

Table Of Contents

I- Introduction

II- Definition of Arab Muslim Culture

III- History of Arab Muslims in North America

IV- Muslim Population Today in North America

V- Muslim's Mission and Strategies in North America

VI- Types of Muslims in North America

VII- Cultural Differences Among Arab Muslims in North America

VIII- Testimonies of Arab Muslims who Immigrated to North America

IX- What Should we do as Christians to Evangelize Arab Muslims?

X- Conclusion

I- Introduction

It is difficult to estimate the precise number of Muslims living in America today. Government census statistics no longer include data on an individual's religious affiliation, and few organizations have accurately determined the spiritual beliefs of private citizens. Some researchers have produced estimates based on immigration statistics which include the country of one's birth and former residence. More than 90 percent of Arab Americans have close friends or family in the Middle East and almost 65 percent have traveled there. About one half of Arab-Americans are Muslim, while the other 50 percent identify themselves as Christian. Although Muslim immigrants coming to America believe they are coming here for economic opportunity or political freedom, we should see that God is actually bringing them here so that they can hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. Just coming to America however does not automatically enable them to hear and understand the Gospel. There are barriers that can cut them off from the Gospel. Linguistic and cultural barriers are just as effective as the geographic and social barriers they face.

II- Definition of Arab Muslim Culture

Culture is a mental map of the world that people live in. Not just a physical map, but one that determines decisions and behavior.

“A simple definition of culture is “a system of meanings and values that shape one's behavior”...Our culture shapes who we are, what we believe and how we behave.”¹

¹Patty Lane, A Beginners Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends in a Multi-Cultural World (Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 16.

Many equate Islam and Muslims to mean Arabs. Muslims may be any nationality. An Arab

4

could be a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, or an atheist. Arabs constitute only about twenty percent of the Muslim population. The term Arab-American is given to persons who immigrated to the United States from a group of independent nation-states on North Africa and the Middle East. They have a common linguistic and cultural heritage that has been shaped primarily by the religions of Islam and Christianity in that region. In the Arabic language the word culture has several words. It could be *thaqafah*, *hadarah*, *tamaddun*, *umran*, *taqlid*, or *adat*. All of these carry some connotation of the concept "culture" as understood today in the Arab world. Muslims living in North America could actually choose what to "assimilate" from the western "culture". Most definitions of culture include material and social "norms" that a society agrees on and inherits. So, Muslims in North America could very well endorse and support social norms as long as they don't contradict with their Islamic belief and values.

Dr. Jasser Auda An Egyptian Canadian professor with two specializations, Engineering and Islamic Studies says: *"In Islamic legal thought, the closest to us definition of "culture" is what scholars called "al-`urf". However, `urf could be more precisely translated as traditional norms, i.e. it excluded beliefs and values. `Urf is considered by several schools of thought to be a "source of legislation" in areas that the scripts did not cover in detail."*

III- History of Arab Muslims in North America

The presence of Islam and Muslims in North America can be divided into five periods which I refer to as waves. The first Wave, according to the Islamic Culture Center in Washington DC., of Muslims were early arrivals in North America by the eighteenth

5

century. There were many thousands of them, working as slaves on plantations. These early communities, cut off from their heritage and families, inevitably lost their Islamic identity as time went by. In 1947 the Washington Islamic Center was founded during the term of President Truman, and several nationwide organizations were set up in the fifties. The same period saw the establishment of other communities whose lives were in many ways modeled after Islam. More recently, numerous members of these groups have entered the fold of Muslim orthodoxy. According to some overwhelming evidence Muslim orthodoxy, Muslims came to America before Columbus. But, these Muslims came as traders and navigators and went back home to the Kingdom of Mali, North-West Africa.

“Most historians agree that the first great influx of Muslims occurred during the years of the African Slave trade”²

The second wave of Muslims immigrated to the united States at the end of the nineteenth century, and we can summarize this movement in three phases:

“The first was the immigration of the Lebano-Syrians, between 1897 and 1920, linked to an economic crisis. The second phase began during the 1920’s and the 1930’s; it coincided with the contact between Arab immigrants and Blacks in the ghettos of the big northern cities, in Detroit and especially in Chicago. From 1947/48 the last phase began. It is linked to both the consequences of the creation of the State of Israel and the establishment of radical military regimes in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, and communist regimes in Balkans. Those who came were open to western

²Ron Peck, The shadow of the Crescent: The Growth of Islam in the United States (USA: CMM, 1995), 1.

culture, rich very aware of their position and better prepared to live in the U.S.A. We may add students of various origins who came quite often full of religious fervor.”³

The third wave of Muslims came to America from the area of Shaam (present day

6

Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, etc.), Palestine, British India, Southern Europe (present day Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Albania), Turkey, Central Asia and Ukraine. These Muslims had come, primarily, from the illiterate class and had a farming background. Most of these immigrants were understandably more concerned with finding a comfortable economic living in America than keeping their Islamic culture. However, they built a few prayer places (Mosques) in residential areas or rented homes for community prayers.

