

calling to repentant confession of our need for grace, forgiveness, humility, and wisdom in the journey with Muslims. It is an invitation to gratitude and thanksgiving for the many and surprising ways Muslims have opened their doors and hearts for Anabaptists to become servants and friends among Muslims. Our hope and prayer is that the stories and reflections of this book will encourage and help to equip Christians for the calling to presence in the way of Christ.

### A Word of Thanks

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## Introduction

### *Three Journeys: Jesus—Constantine—Muhammad*

David W. Shenk

Here are three excerpts that provide context for this introduction to *Anabaptists Meeting Muslims*.

I, Linford Stutzman, am writing from Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Almost four months have passed since “An Anabaptist Consultation on Islam” in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I am reading parts of this manuscript coming out of that conference and reflecting on the conclusions in Bethlehem. This town in which Jesus was born is located in a part of the world that has seen more than its share of bloodshed in the name of God from earliest written history until last night when fifteen more Palestinians died in the ongoing violence.

When Jesus was born, one of Herod’s palaces dominated the landscape to the southeast of Bethlehem. At the time of Jesus’s birth, this town was a place of oppression and fear. Today a new Jewish settlement dominates the landscape to the north, with a brand new high-tech, lethal fence snaking through these communities to keep Jewish and Muslim neighbors apart. The city of Jesus’s birth is still a place of oppression and fear for the people of Bethlehem, including the Christians.

In many ways, this small part of the world provides a preview of the future of the entire planet if believers in the God of Abraham do not live in ways that bless “all peoples” (Gen 12:3).

Yet within this cauldron of strife there are those Muslims, Jews, and Christians who are committed to a different way, the way of reconciliation and blessing. Many in the tiny Palestinian Christian community are an encouragement to all those who seek to walk in the way of peacemaking. Anabaptists and all Christians have much to learn from the bold suffering of Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem, who understand their Christian witness to all of their neighbors as one that demonstrates forgiveness and reconciliation between Muslim, Christian, and Jewish enemies.

*Linford Stutzman<sup>1</sup>*

The leaders of four major religions were challenged at the Davos World Economic Forum (January 2003) to commend to their faith community that violence no longer be considered acceptable to settle the affairs of men and nations. The representatives of Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Islam each lauded the principle, but reserved for themselves the right to use violence. The final speaker, a Catholic theologian, responded sadly and thoughtfully. He said . . . the audience must be discouraged by the answers from previous speakers. He would like to take the opposite view but would decline, since he doubted if his own leadership would support him.

*Art DeFehr<sup>2</sup>*

Some of our Muslim neighbors in Central Asia are very disturbed about the recent wars in our regions. These wars seem to them to be Christian wars against Muslims. Furthermore, some American Christian leaders have said some unkind and critical things about Islam. These statements are broadly publicized in our countries. Sometimes the anger of our Muslim neighbors about these matters turns into hate against our churches; we get blamed for the wars and the attitudes of American Christians.

*Central Asian Pastors<sup>3</sup>*

Shortly after the September 11 attacks, I asked Mark Oxbrow, a missions director with the Church Missions Society of the Church of England, "What do you say in churches in the United Kingdom when you are asked to speak on the Christian faith and Islam?"

Mark responded, "I speak about three different journeys for peace: Jesus, Constantine, and Muhammad. Those different journeys are options for each of us, and each of us needs to choose which one we will take."

Just as is true of British Christians, Anabaptists in North America and around the world are faced with the option of these three different journeys for peace. Bishop Kenneth Cragg, who has invested many years in the Middle East and is a reputable scholar of Islam, occasionally reminds both Muslims and Christians of the theological significance of two journeys: Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem and Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Mark Oxbrow reminds his audiences of a third journey as well, that of Constantine to Rome that laid the foundations for Christendom.<sup>4</sup>

J. Dudley Woodberry in his essay in this volume, "The Kingdom of God in Islam and in the Gospel," explores in some depth convergences and divergences between the way of Jesus and that of Muhammad. In this brief introduction I will not duplicate his observations, nevertheless, I believe it is essential to look at the Anabaptist journey with Muslims in the light of these three journeys for peace: Jesus, Constantine, and Muhammad. Those three journeys have shaped civilizational systems and faith communities, which provide the background and context of the present-day Anabaptist journey with Muslims.

## The Journey of Jesus to Jerusalem

Jesus was at the height of his popularity in Galilee after feeding the five thousand men plus women and children by blessing and breaking five loaves of bread and two fish. The Galileans were impressed, and attempted to make him their king "by force" (John 6:15). Surely an army of Zealot independence fighters would have joined forces with Jesus to gain independence from the Romans, and then from the Galilee beachhead they could expand the kingdom of God throughout Israel and eventually throughout the earth. Jesus resisted that invitation and from that time onward he "resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). In the following weeks, Jesus tried to make his disciples aware that in Jerusalem the authorities would arrest the Son of Man and "mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him," but on the third day he would rise again (Luke 18:32-33).

