

1. INTRODUCTION: ISLAM'S STRENGTHENED SELF-IMAGE

1.1. Oil Money and Population Growth

Since the 1974 Oil Embargo, Muslim countries have been using oil revenues to promote Islam throughout the world. In the West, evidence of this is easily seen in the growth of Islamic community and educational institutions, mosques, and especially since 911 in the active consultation and inclusion of Muslims and Islamic groups in government policymaking.

This growth in influence has also been supported by growth in Muslim populations worldwide and in the West. Just in the UK, for instance, through immigration and birth, the population of Muslims in the UK has grown 300% in the 25 year period between 1975 and 2001, from 400,000 to 1.6 million.¹ A similar trend has occurred in the US where Muslims claim that Islam has overtaken Judaism as having the second largest number of adherents.² Samuel Huntington, in 1996, predicted widespread political and social effects that explosive Muslim birth rates would cause throughout the world.³ Perhaps the most significant effect is a resurgence of Islamic confidence. This also

1.2. Islam's assumed superiority

Demographic factors also have theological supports. As mentioned earlier, the Qur'an asserts for Muslims that they are the best people of the world, and have a right to dominate world affairs. Two verses that are easily found in Islamic literature are:

'You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind...'⁴

'He it is who has sent His Messenger to make it victorious over all (other) religions even though idolaters hate it.'⁵

An intrinsic part of Islamic identity is an assumed superiority over others.

1.3. Islam's Dhimmi Attitude

When considering Jihad, we mentioned that the Qur'an and classical Islam promote a view that non-Muslims are inferior, and that historically, this found expression in the creation of a special legal

¹ Riddell, Peter G., *Christians and Muslims*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.34.

² See websites like www.islamicweb.com/begin/results.htm for these kinds of claims.

³ Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 1996.109-120.

⁴ Surah 3:110.

⁵ Surah 61:9.

status for tolerated non-Muslim minorities- Dhimmis. It is a status designed to reinforce the perception of the superiority of Islam and the humiliation of non-Muslims.

1.4. Islam's Worldview

From its outset, Islam has divided the world into the ***Dar al-harb*** ("The Realm of War") and the ***Dar al-Islam*** ("The Realm of Peace") Traditionally, The Realm of War are the non-Muslim areas of the world. The Realm of Peace is those areas under Islamic rule. Jihad from its outset was intended to extend the geographic area of Dar al-Islam, either through persuasion or warfare.⁶ Though many Muslims do not have this active attitude today, it is an intrinsic part of Islamic heritage and is the heritage that Islamic fundamentalists are dipping into to gain the support that they are enjoying.

1.5. Islam's Response: ASSERT MUSLIM IDENTITY

Though there may be differences between Muslims who turn to violence to promote Islam and those who don't, one common feature of the Muslim world today is this overriding concern to assert Muslim identity and influence. There are many websites and books devoted to analyzing the political assertions of Islam today. We would like to focus on a facet of this that has been going on in the West for at least a decade, and if it is not going on in your country now, it soon will. That facet is how Muslims are asserting themselves through polemics and apologetics. This is being done particularly by the Islamic student associations on university campuses.

2. ASSERTING THAT SELF-IMAGE: POLEMICS AND APOLOGETICS

2.1. Polemics to attack West and Christianity

Even a superficial look at literature and lecture topics, as well as the topics that repeatedly come up in conversation with Muslims, is enough to convince a person that two things are in for criticism, the West, and Christianity. Politics and Religion are the main points of conversation, and they are all done with a slant to put the Christian on the defensive. There is often not the desire for friendly discussion, but rather a tone of accusation and aggression is set from the outset by Muslims.

Now, there are regional differences with this. For instance, I learned from a German friend that Muslims are less aggressive on his university campus than seems to be the case in England. Some of this has to do with the ethnic background of the Muslim- Arab or Iranian? Indian/Pakistani or Turkish? Also, it has to do with sect of Islam the

⁶ Newby, Gordon D., *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2002. 51.

person might be from. If they are Sufi, for instance, or Shi'ite, they may be much less aggressive on these kinds of things.

That said, even from the most polite Muslim friends, I have received very aggressive and polemical literature. Behind a polite and tolerant façade, there may be a very aggressive agenda.

2.2. Apologetics to bolster Muslim self-esteem, glorify Muhammad and the Qur'an

When you read or hear the arguments Muslims use, you might find them odd and irrelevant - attacks on the Bible and Trinity that show tremendous ignorance of our beliefs and history; or, praise for the matchless literary qualities of the Qur'an in Arabic; or declaring the Qur'an predicted scientific facts that are only being discovered today.

For many Muslims, the public vindication of Islam's honour is more important to them than truth, valid criticism, and even friendly relations with you. Their polemics are more to bolster their own confidence and to intimidate others, rather than to persuade and honestly engage.

2.3. Increased Organisation to promote their interests

The West has seen a tremendous increase in Muslim organisations since 9/11. This has even enjoyed a large amount of government encouragement as Western political leaders have sought to encourage more Moderate Muslims and lessen the power and influence of Islamic fundamentalists. Muslims have been quick to capitalize on this by influencing school curriculum's. For instance, the UK requires religious education about all major religions. Recently, my son had to learn how the Qur'an supposedly predicted modern scientific discoveries as part of his coursework on Islam. From friends in Romania I was informed of polemical literature the local mosque was distributing.

Our response to this situation is vital. Islam is asserting its claims, making its attacks on Christianity, and promoting its agenda all in the public arena. We need to face this challenge and promote Christ.

My colleague Jay Smith is in the vanguard of debate to Muslims today, in both facing and arguing against their claims, and in preaching Christ to them, all in the public arenas of Speaker's Corner in London, and on numerous university campuses.

Huntington, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster UK Ltd, 1996.

Newby, Gordon D., *A Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2002.

Riddell, Peter G., *Christians and Muslims*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.