

Franciscan University Presents
“Catholics and Islam”
with guest, Robert Spencer

an excerpt from
Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics
100 Questions and Answers
by
Daniel Ali and Robert Spencer

Should Muslims be evangelized by Christians or be left alone?

Some say that Christians should not speak to Muslims about our faith, both because it is useless (even impossible) to do so and because Muslims have their own covenant with God. These notions are false and misguided for several reasons.

As for the idea that converting Muslims is impossible, our Lord says that “with God, all things are possible” (Mt 19:26). Christianity teaches that God wills for everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth, Jesus Christ, who came to preach the Gospel to all people without exception. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands His disciples to announce the Gospel to “all nations,” going into the entire world (Mt 28:20). Throughout its history the Church has taken this call of Jesus seriously. Many Christians today, though, act as if Muslims are the exception to this command, and they complain about how hard it is to lead Muslims to Christ. Yet success is possible: in recent years many Muslims have embraced Christianity.

The evangelization of Muslims is not an unimportant issue. Nowadays many people tend to think that all religions are basically the same and that an individual’s particular beliefs do not matter. They point out that both good and evil people can be found among all sects and creeds. While this is undeniably true (Mt 7:21-23), it is beside the point: insufficient attention is given to the fact that not all religions expect the same things of people or call them to uphold the same standards. The command to “love your enemies” (Mt 5:44) is a higher, better call than the exhortation to be “merciless to unbelievers” (Sura 48:29). However well or poorly Christians live up to these words, they still stand as a microcosm of the mystery of Christ’s Cross and the secret of peace for anyone who has the courage to live them out. Muslims should not be deprived of an opportunity to learn about the words and works of Jesus (and His revelation of God as Father) due to Christian indifference.

At the same time, some Christians advocate making common cause with Muslims on certain moral issues—fighting together for pro-life causes, for example. The Catholic Church has demonstrated the possibilities of such endeavors on a worldwide scale by

joining with Muslim countries at the United Nations to defeat anti-life and anti-family initiatives. In light of such successes, it would be foolish to say that mutual cooperation between Christians and Muslims cannot happen.

However, in light of the elements of Islamic theology previously discussed, it is clear that such collaborations have their limits: some Muslims will never want to deal with Christians as equal partners. Their receptiveness to such initiatives will vary from place to place and issue to issue. This does not mean that Christians should not approach local Muslim groups to try to enlist their support on a particular issue about which Christians and Muslims agree, but they should be prepared for the possibility they may be rejected.

Regardless of whether our efforts are accepted or rejected, the urgency of our mission to Islam can be taken from the very words of Jesus Himself. There are three key New Testament passages that should inspire us in our efforts to evangelize Muslims:

1. In describing Himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus tells his followers that “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). We must earnestly desire to bring this abundant life of Christ to Muslims and, indeed, to all who do not yet possess it.
2. In John 14:6, Jesus teaches: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” We must strive to present the true Way, Truth, and Life to Muslims so that they might come to know God as their loving Father.
3. Immediately before His ascension into heaven, Jesus gives His disciples the Great Commission to preach His saving Gospel to all: “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). This commission is ours as well.

Sharing the Gospel with Muslims

St. Francis of Assisi’s advice to his own friars is a good place to start. He said: “Preach the Gospel with all your might; and if necessary, use words.” Successful evangelization of others is mostly a witness to the treasure we hold in “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). Thus we have to prepare ourselves inwardly to bear witness to the Christian life outwardly. Daily living for God, consciously and continually choosing to live for God, and rejecting evil in all its forms is the necessary foundation for any successful evangelization effort.

Study what the Church actually teaches, so as to “be ready with an answer to those who ask you what is the cause of your joy” (1 Pt 3:15). Frequent the Sacraments, pray a great deal, and read and study the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers. Digest the wisdom of the Scriptures and the light that the Fathers bring to them, until you intimately know the riches they contain. If you have an active spiritual life, you

will have much to share with non-Christians about the power of the Resurrected Christ in your life.

