

## What Can Christians Learn from Islam?

Years ago, in Nigeria, I met a Muslim along the long driveway leading to our mission compound. I greeted him in the local style and he stopped to chat in the Hausa language. In the course of the conversation, I told him about my plans for the next day. I was going to do this and that, I confidently announced. He was silent for a moment, cocked his head slightly and then asked, “*Allah fa?*” “What about God?” Does He not figure in your plans?

I felt deeply embarrassed. Here was a Muslim for whom I was paid to bring the Gospel and he brought the Gospel to me! I was brought up in a culture where the term “*Deo volente*,” Latin for “God willing,” laced daily conversation. Immigrating to Canada where that term is rarely used, I had dropped it somewhere along the line. And, now, here was this Muslim *reminding* me of a neglected component of my inherited worldview and language.

That seemingly insignificant interchange has stuck with me ever since. “Allah fa?” Yes, indeed, what of God in our ordinary daily lives? His name interlaces most Muslim conversations, not, as in the West, as barbaric profanity, but as an expression of our dependence on Him in everything. Of course, deep down I *knew* that God is there all the time, but the secular culture in which I grew up on Vancouver Island made me careless and drop the lingo—and with it blunted the edge of this spiritual awareness. It was still there, but marginalized, so that this Muslim gentleman was offended. He *reminded* me.

*A main function Muslims can play in Western Christianity is that of reminder.* We have been so deeply influenced by the pervasive secularism that much of our Christian sensitivities have been blunted and Christian standards marginalized, if not plain forgotten. We know the Name of Jesus is holy and needs to be revered, but when He is insulted in public life by sheer derision or outright exclusion, we shrug our shoulders. A few years ago the Anglican Church in the UK was silent when someone publicly insulted Christ, but the Muslim community stood up and denounced the insult. After all, Jesus is seen as a Muslim Prophet second only to Muhammad. When someone is perceived as insulting Muhammad, even non-practicing Muslims get on their high horse and cause riots. But Christians just shrug their shoulders in indifference as if it is an inconsequential matter.

The generation that founded the *Christian Courier* was deeply offended by Canada’s secularism and challenged it by establishing Christ-honouring alternative social institutions. They took their issues to the highest courts of the land. Today, only half a century later, most of their descendants know little of and care less for those issues.

Muslims continually challenge this secularism and remind us of God across all of life. They have their prayer times and little stops them from performing it. Certainly not shame or embarrassment. Neither are they embarrassed about being identified as Muslims and, thus, religious. In fact, they are proud to be Muslim. We may sneer at some of their female fashions, but who sees Christ in us with *our* fashions? Where has modesty gone? Women, without any apology on my part to those concerned with the politically correct, do you realize how many of you befudge the reputation of Christ among Muslims with your fashions? Muslims remind us of modesty not only but of the general need for morals, both private and public. Of course, men

who casually ascend Christ's pulpits in torn jeans and flip-flops similarly downgrade His holy Name by their lack of respect, a word we have almost forgotten. (Unless it is a conscious decision to identify with a population where such dress is standard.) While we have largely succumbed to the secular demand for separation of religion from both politics and government, Muslims boldly march into the market place with religion up front, even with Muslim banks. In contrast, we deride such banks that uphold moral standards that go beyond the financial bottom line. When they speak mission, they do not talk of mere church planting; they actively claim the entire world for God. Sounds familiar? Reminded of some things?

Muslims serve to remind us of the need to re-install God in our daily lives at every level. We Reformed ought to respect them for it, observe them, listen to them and be reminded once again of our roots. Perhaps we can even cooperate with them at selected fronts.