



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Christianity and Islam

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us explore fruitful new avenues for engagement between Christianity and Islam. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

No God but God

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Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? The question is too simplistic. It is more helpful to ask, "What kind of God is revealed in Christianity and in Islam?" Though the traditions agree that God is one, they diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed.

How Muslims See Us

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Islamic revivalist movements are reshaping culture, politics, and ethics in the Muslim world. Islamists are impatient with their regimes, their way of life, and the intrusion of western materialism and sexual promiscuity. Unfortunately, many link Christianity with the evils of the secular west.

Wise Foreign Relations

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Men and women in the ancient Middle East were educated in the tradition of wisdom as a paradigm for conducting diplomacy. Indeed, the Bible's much neglected wisdom tradition is a source of fresh possibilities in U.S. foreign policy vis à vis the Muslim world.

Reading Together

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While many good books can tell us the facts "about" Judaism and Islam, we can learn some deep truths "from" these Abrahamic traditions by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning. We may broach even the hard issues among these faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.

Peace and Justice in the Qur'an

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In submitting to God, according to the Qur'an, we opt for peace over against war and heed the divine command to act with justice in conversation, in business transactions, and in treating others. How similar, then, are the Islamic notions of peace and justice to their Christian counterparts?

Beyond the Veil

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While for many non-Muslims the veil has become the characteristic symbol of modesty in Islam, the reality is more complex. Modesty is at home in our own faith journey, and by reflecting on this virtue beyond the veil, we may discover a fruitful new avenue for dialogue with Muslims.



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Focus Article:

📖 No God but God
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 11-17)

Suggested Article:

📖 God Is Greater
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 62-64)

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No God but God

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? The question is too simplistic. It is more helpful to ask, "What kind of God is revealed in Christianity and in Islam?" Though the traditions agree that God is one, they diverge widely on how that Oneness is expressed.

Prayer¹

O God, you are God, besides whom there is no God: the Knower of the unseen and the seen; you are the Beneficent, the Merciful.

You are the King, the Holy, the Giver of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty, the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness. Yours is the glory.

You are God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. Yours are the most excellent names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth declares your glory. You are the Almighty, the All-wise.

As heaven and earth declare your glory, come to us, O God, and teach us to glorify your name. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Exodus 18:1-27; John 4:19-24

Reflection

Though Christians and Muslims often "talk past each other" about the nature of God and how God is revealed in the world, these topics are "fruitful starting points" for dialogue between the traditions. When we attend to the Bible and to the primary sources in orthodox Islam – the Qur'an and the Hadith (the collected stories about the life and teachings of Muhammad) – we find a "surprising wealth of commonalities" on God's nature.

"Both traditions care deeply about worshiping God as Creator, Supreme Lord, and Final Judge of the creation, and they agree that God gives moral revelation and spiritual guidance through prophets and the community of faith," van Gorder observes. "Common themes in their worship include receiving forgiveness from God, extending forgiveness to one another, and submitting all of our life to the One God."

Christians and Muslims disagree on God's relational nature. "Through Jesus we have come to know God as an active participant among humanity through divine love," he says. "In Islam, the primary affirmation is that 'God is One' and thus beyond the limitations of finite comprehension. Christianity calls individuals to enter into covenant relationship with God. Islam calls individuals to worshipfully assume a proper place of obedience before God's will and revelation." Nevertheless, he says the Gospel appeals to Muslims, for "the relationship that Christians have towards God is based on the revelation that God is 'our Father.' Expressed this way, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation may be viewed by Muslims not as a blasphemous absurdity but as the summation of God's Fatherhood." In our conversations with Muslim friends about God's nature, van Gorder urges us:

- ▶ *to understand the central ideas of Islam.* This requires listening and learning from Muslims, which may be more difficult than ever. "While unflattering images – brash terrorists, suicidal fanatics, and a host of others – dominate American media-generated



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pasquinades of Islam, too few of us bother to nurture a deep and studied appreciation for Islamic art, music, literature, architecture, and ethics," he notes. "There is no justification for this continued ignorance and defamation."

- ▶ *to speak clearly with love.* "If your brother does not understand you," an African proverb laments, "perhaps it is because you do not fully love him." The loving work of careful exposition requires us to be humble and patient, and to be inventive in crafting new theological language in response to how Muslims comprehend the Gospel. "Without apology, we should present our faith as filled with mystery – referring to the atonement Charles Wesley wrote, 'The Immortal dies! Who can explore this strange design?' Yet, we should make the effort to articulate logically what these mysteries mean to us."
- ▶ *to listen with humility.* We can present our claims of truth with the humility "of the Apostle Peter, who not only readily presented a message to Cornelius, but also received truth from him in a spirit of teachableness (Acts 10:28-48)," writes van Gorder. "Focusing too much on diplomacy, in fact, can inhibit the potential for genuine insight, for we may be confident that, as we interact with Muslims, God will bring us to greater insight just as He used Cornelius to direct Peter into deeper dimensions of biblical truth. By this posture of being willing to learn, we express our confidence in faith and we may engender a similar response of teachableness in others."

Karen Thomas Smith finds guidance for our conversations with Muslim neighbors in two biblical events – Jethro's visit to his son-in-law Moses, and Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman. "We must bear the tension of living in the ambiguous domain of spirit and truth, where even those of alien faith may speak to us of the God who has poured himself out in saving love in Jesus Christ," she concludes. "Even where God has done this unique thing in Christ, we can expect others who do not share our faith to visit us and bless us even as we witness to them of the saving acts of God. And we may all wonder at the mystery of the God who is greater than our imagining."

Study Questions

1. What questions do you have about the Muslim view of God? Where do you turn for reliable information?
2. Discuss van Gorder's claim that "the central theological message for Christians interacting with Muslims is not that 'our God' is true and 'your God' is not, but the biblical revelation that 'God is love' and is actively seeking humanity to participate in a new covenant with God (Jeremiah 31:31-34)."
3. For Smith, how does Jethro's visit to Moses suggest that *Allahu Akbar*, or God is greater"? How is this theme present in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman?
4. How can your congregation prepare members for dialogue with Muslim friends and neighbors?

Departing Hymn: "Hear the Prophet Speak of Water"

[†]With phrases from Surah 59:1, 22-24 in Shakir translation of *The Holy Qur'an*.



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Focus Article:

📖 How Muslims See Us
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 18-27)

Suggested Article:

📖 Questions Rooted in Faith
and History
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 84-88)

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How Muslims See Us

Islamic revivalist movements are reshaping culture, politics, and ethics in the Muslim world. Islamists are impatient with their regimes, their way of life, and the intrusion of western materialism and sexual promiscuity. Unfortunately, many link Christianity with the evils of the secular west.

Prayer

We pray for those we know who have suffered evils of all kinds, who suffer still from their wounds, and who long for security and salvation.

Teach us again, as Jesus taught us, to pray for enemies and bless those who curse us, so that prayer may be turned into peace and cursing transformed into blessing for all of us, your people, and for our posterity.

God, you are the Alpha and the Omega, the First, Al-Awwal, and the Last, Al-Akhir.