By this time the disciples were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They could not fathom that an arrest and death were possibilities for the Messiah. Peter, representing the convictions of all the disciples, rebuked Jesus for such notions, and Jesus responded very sharply, "Out of my sight! You are a stumbling block

to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matt 16:23).

Finally as Jesus approached Jerusalem, he mounted a colt. Jubilant children singing hosannas accompanied him. Yet as he came over the crest of the Mount of Olives and saw the city before him, he stopped his colt and wept, because Jerusalem would not receive "what would bring you peace" (Luke 19:41). Then with the children still singing, he and the children entered the temple and cleansed it of the merchants who were corrupting the whole system with their exploitative practices.

All of this is tremendously significant as it relates to the mission of Jesus and the nature of the kingdom of God. In that colt ride he was proclaiming the fulfillment of two biblical prophecies in regard to the messianic kingdom.

First, he was fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy of five centuries earlier. Most frequently we read only the introduction to the prophecy and miss the universal, peacemaking, nonviolent, and voluntary messianic rule that Jesus was announcing in riding that colt into Jerusalem.

Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:9-10).

A second observation is that Jesus was announcing that he was fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy that the radiant glory of God would enter Jerusalem from the east, fill the temple with the glory of God, and cleanse the temple of all corruption forever (Ezek 43:1-9). The contemporary British theologian, N. T. Wright, develops this theme. In regards to Jesus's entrance into Jerusalem and his encounter in the temple, Wright comments:

Jesus of Nazareth was conscious of a vocation, given him by the one he knew as, "father," to enact in himself what in Israel's scriptures, God had promised to accomplish all by himself. He would be the pillar of cloud and fire for the people of the new exodus. He would embody in himself the returning and redeeming action of the covenant God.<sup>5</sup>

How, then, did Jesus establish the kingdom that he was inaugurating?

First, he went into the temple and drove those who exploited the poor from the temple precincts. In the confrontation he also made it known that the temple of stone was needed no more. He was the new temple; later the apostles proclaimed that the church as the body of Christ was the temple. "Place" was not necessary in the kingdom Jesus was establishing. The place of the kingdom was wherever Christ was welcomed.

Second, during his last meal with his disciples, Christ washed the feet of his betrayer. Consider for a moment the significance of this act. The One who is the radiant glory of God, who created the fifty billion galaxies in space, washed the feet of his betrayer!

Third, as Jesus the Christ was dying on the cross he cried out in forgiveness of those who crucified him. This is God in Christ seeking to embrace the world in his reconciling invitation. In that suffering embrace, we are reconciled to God and to one another and with all of creation. In that embrace, the kingdom of God breaks into human experience.

Fourth, after his resurrection he appeared to the disciples several times. John described an appearance where Jesus showed the disciples the nail prints in his hands and the wound from the spear thrust into his side. Then he said to them, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22). In that same commissioning he proclaimed the forgiveness of sins.

Within several weeks the Holy Spirit came upon the gathering of disciples, and from that time onward the apostolic church believed that the journey of Jesus from Galilee to the cross in Jerusalem is the way of the kingdom of God. These first Christians believed that in Jesus crucified the God of all creation suffers for us and because of us. He identifies fully with the suffering of all humanity, and especially with the outcast and powerless. He was crucified between two thieves. He suffered a cursed death "hung on a tree" (Gal 3:13) outside the centers of power. He died in disgrace at Golgotha "outside the camp" (Heb 13:13). This one, who was crucified with the outcastes and stripped of all earthly power, is, in fact, the full in history presence and revelation of the power of God. Christ crucified and risen is the power center of the universe; he is the Lamb slain who stands in the center of the throne of God (Rev 5:6). In his redemptive sacrifice Christ forgives and redeems people from "every tribe and

language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). Christ crucified—the power of God (1 Cor 1:23-24)!

For the apostolic church, all kingdom ethics were grounded in the reality that in Christ crucified God revealed himself to be our suffering servant. Jesus proclaimed, "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34). The apostle Paul wrote, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus . . . who . . . made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8).

With remarkable consistency, for the next three centuries the church insisted that a cross-centered ethic meant that the Christian as a disciple of Jesus could not take arms. This was a costly commitment, for the church was a minority movement often persecuted for refusing to venerate the emperor. Yet the church confessed that Jesus is Lord—therefore disciples of Jesus could not venerate the emperor or participate in practices that were in variance with the way of the Lord Jesus Christ. This meant that Christians would not participate in sacrifices to the spirit of the emperor and they would not participate in the imperial military. Origen, who was one of the early pioneers in developing the Alexandrian Catechetical School, was a forceful yet typical voice insisting that Christians desist from any participation in warfare.