The fourth wave arrived after World War II and particularly in the late 1960's, when the immigration law gave equal opportunity to people from all countries to migrate to the U.S. on a qualification and merit basis.

“The real flood of Muslim immigrants began as a result of the change in the U.S. immigration laws in 1965, which gave much larger quotas to Muslim nations”⁴

Since then the influx of Muslim students and professionals like medical doctors, and engineers, came to America for education and employment opportunities. These new immigrants, with the financial support of International Islamic organizations and some Muslim governments started establishing Mosques/Islamic Centers, national and

³Michael A. Kosezegi and J. Gordon Melton eds., Islam in North America: A sourcebook (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 27.

⁴Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne , eds. , Perspectives on the world Christian Movement (United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1999), 90.

professional Islamic organizations. One of the largest Islamic Centers was constructed in Washington, D.C. and was inaugurated by President Eisenhower in 1957.

The current wave is one of citizenship and place of birth. Contrary to popular assumptions and the current political climate that foments suspicions about Arab American loyalties, more than eight in ten Arabs living in the United States are citizens, with a higher rate of naturalization (54%) than the overall foreign born population (40%).

7

Growth by new immigration was significant, with more than one in four foreign-born Arabs entering the U.S. in the decade since 1990. The agency formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimates that more than 300,000 Arabs immigrated to America in this period, with the peak year at 1996. Changes in immigration policy since the mid 1990s has caused a decline, which is certain to be exacerbated by post September 11, 2001 visa delays and excess scrutiny.

IV- Muslim Population Today in North America

In the United States, there are essentially three categories of Muslims:

“1) First generation immigrants who form 55% of the American Muslim population. 2) American converts/reverts to Islam, they form 25% of the American Muslim population. 3) those born to the first two groups as Muslims, and they form the remaining 15%.”⁵

There are two estimates which have different ideas regarding the numbers of Arab Muslims populations. The Arab American Institute (AAI) believes there are about 4 million Arab Americans most of Lebanese or Syrian origin, but the population of

⁵Ibid. , 95,97.

Egyptian, Palestinian, and Iraqi Americans has been growing steadily. Two thirds of Arab Americans speak fluent English, three quarters use Arabic language media to obtain vital information with over 70 percent saying the best way to reach them is through broadcast outlets.

The sources of U.S. Census believes there are about 1.25 million Arab Muslim Americans roughly one in three claim Lebanese heritage, with 11% indicating roots in

8

Egypt and Syria, 6% as Palestinian and 10% as Iraqi, Chaldean or Assyrian. When looking at where subgroups tend to live, we learn that those of Lebanese heritage dominate in most states, with the exception of New Jersey — where those of Egyptian heritage are the largest Arab group — and Rhode Island where persons of Syrian descent exceed other Arab Americans. The state with the largest number of people tracing their roots to Palestine was Illinois, which also claims a large number of Arab Americans of Iraqi and Assyrian/Chaldean background. Michigan and California similarly counted a large number of Arab Americans of Iraqi and Assyrian/Chaldean heritage. Moroccans now represent 3% of the Arabic-speaking population, a new immigrant community that resides primarily along the eastern seaboard between Massachusetts and Virginia.

“The majority of Arab Americans are Christian -- Eastern Orthodox (e.g., Greek Catholic, Maronite, Coptic, Assyrian, and Chaldean), Roman Catholic, and Protestant, but Muslims are the fastest growing segment of the community. The large majority of Arab Americans are native-born Americans, and 82% are U.S. citizens. Every year, there are thousands of Muslim students who are graduating from colleges and universities in the United States and Canada but only 10% of them are involved in some Islamic activity after their graduation.”⁶

⁶*U.S. State Department*

V- Muslim's Mission and Strategies in North America

Generally, Muslims in North American society implement the same missionary strategies that evangelical Christians use to witness to non-Muslims about Islam. North American Muslims claim that even if the original strategy is no longer possible, Muslims are still responsible to win the world to Islam. Therefore new strategies are needed to win the world. And where could such strategies be found? Within Christianity, the greatest

9

religion in the world. The *first* priority strategy for Muslims is to establish and organize mosques in North America.