May we find our ending as our beginning in your peace, God of peace, As-Salam, and may we dwell in your house of peace forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Genesis 17:1-7

Reflection

A beautiful illumination in the twelfth-century *Bible de Souvigny* depicts Abraham holding the righteous in his bosom. Among the twenty smaller figures that face one another in conversation, one holds a Bible, and all of them are gathered together by the arms of the larger figure, Abraham, who gazes out toward us, the readers of scripture. Due in part to the Muslim influence on the artist's work, it sometimes is titled "Jews and Arabs in the arms of Abraham." One source identifies the small figures as "Jews, Muslims, and Christians," for in varying ways all three trace their spiritual descent from God's covenant with Abraham.

Genesis carefully places the story of Ishmael's birth to Abraham and Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave, between the first account of the covenant (15:1-21) and its restatement with the sign of circumcision (17:1-7). God's protection of Hagar and Ishmael will be mirrored in Abraham's love for his first son, who is circumcised with him as a sign of the covenant (17:23-27). Though God extends the covenant through the promised son Isaac, God blesses Ishmael with twelve princely sons who will lead a great nation (17:20-21). Muhammad considered himself to be a descendent of Ishmael, as do the people of Arabia today.

Our common heritage in Scripture is more difficult than ever for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to acknowledge and explore. A source of friction is the rhetoric of "Islamic revivalism," for though this movement primarily targets the politics and culture of the West, it is often antagonistic toward Jews and Christians generally. Some reasons for this, Wagner says, may be found in:

- *the recent political history of the Middle East*. Since the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1919, Arab nations have suffered political defeat by various European nations, the U. S., and Israel, and loss of control of the "Noble Sanctuary" in Jerusalem. Political and



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economic systems—experiments with secular Pan-Arab Nationalism, Marxism, and Arab monarchies—have failed to keep pace with the developed world’s advancing quality of life. “Middle Easterners who once were fascinated with things American and maintained a keen desire to visit the United States are now becoming angry with U.S. policies,” Wagner notes. “The United States has replaced England and France as the hated colonial power, the occupying power that needs to be repelled from the region.”

- ▶ *the personal experience of prominent leaders of the revival, like Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).* Living in the United States during the 1950s, Qutb was deeply troubled by “churches using secular entertainment schemes to draw larger numbers; rampant sexual immorality; racism toward African-Americans; and Israel receiving unconditional support by the U.S. government and in mainstream media.” He returned to Egypt and portrayed the powerful United States as morally bankrupt.
- ▶ *our confusion of Gospel with empire.* Earlier missionaries often had close ties with western governments. Despite “the wonderful accomplishments of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in spreading the Gospel and establishing educational institutions and medical facilities,...all too often as missionaries exported western political interests and culture into the Islamic world, the essence of the Gospel was compromised.”

Can we approach Muslims with “a humble attitude, a listening heart, and a contrite spirit,” as Wagner recommends? “At times the journey will be difficult and controversial. We will discover rich growth in our own Christian faith as well as make new friends on the path of dialogue that seeks understanding.”

Study Questions

1. Can the Gospel be separated from western culture? When we share the Gospel, what do many Muslims hear?
2. Describe the “10/40 window” approach to Christian missions. What caution does Wagner raise for the evangelical missionary agencies that adopt this approach?
3. Wagner sketches the inclusivist, exclusivist, and pluralist paradigms to approach people of other world religions. Why does he recommend the exclusivist paradigm? Do you agree?
4. How does the hymn “To You, Our God, We Fly” balance our repentance with a call for God’s protection?

Departing Hymn: “To You, Our God, We Fly” (verses 1, 2, 3, and 8)

To you, our God, we fly / for mercy and for grace;
O hear our lowly cry, / and hide not, Lord, your face.

Arise, O Lord of hosts! / Be jealous of your name,
and drive from out our coasts / the sins that put to shame.

Your best gifts from on high / in rich abundance pour,
that we may magnify / and praise you more and more.

Give peace, Lord, in our time; / O let no foe draw nigh,
nor lawless deed of crime / insult your majesty.

William W. How (1871), altered
Suggested Tune: IBSTONE



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Focus Article:

📖 Wise Foreign Relations
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 28-35)

Suggested Article:

📖 Reading Locke
on the Tigris
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 65-67)

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Wise Foreign Relations

Men and women in the ancient Middle East were educated in the tradition of wisdom as a paradigm for conducting diplomacy. The Bible's much neglected wisdom tradition is a source of fresh possibilities in foreign policy vis à vis the Muslim world.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 3:3-15

Responsive Reading (Psalm 72:1-5; 12-14)

Of Solomon [we sing]:

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.

**May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice.**

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.

**May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.**

May he live while the sun endures,
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

**For he delivers the needy when they call,
the poor and those who have no helper.**

He has pity on the weak and the needy,
and saves the lives of the needy.

**From oppression and violence he redeems their life;
and precious is their blood in his sight.**

Reflection

King Solomon began a ruthless opportunist, establishing his rule over Israel by murder (of his half-brother Adonijah and father's commander Joab) and exile (of the priest Abiathar), and keeping it with strategic foreign marriages and religious syncretism (1 Kings 2:12-3:2). With wonderfully ironic timing, the God of Israel invades the merciless, self-serving monarch's dream during his politically convenient jaunt to sacrifice at the "high place" of Gibeon. Solomon's turnaround leads him to worship before the ark of the covenant, repent through a fellowship offering, and throw a feast for all his servants (3:15). At the heart of his gift of wisdom is a newfound concern for the nation's wellbeing.

"We need to think outside the box," says Strohmer, to realize the biblical "wisdom tradition comprises a wealth of literature that invites us into the stories, intrigue, and policies surrounding the statesmen, diplomats, and foreign ministers of the ancient Middle East." This tradition approaches law, commerce, and statecraft through the "conditions that are universal to the entire human family, which places the literature at the service of humanity as a whole, *before* any distinctions are made between believers and those who would not consider themselves believers."

As Israel developed as a nation under David and Solomon, like other ancient nations it formed a professional class of "the wise," including *hakâmîm*, "high-ranking government officials...who



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specialized in matters of state and international relations," and *sôperîm*, "political secretaries and professional writers called scribes." These men and women were "tasked with developing geopolitical common ground on which to frame policies that are as just and good for all sides as possible."

Finding common ground is a crucial goal in the Middle East today, for as negotiator Rabbi Marc Gopin observes, "the ubiquitous human psychology of othering, the need to distinguish and exclude" remains the greatest obstacle facing diplomats there. Strohmer hopes that "moderate and progressive Islamic reformers would be receptive to the wisdom way, for it corresponds in part with the Islamic tradition of *ijtihād*, which is popularly translated 'independent thinking' or 'critical reasoning.'"

Study Questions

1. How does "the wisdom tradition within foreign policy [have] a family resemblance much closer to philosophy than to theology"? Why does Strohmer think Christian Zionism is out of step with the biblical wisdom tradition?
2. If we were to follow the wisdom way in the Middle East today, Strohmer suggests, we might embrace "Ezekiel's vision of a new holy land," which applies "a principle that resident aliens and native Israelites should be treated alike" (Ezekiel 47:22-23). How would this principle apply today?
3. Some might object that using the Bible as a source of ideas in foreign policy is inappropriate. Discuss Strohmer's response.
4. What experiences in Dohuk, Iraq, helped Mark Long break through his stereotypes of Muslim believers? Are similar experiences available to you?
5. In the context of "wise relations," discuss Mark Long's realization: "How often I have felt 'right' about my faith only by convincing others they were 'wrong' in theirs. How often I have done apologetics but forgotten to give grace, to declare through my life as well as my words the gospel of our Lord."

