



NEAREST IN AFFECTION

Perspectives on Christian-Muslim Relations



PERSPECTIVES

- Travel in the Middle East for many years
- Extended periods in Israel/Palestine
- Dean, SGC 2015–2017
- Academic interest in early Islamic reception and transmission of the Jesus traditions
- Researching Islamic coins from the Bethsaida Archaeology Project
- Arabic language studies
- Response to Christchurch terror attack

THE NEAREST IN AFFECTION

“... you will find the *nearest of them in affection* to the believers those who say, ‘We are Christians.’ That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.”
Sura al-Ma’idah 5:82

Objectives in this lecture:

- Moving from fear to affection
- Affirming shared inheritance of Abrahamic family of faiths
- Not overlooking our differences
- But affirming what we have in common
- Working and playing together

MUSLIMS IN AUSTRALA

- pre-European contact in NW of Australia
- 10 reported in 1828 census (‘Mohammedans’)
- first non-indigenous person in Clarence Valley (Sheik Brown, Nymboida, 1835)
- Late 19C ‘Afghan camel drivers’
- ‘White Australia’ policy after 1900 excluded non-European Muslims
- 1975+ Lebanese migration (40% Muslim, 60% Christian)
- 1990+ more inclusive immigration and refugee policies

2016 CENSUS

- National**
- 604,200 Muslims
- 2.6% population (2.2% in 2011)
- Clarence Valley**
- 43 Muslims (50,671)
- 0.08%
- Coffs Harbour**
- 466 Muslims (72,944)
- 0.6%

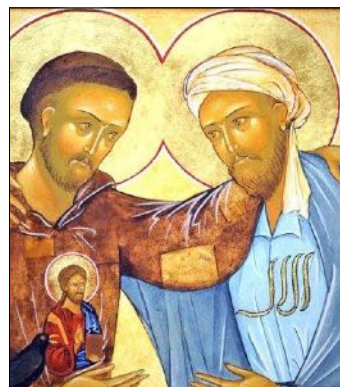


KEY SELECTED DATES

- 2,000 BCE Abraham/Ibrahim
- 1,300 BCE Moses/Musa
- 900s BCE David & Solomon / Daawud & Sulaymaan ibn Daawud
- 30 CE death of Jesus / Isa ibn Maryam
- 570–632 CE Muhammad
- 610 CE revelation of earliest Surat
- 622 CE flight to Medina (*Hijra*)
- 632 CE / 10 AH death of Muhammad
- 637 CE / 15 AH Jerusalem surrenders to Omar the Caliph
- 1096/1099 CE First Crusade captures Jerusalem

EARLY REACTIONS TO ISLAM

- Islam developed in areas outside imperial (Byzantine) influence
- Reflect the non-Chalcedonian mindset of ‘Oriental Christians’
- Islamic insurgency into Byzantine territories (political/military threat)
- Welcomed by Christian inhabitants of Jerusalem as liberators
- Christian majority in Egypt and Levantine Islamic lands for extended period
- Christians flourished in Caliphate
- Christians adopted Arab identity and Arabic language (prev. Aramaic)
- Christians translated Greek & Latin classics into Arabic



CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO ISLAM

- Islam as a deviant and heretical sect
- Muslims as objects of missionary activity
- Christian minorities in Muslim societies
- Religious rivalry in new fields of expansion (West Africa, East Africa)
- European colonial expansion
- Muslim migration into European societies

MODERN TENSIONS BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE WEST

- 1979 Ayatolla Khomeini and Iranian revolution
- Islamic character of local nationalists (Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia)
- Rise of 'Islamophobia' around time of the First Gulf War
- 9/11 and alQaeda (Afghanistan War)
- Second Gulf War and sectarian violence in Iraq
- ISIS and the Caliphate
- Violence against Western Muslims (anti-hijab comments & legislation)
- Anti-immigration populism in western countries
- Violence by Muslims against Westerners



RETHINKING CHRISTIAN VIEWS OF ISLAM

- **Allah:** the one God worshipped by Jews, Christians and Muslims (understood differently but also common ground)
- **Thy kingdom come:** Islam as a way of life with submission to divine will at its very core
- **Creation:** comes from God and humans are stewards (*khalifa*) of creation
- **Communities of practice:** prayer, Scripture study, family values, charity, pilgrimage
- **Afterlife:** judgment and eternal life with the Compassionate One

AGENDA FOR AFFECTION

- Strengthen the multifaith character of Australia
- Local interfaith relations (do not be strangers)
- Social harmony
- Education: schools, adherents, wider society
- Environment and eco-justice
- Compassion and social justice
- Humanitarian aid and international development
- Violence against women and other vulnerable persons
- Being human in a high tech world

A COMMON WORD

Between Us and You

Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter of polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders. Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

A COMMON WORD

Between Us and You

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.