“Prince Bandar explained that the King's donation covers the cost of construction of the *Ibn Taymia* complex which will include an Islamic center for learning, publications, and conferences as well as a place of worship serving some 250,000 Muslims in United States. The Chairman and the Board of Directors of the *Ibn Taymia* Institute, said; The *Ibn Taymia* Institute is not a political or a commercial concern, but a charitable Islamic organization registered in the United States with the right to own property and operate religious and educational activities in all states. Its objectives are to promote the call of Islam and the teachings of the Prophet, and to foster Muslims' pride in their religion and their heritage, by building mosques, holding conferences, publishing books, and linking American Muslims with their brothers in the Arab and Islamic worlds, providing them with educational and material assistance and cementing human and friendly ties with other religious and educational institutions whether governmental or not, American or not, and entering into dialogue with them based on knowledge and justice.”⁷

Aziz Bin Fahd, paid the \$875,000 cost of the land on which the mosque will be built.

The *Second* strategy is to develop *da'wah* (calling people to the way of Islam). For instance, the Islamic Assembly of North America mission strategy is “to bring

⁷[1995 Saudi-U.S. Relations News Story](#)
[07/08/1995](#)

together the efforts of many *da'wah* activities and coordinating the activities of different Islamic centers and groups in North America. Their goal is to look upon not only as a duty for Muslims here, but also as an inherent part of their culture an to unite all Muslims in Milwaukee area under one organization and to teach Islam to non-Muslims.”

The *Third* strategy is political involvement.

“Muslims are seeking to become politically involved in America, they are looking for power in their hand ultimately to Islamize the country”⁸

10

The *Fourth* strategy is seeking greater access to the media in order to present Islam in a positive light and to make Islam look attractive in North America. The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in September 2001 caused major damage to the image of Islam. The world media and Christians rushed to learn about Islam, its beliefs and the meaning of Jihad. Religious debates were front-page news.

“In accordance with the large number of Arabs located in North America, ART has dedicated a channel to cater to and provide these masses with a touch of home. ART's goal is to link the Arab communities to their homeland with programming in their own languages. Programming highlights include entertainment, drama, sports and movies as well as coverage of national events, festivals and religious celebrations. ART also focuses on the younger generation of Arab Americans, offering broadcast language lessons and learning programs. ART is committed to delivering a cultural message to Arab Americans, with a powerful distribution system and global network. ART is available 24 hours a day in North America.”⁹

The sects of Islam, moderate Muslims and many educated groups in Islam in North America disagree with what has happened. Many Imams in North America are saying

⁸Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka, Muslims and Christians at the Table:Promoting Biblical understanding Among North American Muslims (New jersey: P&R Publishing, 1999), 24.

⁹ART America Television

that Islam is a religion of peace. This statement comes from one of two motives, wishful thinking and deception. They want to make Islam look attractive to Westerners. They say violence is not acceptable in true Islam and even the extremists say it would be the same as judging Christianity only by the crusades. So many “fatwas” appeared to prove that Islam is a religion of peace. Islam is now like a wounded lion trying to stay alive. Muslim leaders, particularly in United States, are focusing on fixing their reputation and trying to present a different image of Islam.

I myself have seen pamphlets that are always filled with verses from the *Qur'an* that sound more like Christianity than Islam. Some who don't know Islam and even those who

11

practice Islam sincerely believe these teaching are true. But well-educated Islamic leaders know that teachings are part of a strategy to make Islam look good to Westerners.

The Last strategy that Muslims desire to do is to train their children in Islamic law and *shari'a*.

VI- Types of Muslims in North America

There are five types of Muslims in North America. 1- Secular Muslims who are quiet and even hang American flags on their houses and show support to United states. 2- Ordinary Muslims who practice some of the teachings of Islam, but they don't want to do anything difficult, like participate in Jihad. They are more interested in having comfortable lives, providing for their children and running their businesses. They are Muslims because of their culture and traditions and not their strong religious beliefs. Most of the Muslims in the United states are ordinary Muslims. 3- Religious Muslims are

committed to Islam. They practice Islam, pray five times a day, give alms and fast during Ramadan. A Religious Muslim may not be a radical, but at any time he feels his religion or people are threatened, he may cross the line. 4- Orthodox Muslims want to follow the requirements of Islam, but they also want to do it in the same way as Muhammad did in the seventh century. 5- Sufites are trying to transfer the meaning of Jihad from the spreading Islam with the sword to a spiritual struggle to fight evil within oneself. They have been rejected from other Muslim groups who do not consider them to be true Muslims. Finally, the fanatic Muslims, who are committed to put their words into action. They are ready to fight and practice *Jihad* and join militant groups like *Hizboallah*, *Hamma*s and *al-Qaeda*.

