith. The *Guidelines’* emphasis on “the common values which should unite Muslims and Christians at all levels both of their experience with God and of their service to humanity” is presented alongside the conviction that “dialogue cannot have as its purpose the will to ‘convert’ other persons to one’s own religion at any price or to try to make them doubt the faith in which they were raised.”<sup>30</sup> This point is repeated several times in the document. It asserts, for example, that “we should never entertain suspicions that the others are trying stealthily to proselytize us or to impose their kind of dialogue upon us.”<sup>31</sup>

While the document acknowledges that “the joyous proclamation of the way of salvation in Jesus Christ... represents the basic Christian missionary duty,”<sup>32</sup> it also claims that “nothing would be more detrimental to true dialogue than a false effort at accommodation whereby Christians, for example, would seek to make their faith acceptable to Muslims.” Moreover,

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<sup>28</sup> Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> And so, the document’s introduction states that “Without any concession whatever to doctrinal rigidity on the one hand, or to a polemical spirit on the other, Christians must explore, under the Spirit’s guidance, any possible ways of convergence between themselves and Muslims...” *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 32.

<sup>32</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 36.



conversion to God... is not a question of changing from one religion to another... Believers reject such proselytism unanimously as unworthy of the faith by which they live and the God whom they serve.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, according to the *Guidelines*, a “subtle danger that threatens the practice of dialogue” is the suspicion “that one’s partners in the exchanges have ulterior motives of proselytism.” And so, once again,

true dialogue presupposes that the participants have no intention of changing the other's religion nor even of instilling doubts regarding the faith of the others. Such intentions would be a parody or a betrayal of authentic dialogue.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, even though the document is well aware of the Qur’an’s forceful rejection of the foundational doctrines of Christianity such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Christ’s redemptive death,<sup>35</sup> it suggests that Christians should have no intention of “instilling doubts” concerning the Muslim denial of what Christians hold to be the divinely revealed, central truths of salvation. On the contrary, “Christian thought is invited to give Islam a special place as a monotheistic, prophetic religion which is linked with the Judeo-Christian tradition” and “as a place of privilege where access is gained to divine mercy and, thence, to salvation.”<sup>36</sup> Consequently,

Christians can and should consider their Muslim friends as true witnesses of the living God, and their religion as a fervent appropriation of the message originally given to Abraham.<sup>37</sup>

A cursory knowledge of divine revelation as communicated in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition suffices to reveal serious tensions between the approach to interreligious dialogue presented in the *Guidelines*, on the one hand, and the Gospel message and missionary mandate of the Church—as presented in more authoritative ecclesial documents—on the other. While interreligious dialogue surely has an important role to play in our pluralistic, modern world, it is also true that it is “a part of the Church's evangelizing mission.”<sup>38</sup> As Paul VI wrote in his 1975 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the proclamation of the Gospel is “also addressed to the immense sections of mankind who practice non-Christian religions,” and the Church is not at liberty to withhold the proclamation of Jesus Christ from these non-Christians.<sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul II states in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* that dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad*

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<sup>33</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, pp. 42.

<sup>35</sup> “The Qur'an also points out that God ‘hath taken neither wife nor son’ (Qur'an 72:3), for ‘He begetteth not nor was begotten’ (Qur'an 112:3). It is also said that those who say, ‘Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary,’ are unbelievers (Qur'an 5:17), even as are those who say, ‘Allah is the third of three’ (Qur'an 5:73). ‘O People of the Scripture ... say not ‘Three’—Cease!’ (Qur'an 4:171).” *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, pp. 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Guidelines for Dialogue*, pp. 66.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 55.

<sup>39</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 53.

*gentes*. Since other religions contain “gaps, insufficiencies and errors,” it follows that “dialogue does not dispense from evangelization” and “the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue.”<sup>40</sup> This imperative rests on soteriological grounds: while she acknowledges the possibility that non-Christians *may* attain salvation,<sup>41</sup> the Church affirms the necessity to proclaim the Gospel to all people, including to those of other religions, because “all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body.”<sup>42</sup> Thus “dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.”<sup>43</sup> Since “the Father willed to call the whole of humanity together into his Son’s Church,” she “still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men.”<sup>44</sup> As stated in the CDF declaration *Dominus Iesus*:

If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation... Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*... Thus, the certainty of the universal salvific will of God does not diminish, but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup>

In this light, a more sober assessment of Islam proposed by John Paul II in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1995) implies that dialogue with Muslims should not exclude sharing the Gospel with them:

Whoever knows the Old and New Testaments, and then reads the Koran, clearly sees the *process by which it completely reduces Divine Revelation*. It is impossible not to note the movement away from what God said about Himself, first in the Old Testament through the Prophets, and then finally in the New Testament through His Son. In Islam all the richness of God's self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New Testaments, has definitely been set aside.

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<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* 55; cf. *General Directory for Catechesis* 86. Pope Francis makes the same point in *Evangelii Gaudium* 251, in the paragraph immediately preceding his statements on Islam: “Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support and nourish one another.”

<sup>41</sup> CCC 847; cf. *Guidelines for Dialogue*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> CCC 846, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 16; cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5.

<sup>43</sup> *Redemptoris Missio* 55, emphasis in the original.

<sup>44</sup> CCC 845; 848. “All must be converted to [Christ], made known by the Church's preaching, and all must be incorporated into Him by baptism and into the Church which is His body” (*Ad Gentes* 7); it must be *firmly believed* that “the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. Mk 16:16; Jn 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door” (*Dominus Iesus* 20; cf. *Ad Gentes* 7; emphasis in the original).

<sup>45</sup> *Dominus Iesus* 22 (emphasis in the original). See also the 2007 CDF *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization* (7): “Although non-Christians can be saved through the grace which God bestows in ‘ways known to him’, the Church cannot fail to recognize that such persons are lacking a tremendous benefit in this world: to know the true face of God and the friendship of Jesus Christ, God-with-us.”

Some of the most beautiful names in the human language are given to the God of the Koran, but He is ultimately a God outside of the world, a God who is *only Majesty, never Emmanuel, God-with-us. Islam is not a religion of redemption.* There is no room for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as a prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad. There is also mention of Mary, His Virgin Mother, but the tragedy of redemption is completely absent. For this reason not only the theology but also the anthropology of Islam is very distant from Christianity.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the poignancy of this papal evaluation of Islam, it seems that a “lowest common denominator” approach has prevailed in most Catholic statements on Islam since the Council. These statements are characterized by the constant repetition of a few predominant themes, such as recognizing and developing the spiritual bonds and religious values that unite Christians and Muslims as sons of Abraham, our common faith in God, the universal dignity, brotherhood and freedom of men, civic and political cooperation, the rejection of violence, mutual understanding, and the fostering of friendship, respect, peace, justice and reconciliation in order to build a harmonious society.<sup>47</sup> One is hard pressed to find any words that even hint at a desire to see Muslims encounter Jesus Christ as Divine Redeemer rather than mere prophet.

It is important to note that the approach represented by the *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims* has had an influence disproportionate to its level of authority. While the *Guidelines* seem to undermine evangelization efforts, authoritative Church documents such as the Vatican II Decree *Ad Gentes*, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the Papal Encyclicals *Redemptoris Missio* and *Evangelii Gaudium*, and the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus* unanimously and clearly assert that interreligious dialogue is never opposed to the imperative for Christians to proclaim Christ to all people, including to those of other religions.

## **Muslim Attitudes towards Christianity and the West**

If dialogue with Muslims is to be meaningful, it is imperative to understand their perspective of Christianity and Western culture. What has been the Islamic response to the “soft” conciliatory Catholic approach to interreligious dialogue? Have Muslims responded in kind? An increasing number of commentators, analysts and authors have been sounding the alarm for years concerning the rapid growth of Islam in the West. These calls have increased dramatically since the September 11 attacks and the ever-increasing proliferation of Islamic terrorism throughout the world. Foundational to these concerns is the central question as to whether jihadists have hijacked what is essentially a peaceful religion, or whether violence is inherent in the teachings of Islam.

