

## DEALING WITH FEAR OF ISLAM

### Introduction

In Europe there is a widespread tendency to conflate one's perspective on Islam as an international political force with one's perspective on the ordinary Muslims living as a minority population in the countries of the West. Islam is seen as the enemy outside and the enemy within. This attitude came to be called *Islamophobia*.

*Islamophobia* continues to remain strong in Europe and is expressed in public with increasing frequency. The thesis of this chapter is that Christians should be agents of change rather than being molded by the societies in which they live.

In this chapter I researched some features of *Islamophobia* and its consequences and described how Christians not only tend to share in the *Islamophobia* in Europe but also have some specific perceptions which may increase their fear of Islam.

I wrote a theological assessment of the roots of fear, pointing out that fear is associated with the fallenness of humanity and summarized problematic attitudes through Volf's category of *exclusion*.<sup>1</sup> I then examined ways forward, using Volf's metaphor of *embrace* and the theological category of *grace* which will lead one to considering the cross as a model for relationships with Muslims.

### Islamophobia in Europe

Across Europe there is a prevalent attitude towards Islam that is described as *Islamophobia*. Since 1991 the term *Islamophobia*<sup>2</sup> has been used widely to describe the attitude of fear and hatred of Muslim people and Islam as a religion.<sup>3</sup>

*Islamophobia* is defined in different ways such as: "fear or suspicion of Islam, Muslims, and matters pertaining to them,"<sup>4</sup> "a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or

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<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, US: Abingdon Press, 1996). In this book Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf looks in a theological way at ethnic and cultural conflicts. Volf's book is set against the background of the inter-ethnic problems in the Balkans. This dissertation uses Volf's metaphors of *exclusion* and *embrace* to reflect on the fear of Christians for Muslims and how to overcome and change this.

<sup>2</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary refers to the periodical *Insight* of 4th February 1991 as the first use of 'Islamophobia'.

<sup>3</sup> The term features in several reports and documents of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations and considered the collective voice of the Muslim world, set up an observatory on *Islamophobia* in 2005 to monitor and document activities perceived as Islamophobic around the world. In 2005, The website *Islamophobia Watch* ([www.islamophobia-watch.com](http://www.islamophobia-watch.com)) was initiated to document material in the public domain which advocates a fear and hatred of the Muslim peoples of the world and Islam as a religion. The Islamic Human Rights Commission hands out "Islamophobe of the year" awards ([www.ihrc.org](http://www.ihrc.org)).

hatred of Islam – and therefore, to fear or dislike of all or most Muslims,”<sup>5</sup> or “a powerful or an irrational fear or dislike of the Islamic faith and its believers by non Muslims, resulting in stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and insults which are often accompanied by acts of hatred and discrimination against followers of the Islamic faith”<sup>6</sup> Despite its wide use, the concept *Islamophobia* has not been without controversy. The term has been criticized by a number of commentators for its loose definition and broad application and its use remains a contested issue. Some prefer to replace the word *Islamophobia* with “anti-Islamic racism”<sup>7</sup> Some believe the more accurate term is “anti-Muslimism.”<sup>8</sup> Some call it “a challenge for us all,”<sup>9</sup> “a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion,”<sup>10</sup> “so widespread that it may be more prevalent and dominant than racial abuse,”<sup>11</sup> one of the major issues facing present day international relations.”<sup>12</sup> Others refer to it as “a myth”<sup>13</sup> or denounce it as “a wretched concept that confuses criticism of Islam as a religion and stigmatization of those who believe in it.”<sup>14</sup> While some believe that has a grip upon Europe,<sup>15</sup> others believe that “promoters of the *Islamophobia* concept habitually exaggerate the problem.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ingrid Ramberg, "Islamophobia And Its Consequences On Young People," *Eycb*, June, 2004, <http://eycb.coe.int/eycbwwwroot/HRE/eng/documents/Islamophobia%20report/Islamophobia%final%ENG.pdf>. (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> The Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Organization of the Islamic Conference, "First Annual Report On Islamophobia," *Permanent Mission Of The Organization Of The Islamic Conference*, 2007, <http://www.oic-un.org/reports.asp/> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Al-Maktabi, "Islamophobia," *Salaam*, <http://www.salaam.co.uk/maktabi/islamophobia.html>. (accessed April 14, 2009). The author believes *Islamophobia* combines the elements of dislike of a religion.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Halliday, "Islamophobia Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 5 (September 1999): 892-902. According to Halliday, the enemy is not a faith or a culture, but a people.