12

VII- Cultural Differences Among Arab Muslims in North America.

The earlier years were hard for Muslims in America; many suffered from loneliness, poverty, lack of English, and the absence of extended family and co-religionists.

Gradually, however, as they stayed longer, more and more Muslims realized that returning home was no longer a viable possibility, and they began to settle into the American context. The young Muslims married one way or another. Young men who could not find Muslim partners imported their brides from their home country or, in some cases, married outside the faith. They began to find employment in more permanent kinds of businesses, often relying on traditional skills to begin restaurants, coffeehouses, bakeries, and grocery stores. They learned English, began to become more economically independent, and sought out other Muslims for the formation of communities in which they could begin the religious education of their children. Many Muslims today in North

America have unconsciously absorbed much of the prevailing secular view of life. Muslims in North America, as do people everywhere, often possess a form a godliness while denying its power (2Timothy 3:2-5).

“Arab American community has suffered and continues to suffer in many ways because of negative stereotyping of Arabs. Thus, Arab Americans are made to feel ashamed of their ancestors and their former homeland. As a result, some have avoided reference to their Arab heritage, for instance, often describing themselves in terms of the geographic region from which they came or the religious sect to which they belong. Also, in an attempt to “assimilate” completely in American society, some have changed their names, to ones which sound more American, e.g., Changing Haddad to Smith.”¹⁰

13

Muslims are struggling with their own Islamic law. *Shari'ah*, is based on the *Qur'an*, and the teachings of Mohammed.

“The word Shari'a means “road,” “the clear path,” “the way to the watering place.”¹¹

The *Shari'a* is the habit of Islam. It strongly influences Muslim life, so how do Muslims survive in North America? The structured frame of Islamic Law provides a unifying issue to Muslims who live in that diversity. In one sense, it is true to say that the *Shari'a* holds the Muslim world together. At the same time, it is also true to say that local American culture has influenced Muslim custom.

Arab Muslims in America appreciate their cultural heritage and do not wish to lose it. Today Muslims are asking themselves whether it is possible to join in *Khutba*

¹⁰Michael A. Kosezegi and J. Gordon Melton eds., Islam in North America: A Sourcebook (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), 55,56.

¹¹Roland E. Miller, Muslim Friends their Faith and Feeling: An Introduction to Islam (Saint. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 264.

service on Sunday instead of Friday, since that is the only day they are free. The classical *Shari'a* says no, but many Muslims say yes, since the primary duty is the worship of God. In fact, many mosques in North America now conduct worship on Sundays. The dynamic interaction between classical *Shari'a* and human culture continue today.

There are three fundamental questions that Arab Muslims are discussing today in North America. Can the *Shari'a* be changed? Can the *Shari'a* be updated or can the *Shari'a* be supplemented? The Arab Muslims life in North America has become very complex.

The *Qur'an* has become less important for Muslims in North America, although it affects their thinking in all areas of life. A Muslim has personal devotions to God, goes every day

14

to the mosque for prayer and is used to praying in public. Islam affects the family and community life, work, politics and culture. The *Qur'an* grants the Muslim spiritual power which is more important than understanding the meaning of the text. The *Qur'an*, spoken and written, is used in treating illness, in obtaining protection in all kinds of circumstances, in gaining blessing and in placing curses. There are visible manifestations of the occult in Islam everywhere even on streets and in names, primarily as an attempt to ward off the "evil eye".

“The first thing Muslims hear upon birth and the last thing they hear just before the moment of death is a reading from the *Qur'an*. Verses from the *Qur'an* are often inscribed on the walls of Muslim homes. The *Qur'an* is also a textbook on Islam for Muslim children...The *Qur'an* is memorized by many Muslims. Including children.”¹²

¹²Ron Rhodes, Reasoning from the Scriptures with Muslims (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 69.

