Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Increasing numbers of Christians and Christian missiologists are now responding in the affirmative, especially as they seek amicable relations with Muslims. This article looks at this age-old question from the Islamic point of view, noting that Muslim scholars have not mirrored their Christian counterparts in moving toward theological reconciliation. Indeed, the foundational teachings and example of Muhammad restrict them from doing so, thus creating a dynamic of “one hand clapping” in interfaith discourse.

Two interfaith efforts initiated by Muslims themselves—the 2007 “A Common Word between Us and You,” and the 2016 “Marrakesh Declaration”—provide excellent data points for assessing Muslim sentiments regarding contemporary interfaith dialogue, in general, and the “Same God Question” (SGQ), in particular. These data points indicate that Muhammad’s non-inclusive, non-tolerant view toward other religions continues to influence his followers today.

Theological Reconciliation to Relational Reconciliation?
Theological movement of Christian scholars toward the Muslim position may not be fully and consciously based on theology, but on a desire for improved relations. Due to the centuries of hostility between Christians and Muslims, many peace-loving Christians would gladly trade much for peaceful coexistence—that elusive biblical shalom. This desire is not wrong. Yet, this desire, even if it is subconscious, cannot be realized through theological acquiescence.

The SGQ itself is most often rendered in a manner that elevates the human element and tends to produce a human-centered response. Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God? This often tends to breed more questions: Which Muslims? Which Christians? What is meant by worship? Perhaps a better question should have a more theological framework: Is the God presented in the Quran the same as the God presented in the Bible? I would suggest that another important question underlies the SGQ, and ultimately

continued on page 3
There is no denying that we live in an increasingly violent world. Attacks on places of worship—Christian, Muslim, and Jewish—and even armed attacks on schools and businesses are becoming more frequent. Just today the media was covering yet another school shooting, and the question being asked was, “Why?” As I thought about these events, the phrases “in the last days” and “the end times” filled my mind. In a fresh look at the New Testament, I noted three things that will be prominent in the “last days”: (1) The Holy Spirit will be poured out (Acts 2:17); (2) There will be times of difficulty (2 Tim. 3:1); and (3) Scoffers will increase as they follow their sinful desires and reject the return of Christ (2 Peter 3:3). Undeniably, we are seeing an unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit, coupled with a growing wave of persecution and martyrdom. And, right in line with the scriptural depiction of the last days, the voices of scoffers who reject the Bible and the truth about Jesus have never been louder.

Scripture indicates that “the end is near” or “at hand.” Romans 13:12 states, “The night is far gone; the day is at hand.” 1 Peter 4:7 says, “The end of all things is at hand.” James 5:8 could not be clearer: “The coming of the Lord is at hand.” We know that the rapture of the Church is the next great event on God’s calendar, and that it may take place at any time. As Spirit-filled believers, the “signs of the end times” and the promise of the rapture of the church should fill our hearts with confidence and faith. First, we are reminded that God will build His Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matt.16:18). Second, we believe that the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations—and then the end will come (Matt. 24:14). We also have concrete instructions that motivate us with a holy ambition to evangelize the world (especially Muslims) for Christ (Matt. 28:19).

The global persecution of Christians increases annually. Most of the persecution occurs in predominately Islamic contexts or comes from radical Islamic groups. Incredibly, however, Duane Miller and Patrick Johnstone report that the number of believers coming from Muslim backgrounds has grown from 200,000 in 1960 to an estimated 10 million today. In these “last days,” the Holy Spirit is drawing Muslims to Christ in ever-increasing numbers. Why is this happening? Miller and Johnstone offer the following reasons: (1) Intentional growth in intercessory prayer, (2) A bolder outreach to Muslims, (3) “Globalization” that has exposed Muslims to Christians and media, and (4) Social and political turmoil that has led many Muslims to question their faith in Islam. In these “last days,” please join with Global Initiative as we marshal intercessors and provide training to equip the Church to reach Muslims with the Good News about Jesus.

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

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requires a negative answer. This underlying question posits: “Since the Bible teaches that Jesus is God and since Islam teaches that Jesus is not God, how then is it possible that Christians and Muslims worship the same God?”

Evidence that Muslims are not Moving toward Christians on the SGQ

Muslims are not moving toward Christians on the SGQ, because to do so would require them to abandon the foundational tenet of Islam—Tawhid (Divine Unity). Further, any expansion of the Islamic view of the Godhead toward biblical Trinitarianism would undercut the prophethood of Muhammad and collapse the entire Islamic theological edifice. Muslims, in recognition of this reality, have refrained from theological reconciliation with Christians as it relates to the Godhead.