Departing Hymn: "Let There Be Light, Lord God of Hosts"

Let there be light, Lord God of hosts,
let there be wisdom on the earth;
let broad humanity have birth,
let there be deeds, instead of boasts.
Within our passionate hearts instill
the calm that ends all strain and strife;
make us your ministers of life;
purge us from lusts that curse and kill.

Give us the peace of vision clear
to see our brothers' good our own,
to joy and suffer not alone,
the love that casts away all fear.

Let woe and waste of warfare cease,
that useful labor yet may build
its homes with love and laughter filled;
God give your wayward children peace.

William M. Vories (1880-1964), altered

Suggested Tunes: HESPERUS or WINCHESTER NEW



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Focus Article:

📖 Reading Together
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 68-75)

Suggested Article:

📖 First Steps in Understanding
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 89-93)

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Reading Together

While many good books can tell us the facts “about” Judaism and Islam, we can learn some deep truths “from” these Abrahamic traditions by engaging in Scriptural Reasoning. We may broach even the hard issues among these faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Responsive Reading (2 Timothy 3:14b-17)

Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

Reflection

When interfaith dialogue is merely “‘making nice,’ – instructing one another in basic elements of the faiths involved, stressing commonalities, and agreeing how wonderful it is that we share basic moral values,” notes Kristen Lindbeck, it leaves the important and sometimes painful questions unaddressed. “Many Christians wonder if Muslims are saved, or are certain that they are not. Muslims are often taught that the doctrine of the Trinity is a polytheist corruption of the true faith of the prophet Jesus.” We’d like to talk with Muslim friends about ethics and faith in government, business, and schools. “Do we trust the people from other faith communities enough to frankly discuss such issues in their presence? Usually not.”

Scriptural Reasoning groups take a different approach to dialogue. In church, community, or academic settings, SR brings Jews, Christians, and Muslims together to read scripture and pray. “After participants in SR have experienced on-going trust for weeks or months, they can broach even the hard issues between and within their faiths in an atmosphere of friendship, humility, and mutual respect.” How exactly how do SR groups work? Though there is no simple recipe, it is important to:

- ▶ *focus on scripture reading and prayer.* “The encounter with scripture ...ensures that participants are looking together at something beyond personal opinion.” Framing the session with prayer reminds them “that in the presence of revealed scripture we are also in the presence of the Revealer.”
- ▶ *engage in small-group discussion.* A three-way discussion of scripture by Jews, Christians, and Muslims is especially valuable, Lindbeck says, because the Abrahamic faiths “inform one another in overlapping ways: Christianity and Islam are proselytizing majority religions; Judaism and Islam are strongly parallel in their understanding of God’s Oneness; Christianity and Judaism have longer experience with the challenges of modern society, modern



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science, and the separation of church and state." The faiths speak related religious languages about God and ethics. Though not agreeing on every point, they share a basis on which to begin discussion.

- ▶ *allow spontaneous exploration.* SR groups assume "because scripture is revealed by an Eternal God, it is open-ended. God is still speaking to us in the text," says Lindbeck. "Yet Scriptural Reasoning is not relativistic; participants explore and listen to scripture, ask questions of others, and look within themselves and their own faiths."

Jews, Christians, and Muslims are "people of the book," who have been formed and nourished by reading scripture. While America's founding fathers "rightly proposed the separation of church and state,...their nineteenth- and twentieth-century followers encouraged the more debatable separation of religion from politics and they harmfully demoted faith to a purely private matter, divorced from public ethics, education, social justice, and economics." SR is a way of listening to scripture, suggests Lindbeck, which can put "God's will back into...the public discourse of society in an open-minded, open-ended way."

Study Questions

1. What features of Scriptural Reasoning are attractive to you as a new form of interfaith dialogue? Do you have concerns about its goals or methods?
2. What checks SR from being either relativistic or syncretistic?
3. Do you agree that "Scriptural Reasoning can include more of the full spectrum of each faith, from liberal to conservative, than usually occurs in general interfaith conversations"?
4. With what attitude of mind and heart should we approach scripture, according to "Open My Eyes, That I May See"? Is this attitude appropriate for Scriptural Reasoning?

Departing Hymn: "Open My Eyes, That I May See"

Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.

*Silently now I wait for Thee,
ready my God, Thy will to see,
open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!*

Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
and while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.

Refrain

Open my mouth, and let me bear,
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare
love with Thy children thus to share.

Refrain

Clara H. Scott (1895)



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Focus Article:

- ☞ Peace and Justice in the Qur'an
(*Christianity and Islam*, pp. 36-42)

Suggested Articles:

- ☞ Building of Mystery
(*Christianity and Islam*, pp. 43-45)
- ☞ Shared Stories in Metal
(*Christianity and Islam*, pp. 46-48)

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Peace and Justice in the Qur'an

In submitting to God, according to the Qur'an, we opt for peace over against war and heed the divine command to act with justice in conversation, in business transactions, and in treating others. How similar, then, are the Islamic notions of peace and justice to their Christian counterparts?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 34:11-22

Responsive Reading[†]

Peace be unto you. Salaam ualeikoum.

Ualeikoum salaam. And unto you, peace.

Hear the words of the Lord:

"Which of you desires life,
and covets many days to enjoy good?
Depart from evil, and do good;
seek peace, and pursue it."

**"Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called the children of God."**

"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably
with all."

"For it is to peace that God has called you."

May the God of peace be with us all.

**And may the God of peace be praised among all the children of
Abraham, and by all the nations which through Abraham
are blessed! Alleluia! Alhumdullilah!**

Reflection

"While the Qur'an attaches great value to peace, it does not privilege it absolutely," notes Mustansir Mir. "Peace at the expense of justice is not acceptable to the Qur'an. Justice is the gateway to peace. Having said that, one must emphasize that justice remains the gateway; it does not become the destination. For all its importance, justice is instrumental in character; peace is the objective. Seen in this light, peace emerges as a more fundamental value than justice." Pacifism is not an option in Islam. Neither the Qur'anic teachings nor Mohammad's practice (he organized and led military campaigns) allow it. Rather the Muslim view is similar to the just-war theory in the Christian tradition, for "the Qur'an unequivocally permits the believers to take up arms against oppression and against imposition of war."

The profound concern for social justice in the Qur'an is based on the beliefs that all human beings are the creatures of God and their wealth is a gift from God for their common welfare. Thus, the rich must share their resources with the less fortunate. Specific teachings encourage the circulation of wealth in society by forbidding hoarding, usury, and bribery; requiring that an inheritance be spread among the heirs; and collecting *zakah*, or the welfare due, to be distributed to the poor. When it comes to social justice, Mir concludes, "Many Christians and Muslims today would seem to share the confidence in the human ability to improve the world and, more than that, to feel a sense of responsibility to contribute to the world's betterment."