As Muslims start living in the United States, they find out that there are many churches, religious groups, and aggressive Christians trying to convert them to Christianity and to convince them that Israel is the promised land, the nation of God, with the right to exist in the Middle East. They start to examine Christians and research in order to find out the truth. They think of god merely as a kind of figurehead. On one hand, they want to be happy materially and socially. On the other hand, they long to be distinctly Muslims. They feel that even if god is there, He is certainly silent on daily issues of their lives. In today's society, especially youth are leaving their Islamic god and Muslim values in the dark. In addition, a significant number of young Muslims are marrying outside the community. They need now a living God who can hear their voices.

15

Muslims Holidays and festivals lost its value in the life of a Muslim in North America. Festivals are playing an important part in the life of a Muslim each year. During *Ashura* Sunni Muslims remember the Prophets in the *Qur'an* and *Shi'ite* Muslims mourn in commemoration of the massacre of Imam Husain, the Prophet's grandson. *Eid al Fitr* is the festival of fast Breaking. *Eid al-Adha* is the festival of sacrifice. *Isra-wa al-Mi'raj* is the night of Muhammad's Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and his Ascension to the seventh heavens from the Dome of the rock. *Mawlid al-Nabi* is the birth of the Prophet. *Nisf Sha'ban* (Half of Sha'ban) commemorates the change in the direction (*qibla*) of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. *Saum of Ramadan* (Fast of Ramadan) is the month of fasting. *Youm al-Juma'a* is the Day of Assembly. Every Friday, Muslim men are obliged to assemble for prayers at noon. Women and children are not required to attend, but are

welcome. In North America Muslims are not practicing their holidays as they usually did in their own countries.

The Arab-American family structure and customs are challenging. The challenges and moral dilemmas facing Muslim families require an understanding of the shifts in ideological, social, religious and political forces that are shaping the structure and function of families in North America.

“The family is the foundation of Islamic society. The peace and security offered by a stable family unit is greatly valued, and seen as essential for the spiritual growth of its members. A harmonious social order is created by the existence of extended families; children are treasured, and rarely leave home until the time they marry.”¹³

16

The American born Muslim will likely have some basic Christian ideas which influence his outlook.

Among Muslims, there are thousands of cultures and subcultures. Some of the cultural clashes Muslims encounter in North America are not only with American society, but between various Muslim cultures.

“Recently sixteen American Muslim organizations called for the removal of a marble frieze of Muhammad on the north wall of the Supreme Court building. He is depicted as a lawgiver along with numerous others. The image shows Muhammad with a sword in one hand and the *Qur’an* in the other. The Muslims wrote the high court, “this imagery reflects long-held stereotypes of Muslims as intolerant conquerors and perpetuates misconceptions that continue to have a negative impact on the lives of ordinary American Muslims” they also

¹³[The Islamic Affairs Department *Understanding Islam and the Muslims*, \(Cambridge, The Islamic Texts Society\), 6.](#)

said that Muslims discourage the use of created images of the prophet.”¹⁴

Postmodernism is a word which simply sums up the way much of the world thinks today. For Muslims they believe in fate and always are comfortable with reason. Islam never succumbed either to modernity nor is losing out to post modernity.

“ . . . together with us they [Muslims] adore the one, merciful, God.” Many religious leaders today are being accepting the idea that the Allah of the Koran, the god of Rome, and the God of the Bible are one and the same. To the “people of the Scriptures” or “book,” Muslims are told to say, “We have faith in that which has been revealed to us and in that which has been revealed unto you. Our God and your God are one, and unto him we are resigned”¹⁵

VIII-Testimonies of Arab Muslims who immigrated to North America.

The following are some reflections from Arab Muslims who have integrated to North America.

17

One Muslim said, “I am from a Muslim background from Syria. I grew and lived 13 years in the Middle East in Syria and I have been living in North America for 27 years.

Honestly I often feel confused about where I belong . Deep down in my heart I feel like an Arab and a Muslim, but after so many years I have adapted to Western culture. This was not always good. I hurt myself a lot. At the same time I am -maybe- a little more tolerant or I am able to accept other people's opinion or beliefs than friends and relatives I

¹⁴Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka, Muslims and Christians at the Table:Promoting Biblical understanding Among North American Muslims (New Jersey: P & R Publishing, 1999), 54.

¹⁵The Qur’an 29:46.

have who live in Arab countries. I feel the last years that I want to feel more united, not torn apart. Please help!!!”