As a rule, Muslim scholars (the Ulama) take theology seriously. Their ranks include many prolific writers. While a wide-ranging theological survey exceeds the scope and space allowed by this format, several interfaith initiatives by teams of prominent Muslim scholars provide a good basis for analysis. These included the aforementioned “A Common Word between Us and You” initiative of 2007 and the “Marrakesh Declaration” of 2016.

“A Common Word between Us and You” (2007)

On October 13, 2007, 138 Muslim scholars presented the document, “A Common Word,” to the Christian world. The full document begins with an immediate affirmation of the non-negotiable prominence of Muhammad as the basis for belief in God:

The central creed of Islam consists of the testimonies of faith or Shahadahs, which state that: There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of God. These two Testimonies are the sine qua non (indispensable characteristics) of Islam. He or she who testifies to them is a Muslim; or he or she who denies them is not a Muslim.

The Common Word document purports to highlight values cherished by Muslims and Christians alike, such as love of God and love of neighbor. However, the Muslim scholars fail to even hold out an olive branch to their Christian counterparts regarding the SGQ. Instead, they immediately follow their initial insistence on acceptance of Muhammad with one of his hadith statements that Allah “has no associate,” a clear admonition against the belief in the Sonship of Christ and the Trinity. (These statements, which emphasize that Allah has no partner, serve a polemic purpose and, therefore, do not create an environment of mutual respect. A reciprocal introduction from Christians would be to preface an inter-faith document for Muslims with multiple verses regarding “false prophets.”)

The authors of “A Common Word” frame their appeal around the key quranic verse, Al-Imran, 3:64, from which the document gets its name:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him; and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

With the command “Come!” this verse clearly commands Christians to move away from their cherished and long-standing belief in the Trinity. The verse reiterates that Christians must ascribe no partners or associates to Allah. The word used in 3:64 for ascribing partners with Allah is a literal cognate of shirk, the unpardonable sin in Islam according to Sura 4:116. “A Common Word” finishes by again quoting Sura 3:64 and admonishing Christians not to attribute partners with Allah. The Muslim scholars conclude invitingly: “Let this common ground be the basis of all future interfaith dialogue between us.”

Throughout “A Common Word,” the Muslim scholars quote Bible verses that they reinterpret in a Unitarian fashion. Nowhere in the document do they affirm that the Trinitarian understanding of God is acceptable. In fact, they continually use the Islamic honorific, alaihi as-salaam (in Arabic script) after the name of Jesus Christ, to emphasize they are referring to the Islamic Jesus, who is neither Lord, God nor Savior. “A Common Word” therefore, serves primarily as a theological thumb in the eye to Christians.

Interestingly, “A Common Word” received immediate acclamation by a large number of Christian leaders, who responded with heartfelt appreciation the next month with the “Yale Response.” The “Yale Response” was ultimately signed by over 300 prominent Christians leaders, representing an embarrassing level of one-sided, self-abasement on the part of the Christian scholars. Their Preamble declares: continued on page 4
Muslims and Christians have not always shaken hands in friendship; their relations have sometimes been tense, even characterized by outright hostility. Since Jesus Christ says “First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye” (Matthew 7:5), we want to begin by acknowledging that in the past (e.g. in the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. in excesses of the “war on terror”) many Christians have been guilty of sinning against our Muslim neighbors. Before we “shake your hand” in responding to your letter, we ask forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and of the Muslim community around the world.

Based on this beginning, the Christian respondents indicate they seek amicable relations between Muslims and Christians. This conciliatory statement appears to overlook the fact that the Muslim authors of “A Common Word” had just taken Christians to the theological woodshed. The Yale Response makes no insistence that Muslims tolerate or co-exist with the Christian belief in biblical theology, including the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Muslim scholars utilized quranic material and co-opted biblical material to excoriate the biblical position, it is surprising the Christian scholars, who should know the Bible even if they may not be familiar with the Quran, failed to raise this objection.

Furthermore, neither “A Common Word” nor the Yale Response ever mentions the atrocities inflicted on Christians by Muslims over fourteen centuries. This reality cannot be overlooked if Christians and Muslims are indeed to proceed into an era of open and honest communication.

In summary, the Yale Response to “A Common Word” was written not in the spirit of Christian humility—but rather in the spirit of Islamically-ordained humiliation—known as Dhimmitude.

The “Marrakesh Declaration” on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Countries

The Muslim contributors to the 2016 “Marrakesh Declaration” obviously wanted to set themselves and their religion apart from the modern Jihadists who have carried the news headlines for years. They clearly wished to gain international goodwill by trying to project a more benevolent position toward non-Muslim minorities.