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One important difference between Christian and Muslim notions of peace and justice involves the need for reconciliation, for restoring humanity to fellowship with God. "Islam, which does not accept the notion of original sin and, hence, does not feel the need for a savior to deliver humankind from the bondage of sin, does not attach to reconciliation the kind of significance it has in Christianity."

Even on this point, Mir suggests, an interpretation by Muslim mystics, or Sufis, of some verses in the Qur'an on the relationship between God and humanity might be the basis for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Sufis "speak of separation (*firaq*) and union (*wisal*), meaning that human beings, while they are in a state of separation from God in this world, wish this state to come to an end and long to unite—or rather, reunite—with God." Yet, Mir cautions, "from an Islamic viewpoint, any attempt to make the suggested comparison must pay due regard to the claims or demands of the Law...[and] the Christian notion of the redemptive role of Jesus would be considered problematic."

Study Questions

1. What important similarities do you see between the Muslim and Christian stances toward war and social justice?
2. Do Christians and Muslims agree about our motive for being peaceful and just in our relations toward others?
3. Discuss how the two traditions disagree about the need for reconciliation between humanity and God. Does this difference influence their respective notions of peace and justice?
4. Some people accuse Islam of being a war-mongering religion, in part because the "incendiary" verses in the Qur'an have been used to justify violence against followers of other religions. How does Mir respond?
5. What makes the Freer canteen unusual and significant in the history of Islamic art? Do you think it suggests possibilities for peaceful sharing between Christians and Muslims today?
6. Discuss the significance of the Temple Mount to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. How is the Dome of the Rock an architectural reminder of peaceful exchange and of conflict?

Departing Hymn: "O God of Earth and Altar" (verses 1 and 2)

O God of earth and altar, bow down and hear our cry,
our earthly rulers falter, our people drift and die;
the walls of gold entomb us, the swords of scorn divide,
take not thy thunder from us, but take away our pride.

From all that terror teaches, from lies of tongue and pen,
from all the easy speeches that comfort cruel men,
from sale and profanation of honor, and the sword,
from sleep and from damnation, deliver us, good Lord!

G. K. Chesterton (1906)

Suggested Tunes: LLANGLOFFAN or PASSION CHORALE

[†] Quoting Psalm 34:12, 14; Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; and 1 Corinthians 7:15b.



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A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Beyond the Veil
(*Christianity and Islam*,
pp. 76-83)

What do you think?

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Christian Reflection

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Beyond the Veil

While for many non-Muslims the veil has become the characteristic symbol of modesty in Islam, the reality is more complex. Modesty is at home in our own faith journey, and by reflecting on this virtue beyond the veil, we may discover a fruitful new avenue for dialogue with Muslims.

Prayer†

Let us walk in peace.

**May our way be resolute
and our purpose firm in your good counsel.**

May we be granted, O Lord,
the benefit of gratefulness for your grace,
the beauty that belongs with your worship.

**And may we be given pure and reverent hearts,
uprightness of character,
tongues that speak right,
and deeds that are worthy,
O Lord God. Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4:17-24

Reflection

"Every religion has an innate character," said the Prophet Muhammad. "The character of Islam is modesty."

Islam recognizes the central role of modesty is "to create a private space for love and to protect marriage," Evelynne Reisacher notes. Indeed, "guarding one's modesty," an expression for a husband and wife's chastity, "appears in Qur'anic lists of the pivotal practices of Muslim believers...along with praying humbly, avoiding vain talk, and exercising deeds of charity (Surah 23:1-5), and with surrendering to Allah, speaking the truth, persevering in righteousness, being humble, giving alms, and fasting (Surah 33:35).

Several religious texts have been interpreted as requiring specific forms of modest dress and behavior, including:

- ▶ *veils and covering for women.* Women are not to call attention to their *zeena*, which is variously interpreted as specific features of the body (the face, hands, or feet), natural beauty generally, or the adornment of make-up, jewelry, and dress. Thus, "the amount of a woman's body that should be covered has been debated over the years. Today different styles of veil are worn, and some Muslims even say the true 'veil' should not be an item of apparel, but an inner attitude of modesty."
- ▶ *female seclusion.* "The extreme case of covering for the sake of modesty is seclusion, the rule that a woman generally should stay in her house, but be covered if she must go outside," says Reisacher. Some passages mention a screen (*hijab*) hung for the privacy of Muhammad's wives, or a dividing curtain (*sitr*) used in open apartments. Those who interpret these verses "as requirements for all female believers, [encourage] women's seclusion from the public sphere. Other believers encourage women's limited access to the public sphere in order for them to care for children and manage households. As women's roles change due to new



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economic demands, Muslims continue to reflect on these Qur'anic texts."

- ▶ *modest dress for men.* Men should cover their private parts (*awra*) — specifically the genitals, and generally the parts of the body that elicit sexual stimulation. "Traditionally Muslims understand that the minimum covering required for men is from his navel to his knees.... Muslims continue to debate the extent of the covering, of course, because what elicits sexual stimulation varies according to the context."

Reisacher reminds us that in Islam, "modesty is not primarily about the veil, but about purity, marriage, male-female relations in the society, and our relationship to God. If we want to understand Islam, we need to be sensitive to the core values of modesty as well as to how these translate into dress practices."

Study Questions

1. What is at the heart of the Muslim concern for modesty in dress and behavior?
2. Is modesty a specifically religious virtue? Is modesty an unpopular virtue in western culture? Why?
3. What is universal in the virtue of modesty? What is culturally specific?
4. "Wearing the veil does not require having modest attitudes," Reisacher says. "Indeed, some women may wear the veil because they have to do it, yet their thoughts, relationships, and the way they dress under the veil may not be pleasing to God." Discuss this observation.
5. How can committed Muslims disagree about how to apply specific instructions in the Qur'an and the Hadith concerning dress and seclusion? Do you find similar debates among Christians over applying certain biblical instructions today?

Departing Hymn: "Purer in Heart, O God"

Purer in heart, O God, help me to be;
may I devote my life wholly to Thee:
watch Thou my wayward feet,
guide me with counsel sweet;
purer in heart, help me to be.

Purer in heart, O God, help me to be;
teach me to do Thy will most lovingly;
be Thou my Friend and Guide,
let me with Thee abide;
purer in heart, help me to be.

Purer in heart, O God, help me to be;
until Thy holy face one day I see:
keep me from secret sin,
reign Thou my soul within;
purer in heart, help me to be.

Fannie E. Davison (1877)

[†] Adapted from a passage by *Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali* (1058-1128) translated by Kenneth Cragg in *Common Prayer*, 80.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

No God but God

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Acts 17:22-31	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss Scripture Reading
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)	Questions 1 and 2	Questions 3 and 4
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore the agreement between Christianity and Islam on God's nature.
2. To consider the key difference that God's incarnational self-revelation makes in the Christian understanding of God.
3. To discuss how we should approach dialogue concerning God's nature with Muslim friends and neighbors.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

Christian van Gorder urges us to seek a clear understanding of the Muslim view of God, for otherwise we may simply "talk past" our Muslim friends and neighbors. He gives this example of the problem: "Despite our eagerness to declare to Muslims the promise of relational intimacy with God, we should realize that, at least among non-mystical strands of Islam, humanity's distance from God is seen as a positive force that both defines and maintains creation. I once had a conversation with a Muslim about intimacy with God only to hear him respond that he was grateful that God was distant and uninvolved with the sinful details of his daily life. For this man, 'bridging the gap' between God and man, was not only impossible, but it was also undesirable" (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 13).

