

A Christian Approach to Islam (Session 1)
A Presentation for Church of the Servant (CRC), Grand Rapids

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Introduction: The issue of Islam's relationship to Christianity is prominent, and difficult, in American church and society today. In Europe and North America, people are thinking about it as never before. Today we will do an overview; next week, we will examine the main Muslim beliefs.

The RCA position on religious pluralism and relationships to other faiths (which I suspect is very similar to the CRC's) dates from the 1990s, when this issue became prominent among us and more widely in Protestantism. Briefly, this position states that although we can find good in other religions, only in Christ is salvation found. See the RCA statement, "The Crucified One is Lord" <http://www.rca.org/NETCOMMUNITY/Page.aspx?&pid=1611&srcid=200>, or go to the RCA.org website and search by title for it.

Some of the main considerations are as follows:

1. Why an important topic?
 - a. Shrinking world
 - b. Mixing of cultures and religions, increasingly throughout North America
 - c. Violence: Holocaust, spread of terrorism, wars in the Middle East
 - d. Personal/informal dimension: "Christianity works for me, but . . ."
2. The Bible
 - a. OT: Struggle for monotheism; exclusivism vs. inclusivism
 - b. NT: Struggle against the gods of Roman paganism & the rising imperial cult; finality of revelation and salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ as the Son of God
3. The Rise of Islam
 - a. Pre-Islamic "Age of Ignorance": traditional Semitic polytheism, small presence of Jews and Christians.
 - b. The Activity of Muhammad (roughly 612 to 632)
 - c. Death of Muhammad; Sunni - Shia split
 - d. Islamic conquests and defeats (see map on reverse)
4. History of Christian interactions with Islam
 - a. Medieval Church (e.g., Thomas Aquinas on Islam)
 - b. The Crusades: a fiasco and its aftermath
 - c. Reformation churches & 19th century missions movement
 - d. Modern & Post-Modern times
5. The modern situation: Islam quiet and now active
 - a. Quiescence during 1600-1900
 - b. Breakup on Islamic empire into nations states after WW I.
 - c. Foundation of Israel
 - d. Rise of Islamic "fundamentalism" ("Islamism/radical Islam")
 - e. Birth of terror organizations and recent atrocities