Another Muslim provided an example of cultural misunderstanding. “It was my first week in the States and a friend invited me to eat lunch with him. After finishing the meal, my friend left the restaurant after he paid a cashier. As I was leaving behind him, the cashier called me and asked me to pay for my food. I was so embarrassed because I thought my friend had paid for both of us. I had no cash with me and of course had no credit cards at that time. I called my friend and he paid. I did not know that when someone invites you out, you had to pay for yourself. In my culture, if you invite someone you pay for him. Even if he offers to pay, you do not allow him to. Well, it was just a cultural misunderstanding and I had to learn it the embarrassing way@.

Another Muslim said, “In my country, I had friends but no freedom. Here I have much freedom but no friends. People are interested in me only for the first time.”

One of the Muslim students said, “ When I walk down a hallway and an American says with a smile Hi, How are you doing?, I stop and try to tell how I am doing. Instead, they just keep on walking and don=t really care about my answer.”

IX -What Should we do as Christians to Evangelize Arab Muslims?

When we as Christians develop friendships with Muslims we might wonder: “How do we attract them? How can we win them to Christ? How can we set ourselves as good examples to them? Why are we helping them?” An appropriate response would be, because I have experienced God=s grace, love and goodness in my life, God has told me to share what I have received. Matt. 10: 8 “*Freely you have received freely give*”

There are many important things that Christians must observe in dealing with Muslims. First, avoid negative questions such as: What do we have in common with Muslims? Could we win a discussion? What if they can't speak English? How can I communicate with them? What if they don't like me or us or our food? Also, many Christians believe that it is impossible for a Muslim to receive the message of salvation for these reasons and believe the effort to share the Gospel with them is futile and a waste of time. We often become preoccupied with these questions. They weigh us down with unpleasant aspects and they kill our vision, passion, faith, motives, and desire to reach these people until finally we will not do anything at all. Secondly we must cross stereotypes and deal with reality and truth. Begin where Muslims are, and find out where they are by getting to know them. Stereotypes hinder us in our evangelism.

Some of stereotype assumptions:

Stereotypes Muslims have of the North American people	Stereotypes North Americans have of Muslims	Stereotypes Muslims have of themselves	Muslim Assumptions
All Christians	Many are rich	Islam is the only way to heaven/	Children must be educated in Islamic

		Universal	schools
Materialists	Camel Jokes	Have all the answers	N. A people are misinformed
No moral standard	All Arabs	Moral champion	N. A. people are hard to understand
Independence	Terrorists/ religion of sword	Religious not secular	Muslims must maintain a separate Islamic subculture
Individuality	Fanatics	growing world power/	God is on our side

Third, be aware and sensitive to their culture. We need to understand culture differences. Otherwise we will never fully understand anyone outside of our own ethnic group.

“Look to the good things in the culture. Norman Vincent Peale wasn’t the first to discover the power of positive thinking. Paul preached it long ago when he wrote to the Christians in Philippi. There are pleasant and unpleasant aspects to every culture. There is always a tendency to become preoccupied with the unpleasant aspects. They have a way of standing out, of attracting attention, and of grating on one’s pleasant things. You

can appreciate them and thank God for them. If you do this you will soon discover that the pleasant aspects outnumber and overshadow the unpleasant ones.”¹⁶

We need to train ourselves to help Arab Muslims through culture differences by respecting them, learning about their culture, behavior, rules even learning a few simple words and phrases of their language. “You say “Amen”, I say “Ameen”. You say “Potato” I say “Patata”. We should acknowledge the perspective that the Arab Muslim culture isn’t “wrong”, it’s just “different.” Differences include visible culture (food, music, art, architecture, political, economic, social, psychological, national, racial and religion).

For many Muslims, clothing is important as a means of preserving a strict moral ethic.

“Some groups allow females to expose only their eyes and hands to the outside world. Few are this extreme, but one should generally expect Muslims to be secretly or openly offended by what most Americans wear...Whereas in America the female breast may be considered the chief sex symbol, this is not necessarily so in other cultures. A woman’s long flowing hair, legs, ankles, eyes and lips are in many cases the chief “turn ones” for Muslim males”¹⁷

At this point we should deal with a question that nearly arises. How much should we change our lifestyles to avoid offending people? In 1Corinthians 9:22 Paul’s desire was to become all things to all people in order to win them to Christ. When reaching out to Arab Muslims do not move too fast and do not get involved physically or emotionally. Be aware that touching may not be appropriate and may be misinterpreted by your Muslim friend, especially by females.