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<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1995), pp. 92-93. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>47</sup> USCCB: *Vatican Council and Papal Statements on Islam*. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm>. Accessed April 22, 2015.

Although many Muslims are peace-loving and law-abiding people, it cannot be denied that numerous passages in the Quran and Hadiths exhort Muslims to wage *jihad* (holy war) against the *kuffar* (unbelievers or infidels), in imitation of Islam's prophet Muhammad.<sup>48</sup> Yet holy war is not an end in itself; it exists for the sake spreading Islam and ultimately subjugating unbelievers in a global Islamic state. This is in conformity with the traditional Islamic worldview that sees the world divided into the *dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam, i.e. those nations already under Islamic rule), and the *dar al-harb* (the house of war, i.e. the nations that are not (yet) under Islamic rule).<sup>49</sup> This division, however, is only temporary, for Islamic eschatology envisions a world in which all idolatry has ceased and Islam reigns supreme.<sup>50</sup> According to the Qur'an and Hadiths, the "house of Islam" is to wage war on the unbelievers until the entire world has been islamized and brought under the rule of Sharia law. In this scenario, pagans or "idolaters" must convert to Islam or else be killed.<sup>51</sup> Jews and Christians, the "people of the book" have a third choice: if they do not wish to convert to Islam, they must submit to second class *dhimmi* status under Islamic rule, pay the *jizya* tax to Muslim authorities, and accept a humiliating "state of abasement."<sup>52</sup> It is important to note that this worldview is not just held by fringe adherents of an extreme form of "radical Islam;" it is clearly taught by the Qur'an and the authoritative Islamic traditions transmitted in the Hadiths, which are binding on all Muslims.

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<sup>48</sup> While some Muslim apologists claim that the true meaning of *jihad* is an inner, spiritual struggle against evil, Islam expert Samir Khalil Samir, S.J. points out that this view is a recent innovation "that corresponds neither to Islamic tradition nor to modern language;" these unequivocally understand *jihad* as "the Muslim war in the name of God to defend Islam." Samir Khalil Samir, *111 Questions on Islam* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), p. 62; as quoted in William Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), p. 100. On the acts of violence committed by Muhammad, see Robert Spencer, *The Truth About Muhammad: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> Some modern Muslim scholars add a third "house," the *Dar al-ahd*, or abode of the covenant, which includes the countries that have diplomatic agreements and covenants with the Muslim nation. Cf. Ahmed Khalil, "Dar Al-Islam And Dar Al-Harb: Its Definition and Significance," <http://en.islamway.net/article/8211/dar-al-islam-and-dar-al-harb-its-definition-and-significance>

<sup>50</sup> Although Christianity also envisions a world free of idolatry at the end of time when the enemies of Christ will be defeated, the means by which this is to be accomplished are radically different from those taught by Islam: Christianity does not hold to a doctrine of "holy war" but calls its adherents to love their enemies (Mt 5:44). Moreover, as the Catechism explains, the kingdom of God will be fulfilled "not by a historic triumph of the Church through a progressive ascendancy, but only by God's victory over the final unleashing of evil, which will cause his Bride to come down from heaven. God's triumph over the revolt of evil will take the form of the Last Judgment after the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world." (CCC 677)

<sup>51</sup> Qur'an 9:5; 9:73; 9:123; cf. Robert Spencer, *Stealth Jihad: How Radical Islam is Subverting America without Guns or Bombs* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2008), pp. 35-36.

<sup>52</sup> "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (Qur'an 9:29). Cf. Sahih Muslim 19:4294; Daniel Ali and Robert Spencer. *Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2003), question 81. Spencer further notes how all four Sunni schools of jurisprudence agree on the importance of jihad warfare against non-Muslims who refuse to convert to Islam (*Stealth Jihad*, pp. 36-39).

In sum, the ultimate goal of *jihad*, according to Islamic sacred texts, is not to kill unbelievers or even force them to become Muslims, but rather to bring them into the Islamic social order.<sup>53</sup> How is this goal to be reached in North America and the West, where Muslims are still a minority? The term “stealth jihad,” popularized by Robert Spencer’s book of the same title, has been increasingly used in recent years to describe the quiet and gradual advance of Islamic ideology in non-Muslim societies. Spencer and others have shown that Muslim individuals and organizations are “leading a full-scale effort to transform pluralistic societies into Islamic states, and to sweep away Western notions of legal equality, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, and more.”<sup>54</sup>

A key player in this global cultural jihad is the Muslim Brotherhood. This international organization, founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928, is one of the oldest, largest and most influential Islamist organizations in the world, now active in more than 70 countries.<sup>55</sup> In a 1982 document, the Muslim Brotherhood outlined a 12-point strategy to “establish an Islamic government on earth,” advising to avoid “confrontation with our enemies, at the local or global scale” which would be liable to undermine Islamic proselytizing, and instead to “use deception to mask the intended goals of Islamist actions.”<sup>56</sup> This strategy represents a “flexible, multi-phased, long-term approach to the ‘cultural invasion’ of the West,” calling for “the utilization of various tactics, ranging from immigration, infiltration, surveillance, propaganda, protest, deception, political legitimacy and terrorism.”<sup>57</sup>

A 1991 Muslim Brotherhood document entitled “An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America” lays out a plan and strategy to conquer and Islamize the United States. This memorandum explains that the Brotherhood

must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and ‘sabotaging’ its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and Allah’s religion is made victorious over all other religions.<sup>58</sup>

The strategy to reach this goal is to “settle” Islam in the U.S. so that Islam could be “enabled within the souls, minds, and the lives of the people of the country.” Muslim leaders are urged to make “a shift from the collision mentality to the absorption mentality,” that is, avoiding

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<sup>53</sup> Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>54</sup> Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, p. 6; “Stealth Jihad,” <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=815>.

<sup>55</sup> “Muslim Brotherhood,” <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/groupProfile.asp?grpId=6386>; Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Patrick Poole, “The Muslim Brotherhood ‘Project’ (continued)”, May 11, 2006, <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readarticle.aspx?artid=4475>, quoted in Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, p. 16;

<sup>57</sup> Patrick Poole, “The Muslim Brotherhood ‘Project’”, May 11, 2006, <http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readarticle.aspx?ARTID=4476>.

<sup>58</sup> Mohamed Akram, “An Explanatory Memorandum on the General Strategic Goal for the Group in North America,” May 22, 1991, cited in Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, pp. 9, 16; cf. “The Muslim Brotherhood’s ‘General Strategic Goal’ for North America,” <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=1235>

confrontation and seeking instead to “implant into the larger society a host of seemingly benign Islamic groups with ostensibly unobjectionable motives” in the fields of

education; religious proselytization; political activism; audio and video production; print media; banking and finance; the physical sciences; the social sciences; professional and business networking; cultural affairs; the publishing and distribution of books; children and teenagers; women's rights; vocational concerns; and jurisprudence.<sup>59</sup>

This project is not the mere fantasy of a handful of religious fanatics in the Middle East: In an appendix, the same document lists 29 major North American Muslim organizations that they believe could collaborate effectively with the Brotherhood’s objectives.<sup>60</sup> For example, at a conference held by the Muslim Arab Youth Association in Toledo, Ohio in 1995, Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood theologian and cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi called for the conquest of Rome, Europe, and America, just as Constantinople was conquered. The strategy for this conquest, he explained, is “not through sword but through *Da’wa*” (Muslim proselytism).<sup>61</sup> In November 2011, the same al-Qaradawi called on Muslims to adopt the strategy of “gradualism,” which aims at advancing Shariah law and the universal Islamic state through gradual and peaceful means. Thus, gradualism is “an intelligent form of jihad based on pragmatism, patience, long-term planning and self-evaluation.”<sup>62</sup>

In sum, Islamic sacred texts teach that Christians and other non-Muslims are “infidels” who are to be subjugated so that Islam ultimately reigns supreme in the world. This eschatological vision undergirds the strategy of “stealth jihad” that seeks to infiltrate the West to gradually bring it under Islamic dominion. This Muslim view of Christianity is obviously at odds with the Catholic aim of engaging in respectful dialogue with Muslims for the sake of achieving mutual understanding and promoting social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom.