Informing the governing authorities on the commitments of the church Origen wrote, "No longer do we take the sword against any nation, nor do we learn war any more, since we have become sons of peace through Jesus who is our author."<sup>6</sup>

Celsus was a scathing critic of the church and accused the church of abandoning the responsibilities of patriotic citizenship. To this charge Origen responded, "Even more do we fight on behalf of the emperor. And though we do not become fellow-soldiers with him, even if he presses for this, yet we are fighting of him and composing a special army of piety through our intercessions to God."<sup>7</sup>

Cyprian was Origen's colleague in the Alexandrian Catechetical School. He denounced "wars scattered all over the earth with the bloody horror of camps. The whole world is wet with mutual blood; and murder, which in the case of the individual is admitted to be a crime, is called a virtue when it is committed wholesale. Impunity is claimed for wicked deeds, not on the plea that they are guiltless, but because the cruelty is perpetrated on a grand scale."<sup>8</sup>

Origen and Cyprian were only two voices. Equally clear in their

renunciation of Christian participation in war were other church fathers such as Tertullian, Athanasius, or Lactantius. The main thrust of their writings is that even though the state may consider warfare lawful, a follower of Christ could not kill a fellow human being. For these leaders of the church, warfare was murder on a large scale. They would love their enemies, pray for the state, be loyal citizens, but as followers of Jesus they would not participate in the violence of warfare. They believed that the nature of the kingdom of God was revealed in the life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It was to Christ and his kingdom that they were committed. Many died as martyrs rather than deviate from the call of Christ—"take up [your] cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

## The Journey of Constantine to Rome

However, the church's commitment to a cross-centered kingdom commitment began to undergo a dramatic transformation when Constantine gained the Roman imperial throne. For months Constantine had been engaged in a long march from Britain south to Rome, where he knew he would meet in battle his rival to imperial power and his enemy, Maxentius. Constantine commanded only 40,000 troops. Maxentius had the full force of the garrison in Rome at his command. Where could Constantine acquire adequate power for the military engagement ahead? Perhaps the divine sun? So Constantine turned to the sun in worship, a commitment that he never fully abandoned.

Then on the eve of battle on the outskirts of Rome, Constantine allegedly saw the sign of the cross in the sky with the words beneath that cross: *In hoc signo vinces* (under this sign, conquer). He took that as an omen and painted the *chi rho* sign of Christ crucified on his weapons of war.<sup>9</sup> The next day Constantine won a decisive victory in the battle with Maxentius. He went on to become emperor of the western empire, and Licinius emperor of the eastern empire. Licinius, in his wars in the east, also reported on a message from God. Every night an angel appeared instructing him to pray to the *Summus Deus*.<sup>10</sup> He encouraged his troops to do so likewise.

Within a year of Constantine's victory, he and Licinius issued the Edict of Milan (AD 313), which assured religious freedom throughout the Roman Empire, not only for Christians, but for all religions. Letters were sent throughout the empire proclaiming, "Everyone who has a common desire to observe the Christian worship may now

freely and unconditionally endeavor to do so without let or hindrance. . . . To others also freedom of their own worship is likewise left open and freely granted."<sup>11</sup>

The churches rejoiced in the new freedom. Yet the vision quickly developed into far more than that of a pluralist society with benevolent government assuring the freedom of worship to all. Constantine tilted the western empire toward favoring the church. The church historian, Eusebius, was ecstatic when Constantine ordered Bibles to be made available for leaders in his seat of government in Constantinople. Eusebius believed that a Christian civilization was now a possibility. This civilization would unite political and ecclesial authority and power.

Eusebius wrote, "There was a multitude of rulers before the coming of Christ. All nations were governed by different tyrannies and democracies and men had no intercourse with each other . . . nation rose against nations and city against city."<sup>12</sup> However, in the mind of Eusebius, Christ and Augustus were corulers whose mission was to bring order, as well as peace. W. H. C. Frend observed, "Mankind was moving forward toward a universal monarch under one Church, and Constantine was God's chosen instrument, the reflection of his divine power."<sup>13</sup>

As long as the followers of Jesus Christ were a people committed to a kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36), then his servants would not use force to protect the truth of Christ or the integrity of the kingdom. Ethics were grounded in the way of cross.

However, any notions of a cross-centered ethic seemed to be nonsense in a kingdom where authority resided in Caesaropapism (the union of imperial Caesar and papal authority), unless the cross was a radical denial of the cross of Christ. That is, of course, exactly what Constantine did. For him the cross became a talisman, a potent magic. This Constantinian cross used as a weapon for violence against the enemy is not the cross of the one who proclaimed forgiveness for his enemies as he died absorbing their taunting violence. The cross within a theology of Caesaropapism was a symbol of sacramentally effectuated grace, not a revelation of normative Christian ethics or the cross of the God who is our suffering servant, of the God who reaches out to us in forgiveness and redemptive love even as our sins crash upon his broken body, the cross of the one who has taken our place and in whom we are forgiven.