Indeed, God's coming to us in Jesus Christ defies everyone's expectations and escapes all of our explanations. How, then, do we share the truth of God's incarnational self-revelation with Muslim friends and neighbors in humility and love?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and lift one or more of these celebrations and concerns before God. Conclude by reading responsively the prayer in the study guide; the leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask two group members to read Exodus 18:1-27 and John 4:19-24 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Dialogue between Christians and Muslims should begin with how the two traditions view God's nature, according to Christian van Gorder. He sketches their common themes concerning the nature of God before he focuses on their key difference on how God relates to the world. Christianity, drawing from God's incarnational self-revelation in Jesus Christ, starts with "God is love" and says that God calls us, despite our past sinful rebellion, into personal relationship. Islam starts with "God is One." From a Muslim perspective, the Christian view may appear to be a dangerous confusion about, or an arrogant denial of, God's Oneness and creative authority.

Van Gorder makes three suggestions about how to approach conversations with Muslim friends on the nature of God: (1) begin by understanding Islam, (2) speak clearly with love, and (3) listen with humility.

Under the second point he urges us to be content with expressing divine paradox and mystery, but to avoid needless confusion and careless nonsense in our speech. Enrich his third point by considering Karen Thomas Smith's sensitive discussion of the biblical stories of Jethro's visit to Moses and Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.

If you decide to extend the discussion to a second session, members might reflect on van Gorder's account of the Christian and Muslim views of God's nature in one session, and on Smith's insights into Exodus 18:1-27 and John 4:19-24 in another session. The dual session plan above suggests that the Bible study for the van Gorder session might focus on Paul's conversation with the people at the Areopagus, or "Mars Hill," in Athens (Acts 17:22-31).

Study Questions

1. Encourage group members to share their questions. Where did they come from—reading the Qur'an, personal experience with Muslim friends and neighbors, TV programs, newspaper articles, books, or sermons? Did van Gorder's article raise questions for them? Among the sources of reliable information are the books reviewed in *Christianity and Islam* (pp. 84-93). Do knowledgeable Muslims live in your community? Are there local experts on Islam in your congregation? What sources have members found helpful in the past, and which sources were not reliable?
2. Why not simply debate whether 'our God' or 'your God' is true? What is wrong with this? For one thing, the very concept of "our God" is inappropriate, for it attempts to reduce and capture the transcendent God for Christians (or Muslims) only. Does God care only for some people? Do Christians (or Muslims) have nothing to learn about God from anyone else? These attitudes are neither humble nor patient, and do not reflect the mind of Christ.

Furthermore, they contradict the biblical truth that God dwells in mystery and is beyond human reason. Essential truth about God is available to every person (Romans 1:20), but in God's self-revelation through Israel and Christ we learn the depth of God's love for the creation and hear the call for all humanity to participate in a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; compare Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25, and Hebrews 8). May Christians learn about God from others? May others help us to see facets of the covenant God has established in Christ?

3. "At the heart of Jethro's visit [to his son-in-law Moses] is a divine and, therefore, wonderfully baffling mystery: the salvation received as a gift through Israel's unique covenant with God is blessed at its birth by a priest who is outside that covenant," writes Smith. "Must our encounters with the descendants of Abraham who are outside the covenants of God with Israel and in Christ lead to a 'clash of civilizations,' as many pundits insist, or may they open us to God's blessing in rich ways we have yet to imagine?"
Smith calls attention to Jesus' radical words that God will not be captured by Samaritan or Jewish institutions, but will be worshiped "in spirit and in truth." She takes this to mean that "Even where God has done this unique thing in Christ, we can expect others who do not share our faith to visit us and bless us even as we witness to them of the saving acts of God. And we may all wonder at the mystery of the God who is greater than our imagining."
4. Brainstorm in small groups on how the congregation can help members achieve these three goals: to understand Islam, to speak clearly to Muslims with love about our faith, and to listen to Muslims with humility. Discuss specific local resources to learn about Islam, opportunities for dialogue with Muslims, and how special worship and learning opportunities might make us teachable by Muslims in a way that does not lead to syncretism.

Departing Hymn

"Hear the Prophet Speak of Water" is on pp. 50-51 of *Christianity and Islam*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

How Muslims See Us

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the social and political background of Islamic revivalism.
2. To consider how Islamic revivalists view Christians in relation to secular western culture.
3. To discuss how Christians should approach people of other religions in a pluralist world.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "To You, Our God, We Fly" locate the tune, IBSTONE, in your church's hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

"While Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Franklin Graham take an adversarial approach to Islam, others evangelicals like Brother Andrew present an attractive alternative," writes Wagner. "Very few, if any, evangelicals have reached the inner sanctums of the leading Islamists in the Arab and Islamic world as has Brother Andrew, who has not compromised his Christian witness but has reached out to Muslims with love, honesty, and compassion."

"'I know you,' a Muslim student in the Gaza Strip greeted Andrew after he delivered a lecture at the Islamic University. Andrew didn't recognize him, but the student continued, 'I was at the lecture in the auditorium last year.'

"'Then why are you smiling? I didn't think you accepted what I said.'

"'No, it was great!'

"'Why do you say that?'

"'Because you did not put us down. You left us in our dignity. That is why me and my friends admired you and what you said. We have never had the opportunity to hear about Christianity before'" (*Christianity and Islam*, pp. 24-25).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently and lift one or more of these celebrations and concerns before God. Conclude by reading responsively the prayer in the study guide; the leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Genesis 17:1-7 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Jews, Christians, and Muslims today find hope in their relation to God's covenant with Abraham. Rather than sort through the various ways they see themselves to be indirectly "children of Abraham," the study employs an image from the *Bible de Souvigny* to emphasize the three tradition's common origins in the patriarch. The often-reprinted image may be viewed online at www.artres.com.

The scripture reading stops with Genesis 17:7, because the next verse introduces the promise of "all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding," a portion of the covenant that applies only to the descendants of Abra-

ham's future son, Isaac. Ishmael and his descendants do not inherit the land of Canaan (see Genesis 21:8-21 and 25:12-18), though they live under God's blessing. For the story of God's protection of the slave-woman Hagar before the birth of Ishmael, or "God hears," see Genesis 16. God's care for Hagar and Ishmael after Sarah forces Abraham to send them away is described in Genesis 21.

Study Questions

1. On a personal psychological level, of course, it is difficult for us to separate *our presentation of the Gospel* from western culture. Missionaries, like other travelers, endure "culture shock" when they live in another culture. Encourage members to share their experiences from travels or short-term mission trips, or share their knowledge of the difficulties faced by friends and family members who have been missionaries. Can the story of Jesus' birth, ministry, death, and resurrection be presented without cultural accretions? If not, does the Holy Spirit enable people in other cultures to hear the Gospel despite these additions?

Wagner suggests Muslims must filter what Christians say from the interference caused by (1) "the exaggerated materialism and sexual promiscuity [of western secular culture] transmitted to their region" through television, movies, and the internet, and (2) "western nationalist politics." What are some primary examples of such interference in recent years?