## Islamic *Da’wah* in the West

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<sup>59</sup> “The Muslim Brotherhood's ‘General Strategic Goal’ for North America,”

<http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/viewSubCategory.asp?id=1235>

<sup>60</sup> “The Muslim Brotherhood's ‘General Strategic Goal’ for North America”

<sup>61</sup> “What remains, then, is to conquer Rome. The second part of the omen. “The city of Hiraq [once emperor of Constantinople] will be conquered first,” so what remains is to conquer Rome. This means that Islam will come back to Europe for the third time, after it was expelled from it twice... Conquest through *Da’wa*, that is what we hope for. We will conquer Europe, we will conquer America! Not through sword but through *Da’wa*.” The Investigative Project on Terrorism, “Yusuf al-Qaradawi,” July 9 2008,

<http://www.investigativeproject.org/profile/167> ; Cf. also “Muslim Brotherhood Cleric Calls for 'Gradualism' in Applying Shari’ah,” December 9, 2011. <http://www.investigativeproject.org/3336/muslim-brotherhood-cleric-calls-for-gradualism-in->

[for-gradualism-in-](http://www.investigativeproject.org/3336/muslim-brotherhood-cleric-calls-for-gradualism-in-)  
<sup>62</sup> Ryan Mauro, “The Islamists Multi-Staged Strategy for Victory Over the West,” January 21, 2013, <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/gradualism-islamist-strategy-victory/>; Onislam.net, “Gradualism in Applying the Shari’ah,” November 24, 2011, [http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/shariah-based-systems/judiciary-and-police-systems/169643-gradualism-in-applying-the-shariah.html?Police\\_Systems](http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/shariah-based-systems/judiciary-and-police-systems/169643-gradualism-in-applying-the-shariah.html?Police_Systems)

In his 1992 book *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, Larry Poston set out to study, as the subtitle of his work indicates, "Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam."<sup>63</sup> Poston describes the structures, development,<sup>64</sup> strategies and methodologies<sup>65</sup> of "paramosque" institutions and Islamic centers in North America, distinguishing between indirect and direct da'wah. "Indirect da'wah" or "lifestyle evangelism" seeks to attract non-Muslims to Islam by means of the exemplary lifestyle of Muslims and verbal interaction with them, combined with the publication of Islamic literature and the establishment of Islamic educational institutions.<sup>66</sup> By contrast, "direct da'wah" consists in activist preaching and proselytism involving

the confrontation of non-Muslim individuals with specific precepts of the Islamic faith in the expectation that this information will evoke a decision on the part of those individuals either to submit (*aslama*) to Allah and the cause of Islam or to consciously and deliberately refuse to accede to Allah's demands (*kafara*).<sup>67</sup>

Methods of direct da'wah include but are not limited to establishing friendly contacts with and reaching out to individuals, churches, and public schools, inviting them to meetings, seminars and information sessions on Islamic topics, establishing small study circles in private homes, reaching out to young people via youth camps and summer schools, publishing and freely distributing Islamic literature including Qur'ans, disseminating information about Islam in prisons, and making effective use of the mass media.<sup>68</sup>

Many Muslim websites dedicated to da'wah offer free Islamic literature and resources, including "da'wah manuals" which explain in detail methods to convert unbelievers to Islam (often with an emphasis on persuading Christians) and eventually form them into dynamic and effective Muslim workers and leaders.<sup>69</sup> Poston has discerned in the writings of Muslim theorists and the programs of paramosque agencies three separate stages of growth and development for Muslim converts: the first stage involves the conversion of the non-Muslim to Islam; stage two aims at "the reinforcement, strengthening or deepening of Islam in the individual;" while stage three forms the Muslim into an active "Islamic Worker" or "*da'i*."<sup>70</sup>

At the same time, not a few mainstream Muslim organizations considered "moderate" by the American public have turned out to be stealthily pursuing radical agendas, quietly attempting to Islamize the United States by undermining national security, pushing for greater public

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<sup>63</sup> Larry Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West: Muslim Missionary Activity and the Dynamics of Conversion to Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, pp. 93-114.

<sup>65</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, pp. 115-134.

<sup>66</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, pp. 117-122.

<sup>67</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, p. 122.

<sup>68</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, pp. 125-130. For more on Muslim *da'wah* methods, see also "Dawah" and "Islamic Missionary Activity," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dawah>; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_missionary\\_activity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_missionary_activity)

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 2 below.

<sup>70</sup> Poston, *Islamic Da'wah in the West*, p. 132.



acceptance of Islamic practices, and silencing as much as possible any criticism of Islam.<sup>71</sup> Some have been found to have ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and other terrorist organizations. The most notorious example is the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), which offers “sensitivity training” to corporations, government officials and law enforcement officers to teach them how to interact with Muslims. While CAIR has officially condemned terrorism and religious extremism, in 2007 the Justice Department named CAIR an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation jihad funding case on behalf of the terror group Hamas.<sup>72</sup>

Stealth jihad is also actively at work in schools and educational institutions across the United States, where textbooks financed by Saudi Arabia are used to present a sanitized or glorified view of Islam which downplays or dissimulates the history of violent jihad, all under the cover of “multiculturalism.”<sup>73</sup>

An illustrative example of stealth jihad and *da’wah* at work can be found in a statement entitled “A Common Word between Us and You.”<sup>74</sup> This text is an open letter from Muslim leaders to Christian leaders, published on October 13, 2007, that has gained considerable attention in interreligious circles. In its introduction, “A Common Word” proposes that

Islam and Christianity share, at their cores, the twin ‘golden’ commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one’s neighbor. Based on this joint common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide. ACW was and is an extended global handshake of interreligious goodwill, friendship and fellowship and consequently of world peace.<sup>75</sup>

While this affirmation of the double commandment of loving God and neighbor is laudable, a closer look reveals that the title “A Common Word” comes from a rather polemical Qur’an verse that is cited at least five times in the document. Here is the full verse:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to A Common Word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (3:64)<sup>76</sup>

Thus the very title of this Muslim interfaith document and initiative, which professes to be “arguably the most influential interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians in history”<sup>77</sup> is

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<sup>71</sup> Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, p. 102; see below, appendix 1, for some of the main Muslim groups in North America.

<sup>72</sup> Josh Gerstein, “Islamic Groups Named in Hamas Funding Case,” *New York Sun*, June 4, 2007, as cited in Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, p. 105; Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>73</sup> Spencer, *Stealth Jihad*, p. 198-207.

<sup>74</sup> *A Common Word (Open Letter from Muslim to Christian Leaders)*. October 13, 2007.

<http://www.acommonword.com/>. The full document is available at <http://rissc.io/docs/20-acw/20-ACW-5.pdf> (accessed April 2015).

<sup>75</sup> ACW, p. 7.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted in ACW, pp. 21, 40, 54, 69, 72.

<sup>77</sup> ACW, p. 9.



in fact a not-so-subtle rejection of the claims of Christianity, in which Jesus is considered to be a “partner” of God. The exhortation that “we shall ascribe no partner unto [God], and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God” along with the Islamic professions of faith—the *Shahadah* (“There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”), is repeated no less than 16 times throughout the 20-page document.