The implications were astounding and transformational for the

church that had experienced three centuries of intermittent persecution, and which was always on the periphery of social and political norms. With astounding rapidity the church was seated with the empire at the centers of power. Nowhere was that more evident than in the Council of Nicea (AD 325), where the unbaptized Constantine presided over a council of bishops to determine christological and trinitarian doctrine. Not only did Constantine preside at the opening sessions, but he also implemented instruments of force to impose the decisions made at Nicea on recalcitrant churches, as for example with the Donatists of North Africa.

The marriage of empire and state required that normative ethics be severed from a cross-centered commitment. The Roman Empire had become the fulfillment of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth, but political power and the way of the cross were incompatible. It was only in the religious life of monasteries that the ethics of the way of the cross could be truly practiced. In the course of time, for western Christian society as a whole the confessional became a convenient alternative to discipleship. For the ecclesial authorities, the preservation of the truth of the gospel required temporal power. It is not surprising that before long the church joined hands with the political order to use "fire and steel"<sup>14</sup> to confront evil, such as the pagans who were outside the reach of the church. The imperial sword and the mission of Christ were merged.

This is not to say that there was no concern for ethics. A new foundation for ethics did develop, based on the pragmatics of political power and justice that served the centers of imperial power. The way of the cross might have been feasible when the church was a peripheral minority, but now it needed a more practical ethic that fit the norms of political power. Within less than a century of Constantine's victory at Rome, the North African, Augustine, set about developing a theology and ethic of power that could serve both church and empire. Augustine determined there are two kingdoms, the city of God and the city of man. The ethical foundations of the two are quite different. The Christian is equally loyal to both kingdoms, being aware, however, that at the end of the day it is the city of God that is eternal. That is, the kingdom of grace. The ethical alternatives to the way of Christ that we must embrace in the real world reveal that we are indeed saved by grace alone.

To help the individual Christian, as well as the Christian political authorities, discern how to live in a world of conflict and war,

Augustine developed a just war ethic. If a Christian nation had to fight, the bottom line was that the war had to be just and that there were no other alternatives. These principles of just war have been further refined, but Augustine, borrowing from the wisdom of some of the Greek political philosophers, has had significant influence on western Christian understandings of just war. However, inevitably justice was defined by those in power. Instead of hope for the powerless, Christianity had become a bulwark for the powerful. The realities of living within the city of man required recognition that we could not just be city of God citizens.

The implications of this kind of politico-ethical transformation were devastating for the churches in the east. For the first three centuries of the Christian era, it was mostly the churches in the west that were persecuted. However, with the emergence of Caesaropapacy in the west, it was the churches in the east that began to experience the wrath of the persecutors. Under Constantine, Christianity in the west had become transformed into the religion of western empire. Peace had come to the western church, as Bishop Mar Jacob of Edessa wrote, "Constantine, the chief of victors, reigns and now the Cross the emperor's diadem surmounts."<sup>15</sup> This legacy provided the paradigm for what became known as the Holy Roman Empire, and later as Western Christendom.

For the church in Persia, developments in the western church became the sentence of death. The Roman Empire and Persia had engaged in several centuries of conflict. Another war was pending when Constantine wrote to the Shah of Persia, Shapur II, "I rejoice to hear that the fairest provinces of Persia are adorned with . . . Christians. . . . Since you are so powerful and pious, I commend them to your care, and leave them in your protection."<sup>16</sup>

For the Shah, this letter meant only one thing: the Christians were a fifth column representing Rome by sabotaging Zoroastrian Persia from within. Twenty years later, Constantine massed his troops for war against Persia with bishops accompanying his armies. According to Eusebius, they accompanied Constantine "to battle with him and for him by the prayers to God from whom all victory proceeds."<sup>17</sup>

The rage of the Persians against the Christians knew no boundaries. For more than twenty years the Christians were systematically hunted from one end of the empire to the other, tortured and killed. The Persian church was nearly eradicated by this, "The Great Persecution." It has never recovered from that blow. Ever since

Constantine, the church in the east has sought to make it clear that it is not beholden to the church in the west. Constantine and the development of the Holy Roman Empire and later Christendom have made it necessary for churches of the east to become alternatives to the western church. Sometimes this need to preserve some distance from the western church has pushed the eastern church into directions that the western church considered to be heretical (for example, Nestorianism).<sup>18</sup>

These alternative definitions were also expressed in a thousand years of eastern missionary outreach across Central Asia into China; it is a remarkable story how these minority churches that had no imperial support reached out in mission across Asia.<sup>19</sup> This was quite different than the church in the west where the mission of the church was expressed in concert with empire and military conquest.

