

Muslims and America

Understanding the Muslim
perspective

Topics

- Difficulty
- Historical background
- Effects of recent foreign wars and terrorism
- The fundamentalist evangelist Christian attitude towards Islam and Muslims
- Freedom of religion, democracy, church vs. state etc.

Difficulty

- Situation today is an unholy mix of religion, politics, war, terrorism, nationalism etc.
- Difficult to isolate strands and understand what is primary vs. secondary
- IRA and Northern Ireland another example of a complex, long-running situation

Historical background

- Over 1.2 billion Muslims in world.
- Majority non-Arab, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria
- 85% Sunni, 10% Shia
- Estimated 4 – 6 million in US
- Majority immigrants, many African American
- Early 1900's – some Muslim sects established, but had heretical beliefs
- Nation of Islam (Farrakhan) beliefs were and are heretical

Historical background

- Only second time in about 1,400 years Muslims living in Christian countries as religious minorities
- Western Christian attitudes carried over from medieval times
- Muslim attitudes carried over from recent period of colonization
- Muslim attitudes due to recent foreign wars

Recent Foreign Wars

- US overthrew democratically elected govt. of Iran in 1953 and replaced it with a repressive monarchy (in the 20th century!)
- US supported Muslim Afghan Mujahideen against Russia in Afghanistan, then abandoned them
- No support for Muslim Bosnia during seven years of genocide and rape
- US one-sided support for Israel against Muslim Arab countries
- First Gulf War, invasion of Iraq, bases in Saudi Arabia
- Terrorist attacks on America 9/11, Embassies, USS Cole
- Invasion of Iraq

Effects on Muslim attitudes

- American foreign policy perceived as switching from anti-Communism to anti-Islam and pro-Israel
- Muslims regard American foreign policy, like the business policies, to be driven by lobbies and PACs of special interest groups, contrary to American values and not necessarily the will of or in the interest of the American people
- American foreign policy perceived as the opposite of the “beacon of freedom and democracy”
- Muslims do differentiate between American govt. and foreign policy and American people and American values
- Muslims ask, “Is America with us or against us?”

Effects on American attitudes

- Disbelief that anyone could so dislike America
- Question and doubts about Islam (jihad, infidels, terrorism, suicide bombers)
- Suspicions about fellow American Muslims
- Silver lining – noble reaction by many towards fellow citizens, reaching out
- Some still need to differentiate between terrorists and mainstream Muslims as they would KKK vs. mainstream Christians

Muslim perspective of fundamentalist evangelist Christian attitude

- “Conservative” churches and congregations don’t want to know anything different from what they already know
- Support for Jews and Israel based on interpretation of Second Coming of Jesus, even against fellow Christian Palestinians
- Seems to be a real fear of Islam’s appeal to Christians
- Willingness by Christian leaders to poison American minds against Islam and Muslims by misrepresentations, ignorance and misunderstandings
- Credence given to opinions of missionaries and anti-Islam Christian leaders, not to academics or Muslims
- No will or inclination to dialog or understand

Muslim perspective of fundamentalist evangelist Christian attitude

- Christian leaders strive to link Islam to terrorism by misrepresentation
- Muslims interpret anti-Islam rhetoric and polemics by Christian conservatives as proof of America's anti-Islam and anti-Muslim policy

Freedom of religion, democracy, church vs. state etc.

- There is no “Rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and rendering unto God what is God”. Caesar is subject to God and God’s laws, the state must conform to the religion. Religion is the basis for allegiance to the state.
- Islamic law provides for freedom of religion of minorities, other than conversion from Islam, while limiting political rights in certain aspects. Jews and Christians can follow own personal and family laws.

Freedom of religion, democracy, church vs. state etc.

- Islam has the principle of “shura” or consultation which is the basis for the Islamic form of democracy.
- A government or legislature in an Islamic state could not override the commandments of God. To put other laws above God’s is tantamount to idolatry.