Seek out personal relationships with Muslims, and strive to be as good a person as the person with whom you are speaking. Human nature is the same everywhere—the one true God created all human beings, and He is love. Whatever the official tenets of their faith, Muslims are just as likely to be kind and loving as anyone else.

Learn enough about Islamic theology to be able to recognize insincere or incomplete statements of Muslim belief. (You have taken a bold step in this direction by reading this book.) Much of what you bring up will be disputed immediately if it casts the Koran, Muhammad, or Allah in a bad light. Realize that much of what you may receive in return is distorted information, although the Muslim will be sincerely offering a defense of his faith.

Share a deeper understanding of what the Incarnation means and why this is not blasphemy, but rather is an accord with belief in a loving Creator. Explain how God wants a mutual relationship of love with His creatures, and how it would be contrary to His nature to be a “slave master.” Focus on Jesus and His miracles as proof that He was (and is) the Messiah, the Son of God. Explain how he could not be merely a prophet—He claimed to be “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” and clearly stated that “no one comes to the Father *but through Me*” (Jn 14:6).

Be prepared: the Muslims you meet may not even believe what we have told you in this book. Not many Muslims are well versed in their faith, and many, particularly in the United States, have been influenced by Western secular ideas. Many have not even read the Koran since they may not read Arabic, and yet they may still believe that only the Arabic Koran is the true Koran. They may know only the “spoken version” of Islam, which is subject to varying cultural influences and may or may not include all of the major doctrines of the faith.

It is wise not to assume that a particular Muslim believes all that we have discussed in this book, since our answers rely upon the sources of the faith: the Koran and the Hadith. The average Muslim may never examine these sources. If you ask your Muslim friend questions, you will quickly discover whether or not he has read the Koran and Hadith.

A good question to ask yourself is this: “Do I have as much zeal for the truth of Christ as the devout Muslim does for Islam?” But be forewarned! If you devote yourself to bringing the Gospel to Muslims, they will not see you as a fellow pilgrim moving toward the Kingdom or as a living temple of the Holy Spirit. To a serious Muslim, you will more likely be seen as an infidel with no real dignity or rights. You will be seen as a proper target of disinformation—half-truths and distortions of Islam designed to disarm and distract you from seeing the truth about the religion. Any good you do or evil you endure will be dismissed and your Christian virtue overlooked, since you will be regarded

as an infidel and predestined by Allah for destruction in Hell. Some will even believe that they will be rewarded in Heaven for harming you or undermining your life.

What should the Christian reaction be to all of this? Ultimately, Christianity's unique and most compelling answer to Islam is the sacrificial love of Christ on the Cross. There is an immense difference between a life lived in the mistaken belief that the cross is a defeat and a humiliation (as Islam teaches) and a life lived in the profound truth that the Cross is man's only real source of victory and a liberation.

Insofar as we Christians are willing to imitate the sacrificial love of Christ, we will show Muslims the elements of mercy, compassion, and true peace that their religion is lacking. We will show them why, despite the tremendous obstacles, it is worthwhile to give everything for Jesus Christ. Insofar as we do not model this sacrificial love, of course, neither Muslims nor anyone else will see why they should prefer the Christian faith to their own.

This is our great challenge and our great responsibility.

**Titles Mentioned on *Franciscan University Presents*
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* *Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics* by Robert Spencer. Ascension Press.

Of Gods and Men (movie) directed by Xavier Beauvois.

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What Were the Crusades? by Jonathan Riley-Smith. Ignatius Press. Available on www.amazon.com.

The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude by Bat Ye'or. Farleigh Dickinson University Press. Available on www.amazon.com.

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* *The Suffering of Love: Christ's Descent Into the Hell of Human Hopelessness* by Dr. Regis Martin. Ignatius Press.

* *The Truth About Trouble* by Father Michael Scanlan, TOR. St. Anthony Messenger Press.

* *Signs of Life: 40 Catholic Customs and Their Biblical Roots* by Dr. Scott Hahn. Doubleday Publishing.

* *Let the Fire Fall* by Father Michael Scanlan, TOR. Franciscan University Press.

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