### ***Da’wah’s* Successes: Conversions to Islam**

The success of the Muslim *da’wah* project is demonstrated in the growing number of conversions to Islam in countries worldwide, including Western nations like the U.S. Soeren Kern estimates that recent Muslim converts in Britain now exceed 100,000; in France, there are some 70,000; in Spain, at least 50,000; in Germany, 20,000.<sup>78</sup> Though it is difficult to obtain precise numbers, observers who monitor Europe’s Muslim population estimate that “several thousand men and women convert each year.”<sup>79</sup>

Why are so many men and women converting to Islam? Many are reacting against the decadence of Western society. Others find Islam attractive because it brings order to their lives, providing “a complete plan for life in contrast to the ruleless and clueless life offered by secular society.”<sup>80</sup> Kilpatrick notes that Muslim converts often experience Islam as bringing “peace,” “order,” “discipline,” and a way of life that they were not able to find in Christianity and other religions. Others point to the simplicity of Islamic faith in contrast to the complexity of Christian doctrine. For example, Mary Fallot, a young French convert, liked the way

Islam demands a closeness to God. Islam is simpler, more rigorous, and it's easier because it is explicit. I was looking for a framework; man needs rules and behavior to follow. Christianity did not give me the same reference points.<sup>81</sup>

The increasing number of conversions from Christianity to Islam in the West raises some serious questions about the wisdom of the current Catholic approach to dialogue with Muslims and the Islamic world.

### **Questioning the Catholic Approach to Dialogue with Islam**

This brief overview of the relationship between Christianity and Islam in the West in recent years reveals a wide gap between each religion’s approach to interreligious relations. While the conciliatory Catholic approach of respectful dialogue with Muslims shuns all forms of evangelism, many Muslim individuals and institutions pursue covert agendas behind a façade of

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<sup>78</sup> Soeren Kern, “Europeans Increasingly Converting to Islam,” Gatestone Institute, January 27, 2012, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/2790/europeans-converting-to-islam> (accessed May 7, 2015); as cited in Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Ford, “Why European Women are Turning to Islam,” Christian Science Monitor, December 27, 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1227/p01s04-woeu.html> (accessed May 7, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 26.

<sup>81</sup> Peter Ford, “Why European Women are Turning to Islam.”

friendly dialogue to advance the cause of Islam by means of aggressive, sophisticated and multi-pronged *da'wah* networks. As Kilpatrick warns, there is a real danger that "Christians in their naïveté and in their desire to be thought tolerant, may inadvertently pave the way for an eventual Islamic theocracy in the West."<sup>82</sup>

A few prominent voices have raised vigorous objections to the current Catholic approach of tolerant dialogue towards Islam. It is worth mentioning two such voices. The first is Egyptian-born Italian journalist, author and politician Magdi Cristiano Allam. Born and raised in a Muslim family in Cairo, Allam was sent to a Catholic boarding school in Egypt and then to the Salesians of Don Bosco, where he was first exposed to Western culture and values. Allam moved to Italy in 1972 and became an Italian citizen in 1986. At that time, he went through a period of atheism which he claims was nevertheless "founded on absolute and universal values." For years he denounced Islamic extremism and terrorism and called for a "moderate Islam." However, he eventually became convinced that by nature Islam cannot be "moderate," for "the root of evil is inherent in an Islam that is physiologically violent and historically conflictive."<sup>83</sup> As Allam became more critical of Islam, he was increasingly drawn to the person of Jesus and to Christianity. In a widely publicized event, Allam was baptized and received into the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XVI on the Easter Vigil of March 23, 2008. In recounting his conversion, Allam drew a sharp contrast between the Islamic faith he renounced and the Christianity he now embraced:

The miracle of Christ's resurrection reverberated through my soul, liberating it from the darkness in which the preaching of hatred and intolerance in the face of the "different," uncritically condemned as "enemy," were privileged over love and respect of "neighbor"... thus, as my mind was freed from the obscurantism of an ideology that legitimates lies and deception, violent death that leads to murder and suicide, the blind submission to tyranny, I was able to adhere to the authentic religion of truth, of life and of freedom.<sup>84</sup>

At the time of his conversion, Allam praised Benedict XVI for his "courage and historical gesture," while forcefully advocating for a more concerted action on the part of the Church to evangelize Muslims:

His Holiness has sent an explicit and revolutionary message to a Church that until now has been too prudent in the conversion of Muslims, abstaining from proselytizing in majority Muslim countries and keeping quiet about the reality of converts in Christian countries. Out of fear. The fear of not being able to protect converts in the face of their being condemned to death for apostasy and fear of reprisals against Christians living in

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<sup>82</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 94.

<sup>83</sup> "Magdi Allam Recounts His Path to Conversion," <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/magdi-allam-recounts-his-path-to-conversion> (accessed May 6, 2015), cited in Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 26.

<sup>84</sup> "Magdi Allam Recounts His Path to Conversion"

Islamic countries. Well, today Benedict XVI, with his witness, tells us that we must overcome fear and not be afraid to affirm the truth of Jesus even with Muslims.<sup>85</sup>

As Asia Times commentator David P. Goldman notes, whereas “the would-be wizards of Western strategy have tried to conjure an ‘Islamic reformation’, or a ‘moderate Islam’, or ‘Islamic democracy,’” former Muslim Magdi Allam is strongly convinced that “the matter on the agenda is not to persuade Muslims to act like liberal Westerners, but instead to convince them to cease to be Muslims.”<sup>86</sup>

Following his conversion, Allam increasingly objected to the Church’s conciliatory approach to Islam, even telling Pope Benedict in an open letter that “Islam is not an intrinsically good religion.”<sup>87</sup> Allam shocked and disappointed many when he announced only five years after his baptism that he was abandoning the Catholic Church (though remaining a Christian), in large part to protest her “soft stance on Islam.” Allam perceived in the Church a certain “religious relativism, in particular the legitimization of Islam as a true religion, of Allah as true God, of Muhammad as true prophet, of the Qur’an as sacred text, of mosques as places of worship.”<sup>88</sup> Convinced that Islam is an “intrinsically violent ideology” he warned in a statement published by *Il Giornale* that “Europe will end up being subjugated to Islam”

unless it “finds the courage to denounce Islam as incompatible with our civilization and fundamental human rights,” and to “banish the Quran for inciting hatred, violence and death towards non-Muslims.” Europeans also need to “condemn Sharia as a crime against humanity” and to “stop the spread of mosques.”<sup>89</sup>

In an open letter to Pope Francis, Allam explained that the first reason for his decision was the “dictatorship of relativism” that, although decried by Benedict XVI, continues to affect the Church. Allam critiqued

religious relativism, and specifically [equating] Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, conceived as the ‘the three great monotheistic, revealed, Abrahamic religions of the book,’ resulting in the legitimization of Islam and consequently the de-legitimization of Christianity.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “Magdi Allam Recounts His Path to Conversion”

<sup>86</sup> David P. Goldman writes under the pseudonym Spengler, “The Mustard Seed in Global Strategy,” Asia Times, Mar 26, 2008, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\\_Page/JC26Aa01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front_Page/JC26Aa01.html) (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>87</sup> “Muslim convert to Catholicism tells pope Islam is not inherently good,” Catholic News Service, October 29, 2008, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0805500.htm> (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>88</sup> “Magdi Allam, Muslim Convert, Leaves Catholic Church, Says It’s Too Weak Against Islam,” Huffington Post, Marcy 25, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/25/magdi-allam-muslim-convert-leaves-catholic-church\\_n\\_2950937.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/25/magdi-allam-muslim-convert-leaves-catholic-church_n_2950937.html) (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>89</sup> “Magdi Allam, Muslim Convert, Leaves Catholic Church”; “Perché me ne vado da questa Chiesa debole con l’Islam,” *Il Giornale*, March 25, 2013, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/bersani-ora-basta-899699.html> (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>90</sup> “Magdi Allam’s open letter to Pope Francis,” Catholic World Report, April 8, 2013, [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/2168/Magdi\\_Allams\\_open\\_letter\\_to\\_Pope\\_Francis.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/2168/Magdi_Allams_open_letter_to_Pope_Francis.aspx) (accessed May