Importantly, however, the “Marrakesh Declaration” fails to ascribe any legitimacy to the worship of the biblical Triune God. This would seem to be a minimum standard of affirmation in protecting the rights of non-Muslim minorities. Furthermore, the Declaration makes no statement asserting that Muslims and Christians worship the same God.

Instead, the “Marrakesh Declaration” celebrates the example of Muhammad and the Charter of Medina, which he implemented during his rule over that city from AD 622-632. Use of the Charter of Medina as a paradigm proves problematic because this covenant was between the Muslims and only those who “followed them and joined them,
and labored with them.” The text of the Charter comes from Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat Rasul Allah (“The Life of the Prophet of Allah”), which is the basis for all later biographies of Muhammad. Though Alfred Guillaume translates the final clause above into English as “and labored with them,” the Arabic original is “wa jaahad ma’hum,” based on the verbal form of the noun “jihad.” W. M. Watt translates this Arabic clause “and who crusade along with them.” The Charter of Medina, therefore, establishes the political-military-religious Islamic state, upon which the now mostly defunct Islamic State in Iraq and Syria based its legitimacy. Ironically, Muslim scholars have historically advanced this same charter as a template for religious tolerance and co-existence.

The Charter did not ensure the rights of those who chose not to follow Muhammad and the Muslims. There were no Christians in Medina, but there were Jews. None of the three Jewish tribes in Medina ultimately chose to follow Muhammad—and thus accept Islam. According to Sura 33:21, Muhammad, the example for all Muslims, banished two of the Jewish tribes and exterminated the final one. Presently, no Jews live in Medina.

The Charter of Medina created the paradigm for the Dhimmī system of Sharia law, in which non-Muslim monotheists are systematically humiliated and strictly forbidden from sharing their faith with Muslims. The Dhimmī system fails to provide a reliable, protective umbrella for Christians or other religious minorities. Indeed, the Dhimmī system oversaw the slow asphyxiation of many Christian and Jewish communities living under Islam—some of which have been extinguished.

Despite this sobering picture, several Christians present at the 2016 Marrakesh proceedings responded with irresistible exultation. Nevertheless, the “Marrakesh Declaration” does nothing to move Muslim religious scholars toward their Christian counterparts on the SGQ. Neither does it affirm the right of Christian minorities to share their faith among their Muslim neighbors, nor does it safeguard former Muslims who have converted to Christ. Even the statements purporting to protect religious minorities from Islamic violence must be read with caution. This Declaration will not be followed by millions of Jihadists, since Sharia law does not unequivocally guarantee this protection.

In the case of both “A Common Word” and the “Marrakesh Declaration,” the Muslim scholars could not have substantially moved toward their Christian counterparts on the SGQ without being considered by other ulama as apostates—and threatened with expulsion from the faith of Islam. This same threat of excommunication, takfīr, will haunt any Muslim scholar from making substantive theological overtures toward biblical Trinitarianism. Indeed, Muhammad established the religion of Islam within these strictures.

The Quran gives God-fearing Christians the status of Ahl ul-Kitab (“People of the Book”) since they have believed in God and a bona fide prophet, Jesus. Islamic law sets the Ahl ul-Kitab above the atheists and idol-worshippers as those who must be killed if they resist Muslims by not submitting to Islam. This seeming conciliatory position of Islam toward Christians may engender hopes for eventual theological reconciliation. In its full context, however, this paradigm established by Muhammad should be considered as the co-opting of Jesus into the Islamic theological edifice and an invitation to Christians to embrace Islam and become Muslims.

**Muhammad Curses the Najrani Christians**

The encounter in Medina of the Najrani Christians with Muhammad provides a clear picture of Muhammad’s interaction with, and policy toward, Christians. As Muhammad and the Muslims gained political hegemony over Arabia, various tribes came to seek terms of peace with the Prophet of Islam. The town of Najran sent a Christian delegation to seek such a peace agreement. The Najranis, accompanied by their bishop, spent three days in theological discourse with Muhammad in Medina. This episode is referred to in Sura 3 (al-Imran). The Najrani Christians offered to pledge their political allegiance to Muhammad if he would embrace their belief in the divinity of Jesus. This Sura recounts their testimony to the Annunciation (3:42-4), the Virgin Birth (3:47), Jesus’ miracles (3:49, including some apocryphal miracles).

The qur’ānic narrative then markedly pivots to an antibiblical Christology in which Jesus denies his own Lordship (3:51). Jesus’ disciples then shockingly declare: “We have believed in Allah and testify we are Muslims” (3:52). Sura 3:57 establishes salvation by works, and also states that “Allah does not love those who do wrong,” another drastic departure from biblical theology. The Najrani episode concludes with Muhammad declaring that Jesus was no more the Son of God than was Adam, who also was created without a human father (3:59).