¹⁶ Anis Shorosh, Islam Revealed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988),

¹⁷Larry A. Poston and Carl F. Ellis Jr., The Changing Face of Islam in America : Understanding and Reaching Your Muslim Neighbor (Pennsylvania: Horizon Books, 2000), 229.

“Most Islamic cultures strongly forbid casual conversation with a member of the opposite sex. To cross this boundary may be viewed as insulting in a Muslim family. For a woman to speak forcefully to a man shows disrespect and Christian man who speaks to a Muslim woman without her husband present insults the husband. American Islam tends to be less restrictive, but Christians should observe conversation protocols until they discern that it is safe to do otherwise.”¹⁸

There are some other issues to be aware of such as the Muslim attitude regarding pets. A dog is seen as a farm animal which we would never have in our home. Do not be

19

offended if Muslims avoid your dog or treat it in an unfriendly manner. Muslims also have some food restrictions which make it hard for them to choose what to eat if they are at a restaurant or at people's homes. Orthodox Arab Muslims will not eat food that is not prepared according to Islamic law. Hospitality is a way of life for the Arab Muslims, and thus, it plays a very important role here. Do not be a stumbling block. Understand his or her mind regarding hygiene.

“The Bathroom is considered unclean and the place of the devil. A Muslim would be surprised to find a Bible for reading in the bathroom of a Christian’s home. Wiping or cleaning oneself after using the toilet is done with the left hand. Therefore, it is considered improper to hand someone something with the left hand.

Ablution (*Wuda*), the ritual cleansing required before prayers, is done in the bathtub and sink when at home by bathing (*ghusl*) is required after sexual intercourse, a wet dream, or giving birth. The body of a dead person is also ritually washed and buried within twenty-four hours.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Ergun Mehmet and Emir Fethi Caner, Unveiling Islam. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 225.

¹⁹Bruce A. McDowell and Anees Zaka, Muslims and Christians at The Table: Promoting Biblical understanding Among North American Muslims (New jersey: P&R Publishing, 1999), 51-52 .

Understanding Culture differences between Arab Muslims, North American and the Bible

Themes	North American	Arab Muslim	Biblical
Relationships	Individualism Independent	Family oriented/ dependent	Love/ Community Oriented/respectful
Values	Doing	Being	People
Future	Highly organized/ Strategic planning	Fate, unstructured	Eternity with or without God
Business	Task oriented	Cooperative	Faithfulness
Family	Distant	rooted	Image of God
Authority	Equal/ democratic	Hierarchy dominant	Submission in love
Gender roles	Diversity/ struggle	Male dominated	Diverse in unity
Money	Idol/ resource to achieve dream	Control, position	Our treasure in heaven
Priority	Technology/ paying my bills	Friendship/ spiritualism	Kingdom of God
History	Influence decision	Proud	God speak through it
Religion	Freedom of choice	Society choice	Law
Conflict solved	Agencies/ Courts	Tribe, family clique	Blood of Jesus

Food/ Customs	Fast/ meeting place	Variety, hospitable	Word of God
Concerns	Career perfect	Reputations	Others around me
Age	Emphasis power	Senior and elder	generations
Time	Value/ respected and dominate	Neglected/ Event oriented	Everything has own time
Observation	Proud people/ superficial	Overall/ Plural	Church community
Communication	Direct/ demand what they want	indirect	Important/ truth
Friendship	Casual	Necessary	God's goal

Fourth, Christians should also acknowledge and discuss intelligently the aspects of theology that Muslims and Christians appear to have in common in other word we need to understand the common ground. Also as Christians our responsibility is to study the scriptures, in the original language if possible, but always in terms of the Bible's cultural context.

“Any sound system of hermeneutics must take into account the cultural context in which the message was originally communicated, the background and syntax and style, the characteristics of the audience, and the special circumstances in which the message was given.”²⁰

²⁰Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne , eds. , Perspectives on the World Christian Movement (United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1999), 341.

Fifth, base your communication to Muslims upon the love of God. The nature of love is described in *Song of Solomon 8:6-7*. In this book the following characteristics of love are listed: love is as strong as death, love cannot be destroyed, love cannot be bought, and

25

love has its origin in the Lord. Of course, Jesus is our example of how to love others. Develop personal relationship with Muslims and recognize that we are dealing with *people* and not with robots, objects or insensitive creatures.

“Muslims are people before they are Muslims. If we can keep in mind that are Muslims-people who have need for friendship, the need for love and security, people who laugh and cry, and so forth-you will find it much easier to treat them with respect and kindness when you speak with them.”²¹

Arab Muslims need friends as soon as they arrive in the United States especially during the first year.