A second critique of the Catholic-Muslim dialogue comes from another Egyptian, Jesuit and Islamologist Fr. Samir Khalil Samir. Samir commented in December 2013 on the guidelines for dialogue with Islam proposed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Alongside some “important and interesting points,” Samir diplomatically noted “some more critical and problematic aspects of the relationship with Islam” that either “require clarification” or are “more delicate.” Among the former, Samir advised caution concerning the claims that (1) Muslims “together with us adore the one, merciful God” (for the mercy of God in Islam means something quite different than the mercy of God in Christianity); that (2) they “have retained some Christian teachings” (but the Koran is also inspired by pious tales of the apocryphal gospels that fail to communicate the overall vision of the Christian message); and that (3) “Jesus and Mary are the object of veneration” (whereas Jesus is, in fact, not an object of veneration in the Muslim tradition and the Jesus of the Koran is “the exact opposite of Christian teachings”).<sup>91</sup> Lastly, (4), “all the Christian dogmas are rejected by the Koran and Islam” – including the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, his Incarnation and the Redemption that He brought to the world.<sup>92</sup>

Among the “more delicate” points of the Catholic-Muslim dialogue, Samir mentions the great difference between Muslim and Christian ethics (Muslim ethics are not always universal, and tend to be linked to legality).<sup>93</sup> He also objects to a generic grouping of all fundamentalisms (Christian fundamentalists do not generally commit acts of violence with weapons). Finally, Samir thinks that Pope Francis’ benevolent statement that “true Islam and the proper interpretation of the Koran oppose all violence” expresses “more a wish than a reality” because there is, in fact, violence in the Koran.<sup>94</sup>

These words of caution notwithstanding, Samir explains in an interview with *Zenit* that he sees the growing presence of Muslims in Europe and in the West as an opportunity to lead them to

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6, 2015); “Bergoglio non mi fa ritirare le dimissioni da cristiano,” *Il Giornale*, March 31, 2013, <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/interni/bergoglio-non-mi-fa-ritirare-dimissioni-cristiano-901680.html> (accessed May 6, 2015); Andrew Bostom, “Magdi Allam Leaves Catholic Church Over Its Dhimmitude,” *American Thinker*, March 25, 2013, [http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2013/03/magdi\\_allam\\_leaves\\_catholic\\_church\\_over\\_its\\_dhimmitude.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2013/03/magdi_allam_leaves_catholic_church_over_its_dhimmitude.html) (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> Kilpatrick notes that Jesus speaks on only about six occasions, and then “very briefly and primarily to deny that he ever claimed to be God.” “The Jesus of the Koran seems to be there for one purpose: to discredit the claims of Christianity in favor of Islam’s.” Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 116-17; cf. also pp. 132-33.

<sup>92</sup> As positive points of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Samir notes the importance of truth and love in dialogue (EG 250), the relationship between dialogue and proclamation (EG 251), and the importance of welcoming immigrants – both Muslims in Christian countries and Christians in Muslim countries. Samir Khalil Samir, “Pope Francis and his invitation to dialogue with Islam,” *Asia News*, December 19, 2013, <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-Francis-and-his-invitation-to-dialogue-with-Islam-29858.html> (accessed May 6, 2015); Sandro Magister, “Islam and Christianity. Where Dialogue Stumbles,” December 30, 2013, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1350689?eng=y> (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>93</sup> On the differences between Christian and Muslim morality, cf. Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 142-44.

<sup>94</sup> Samir Khalil Samir, “Pope Francis and his invitation to dialogue with Islam.”

Jesus Christ. But he is troubled that so few Christians seem interested in taking up the challenge:

The fact that Muslims are in North America and Europe means that they are my neighbors. They can find a Bible and open it, and find Jesus Christ. They can enter into a church; they can participate in prayer with us. The tragedy is when they don't find the real Christian who will help them there. In the past, we went over the ocean to convert Muslims and maybe it was almost impossible. Now the Muslim is in my country, my neighbor, and we don't do anything. This is for me a pity. After all of our efforts for centuries to reach the Muslims, God has sent us Muslims at home and we pass up the opportunity of sharing the most beautiful reality we have, Christ and the Gospel. The presence of Muslims in the West is the greatest benediction we could hope for. The question is whether we will open our heart and receive them as our brothers.<sup>95</sup>

### **Evangelizing Muslims: Mission Impossible?**

Allam and Samir agree that the authentic Christian response to the spread of Islam in the West is the evangelization of Muslims. Kilpatrick concurs, arguing that Islamic jihadism cannot be resisted merely on the basis of secular Enlightenment values.<sup>96</sup> Hence non-religious critics of Islam such as Oriana Fallaci, Ibn Warraq, Wafa Sultan, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Melanie Phillips, Mark Steyn and Pamela Geller, despite their courage and tenacity, have in reality little to propose as a viable alternative to Islam: they lack something that is able to give ultimate meaning to the human person. David P. Goldman poignantly asks: "Why would Muslims trade the spiritual vacuum of Islam for the spiritual sewer of Dutch hedonism?"<sup>97</sup> Raymond Ibrahim makes the same point:

Many Western critics fail to appreciate that, to disempower radical Islam, something theocentric and spiritually satisfying — not secularism, democracy, capitalism, materialism, feminism, etc. — must be offered in its place. The truths of one religion can only be challenged and supplanted by the truths of another.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, even prominent Christian activists such as Robert Spencer, Walid Shoebat, Brigitte Gabriel, and Nonie Darwish largely focus their work on critiquing Islam and warning the West against it, spending more time and energy on exposing the problem rather than inviting Muslims to embrace the solution proposed by Allam and Samir.

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<sup>95</sup> Fr. Samir Khalil Samir, "Middle Eastern Priest Explains Islam," Zenit, March 4, 2009, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/middle-eastern-priest-explains-islam-part-2> (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>96</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, p. 53-55.

<sup>97</sup> Spengler, "The Mustard Seed in Global Strategy."

<sup>98</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, "Islam's 'Public Enemy #1'", National Review, March 25, 2008, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/223965/islams-public-enemy-1-raymond-ibrahim> (accessed May 8, 2015).

Goldman wrote candidly in 2005: “Now that everyone is talking about Europe's demographic death, it is time to point out that there exists a way out: convert European Muslims to Christianity.”<sup>99</sup>

Is this task a *mission impossible*? Kilpatrick thinks not. He argues that despite its apparent strength, power and momentum, Islam is intellectually and theologically a “house of cards,” a whole edifice that ultimately “rests on the testimony of one man” and a religion that cannot stand up to a close examination.<sup>100</sup> “Jihad is fueled by faith, but that faith rests on a surprisingly flimsy foundation.” If the West hopes to survive, it must “expose the lies upon which Islam is built” and “discredit Islam’s theological underpinnings.” Islam must be challenged, and yet this challenge “must be coupled with a positive presentation of the Christian faith.”<sup>101</sup>

Kilpatrick laments the fact that although the average Muslim knows very little about Christianity, Christian churches do equally little to fill in the picture for them. If this is understandable for Middle East Christians, whose lives are potentially at risk, apathy is not only inexcusable but also dangerous on the part of Christians in the West, who still have the freedom to evangelize. Kilpatrick warns that a lack of Christian conviction is at risk of communicating a “dhimmi posture,” that is, “a tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of Islam and of its right to rule over others.”<sup>102</sup>

In an enlightening article on the topic of the evangelization of Muslims, Gabriel Said Reynolds notes that most conversions from Islam to Christianity—in the past and present—have taken place outside the Islamic world. This confirms the extent of the opportunity to reach out to Muslims in the West, who long for truth and love and may be more open to the Gospel than we think. Reynolds remarks, however, that the Catholic Church “has barely been heard from on questions of Muslim evangelism”—though this is “evidently a posture taken for pastoral, not dogmatic, reasons.”<sup>103</sup>

There are in fact numerous evangelistic apostolates to Muslims—although to find them we must look beyond the confines of the Catholic Church.<sup>104</sup> One is particularly worthy of mention: perhaps the most formidable challenger to Islam in the past few decades has been Fr. Zakariah Botros, a native Egyptian Coptic priest who now lives in an undisclosed location in the United States. Already in the 1960s Fr. Zakariah wrote some evangelistic booklets for Muslims and engaged in dialogue with Muslim religious leaders in Egypt. According to his website, “by 1989 Father Zakariah had baptized over five hundred men and women.”<sup>105</sup> In May 2000, he expanded

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<sup>99</sup> Spengler, “The Crescent and the Conclave,” *Asia Times*, April 19, 2005, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front\\_Page/GD19Aa01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Front_Page/GD19Aa01.html) (accessed May 7, 2015)

<sup>100</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 13; 261-62

<sup>101</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 210, 215, 217.