2. The "10/40 window approach" focuses mission resources on the area of Africa and Asia that is between ten and forty degrees north of the Equator. Two thirds of the world's population (3.2 billion people) live in this region. 95% of the people are unevangelized (have not heard the Gospel message). While the predominant religion is Islam (865 million people), the "window" is home to 550 million Hindus and 275 million Buddhists.

Wagner reports that not only Muslims, but indigenous Middle Eastern Christian leaders feel that "they are being targeted by a new 'Crusade,' led this time by the U.S. military and Christian evangelicals." He quotes Josh Anderson's warning in *Sojourners Magazine*, that "With a portion of American Christians waving flags around a radical foreign policy and simultaneously sending missionaries to the nations, the danger of a 'poisoned gospel' is real indeed. To 'muddle maps' in this way is to taint missionary efforts with the intrinsic violence and self-serving nature of the U.S. government's foreign policy. For Christians committed to the expansion of the reign of God, efforts to keep the missions movement free from the national political agenda are crucial." Can we direct mission resources to evangelizing "unreached people groups" without raising fears among Muslims of a new "crusade"?

3. The paradigms differ on the role of Jesus Christ in God's saving action toward humankind. The *inclusivist paradigm* holds that God not only saves people through their faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, but also brings others to salvation, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, as they "do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience." *Exclusivism* says that "Jesus Christ provides the only means of salvation for humanity." The *pluralist paradigm* says "all people, despite their differing (and even contradictory) religious beliefs and practices, are on a path to God or ultimate reality." Wagner rules out the latter view as unacceptable to most Christians and Muslims. He favors the exclusivist paradigm as the dominant view in Christian history and as congruent with evangelical missions.
4. Verse 3, based on Ezekiel's prophecy of Israel's restoration (Ezekiel 39:21-29), asks God to purge us of "the sins that put to shame," even as Israel was purged during the Exile. Verse 8 appeals for protection from enemies of God, both without ("O let no foe draw nigh") and within ("nor lawless deed of crime") the society. What sins in our society might a Muslim say "puts to shame" the name of God? How would you respond?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Wise Foreign Relations

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore how Scripture describes the nature and role of the ancient wisdom tradition.
2. To discuss whether the biblical wisdom tradition can provide insight for diplomacy in the Middle East today.
3. To consider “the ubiquitous human psychology of othering” and how we might break through our stereotypes of Muslims.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Let There Be Light, Lord God of Hosts” locate a tune, HESPERUS or WINCHESTER NEW, in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Comment

“The great historic difficulty surrounding foreign relations, of course, is how to arrange and sustain geopolitical alignments and agreements among nations that frequently press their conflicting national interests and values against each other,” Charles Strohmer observes. “A geopolitical way of ‘getting along’ is necessary, a paradigm for the give-and-take of matters of state and foreign policy as these are lived out in the sometimes contentious, sometimes cataclysmic, and sometimes peaceable and prosperous relations between nations. In the biblical world, the wisdom tradition provided that way” (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 29).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Mention the current developments in the search for peace in Israel and the Palestinian lands. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that Israeli, Palestinian, and world leaders will grow in wisdom as they seek peace and the common good.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read I Kings 3:3-15 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

The study explores Strohmer’s suggestion that the neglected biblical wisdom tradition can guide foreign policy decisions today, especially in the Middle East. The scripture reading gives some background for the view that Solomon had “a wise and discerning mind.” Members may discuss other “wise” men and women mentioned in Strohmer’s article, including the master scribes (*sôperîm*) like Baruch (Jeremiah 36) and the royal secretaries under David, Solomon, and Hezekiah (2 Samuel 20:25; 1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 18:37), as well as the diplomats (*hakâmîm*) who serve the Pharaoh (Exodus 7:11; cf. Isaiah 19:11-12) and Xerxes (Esther 1:13). The tradition of *hakâmîm* includes the wise women from the villages of Tekoa (2 Samuel 14) and Abel Beth Maacah (2 Samuel 20), and some women in the Canaanite court (Judges 5:29).

“The wise” serve their communities by seeking “to discover and to build on mutual ground ‘for all mankind,’” rather than promoting a narrow agenda. To broker a compromise between cities, tribes, or nations, diplomats must be inventive, teachable about the concerns of the other, and evenhanded in negotiating. They must overcome the “psychology of othering, the need to distinguish and exclude.” Encourage members to discuss Mark Long’s experiences in Dohuk, Iraq, in overcoming cultural stereotypes we have of Iraqis specifically and Muslims generally. Long takes a step toward being wise and overcoming the “othering” that stereotypes reinforce.

Study Questions

1. “Wisdom in its diplomatic role and theology in its dogmatic role would have quite different starting points and destinations,” says Strohmer. Wisdom, like philosophy, seeks starting points shared by all humankind or (at least) by all parties in the negotiations. Theology, on the other hand, uses the starting points “of a particular religious community and usually unites only those who believe its dogmas.” Strohmer criticizes Christian Zionism, which “holds that the modern nation of Israel has a divine right to all of the land promised to the people of Israel in the Old Testament,” for insisting on theological dogmas that are controversial, even among Christians (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 32).
Does this distinction between the wisdom tradition and theology mean that there is no opportunity for diplomats to rely on their religious commitments? Should theological beliefs influence a diplomat’s understanding of the situation or goals of diplomacy? Should they be used in the diplomat’s presentations and rationale for policies?
2. Ezekiel 47:22-23 says Israel may allot land to “the aliens who have settled among you and who have children.” This suggests the “foreigners” will have permanent settlements in the land. “Might not this redemptive principle guide the development of just policy in land issues such as the right of return of Palestinian refugees, the sovereignty of Jerusalem, and the borders of a two-state solution?” Strohmer suggests (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 34).
3. Strohmer considers three objections. (1) To the objection that ancient books like the Bible have no contemporary relevance, he replies that many ancient books (e.g., Plato’s *Republic* and Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*) provide wisdom for today. (2) To the objection that the Bible addresses only *personal* devotion, not *social* issues, he replies that the Bible provides guidance in “education, aesthetics, communications, politics” and other social disciplines, as well as foreign policy. (3) To the objection that using Scripture would violate the separation of church and state, he responds that the wisdom way “as the Bible understands it and as it functions under God – does not arise from the church or from religion as institutions” (*Christianity and Islam*, pp. 28-29).
4. Long is moved by the intelligence of the Kurdish professors and students. “As my new colleagues shared insights about natural law, intellectual property rights, limited government, and the political writings of Thomas Aquinas, their intellectual élan was hardly what I expected among a people once described as having ‘no friends but the mountains.’” He is also deeply moved by the religious piety of a law professor who invited him to share his time of prayer. Do members have similar opportunities for intellectual discussions and shared worship with Muslim friends? Are there opportunities to share work, meals, or family time?
5. While Long does not compromise his religious beliefs, he finds new application for Augustine’s teaching, “Every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is His Lord’s.” Being teachable in this way helps us overcome the temptation to stereotype and exclude the other.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Reading Together