“ Muslims are unlikely to become your brethren until they first become your friend. By building and developing friendships with Muslims, Christians lay a strong foundation for an effective witness.”²²

Sixth, we need to be sensitive, not only towards Muslims as people with needs and misgivings, but also towards the Spirit of God who alone can convert people, who "blows where he wills" (John 8.3), and who is not impatient. Most Arab Muslims try to live and let live when it comes to their religious practice. Their solution, therefore, is that Jesus is one of many ways to God.

“They may even pray to accept Christ. Yet, in their hearts, they may still evade Christ’s uniqueness. For this reason we must make the choice very clear. Christ did! Jesus said that He was the way, not just a way. He is the Prophet of God, Priest and King. Christ is not just a prophet among others.

²¹Ron Rhodes, Reasoning From the Scriptures With Muslims (Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 26.

²² Ibid., 22.

He is not only the son of Miriam (Mary), as the Qur'an identifies Him, He is the unique Son of God. Be aware of decisions that come quickly and easily. It is only as we stay in the bible that we keep our focus on the narrowness of God's truth."²³

Present your personal faith experiences and testimony positively rather than presenting

26

Islam negatively. By doing so you allow Muslims to share their experiences in return. The moment you challenge a Muslim's beliefs, he becomes immediately a radical Muslim. Christians need to learn to share stories and to portray biblical figures.

Seventh, the sensitive evangelist may find a deep sense of loyalty in the Muslim. This may begin with the family. Family unity can play an important role. An Eastern proverb illustrates this. "*Me against my brother, my brother and I against my cousin, all of us against the foreigner*". We need to understand family structure. Try to understand how to integrate into their own group. You will see more clearly what steps you may take to become close to that same group. Always prepare to meet a friend by prayer. Remember that only God by the power of Holy Spirit can lift the veil of spiritual blindness from the human heart (2Corinthians 4:4; see also 3:16; John 8:32). Pray with compassion for the Muslims you witness to and pray often with faith (Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 18:1-8; James 5:16). Meet only with individual Muslims, sharing the gospel with Muslims is best done on a one-to one basis because a Muslim will not feel freedom to express any doubt he has about Islam, and he will be afraid to ask questions in front of a group setting. Muslims will occasionally lie or withhold part of the truth to preserve family honor and protect the relationship with other people around him.

²³John Haines, Good News for Muslims: Tools for Proclaiming Jesus to Your Neighbor (Pennsylvania: Middle East Resources, 1998), 51.

X- Conclusion

The Arab-American community, numbering over two million, is composed of the groups who began to come to the U.S from the Arabic speaking area in the Middle East over a hundred years ago. While the early immigrants were mainly engaged in trade and

27

devoted much of their energy to social activities, their descendants and the more recent arrivals are highly educated professionals, many of whom are civic leaders and political. Therefore we will never be effective in reaching out to Muslims with the Gospel alone. Prayer and proclamation of the Gospel go hand in hand. We seek to know our Muslim friend better by studying what the Bible says about the Arab peoples. The unique talents and culture of our friend are much more valuable than we first think. Study people and observe them carefully at home and in the market place. You will find your witness more pointed. Prayerfully study the world of your friend.

“We need to be aware of history, size, growth rate, ethnic composition, geographical locations, and organizations of Muslims in the U.S., but our major focus should be on recognizing the need for prepared workers to reach these distinct groups of Muslims for Christ. Fully supported cross-cultural missionaries and national immigrant ethnic Christians are needed to reach the largest group of first generation immigrants....And all churches and Christian laymen are needed to reach the rapidly growing second and third generation immigrant Muslims.”²⁴

Freedom to Muslims would be a great blessing, but we can't really expect economic and political freedom to bring freedom from their slavery to sin and deception. The kingdom of God that Jesus preached was a spiritual kingdom of God's rule in the

²⁴Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne , eds. , Perspectives on the world Christian Movement (United Kingdom: Paternoster Press, 1999), 98.

hearts of His people, not an earthly and political kingdom establishment. Muslims in North America have political freedom but are just as bound in their Islamic thinking as if they lived in a predominantly Muslim country. A reformed Islam would be a redefined Islam that would not be the same religion as Islam is today. Ultimately, we cannot depend upon human strength or effort, but upon the work of the Holy Spirit through our prayers

28

to open doors of opportunity for gospel proclamation, to bring conviction of sin, and to give faith in Christ to the slaves of Allah.

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