<sup>102</sup> Kilpatrick, *Christianity, Islam and Atheism*, pp. 217-18.

<sup>103</sup> Gabriel Said Reynolds, “Evangelizing Islam,” *First Things*, January 2011, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/01/evangelizing-islam> (accessed May 6, 2015).

<sup>104</sup> See Appendix 3 for a sample of Christian evangelistic apostolates to Muslims.

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.fatherzakaria.net/>

his ministry via the internet-based Paltalk, reaching out to thousands of Muslims from different countries around the world. His outreach continued to grow in 2003 through his program *Questions Concerning Faith*, broadcast on *Al Hayat* Television.

Fr. Zakariah's ministry has led to mass Muslim conversions to Christianity. He has been so effective that he was named "Islam's Public Enemy #1" by the Islamic newspaper *al-Insan al-Jadid*. An Al-Qaida website named him one of the "most wanted infidels in the world," and a \$60 million bounty was allegedly put on his head.<sup>106</sup> What is the key to his success? Apart from his effective use of the media, his mastery of Arabic and Islamic literature, and his irrefutable polemical technique which raises hard questions about Islam rather than attack it, Raymond Ibrahim explains it as follows:

The ultimate reason for Botros's success is that — unlike his Western counterparts who criticize Islam from a political standpoint — his primary interest is the salvation of souls. He often begins and concludes his programs by stating that he loves all Muslims as fellow humans and wants to steer them away from falsehood to Truth. To that end, he doesn't just expose troubling aspects of Islam. Before concluding every program, he quotes pertinent biblical verses and invites all his viewers to come to Christ.<sup>107</sup>

Botros doesn't mince words about Islam, which he considers to be "by far the falsest religion," and about Muhammad, whose greatest crime "which he shall surely never be forgiven for—is that he denied the grace and mercy that Christ brought, and took humanity back to the age of the law." At the same time, Botros makes a clear distinction between the religion and its adherents:

Inasmuch as I may reject Islam, I love Muslims. Thus, to save the latter, I have no choice but to expose the former for the false religion it is. Christ commanded us to spread the Good News. There is no rule that says Christians should proselytize the world—except for Muslims!<sup>108</sup>

Botros is not alone. In recent years, a considerable number of books have been written on the topic of the evangelization of Muslims—most penned by evangelical Christians active in the mission field, and almost none by Catholics. Among this body of literature, one finds numerous testimonial accounts of Muslim converts.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibrahim, "Islam's 'Public Enemy #1'"; Ibrahim, "Al Qaeda declares Coptic priest Zakaria Botros 'one of the most wanted infidels in the world,'" Jihad Watch, September 10, 2008, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2008/09/al-qaeda-declares-coptic-priest-zakaria-botros-one-of-the-most-wanted-infidels-in-the-world> (accessed May 8, 2015).

<sup>107</sup> Raymond Ibrahim, "Islam's 'Public Enemy #1'"; see also Ibrahim, "Zakaria Botros: Islam's Scourge Returns," Frontpage Mag, July 8, 2011, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/2011/raymond-ibrahim/zakaria-botros-islam%E2%80%99s-scourge-returns/> (accessed May 8, 2015).

<sup>108</sup> "More Imams Convert To Christ," Journey to Orthodoxy, April 13, 2013, <http://journeytoorthodoxy.com/2013/04/13/more-imams-convert-to-christ/> (accessed May 8, 2015); see also "Coptic Priest Fearlessly Spreading God's Word" (video), CBN, <http://www.cbn.com/tv/1418777139001> (accessed May 8, 2015).

<sup>109</sup> Though a survey of these accounts is beyond the scope of this article, a partial list is provided in Appendix 4.



## Muslims Encounter Jesus Christ

While an increasing number of Westerners are converting to Islam every year, disillusioned by the emptiness of secularism and unattracted by a weak Christianity, it is also true that many Muslims are encountering Jesus Christ and converting to Christianity. In an interview with *Al-Jazeera*, Sheikh Ahmad Al Katani stated that in every hour, 667 Muslims convert to Christianity – that’s 16,000 conversions a day and 6 million a year. Though these numbers are impossible to verify, numerous sources document massive conversions of Muslims to Christianity in the Islamic world—and not a few in West as well.<sup>110</sup> Missionaries working in the field believe that we are in the midst of the greatest potential turning of Muslims to Christ in history (though it appears that the majority of these conversions occur in evangelical communities). This is the view of Southern Baptist missionary and scholar David Garrison, who traveled a quarter-million miles across the Muslim world collecting interviews from former Muslims who found salvation in Christ.<sup>111</sup> In his book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, Garrison estimates that between two and seven million former Muslims have converted to Christianity in the past two decades, documenting his claim with evidence for some sixty-nine twenty-first century movements of at least one thousand converts or one hundred churches each, spread throughout the Muslim world from West Africa to Indonesia.<sup>112</sup> Another missionary and pastor who served for years among Muslims in Africa, Jerry Trousdale, also sees miraculous movements of the Holy Spirit sweeping over the Muslim world today, with hundreds of thousands of Muslims turning their lives over to Jesus, and this despite the severe hardships and persecutions that await those who turn from Islam to Christianity.<sup>113</sup>

Why do Muslims convert to Christianity? Though a detailed study of this question is beyond the scope of this article, I would like to conclude with a brief review of some key factors at work in the conversion of Muslims as identified by missionaries working in the field. Garrison has noted ten “bridges of God” that have been instrumental in leading Muslims to Christ:<sup>114</sup>

- 1) Salvation only comes by grace through *faith* (Eph. 2:8), that is, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), and the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who *believes* (Rom. 1:16). The heroic faith of many missionaries and evangelists, willing to take on great risks and sacrifices to obey the

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<sup>110</sup> “Six Million African Muslims Convert to Christianity Each Year,” *Orthodoxy Today*, May 6, 2006, <http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles6/AlJazeeraAfrica.php> (accessed May 8, 2015); “Al-Jazeera: 6 Million Muslims convert to Christianity in Africa each year,” *Muslim Statistics*, December 4, 2012, <https://muslimstatistics.wordpress.com/2012/12/14/al-jazeera-6-million-muslims-convert-to-christianity-in-africa-each-year/> (accessed May 8, 2015).

<sup>111</sup> <http://windinthehouse.org/services-view/preorder/>

<sup>112</sup> David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, loc. 110; Warren Cole Smith, “The rising tide of Muslim converts to Christianity,” *Worldmag.com*, July 28, 2014, [http://www.worldmag.com/2014/07/the\\_rising\\_tide\\_of\\_muslim\\_convert\\_to\\_christianity/page1](http://www.worldmag.com/2014/07/the_rising_tide_of_muslim_convert_to_christianity/page1) (accessed May 8, 2015).

<sup>113</sup> Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), pp. 12, 24-25.

<sup>114</sup> Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, chapter 14 (loc. 3388-3550).



Great Commission and go share the Gospel with their Muslim neighbors, confident that the Lord is always with them in this mission (Matt. 28:19-20), has been a key in leading Muslims to Christ. Equally significant is the faith of those Muslims who put their lives at stake in accepting the Gospel and following Christ, aware that they have found the “pearl of great price” for which it is worth forsaking everything else (Matt. 13:46).