Because of this theological impasse, Muhammad insisted on a mutual cursing ceremony with the Najranis. The Najranis declined to curse Muhammad, but he gathered his daughter, Fatima, son-in-law, Ali, and two grandsons under...
his cloak, and cursed the Najranis. The incident is known in Islamic history as “The Cursing” (al-Mubahala) with Muhammad’s indictment stated in Sura 3:61: “May God’s curse be upon those who lie!” The qur'anic narrative ends here with: “This is the true account. There is no god but Allah ... If they turn back, Allah has full knowledge of those who do mischief” (3:62-63).

The next verse, Surah 3:64, is the “common word” verse in which Christians are called to repent of associating partners with Allah (i.e., worshipping Jesus) and return to Tawhid. Thus, Muhammad’s single notable encounter with a Christian community ended with him cursing that community because of their biblical beliefs regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the historical context surrounding the “common word” verse summons a narrative of Christians rejected by Muhammad and the early Muslims, rather than one of inter-communal harmony and mutual respect.

The Primacy of the Shahada Confession

Any person who wants to become a Muslim must declare the Shahada confession: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his apostle.” The Muslim authors of “A Common Word” featured the Shahada in their document. Inherent in Shahada is a denial (Arabic, nafy) as an affirmation (ithbat). The nafy denial is that “there is no god...”

Early Muslims could have originally simplified the Shahada to something like “The Supreme Being is Allah...” The fact that the followers of Muhammad felt the need to include a negating statement in the Shahada meant they specifically wanted to exclude from their faith community those who embrace the biblical teaching of plurality in the Godhead.

Confronting Muslim Scholars Regarding the “SGQ”

The above material indicates that Muhammad saw as a central part of this mission the demolition of the biblical belief regarding the Incarnation of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to advance the Islamic theological narrative, Muhammad shamefully transformed the real Jesus into a fictional character. First, in Sura 61:6, Jesus supposedly announces the coming of Muhammad. Then, in Suras 5:72 and 5:116, Muhammad relates that Jesus assured all who would listen that he (Jesus) never accepted worship from anyone.

Muslim scholars have long since been painted into a corner by Muhammad, who created a watertight monotheistic theology with no freedom to consider a plurality in the Godhead. Any deviation from absolute Tawhid can only trigger the echoing of Muhammad’s cursing of the Najranis through the fatwas (edicts) of his disciples today. Furthermore, Muslim scholars cannot directly contradict the prophet’s teaching, especially on such a foundational doctrine as the divine nature. Therefore, Muslim scholars cannot move theologically toward their Christian counterparts.

Even the moderate and conciliatory Muslim scholar Mahmoud Ayoub of Hartford Seminary resigns himself to this conclusion: “Muslims could not, in the Quran or later, understand or accept the idea that God could reveal himself in a human person, that is to say, Jesus Christ.”

Muslim scholars understand these things, yet their Christian counterparts seem largely unaware of the historical and theological boundaries within which scholars of Islam—regardless of sectarian affiliation—must operate. Should Muslims cross these boundaries, they become part of the growing population of ex-Muslims. Muhammad’s theological position closes the door on reconciling Islamic Unitarianism with biblical Trinitarianism. It is no surprise that Muslims are not moving toward Christians on the SGQ. The mutually exclusive positions of the Bible and the Quran on the identity of Jesus Christ rule out any rapprochement on the SGQ.

Conclusion: How the Triune God of the Bible is Drawing Muslims to Himself

The commonality between Muslims and Christians lies in their humanity, not their theology. In other words, all people are created equal, but not all religions are created equal. Muslims, like Christians and others, are sinners whom God loves equally and unconditionally. Muslims are not worse sinners than others. Neither are they under any curse that the blood of Christ is unable to cancel. While the Quran states in the “common word” passage, “Allah does not love those who do wrong” (Sura 3:57), the Bible states, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NASB).

Tragically, Muslims are taught from birth that God is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, the loving God of the Bible is even now wooing countless Muslims to himself. God’s activity is thus resulting in many of these precious souls leaving behind Islam, the affirmation of Muhammad as a prophet, and the deity he promoted. Duane Miller and Patrick Johnstone recently published a country-by-country report of believers in Christ from a Muslim background. They estimate there are 10.2 million of these believers. Truly these are astounding times for Christian missions! Christians can encourage the ongoing process of Muslims coming to Christ by minding well the guiding light of biblical orthodoxy.

