



# Islamic Beliefs and Practices\*



## Mission Toolkit: Christian-Muslim Relations

### **“Islam Is a Way of Life”**

The word “Islam” means “surrender or submit,” and a “Muslim” is one who submits his/her will to God (Allah, in Arabic). Because God is Lord of the universe, every aspect of the believer’s life is to be submitted to God, including economic, political, social and spiritual life. For this reason, the distinctions between “sacred” and “secular,” “church” and “state” are generally invalidated. All of life belongs to God. More than a system of belief, Islam is considered a way of life, in which right practice is given priority over right belief.

### **Some Basic Tenets**

#### **God**

The basic tenets of Islamic belief begin with the Unity of God. A Muslim confesses simply, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet.” This doctrine would prohibit Muslims from associating anything with God that is not God, such as idols or human beings.

#### **Prophesy and Revelation**

Muslims see God acting in history by the granting of revelations through the prophets. God’s prophets include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad, to whom God has given God’s message as a reminder to human beings of God’s will for their lives. Moses was given the Torah; Jesus, the Gospel; Muhammad, the Quran. Muslims profess belief in all of God’s revelations to humanity through the prophets and the books. The prophets are not to be elevated above normal human beings, though they are considered to be models of true faith and practice.

As the culmination of all prophetic revelations, the Quran (the “recitation”) is God’s word, given in the Arabic language. It nurtures spiritual life, directs social and personal life, and provides the richness of Muslim liturgical expression.

#### **The Last Day**

Muslims teach that there will be a Last Day on which God will judge each human being according to her/his good and evil deeds. On that day, human beings will be rewarded with paradise or punished with hell, according to God’s mercy and justice.

#### **Angels**

In addition, Muslims share a belief in angels as messengers of God to humanity and as agents of God’s activity on earth. The angel Gabriel, for instance, recited the words of the Quran to Muhammad, who then repeated them to the people as God’s prophet in seventh-century Arabia.



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### ***The Five Pillars of Practice***

The practice of Islamic faith has been described as the “five pillars:” profession of faith, prayer, giving one’s material substance, fasting and pilgrimage. The profession of faith expresses belief in the “unity of God” and in God’s messengers, the final one being Muhammad. Muslims are enjoined in the Quran to pray five times daily at specified times, whether at home, in the office or in the mosque. The requirement to give a proportion of income/wealth is a means by which the community cares for its less fortunate members. Each year during the month of Ramadan, Muslims observe a strict fast, for purification and repentance, from sunrise to sunset each day. And finally, the pilgrimage is enjoined on those Muslims who have means to go and perform prescribed rituals at the Ka’bah in Mecca, in modern Saudi Arabia. Muslims from around the globe dress in simple garments to worship together in this holy city.

### ***Vision of a Just Society***

The goal of these five pillars, beyond simple obedience and personal edification, is the establishment of a society on earth, which is consistent with God’s will, as articulated in the Quran and traditions of the Prophet. It is these sources and their interpretation by subsequent generations of scholars that form the basis of Islamic law, called Shari’ah. There are various schools of legal and theological thought within the Islamic world, and each enjoys different degrees of loyalty from Muslims in any given country. Islamic activists often cry out loudly for the implementation of Islamic law as a viable alternative for the establishment of the reign of God in their societies.



*What are some basic Christian beliefs and practices?*

*How are these beliefs and practices interpreted differently among Christian traditions in various contexts?*



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