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To introduce Scriptural Reasoning as a form of interfaith dialogue.
2. To consider how a three-way conversation may add perspective and open up the dialogue among traditions that share a long and often tragic history.
3. To discuss establishing a Scriptural Reasoning group with Muslim and Jewish friends.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. Locate the departing hymn “Open My Eyes, That I May See” in your church’s hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

“Past experience,” writes Muslim philosopher Basit Koshul, “taught me that most forums were basically ‘interfaith-less’ forums where agnostic Muslims, Christians, and Jews met to basically confirm each others’ agnosticism.” However, when he joined the Scriptural Reasoning group, he says: “It was not long before I discovered, to my elation, that this particular ‘interfaith’ forum was unlike any other that I had known. The unique character of this forum was due to the three fundamental presuppositions on which it was based: (1) each of the three traditions confidently asserts its claims to uniqueness, as well as universality; (2) at the same time it does not view this claim as being an obstacle to genuine dialogue; because (3) this dialogue is centered on the Revealed Text” (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 70).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude with a prayer that members’ eyes will be illumined by God’s truth as they study Scripture together, and that their hearts will be open to sharing this rich experience with Muslim and Jewish friends.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Timothy 4:11-16 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

Even though Scriptural Reasoning is a recent movement—the National Society of Scriptural Reasoning was organized in 1995 and its online Journal began in 2001—its methods will be very familiar to many Christians: small groups meet to read and discuss scripture passages together in a prayerful context for the purpose of moral discernment. The twist is that Jews, Christians, and Muslims are invited to participate in the group and the passages selected for discussion may be from either the Qur’an or the Bible. Kristen Lindbeck recommends Scriptural Reasoning as a richer form of interfaith dialogue.

Lindbeck responds to concerns that SR may be either relativistic (“There’s no objective truth, just what you or I happen to believe about the text”) or syncretistic (“The truth is whatever combination of doctrines and views that we select from the Abrahamic traditions”). Encourage members to discuss these and any other concerns they may have about Scriptural Reasoning.

How can we prepare for SR? Our personal experience in personal and group Bible study and prayer is fundamental. To develop more knowledge of the vocabulary of Islam, see Dale Walker’s suggested readings in “First Steps in Understanding.” For specific guidance on designing a SR experience in a congregation, school, or community, see the Children of Abraham Institute (CHAI) website, www.people.virginia.edu/~pwo3v/chai/pages/communityintro.html.

Study Questions

1. Members may agree that SR is attractive because: (1) participants learn *from* other religions, not merely *about* them; (2) as they begin to trust one another and build friendships, participants can address the hard questions that divide them; (3) the Abrahamic faiths share a religious language and a desire to learn God’s revealed truth; (4) study sessions are focused on a scripture passage (not personal opinion) and the discussion is manageable; (5) participants encourage one another in the authority of scripture and model how to discern God’s truth through prayerful reading and discussion of it.

Do members think other features are attractive? Do they have concerns? Do they think the discussion will be productive? Do they worry about which passages to discuss, or whether they are “expert” enough to discuss them with Jewish and Muslim friends? Are they comfortable looking for truth in passages from the Qur’an?

2. We should distinguish relativism – the belief that there is no objective truth, only personal “truths” – from the virtue of being teachable, humble, and open to correction. SR avoids relativism by insisting that God reveals truth through scripture. Another real danger is syncretism – the result of simply combining various beliefs and practices from the three Abrahamic religions. Lindbeck writes that “participants need not give up a belief that their faith among the three has the truest understanding of God’s will; all that is required is openness to the idea that God cannot be limited by human understandings of truth.” Christians, for example, would use God’s revelation through Christ as a “lens” for interpreting the beliefs and practices of Judaism and Islam.

What other resources can help check a temptation toward relativism and syncretism in SR? Members might mention the deep commitments of other SR participants, the guidance of Christian mentors, and the teaching of a congregation.

3. Participants only need to agree they worship the same God, says Lindbeck. SR allows “each faith to understand the others in its own terms: for many Muslims to understand the Jewish and Christian revelations as precursors to the revelation of Islam; for many Christians to understand all salvation, even that of non-Christians, as mediated by Christ; and for many Jews to understand Christianity and Islam as worship of the God of Israel by the nations of the world.... [This means that] participants can present the power and beauty of their own faiths without apology, and without proselytizing or fear of being accused of proselytizing.”
4. The first two verses emphasize that we must be teachable – with God-opened eyes and ears to recognize the truth that God sends. The refrain reminds us that our illumination is a gift we receive rather than a reward we earn: “Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God, Thy will to see.” We must be discerning as we listen for the new truths that will fit together with the old like the “wave notes” of a melody. We must be ready to share with others the “warm truth” we have heard – gladly speaking the truth in love. This dual attitude of being teachable yet courageous to speak, when framed in the context of recognizing that God is the Revealer of truth, is appropriate for discussing scripture with Muslim and Jewish friends.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Peace and Justice in the Qur'an

Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore the meaning of peace and justice within the Qur'an.
2. To discuss the objection that Islam is a war-mongering religion.
3. To consider how Islamic art has reflected both peaceful exchange and conflict between Christianity and Islam.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "O God of Earth and Altar" locate a tune, LLANGLOFFAN or PASSION CHORALE, in your church's hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Comment

Mustansir Mir concludes with this observation: "The Christian (and, of course, Jewish) concept of *imitatio Dei* finds its counterpart in the Islamic concept of *takhallaqu bi-akhlaqi Allah* ("Take on the qualities of God"). Muslims, no less than Christians, believe that the relations between human beings ought to reflect, or be modeled on, the relations between God and man. Holding this view in common, the followers of the two religions have, as bearers of an ethical vision with a direct and immediate reference to society, both a similar and a joint responsibility — namely, that of translating their ethical vision into concrete social action" (*Christianity and Islam*, p. 42).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Mention the current sources of conflict between the west and the Muslim world. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that the leaders of western and Muslim nations will grow in wisdom as they seek peace and the common good.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 34:11-22 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

Begin, like Mir, by reviewing the central place of peace and justice in the Qur'an before addressing these specific issues: (1) the permissibility of war, and (2) the call for social justice toward the poor. Mir's discussion is a model of how a Muslim may use the Qur'an for moral guidance.

Consider the important similarities with Christian notions of peace and justice, and discuss the significant difference between Christianity and Islam about the need for reconciliation with God. You may use questions 4, 5, or 6 to pursue the group's interests — Mir's interpretation of the "incendiary" verses of the Qur'an and reply to the objection that Islam is a war-mongering religion; or the reflection in Islamic art of peaceful exchange and conflict with Christianity.

Study Questions

1. The Muslim stance toward war is similar to the just war tradition in Christian thought, which holds that war may be morally permissible only in self-defense or in retribution for grievous wrongdoing. There is no pacifist tradition in Islam.

In the Qur'anic concern for social justice we may hear echoes of Israel's prophetic tradition and Jesus' teachings on care for the poor. The Qur'an grounds its call for social justice in God's authority as creator and sustainer of the world — all resources are gifts from God and should be used according to God's intentions. The biblical prophets make that case, but they also frequently appeal to the community's memory of God's specific historical interventions in the Exodus and the Exile.

For more information about the Christian just war and pacifist views, see the *Peace and War* issue of *Christian Reflection*. For more on social justice in the biblical prophetic tradition, see the *Prophetic Ethics* issue. These are available online at www.ChristianEthics.ws.