*This article is an abridged version and originally appeared in Themelios, December 2016, and is used with permission.
Friday, July 5, 2019. Please pray for
…Fahd, a young Saudi who entered a Christian bookshop abroad and accepted Jesus after hearing the Scriptures read. He was discipled by a group of fellow Muslim background believers. Fahd has returned to Saudi and “longs for fellowship.”
…a “bookvan” ministry in a highly Islamic South Asian country. The danger from radical Muslims is escalating and the workers wonder what the future holds for them.
…persecuted Christians in Muslim countries. The World Watch List ranks the 50 nations where it is most difficult to follow Jesus. In 33 of these nations, Islam is the driving force of persecution.

Friday, July 12, 2019. Please pray for
…the Mahabba Network in Europe – that their message of loving all Muslims and sharing the gospel with them will spread throughout churches in Europe.
…radio broadcasts penetrating Somalia. A Muslim convert to Christ states, “I have introduced many people in three neighborhoods to the broadcast. They are listening and are very amazed.” Of Somalia’s population of 15 million, 99.6% are Muslim.
…protection for a former Muslim imam in Uganda. After becoming a follower of Christ, he is now a preacher of the gospel. He has been charged with “insulting the Quran.”

Friday, July 19, 2019. Please pray for
…freedom to distribute God’s Word. A recent study found that the number one factor in Muslims converting to Christ in North America was the Bible itself. A converted Muslim says, “Reading it was like being pulled into a powerful story. I could not put it down.”
…the Fulbe people of Ghana. Of Ghana’s population of 29 million, 4,700 are Muslim Fulbes.
…Ayesha, a Muslim lady in Iran. She suffered from paralysis, then heard a contraband CD entitled, “Jesus and His Healing Power.” After listening 10 times, she accepted Jesus and declared, “Immediately I was also healed. All glory to Jesus.”

Friday, July 26, 2019. Please pray for
…a movement of faith in Christ among Muslims in a large Middle Eastern city. In the past year, the number of Muslim-background believers in that city has quadrupled.
…societal tensions created by the growing Muslim community of Sweden. Muslims in Sweden are now able to broadcast public calls to prayer in three cities and want to extend this to more areas.
…humanitarian outreach ministries to more than 4 million Syrian refugees (mostly Muslims) in Turkey.

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV
Friday, August 2, 2019. Please pray for
...Ra’ef in Algeria, who was imprisoned for blasphemy for a Facebook post that read, “Jesus overcomes the lies of Islam.” Ra’ef was released last year but faces pressure from his Muslim community.
...the Wolof people of West Africa. There are 6.6 million Wolofs (less than 200 known Christians) across twelve countries.
...Muslim Uighurs who are attending “spiritual meetings” in Kazakhstan.

Friday, August 9, 2019. Please pray for
...efforts to reach the Pattani Malay people in Thailand. Of the 1 million Pattanis in Thailand, 100% are Muslims.
...Ali, a Christian worker in Iran. He states, “I watch people go from being radical Muslims to radical Christians, willing to die for Christ. A convert might run away from persecution, but a true disciple will die for Jesus in persecution.”
...a “slow but sure movement to Christ” among the 11 million Sylheti people of Bangladesh. 86% of Sylhetis are Muslim.

Friday, August 16, 2019. Please pray for
...a group of Muslim background believers in Bahrain. Attendees include Saudis, Kuwaitis, and Bahrainis.
...spiritual growth in the life of Ghada, a Muslim lady in Canada. Upon watching the Jesus Film, Ghada said, “First, I began to cry. Then I bowed my head and surrendered to Jesus.”
...Twen Theodros, who has been imprisoned in Eritrea for the last 13 years for proselytizing and troublemaking.

Friday, August 23, 2019. Please pray for
...the 2.5 million West African Muslim Soninkes who do not have the full Bible in their language.
...Rahman, in Kosovo. Rahman says he hated Christians, but after becoming a follower of Jesus he has now planted a house church in a majority Muslim city in Kosovo. Of Kosovo’s population of 1.8 million people, 87% are Muslim.
...Arabic-speaking missionaries across Germany, who have ministered in 20 refugee camps and 75 churches.

Friday, August 30, 2019. Please pray for
...a large group of formerly Muslim Kurds in Istanbul who recently gave their lives to Jesus and were baptized in water.
...Pastor Dawud in Syria. He writes, “I see the start of a revival among the Druze and the Kurds in Syria; hundreds have been saved during the war. In my city, there are four churches of new believers.”
...new outreach ministries to Muslim Chechens who have immigrated to Berlin, Germany.

*All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.