- 2) Faith is often born out of intercessory *prayer*—the intercessory prayer of missionaries for the salvation of Muslims, who ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers (Matt. 9:37-38; Luke 10:2) and pray “that the sharing of [their] faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing... for the sake of Christ” (Phlm. 1:6). Also significant is the earnest prayer of Muslims who have prayed to Allah to reveal to them the truth, for “the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).<sup>115</sup>
- 3) *Scripture* has been a key to Muslims encountering Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1:14) in whom all Scripture is fulfilled (Luke 24:44), for “the word of God is living and active” (Heb. 4:12), “inspired by God for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).
- 4) The supernatural activity of the *Holy Spirit* is revealing Christ to many Muslims (Acts 10:44-45), convicting them “of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8) through dreams and visions (Acts 2:17), answered prayers (Ps. 118:5), and signs and wonders (Acts 2:43), revealing that the salvation of Muslims is not the work of man but of God.<sup>116</sup>
- 5) *Faithful Christian witnesses* (Heb. 12:1) have had a considerable impact in revealing Christ to Muslims (2 Cor. 5:20) by their example of holiness, compassion, charity and genuine friendship (John 13:35), which are essential to touch a Muslim’s heart for the Gospel.<sup>117</sup>
- 6) Learning from the *Body of Christ*: mission can only be truly successful when carried out in communion with the universal Church, in which the various gifts are exercised for the building of the whole Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-13), and for the sake of leading converts into this communion.
- 7) *Communication and contextualization* (inculturation) implies the transmission of the fullness of the Gospel message and deposit of faith (2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2), while adapting and “packaging” it appropriately so that it may be received as easily as possible by the culture that is being evangelized (1 Cor. 9:19-23).
- 8) *Personal discovery*: like anyone else, Muslims don’t like to be told they are wrong, or that truth is something other than what they have always believed. But when they discover Christ for themselves and “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8), they passionately accept him and follow him.
- 9) *Islam itself* is often its own worst enemy: it offers no assurance of salvation; it reveals an aloof, distant God and a prophet of questionable morality; and it all too frequently produces fruits of violence, domination and oppression, resulting in a climate of widespread disillusionment and discouragement among Muslims. By contrast, Muslims

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<sup>115</sup> On the importance of prayer as the driving force of Muslim conversions, see Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 3 (pp. 47-65)

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 8 (pp. 127-139).

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 5 (pp. 83-96).

find in the Bible a God whom they can call “Father” (Matt. 6:9), who has loved us to the point of becoming man (John 3:16), and who dwells in us in the person of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). The God of the Bible offers the assurance, intimacy, love and freedom that every Muslim longs for.<sup>118</sup>

- 10) *Indigenization* occurs when those who are evangelized decide to become disciples, follow Christ and obey him of their own accord (Matt. 28:20) – for love is expressed by keeping God’s commandments, which in turn invites the Lord to dwell in his disciples (John 14:15-26). “Knowledge alone never produces spiritual growth and maturity because it doesn’t transform life. Obedient discipleship does.”<sup>119</sup>

The evangelization of Muslims has not been carried out in vain. Both missionaries and converts have much to say about the marvelous fruit that is seen when individuals and communities turn to Christ and become his disciples. Among these, Trousdale mentions healed families, a spirit of freedom and love, diminished violence, fewer addictions, redemption and hope, evidences of divine favor, grace in persecution, freedom from demonic oppression, and the presence of God in the power of prayer.<sup>120</sup>

In light of these ten factors, which have contributed to the conversion of many Muslims, Garrison proposes five practical steps that any Christian believer could take in order to participate in God’s redemptive activity among the followers of Islam:<sup>121</sup>

- 1) *Pray for Muslims* and for their salvation. St. James warns his readers: “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2). Catholics cannot expect to have any impact on the conversion of Muslims if this intention doesn’t become a priority in both the individual and corporate prayer life of the Church.
- 2) *Support outreach and ministries to Muslims*: God will multiply what we invest for the kingdom of God. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” (2 Cor. 9:6)
- 3) *Go to Muslims*: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14-15)
- 4) *Minister to Muslims in your own community*: thousands of Muslims have immigrated and settled in our own cities and neighborhoods. Are we making the best of this opportunity to befriend them, love them, and be living witnesses of our faith to them? (Acts 4:33)
- 5) *Share the Gospel with Muslims*: “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Pet. 3:15)

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 4 (pp. 67-81).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 4 (pp. 99-105).

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements*, chapter 6 (pp. 124-26).

<sup>121</sup> Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam*, chapter 15 (loc. 3669-3721).

## Summary and Conclusion

Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world today, and an increasing demographic challenge in most Western nations. Since Vatican II, the Church has reversed its traditionally polemical approach towards Islam and replaced it with an attitude of respectful dialogue that has largely shunned any attempts at evangelizing Muslims. By contrast, Islamic theology and eschatology, as taught in Islamic sacred texts, view Christianity and the West as “infidel lands” that are ultimately to be subjugated under Muslim rule. This worldview provides the ideological framework for the strategy of “stealth jihad,” by which Muslims are to infiltrate the West and gradually Islamize it by means of a full-scale “cultural invasion” in the form of various *da’wah* outreach projects. In this light, the wisdom of the current “soft” Catholic approach to dialogue with Islam is questionable, because it has resulted in a strongly asymmetrical relationship: while Catholic statements on Islam are often limited to self-evident, politically correct truisms, many Muslim individuals and organizations have taken advantage of this uneven approach to advance their agendas for the conversion of Christians and the islamization of the West. In light of the rapid growth of Islam and its agenda to conquer the soul of the West, can Catholics afford to continue neglecting the evangelization of Muslims? Pundits such as Magdi Allam, Samir Khalil Samir, and Zakaria Botros are calling for a more concerted effort to lead Muslims to Christ, and perhaps the time has come to heed their voices. The evangelization of Muslims is not a easy task, but neither is it an impossible one, as seen in the many stories of Muslims who have encountered Jesus Christ through the work of Botros and other (mostly evangelical) missionary outreaches. Many Muslims thirst for the Truth—a truth they are unable to find in Islam—and for a living encounter with the God who is Love. Perhaps it is time to rethink the Catholic approach to Islam in light of the demands of the Gospel and the Church’s missionary mandate, as expressed by Benedict XVI:

Love urges and “encourages Christian partners in dialogue with the followers of other religions to propose, but not impose, faith in Christ who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life.’” (John 14:16).<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Benedict XVI, address to participants in the tenth plenary assembly of the pontifical council for interreligious dialogue, June 7, 2008. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/interreligious/islam/vatican-council-and-papal-statements-on-islam.cfm>

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Some Major North-American Islamic Organizations

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)	<a href="http://www.cair.com/">http://www.cair.com/</a>
Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA)	<a href="http://www.icna.org/">http://www.icna.org/</a>
Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)	<a href="http://www.isna.net/">http://www.isna.net/</a>
Muslim American Society (MAS)	<a href="https://www.muslimamericansociety.org/">https://www.muslimamericansociety.org/</a>
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)	<a href="http://www.mpac.org/">http://www.mpac.org/</a>
Muslim Students Association (MSA)	<a href="http://msanational.org/">http://msanational.org/</a>
North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)	<a href="http://www.nait.net/">http://www.nait.net/</a>
US Council of Muslim Organizations (USCMO)	<a href="http://www.uscmo.org/">http://www.uscmo.org/</a>