Nevertheless, the Constantinian transformation in the western church contributed to the opening for Islam in the east. This is because the persecutions in Persia decimated the church. It also meant that the churches of the east had to distance themselves from the churches of the west. One way they did this was by defining their theology as an alternative to that of the west. The Dutch historian of religion, Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen, insists that this redefinition has been most persuasively expressed by Islam for "Islamic power . . . offered to anti-Byzantine sentiment a far more effective ideology than anything that heretical Christianity was able to provide."<sup>20</sup>

We should take note. Themes are emerging within the western church today that are similar to the Constantinian era: warnings from Washington instructing regimes to respect the rights of Christian minorities; a war on terrorism to defend the values of western Judeo-Christian civilization; support by many churches for any means necessary to bring that goal to pass; refurbishing just war ethical foundations that are grounded in commitments quite other than the way of the cross; a conviction that an ethic based on the way of the cross does not apply to the real world in which we live; a deepening global perception that the western Christian movement is the faith for the powerful that pushes the poor into despair. In the midst of all of this, an anti-Christian (western) backlash that is seriously affecting the well-being and even survival of some eastern churches.

A Palestinian Catholic priest, Father Labib Kobti, revealed this concern in comments about the occupation of the West Bank and the 2002 siege of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity. He wrote,



Palestinian Christians of the Holy Land who have been living in harmony with Muslims for centuries feel abandoned and alone. They feel angry against the Christians in the west and especially the American Christians. Arab-Christians at the end are the losers; they lost their prestige, their future, and their hopes. I am very concerned for them, perhaps I am so concerned because I am also an Arab Christian.<sup>21</sup>

This Palestinian priest is caught within the ramifications of a legacy of a Western Christendom that conceptualized the world as divided into territory that is Christian compared with non-Christian regions. His suffering church is not within the parameters of Christian territoriality. Although Israel is not Christian, it nevertheless has forged strong alliances with the Christian west, a development that the largely Muslim Palestinians have not been able to emulate.

Christendom was intolerant of pluralism. Minority communities were ghettoized, as was the case with Jews in Europe for many centuries. As a modern example, recently Muslim girls in France have been forbidden from wearing the veiling in public places or in school, in fact all obvious religious symbols are banned. French civilization is now secularized, but a spirit of intolerance for pluralist culture prevails that has its roots in the Christendom ethos.

We now explore another journey that birthed an alternative vision of religion and territoriality, that of the Muslims.

## The Journey of Muhammad to Medina

Six centuries after Christ and three centuries after Constantine, the unlettered Muhammad began preaching in Mecca in Arabia, among a people who were on the periphery of civilization and power. For twelve years he proclaimed portions of the Qur'an as they came to him. He warned the Meccans to leave their polytheistic worship and evil practices. He preached a message of hope for the poor and compassion for the dispossessed.

Very few Meccans accepted Muhammad's message, for he challenged the entrenched networks of polytheism that supported the political and economic structures of Arabian society. However, hope for the Muslim movement came from Medina; emissaries invited him to come to their city and become their prophet and statesman. This was the same invitation that Jesus had received from the Galileans six centuries earlier. Muhammad accepted the invitation, believing that

this summons was a sign of favor and approval from God.

This migration to Medina is the *hijrah*, which took place in AD 622. It is significant that this event is the beginning of the Muslim era—not the birth of Muhammad in 570 or the advent of revelations in 610. The *hijrah* is most significant theologically, for this event enabled Muhammad to gain political and military control of a region. With those instruments of power he and his followers established Islam; in time Muslims referred to regions that they governed as Dar al Islam. This accomplishment was evidence indeed that Muhammad was a prophet of God and the thriving Muslim community had God's favor.

In Medina, a constitution was developed that in later centuries formed the nucleus for full-fledged Muslim systems of law known as the Shari'a. The goal of the Medina constitution was to include all minorities within a covenant of cooperation with the Muslims. The Muslims were tremendously disappointed when some minority communities resisted inclusion in the Muslim-led covenant. Subsequently these dissidents, who were perceived to be a threat to the Muslim community, were dealt with as traitors. Judgment included banishment or death.

Battles ensued between the Meccans and the Muslim armies; the Muslims were victorious, and within ten years a triumphant army of ten thousand Muslim soldiers were peacefully received by the Meccans who had been defeated on the battlefield. The Muslims then cleansed the Ka'bah of its idolatries, and Mecca became a Muslim city.

As Muhammad led the Muslim forces into Mecca he exclaimed, "Truth had come, and falsehood hath vanished away" (Qur'an 17:81).

Wherever Muslim government was established, Christian, Jewish, or Zoroastrian communities were circumscribed as *dhimmi*, protected communities. They were assured peace providing they functioned within the parameters established by the Muslim nation. This included paying a special tax. Regions outside the Dar al Islam were the Dar al Harb, or regions of war not yet brought under the control of Muslim authorities.

