

IS ISLAM SOCIABLE?

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Sociology is “the study of society, social institutions, and social relationships” (Merriam Webster), and man is a social being who craves interaction with his peers. That comes as no surprise to believers in God; after all, He is a social Being. He created man with the ability to choose to love Him or to reject Him, in part because He desires fellowship. One may wonder why God didn’t simply design His greatest creation with the burning desire to follow only after His commandments and to spurn sin in all of its forms. Just like people, God wants to be loved because one chooses to love Him, not because he was forced. Throughout its pages, the Bible instructs that God places a premium on fellowship. The first couple had enjoyed a fellowship with God that will never be known again this side of heaven. Jesus spoke of the fellowship that would be shared between those of “like precious faith” as they sit at the table with “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” in the Kingdom (Mt. 8:11). So, it is obvious that God prizes closeness and fellowship.

There are three general areas where people interact with others in a social way: religious institutions, family relationships, and interaction with other members of society. The intention of this article is to compare and contrast the religions of Islam and Christianity within these social settings as they relate to those religions. If a person is social, then he must be sociable if he is going to be an asset to his religion, his family, and his community. It is with that premise in mind that attention is now turned to the social aspects of Islam, and the question, “Is Islam sociable?”

“In the beginning God created...” Those five words answer every question, or point to the answers of every question that man can imagine. God did create the entire physical world, all social institutions, and the spiritual realm, which man has enjoyed for about six thousand years. Like Christianity, Muslims have a high regard for God, family, and state government, so they say. Also, like the Bible, the Qur'an begins with mention of their god, “With the name of Allah...” (Sura 1:1). However, like many social orders, Islam has been fractured and divided for most of its history. In determining if Islam is a sociable order, one need only turn his attention to the factions found within the Muslim world.

The very first division in Islam appeared immediately following the death of Muhammad in A. D. 632. Unprepared for the absence of their leader, the Islamic community had to hurriedly “develop an organization plan for administration, military command, courts, and spiritual teaching” (Caner, Ergun Mehmet, and Emir Fethi Caner. *Unveiling Islam*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009. 162). The office of caliph was established as the leader and head of the community, but not on an equal footing with their prophet Muhammad. In order to have a stable leadership, the first caliph Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad’s fathers-in-law and first converts, worked quickly to put down any revolt and produced the first written versions of the Qur'an to be followed.

Though the number of Muslims was growing, there was also a growing dissent amongst the practitioners of the religion. The Sunnis, which is the larger of the two largest sects of the Muslim faith, and the Shi'ites disagreed on who should be installed as leader of the religion

following the death of Muhammad (Miller, Dave. *The Quran Unveiled*. Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, Inc., 2005. 43).

The Qur'an has long been seen as the Holy book that contains the divine message of their god Allah, but when one begins to digest its content, it becomes clear that the religion of Islam is not sociable toward fellow believers, and certainly not toward those that oppose the faith. In Iraq, the hatred amongst Muslims is just as glaring as their hatred toward the "infidels" of the world. With the fall of Saddam Hussein and his Sunni dictatorship came the establishment of a Shi'ite-controlled government and Muslim on Muslim terrorism (Luft, G., and A. Korin. *ProQuest*. 2007). It is a common thing for gruesome suicide attacks against Shiites by Sunni terrorists to take place followed by Shi'ite militias and death squads seeking revenge. The thing that is not uncommon is for Iraqis to be dragged from their cars and killed merely for being Sunni or Shiite. The religion of Islam cannot even be kind and sociable towards its fellow adherents of their faith! Contrary to Islam, Christianity does not seek revenge or the harm of others. Paul commanded, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21).

Next week we will continue our study of the religion of Islam and whether or not it is sociable to the other six billion people in the world today. Some of Islam's traditional attitudes toward the social institutions of the world will be noticed in our next *Cordova Connection*.