### Appendix 2: Islamic Da'wah Websites and Resources

Al-Islam.org	<a href="http://www.al-islam.org/">http://www.al-islam.org/</a>
Audio Islam	<a href="http://www.audioislam.com/">http://www.audioislam.com/</a>
Bilal Philips	<a href="http://www.bilalphilips.com/">http://www.bilalphilips.com/</a>
Call to Islam	<a href="http://www.calltoislam.com/">http://www.calltoislam.com/</a>
Canadian Dawah Association	<a href="http://www.cdadawah.com/">http://www.cdadawah.com/</a>
Dawah in Americas	<a href="http://dawahinamericas.com/">http://dawahinamericas.com/</a>
Dawah is Easy	<a href="http://www.dawahiseasy.com/">http://www.dawahiseasy.com/</a>
Dawah Skills	<a href="http://www.dawahskills.com/">http://www.dawahskills.com/</a>
Dawah USA	<a href="http://www.dawahusa.com/">http://www.dawahusa.com/</a>
eMuslim	<a href="http://www.emuslim.com/">http://www.emuslim.com/</a>
Halal Tube	<a href="http://www.halaltube.com/">http://www.halaltube.com/</a>
Introduction to Islam	<a href="http://www.introductiontoislam.org/">http://www.introductiontoislam.org/</a>
Islam 101	<a href="http://islam101.net/">http://islam101.net/</a>
Islam Basics	<a href="http://www.islambasics.com/">http://www.islambasics.com/</a>
Islam Explained	<a href="http://www.islam-explained.info/">http://www.islam-explained.info/</a>
Islam Guide	<a href="http://www.islam-guide.com/">http://www.islam-guide.com/</a>
Islam Propagation Center International (Ahmed Deedat)	<a href="http://www.ipci.co.za/">http://www.ipci.co.za/</a>
Islam Question and Answer	<a href="http://www.islam-qa.com/">http://www.islam-qa.com/</a>
Islam Today	<a href="http://en.islamtoday.net/">http://en.islamtoday.net/</a>
Islam House	<a href="http://islamhouse.com/en/">http://islamhouse.com/en/</a>
Islamic Da'wah Center	<a href="http://islamicdawahcenter.org/">http://islamicdawahcenter.org/</a>
Islamic Education & Research Academy	<a href="http://www.iera.org/">http://www.iera.org/</a>
Islamic Information Center of North American	<a href="http://islamnorthamerica.com/">http://islamnorthamerica.com/</a>
IslamiCity	<a href="http://www.islamicity.com/">http://www.islamicity.com/</a>
IslamicLine.com	<a href="http://www.islamicline.com/">http://www.islamicline.com/</a>
IslamicWeb.com	<a href="http://islamicweb.com/">http://islamicweb.com/</a>
IslamWay.net	<a href="http://en.islamway.net/">http://en.islamway.net/</a>
IslamWeb.net	<a href="http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/">http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/</a>
Just Dawah	<a href="http://www.justdawah.org/">http://www.justdawah.org/</a>
Just Islam	<a href="http://justislam.org/">http://justislam.org/</a>
Just Muslim	<a href="http://www.justmuslim.org/">http://www.justmuslim.org/</a>
Mission Dawah	<a href="http://www.missiondawah.com/">http://www.missiondawah.com/</a>
Mission Islam	<a href="http://www.missionislam.com/">http://www.missionislam.com/</a>
Muslim Heritage	<a href="http://www.muslimheritage.com/">http://www.muslimheritage.com/</a>

On Islam	<a href="http://www.onislam.net/english/">http://www.onislam.net/english/</a>
Peace TV	<a href="http://www.peacetv.tv/">http://www.peacetv.tv/</a>
Prophet Muhammad	<a href="http://muhammad.net/">http://muhammad.net/</a>
SalafiManhaj	<a href="http://www.salafimanhaj.com/">http://www.salafimanhaj.com/</a>
Shabir Ally	<a href="http://islaminfo.com/">http://islaminfo.com/</a> <a href="http://www.quranspeaks.com/">http://www.quranspeaks.com/</a> <a href="http://www.shabirally.com/">http://www.shabirally.com/</a>
ShariahWay	<a href="http://www.shariahway.com/">http://www.shariahway.com/</a>
Sheikh Khalid Yasin	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/KhalidYasinOfficial">https://www.facebook.com/KhalidYasinOfficial</a>
SunnahOnline.com	<a href="http://sunnahonline.com/">http://sunnahonline.com/</a>
Teach Islam	<a href="http://www.teachislam.com/">http://www.teachislam.com/</a>
Tell Me About Islam	<a href="http://tellmeaboutislam.com/">http://tellmeaboutislam.com/</a>
The Dawah Project	<a href="http://www.thedawahproject.com/">http://www.thedawahproject.com/</a>
The Religion of Islam	<a href="http://www.islamreligion.com/">http://www.islamreligion.com/</a>
Tube Islam	<a href="http://www.tubeislam.com/">http://www.tubeislam.com/</a>
Understand Islam	<a href="http://understand-islam.net/site/">http://understand-islam.net/site/</a>
Why Islam?	<a href="http://www.whyislam.org/">http://www.whyislam.org/</a>
Yusuf Estes	<a href="http://godallah.com/">http://godallah.com/</a> <a href="http://islamcode.com/">http://islamcode.com/</a> <a href="http://islamtomorrow.com/">http://islamtomorrow.com/</a> <a href="http://prophetofislam.com/">http://prophetofislam.com/</a> <a href="http://shareislam.com/">http://shareislam.com/</a> <a href="http://watchislam.com/">http://watchislam.com/</a> <a href="http://whatsislam.com/">http://whatsislam.com/</a> <a href="http://www.99islam.com/">http://www.99islam.com/</a> <a href="http://www.allahsquran.com/">http://www.allahsquran.com/</a> <a href="http://www.hearislam.com/">http://www.hearislam.com/</a> <a href="http://www.islamalways.com/">http://www.islamalways.com/</a> <a href="http://www.islamyesterday.com/">http://www.islamyesterday.com/</a> <a href="http://www.justaskislam.com/">http://www.justaskislam.com/</a> <a href="http://www.linkstoislam.com/">http://www.linkstoislam.com/</a> <a href="http://www.searchforislam.com/">http://www.searchforislam.com/</a>

### Appendix 3: Some Christian Apostolates to Muslims

#### A) Primarily Religious (Evangelization/Apologetics)

Organization	Founder/Director	Website
Answering Islam		<a href="http://www.answering-islam.org/">http://www.answering-islam.org/</a>
Answering Muslims	David Wood	<a href="http://www.answeringmuslims.com/">http://www.answeringmuslims.com/</a>
Islam Explained	Brother Rachid	<a href="http://islamexplained.com/">http://islamexplained.com/</a>
Catholic Apologetics		<a href="http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/islam/">http://www.catholicapologetics.info/apologetics/islam/</a>
Global Faith Institute	Dr. Mark Christian	<a href="http://globalfaithinstitute.org/">http://globalfaithinstitute.org/</a>
Engaging with Islam		<a href="http://engagingwithislam.org/">http://engagingwithislam.org/</a>
Fr. Zakaria Botros	Fr. Zakaria Botros	<a href="http://www.fatherzakaria.net/">http://www.fatherzakaria.net/</a> <a href="http://islam-christianity.net/">http://islam-christianity.net/</a>
Gospel for Muslims		<a href="http://www.gospelformuslims.com/">http://www.gospelformuslims.com/</a>
Islam-Is-Dark		<a href="http://islam-is-dark.weebly.com/">http://islam-is-dark.weebly.com/</a>

#### B) Primarily Socio-Political (Anti-Jihad/Anti-Islam)

Organization	Founder/Director	Website
ACT for America	Brigitte Gabriel	<a href="https://www.actforamerica.org/">https://www.actforamerica.org/</a>
Atlas Shrugs	Pamela Geller	<a href="http://pamelageller.com/">http://pamelageller.com/</a>
Former Muslims United	Nonie Darwish	<a href="http://formermuslimsunity.org/">http://formermuslimsunity.org/</a>
Jihad Watch	Robert Spencer	<a href="http://www.jihadwatch.org/">http://www.jihadwatch.org/</a>
Raymond Ibrahim	Raymond Ibrahim	<a href="http://www.raymondibrahim.com/">http://www.raymondibrahim.com/</a>
Shoebat.com	Walid Shoebat	<a href="http://shoebat.com/">http://shoebat.com/</a>
The Religion of Peace	Anonymous	<a href="http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/">http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/</a>
Nonie Darwish	Nonie Darwish	<a href="http://nonie-darwish.blogspot.com/">http://nonie-darwish.blogspot.com/</a>
Islam Watch	Former Muslims	<a href="http://www.islam-watch.org/">http://www.islam-watch.org/</a>

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