Kenneth Cragg observes, "Dar al Islam and Dar al Harb is a fundamental distinction running through all humanity; the household of submission to God and the household of non-Islam still to be brought into such submission."<sup>22</sup>

Muhammad left the suffering of Mecca for Medina, and later returned to Mecca as victor. This pattern is normative. Defeat for the faithful Muslim ummah is a theological anomaly, for God is all

powerful and sovereign. Tactical retreat might be necessary, but in time the Dar al Islam of the Muslims must prevail.

Although Muslims are not to initiate aggression, if the ummah is under threat, then the defense of the ummah is mandated by any means necessary. This is jihad, a three dimensional striving in the defense of Islam (1) within one's soul, (2) with the pen, and (3) with the sword when necessary.

The Qur'an commands, "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you. . . . And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers" (2:190-193).

The ummah will persuade and even seek to induce non-Muslims to convert, but are prohibited from using coercion to convert anyone. The Qur'an declares, "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error" (2:256).

Within a century of the hijrah, the Dar al Islam had extended its political authority from the Indus River, throughout the Middle East, across North Africa, and into Spain. On the Western European front the advance was stopped in the Battle of Tours (AD 732), just over a century after the hijrah. Half of the Christian population on earth had come under the authority of the Muslim Dar al Islam. These churches across North Africa and the Middle East were circumscribed as dhimmi. Within all these regions within the Dar al Islam the primary function of the political system was protection of the integrity of the Muslim ummah.<sup>23</sup> Ideally, the churches and Jewish communities were protected as long as they did not threaten the integrity of the ummah. Eventually, this meant that Muslim political, community, and family systems cooperated to assure that conversions could go only one direction—toward the ummah and never away from Islam.

In modern times, the Dar al Islam vision of Muslim territoriality vis-à-vis the Dar al Harb persists with considerable resiliency. This is the reason that American military bases in Saudi Arabia in the wake of the Gulf War of 1991 became so tendentious, apparently contributing to the decisions by militant jihadists to initiate the tragedy of September 11. For the jihadists it is self evident that for regions of the Dar al Harb to place military forces within the soul of the territoriality of the Dar al Islam is theologically untenable and must be rectified by any means necessary.

However, there are also significant countervailing forces. It is exceedingly significant that at the beginning of the twenty-first

century, one fourth of all Muslims live in regions that are not within the suzerainty of Muslim authority. This is a tremendous transformation—even a century ago it was exceptional for Muslims to reside outside the parameters of Muslim authority. Even the western colonial powers generally respected the authority of the Muslim jurists in regions under western colonial administration. However, there are now 300 million Muslims living outside the parameters of Muslim authority and whose neighbors are Hindus, Christians, atheists, or Buddhists. Notions of a monolithic idealized Dar al Islam is diluted by the realities of modern mobility and globalization. The vision for a Dar al Islam and Muslim diaspora are often in tension.

## Christendom and the Dar al Islam

There are parallels between the theologies of territoriality within a Christendom worldview than that of the Dar al Islam. The community of faith and the political order converge, and the systems represent the kingdom of God. In Christendom the church is "established." In the Dar al Islam the primary function of the political order is to protect the ummah. In Christendom non-Christian communities were ghettoized. In the Dar al Islam non-Muslim communities became dhimmi. Prior to the Enlightenment, Christendom would countenance no dissent from the doctrines of the church; the Dar al Islam, when it heeds the counsel of the theologians, restricts personal freedom and dissent is forbidden.

In Christendom the world is divided into two regions—the civilized regions that are ruled by Christianized governments and the uncivilized regions that are ruled by other kinds of governments. In the Dar al Islam the world is divided into regions of peace under Muslim rule and those regions of war not yet brought under Muslim rule.

Christendom fights just wars; the Dar al Islam fights jihads. Christendom seeks to extend territory—in modern times the United States has frequently taken up a secularized version of this agenda through its vision of manifest destiny—extending the gift of democracy and free enterprise into regions not yet democratized. Likewise, the Dar al Islam from time to time has fought wars to extend the blessings of Islam into non-Islamized societies. Both movements have occasionally merged their missionary impulse with imperialist nationalist goals.

These themes suggest convergences between the political theology of the Muslim Dar al Islam and the Constantinian western church.



Both systems viewed their faith communities and the kingdom of God as identical to political control of territory. These convergences have provided ample grist for territorial conflict right from the beginning of the Muslim movement. In fact, when the Anabaptist movement was birthed, Christendom and Dar al Islam were engaged in another conflict. Vienna was under siege by the Muslims! We now explore that formative time for the Anabaptists.