2. Both traditions call humans to imitate God by sharing the divine concern for peace and social justice. Christians hold that Jesus Christ is God, and not merely a prophet; his teachings articulate and his actions exemplify God's stance toward peace and justice in specific situations. Does the incarnation make a difference in how Christians interpret the call to "be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48)?
3. Islam does not accept a doctrine of the original sin of Adam and Eve, and the consequent disorder of human beings in sinful rebellion against God. Therefore, it "does not feel the need for a savior to deliver humankind from the bondage of sin, [and] does not attach to reconciliation the kind of significance it has in Christianity." Islam is much more optimistic than Christianity about humanity's own resources for submitting to God's will and exemplifying God's concerns for peace and justice.

Members might discuss whether such optimism tempts us to lower God's high standards for peace and justice in order to make them more accomplishable by human effort. Does it set us up for frustration and resignation (to the 'reality' of war and injustice) if we fail, despite our best efforts, to participate with God in achieving those divine goals?

4. Mir says the "incendiary" verses, like 2:191 and 9:5, have been interpreted without their proper contexts. The correction is to study such verses in light of (1) the surrounding verses in the Qur'an and (2) the history of the Muslim community's expulsion from Mecca and flight to Medina. Within these contexts, he sees the verses as justifying violence only against the unjust rulers of Mecca and their followers, and to limit this violence to retribution for their wrongdoing. Members may study the major English translations of the Qur'an — by Yusuf, Pickthal, and Shakir — online at www.al-islam.org/quran.
5. The Freer canteen is one of only a few metalwork pieces produced in thirteenth-century Syria that combine Islamic decorative design with depictions of Jesus' life. Not only the iconography of the images, but also the metalwork technique was borrowed from (or produced by) Christian artisans. Some of these pieces were created for Muslim rulers. The canteen might have been made for a Muslim owner, or for a Crusader who admired its artistry. On either interpretation, we can admire the sharing of technique and respect for interpretation of Scripture between Muslim and Christian artisans and patrons.
6. The Temple Mount is the location of Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple, and Muslim tradition says it is the place from which Muhammad made a miraculous night journey to heaven. The Dome of the Rock's architectural form and decorative mosaics, influenced by Christian Byzantine art, exemplify peaceful exchange. Its location on the Temple Mount may have been a sign of Muslim occupation, and remains a source of conflict.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Beyond the Veil

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To explore the meaning and importance of the virtue of modesty in Islam.
2. To consider how Muslims derive specific instructions on modest dress and behavior from the Qur'an and the Hadith.
3. To discuss the attitude toward modesty in western culture.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Christianity and Islam (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. Locate the departing hymn "Purer in Heart, O God" in your church's hymnal or on the web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

In response to the tense situation in the community after 9/11, our pastor Raymond Bailey invited several Muslims to share the church's Wednesday evening fellowship supper. The president and two members of the local mosque made short presentations after the meal and answered our questions. As I studied the visitors, I was struck by the fact that while the two men wore western suits, the woman wore a beautiful, traditional *jilbab* — a long, flowing gown covering all her body except her hands and face.

"Does she really wear a gown every day in hot, muggy Waco," I was thinking, "or is she just trying to educate our church?" Finally a lady in the congregation popped the question, everyone's question, about the *jilbab* and I'll never forget the answer.

The woman was a lawyer and, yes, for religious reasons of modesty, this was her customary dress. "In my line of work," she continued with a genuine smile, "the *jilbab* is liberating. Judges, opposing lawyers, and juries take me more seriously. I find that it helps them to get past my gender and deal with me as a person."

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading aloud the responsive prayer in the study guide (the leader begins and the group responds with the line in bold print).

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Ephesians 4:17-24 from a modern translation.

Reflection

Providing an overview of Muslim dress codes and manners related to sexual modesty, Evelynne Reisacher says this virtue is central to Islam precisely because modesty is about much more than how we dress. Even as members deepen their appreciation for the Muslim concern for sexual modesty, they may want to explore (1) the neglect of the virtue of modesty in our culture, and (2) how we should apply biblical instructions and stories about modesty. They may discover in our common concern for sexual modesty, a fruitful new avenue for dialogue with Muslims.

Study Questions

1. The virtue of modesty in Islam speaks to sexual purity. It shapes the way people see their bodies, guides interactions between men and women, and underlies a right relationship with God. Despite the various ways that Muslims have interpreted the instructions and stories of the Qur'an and the Hadith concerning modesty, Reisacher notes a common desire for men and women to honor God, respect one another's bodies, and preserve the erotic for personal commitment and marriage.
2. The virtue of sexual modesty – the recognition and concern for propriety in dress, speech, and conduct – is a habitual attitude, a way of thinking and feeling about our bodies and our interactions with others. Some members might argue that modesty is based in human beings' natural and universal desires for privacy and for real sexual giving and intimacy. Wendy Shalit's *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*, for example, says the rules of modesty allows people to control access to their bodies, preserve the beauty of romantic encounters, and channel sexual love into committed relationships.

Within the Abrahamic religions, sexual modesty also has religious roots. It is a way of putting first things first by honoring the holy God who dwells with us and by valuing the development of one's inner self – "the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God" (1 Peter 3:4).

Sexual modesty is a controversial virtue in western culture, where some suspect it unnecessarily restricts personal taste in clothing and relationships, suppresses sexual desire in unhealthy way, and represses women with a sexual double standard. Of course, modesty does set limits on behavior and judges desires, which may seem to some like a loss of freedom. Yet we might turn this suspicious attitude around and ask, "Has licensing immodest behavior brought onerous sexual expectations rather than freedom, more confusion about our bodies rather than recognition of what is truly valuable in the other, and less rather than more commitment to maintaining meaningful relationships?"

3. The virtue of modesty is universally concerned with such things as how our bodies are presented to others, our privacy is preserved, and our sexuality is properly expressed and not abused. Cultures differ on specific dress codes, expectations about privacy, guidelines for sexual flirtation, and decorum in relationships between women and men. Encourage members to share their experiences with the rules of modesty in different cultures of the world. If the rules of modesty vary from culture to culture, does this mean that the concerns expressed in the virtue of modesty are unimportant, or that any cultural rule of modesty is as good as any other in exemplifying those concerns?
4. Modesty is more than a disposition to dress modestly; it includes habitually feeling the proper emotions and thinking in the right way about our bodies and relationships. Compare Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount to cultivate the proper motives *as well as* do the right actions: for instance, we should not merely avoid adulterous affairs or murderous actions, but stop thinking about others with lust or believing they are worthless fools.

Among the unworthy motives for modest dress and behavior are: (1) being intimidated by others and fearing their reprisal, (2) desiring to impress others by appearing to be "righteous," and (3) being overly concerned to please others. When people object to modesty, are they assuming the modest person has one of these unworthy motives?

5. Muslims disagree on (1) the meaning of specific terms, (2) whether Qur'anic instructions are culturally specific, and (3) whether stories about Muhammad's family apply to all believers. Christians have similar debates over biblical passages about women's dress and adornment, worship guidelines, restrictions on divorce, submission to political authority, etc.

Departing Hymn

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