## The Anabaptists

The sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, that birthed Mennonite and related denominations, emerged within the throes of sometimes violent conflict between divergent visions of the rule of God. The Muslim Dar al Islam and Western Christendom had experienced 900 years of intermittent conflict. On January 21, 1525, when a small Bible study fellowship in Zurich baptized one another on confession of faith in Jesus Christ, thereby inaugurating the Anabaptist movement, Christendom was engaged in a severe struggle with the forces of the Dar al Islam. However, the Anabaptists refused to participate in the war efforts against the Muslim Turks.

The Anabaptists were committed to joining Jesus on his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Had not Jesus commanded his disciples to take the cross and follow him? That was a terrifically difficult commitment. For many, the consequence was arrest, torture, and death. The Ottomans were attacking the west, and the ecclesial and political authorities would not tolerate detractors from the conflict.

Under Suleyman the Magnificent the Ottoman Turks were pressing forward into Hungary and toward Vienna. Surely the Muslim forces viewed their triumphs in the Balkans and Central Europe as rectifying the defeat of the Moors in Spain in 1492 and the defeat of Muslim armies in Russia with the concurrent pressure of Russian forces south toward the Caspian Sea. Although Muslim armies were forced into retreat in Russia and Spain, the Ottoman Muslims had occupied Constantinople and the Balkans, and were now advancing on Vienna.<sup>24</sup> Europe was terrified.

Western Christendom was mobilizing for war. In chapter 4 of this volume, "The Mennonite Engagement with Muslims," John A. Lapp comments that the Anabaptist refusal to participate in the war effort was considered treason. One of the Anabaptist prophets, Michael Sattler, stated at his trial which culminated in his execution, "If the Turk comes, he should not be resisted, for it stands written: thou shalt

not kill (Matt 5:21). We should not defend ourselves against the Turks or our other persecutors, but with reverent prayer should implore God that he might be our defense and our resistance."<sup>25</sup>

Michael Sattler's commitment to nonparticipation in warfare against the Turks is in harmony with the commitments of the pre-Constantinian church that we have referred to above. Of course, he and the Anabaptists based their commitments on their understanding of Jesus and their study of the New Testament. They could not imagine Jesus killing his enemies. Jesus lays down his life for the enemy, he seeks to embrace the enemy and redeem the enemy.

The Anabaptist commitment to participating with Jesus in his journey to Jerusalem, and the cross was not only a veto on participating in the European military confrontation with the Muslim Turks, but it was also a veto on notions of territorial Christendom. Sattler said it plainly—the Turks in heart who do not know Christ are the ecclesial leaders who would kill a person for following Christ.<sup>26</sup> Territorial Christendom is not the kingdom of God.

In the Zurich Bible study group where the Anabaptist movement was born, another event happened that was a radical break with Christendom. The group baptized one another on the confession of faith. They believed that baptism was a sign of conversion and new birth; it was a public testimony of a person's decision to believe in and follow Christ.

A commitment to adult baptism meant that the state could not determine a person's faith. In that act the Anabaptists were planting the seeds that would transform Europe and eventually much of the world—a person is free to decide her faith. The implications were astounding. Church and state needed to be separate. That commitment birthed the free churches within the European context. It was only over a century later that the political philosophers of the Enlightenment began to carry forward these convictions with a call for separation of church and state; the United States political system is one of the consequences of that development. But the seeds of this transformation were planted in a small baptismal service in Zurich in 1525.

This is not to say that the Anabaptists had a direct influence upon the political philosophy of the Enlightenment. But they were pioneers in confronting the Christendom paradigm and they suffered profoundly for their insistence that the person is free to decide her faith.

Adult baptism meant that the church was a voluntary community within society. The church, therefore, was never the same as any political territory. It was a community within territory, but not convergent with any politically defined territory (nation state). This meant that the nation state would be a pluralist society. Because people are endowed by their creator with the right to choose, the nation state would be pluralist, for not everyone will choose Christ and the church; some might choose Islam and the ummah or a secularist option. Therefore no nation is Christian. It might be Christianized, but not Christian.

There was, of course, theological diversity within the Anabaptist movement. However, if Menno Simons<sup>27</sup> and the Schleithem Confession<sup>28</sup> of 1527 are considered normative for the first century of the Anabaptist movement, then for the Anabaptists the church was the first fruit of the presence of the kingdom of God on earth. Christ and his kingdom commanded total allegiance. Therefore if the governing authorities or society invited commitments that were contrary to the kingdom of God, then the church needed to dissent even if that meant suffering or martyrdom.

The church was the visible community of disciples of Jesus Christ who gathered in his name; it was a community committed to repentance and who knew the grace of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. The church was a fellowship of born again believers who were committed to following Jesus Christ. Although the church eschewed political power, disciples of Jesus Christ did indeed influence the political systems as salt seasons and preserves food, or as light on a hill shows the way, or as leaven permeates bread.

In the Anabaptist rejection of participation in warfare and infant baptism, the Anabaptists were revealing a commitment to another way than the paradigms of either Christendom or Dar al Islam. They were committed to an alternative understanding of both the Muslim and Christendom understandings of the kingdom of God as regions defined by territory and political systems. This meant that for them, the whole world was the mission field, Christendom included. Being baptized as an infant or living within a Christian ecclesial and political order was no assurance that the person was a Christian. So every neighbor needed to hear and respond to the gospel. This commitment is revealed in their favorite preaching texts:

“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all

who live in it” (Ps 24:1). The Great Commission—“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15-16; Matt 28:18-20).

In time, the severe persecution that befell the Anabaptists muted that calling and commitment. Yet the flame was not extinguished. When opportunity came their way, the Anabaptists were again pioneers to their neighbors, to Indonesia, to Central Asia, India, to their cities, and on and on. If the earth is the Lord’s, then it is impossible to circumscribe the earth into territorial domains. Every person everywhere is loved of God and the calling of the church is to express God’s love as revealed in Christ throughout the earth. All peoples in all territories deserve to be touched by ministries in the name of Christ; freedom to decide one’s faith is God’s gift to all humankind.

The essays and reports in this volume suggest that at the 2003 Anabaptist consultation on Islam at Eastern Mennonite University, we discovered that a gentle Anabaptist commitment to presence among Muslims, to identification with the aspirations of people, and respectful, loving, sensitive listening and learning is our best witness. This Anabaptist presence includes confession of our personal sins, the sins of the church, and the sins of our nations. It includes repentance and a commitment to cultivating relations that transcend political-territorial divisions, to peacemaking and identifying with local peacemakers, especially where there is conflict. It includes patient ministry and bearing witness in the name of Christ, to commending Christ in deed and word, to relating to Muslims as persons created in God’s image, to respect Muslims as persons endowed with dignity, to believe that God’s gift to every person is the freedom to choose, and to the conviction that all peoples should have the blessing of ministries that are expressions of the love of God. Anabaptist presence means a persistent and patient commitment to serving in the way of Christ, a commitment to local church, small and sometimes vulnerable as it might be, in all its variegated expressions, to accept suffering when it comes our way, to identify with those who suffer, and to pray. These commitments have opened doors for ministry and bearing witness that are quite frequently received with appreciation by Muslims and within varied expressions of the Dar al Islam.

Anabaptist commitments are an alternative to all territorial or politically defined expressions of the kingdom of God, whether Muslim or Christian. We observe that many Muslims welcome that

alternative. We are grateful when Muslims receive us and serve us and permit us to serve them. Our consultation revealed remarkable accounts of trust-building and bridge-building across territorial divides.

One such bridge-building is Iranian Shi'a-Mennonite dialogues. A significant dimension of these conversations took place in Toronto in the fall of 2002 with a follow-up in Qom, Iran, February 2004. Anabaptists have miniscule political power. Yet the Islamic theological establishment in Qom, Iran, invites conversation.<sup>29</sup> However, the journey in dialogue and witness is fraught with challenges.

"Do not humiliate us," a mullah advised me when I asked what his counsel is to North American Christians.

Another observed that Jesus would also have taken the same path that Muhammad took in Medina, if he had an opportunity. His public ministry lasted only three years. Given more time, Jesus would also have commanded an army. Indeed, such dialogue often reveals that an Anabaptist understanding of the New Testament vision of the kingdom of God is radically other than the understandings of the kingdom of God among our Muslim friends.

Others commented that never before have they spoken with Christians about faith in serious open dialogue. This is significant. Yet even more significant are the hundreds and thousands of friendships that Anabaptists meeting Muslims are developing in neighbor to neighbor relationships, whether in North America or regions around the world.

Surely Anabaptists are called of God to transcend territorial divisions and in the spirit of Christ serve in ways that enable wider and wider circles of Mennonites and Muslims to meet one another. Every Mennonite needs a Muslim friend. I also wish that every Muslim had a Mennonite friend.



All Christian communities living in faithfulness to Christ have gifts of grace that they offer in the journey with Muslims. Muslims also offer gifts; who among us who has Muslim friends has not been challenged by their earnest quest for truth and commitment to submission to God? This introduction has not adequately explored those gifts, for this is a book about the Anabaptist vocation.

In this introduction I have explored the legacy of the Anabaptist journey within the context of three other journeys: Jesus to Jerusalem,

Constantine to Rome, and Muhammad to Medina. The essays and reports in this book are written with that Anabaptist legacy in mind, and with the awareness that as the twenty-first century commences territorial visions of the kingdom of God are clashing anew. A war on terrorism and jihadism are ominously colliding.

In times like these, what is the call of Christ to the Anabaptist community in the journey with Muslims? Hopefully this volume will provide indications of what the response to that question should be.