<sup>9</sup>The Runnymede Trust, in the title of their booklet: *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997)

<sup>10</sup> Ingrid Ramberg, “Islamophobia and its consequences on Young People.”, Seminar Report of European Youth Centre Budapest, June 1-6, 2004. EYCB, <http://eycb.coe.int/eycbwwwroot/HRE/eng/documents/Islamophobia%20report/Islamophobia%20final%20ENG.pdf> (accessed, April 14, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Necmi Sadikoglu, ", " speech delivered to International Conference on Islamophobia, December 8, 2007, Istanbul. <http://www.oicun.org/articles/120/1/International-Conference-on-Islamophobia-OIC-SG-Statement-Dec-2007/1.html> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Organization of the Islamic Conference “The updated report of the OIC Observatory on Islamophobia to the 35th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers for the period of May 2007-May 2008” Permanent Mission of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, <http://www.oic-un.org/reports.asp#Reports> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Kenan Malik, "Islamophobia Myth," *Prospect*, [http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article\\_details.php?id=6679/](http://www.prospect-magazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=6679/) (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> BBC News. “Writers statement on cartoons.” BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4764730.stm> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Castle, "Islamophobia Takes A Grip Across Europe," *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/europ/islamophobia-takes-a-grip-across-europe-429021.html>. (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Daniel Pipes. “Islamophobia?” New York Sun. <http://www.danielpipes.org/3075/islamophobia> (accessed April 14, 2009).

Although the term is sometimes referred to as unfounded hostility or irrational fear<sup>17</sup> those who are considered Islamophobes state that their fear is far from irrational or unfounded and that it is not fear of Islam in general, but a fear of radical Islam.<sup>18</sup>

### **Features of Islamophobia in Europe**

In 1996 The Runnymede Trust, a UK based independent research and policy agency, set up the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, under the chairmanship of Professor Gordon Conway of the University of Sussex. In August 1997 this Commission produced their final report, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*. This was the first time that the subject of *Islamophobia* had been comprehensively tackled in relation to Muslims in the United Kingdom. This document continues to play an important role in discussions on *Islamophobia*, not just in the UK, but also elsewhere in Europe. The report *Islamophobia: A challenge for Us All*, makes a link between *Islamophobia* and having a “closed view” of Islam. They give the following eight characteristics of such a closed view:<sup>19</sup>

- 1) Islam is seen as monolithic and static rather than diverse and dynamic. People with closed views of Islam are insensitive to the differences and variations within the world of Islam and picture Islam as intolerant of internal pluralism, ignoring the debates that go on among Muslims on matters like human rights, relationship with secularism etc.
- 2) Islam is seen as other and separate rather than as similar and independent. People with closed views of Islam consider Islam as hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world, with no common roots and no borrowing or mixing in either direction.

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<sup>17</sup> The Runnymede Trust writes that “the term Islamophobia refers to *unfounded* hostility towards Islam.”, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, 4. The website [www.islamophobia.org](http://www.islamophobia.org) calls it an “*irrational* fear or prejudice towards islam and Muslims.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Pipes, who has been called “the world’s most prominent ant-Muslim hate-monger” <http://www.mereislam.info/labels/Holocaust.html> but who prefers to call himself an “Islamism-ophobe” writes that “Islamophobia deceptively conflates two distinct phenomena: fear of Islam and fear of radical Islam.” <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/3075>

Another so-called Islamophobe, Bat Ye’or gives ample justification for her point of view. In her book *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* is very suspicious of the growth of Islam in Europe and is convinced that Europe is in the process of becoming Eurabia, citing many articles, reports, particularly pointing to the way Islam has interpreted jihad.

Robert Spencer, director of Jihad Watch, who is called “an inveterate Islam-hater,” writes he does not hate Muslims, but that he mainly calls attention to the roots and goals of jihad violence. <http://www.jihadwatch.org/spencer/>

Paty Santi believes that “fear of the fanatics of Islam is far from irrational. Being afraid .... after the innumerable acts of violence, terror and depravity committed in the name of Allah is not exaggerated; not inexplicable; and most certainly not illogical. <http://drsanity.blogspot.com/>

<sup>19</sup> Although this is not the only way of analyzing the problem of *Islamophobia*, these characteristics are included in this dissertation because they still play an important role on how people define Islamophobia in Europe. For example, when defining *Islamophobia* in their document *Muslims in the European Union - Discrimination and Islamophobia* (2006), the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) writes that an “important reference point are the eight features attributed to Islamophobia in the 1997 publication by the UK-based NGO the Runnymede Trust ‘Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All’ . (61).

- 3) Islam is seen as inferior not different. People with closed views of Islam often consider Muslims as primitive, violent, irrational, scheming, disorganized, and oppressive, while they themselves are civilized, reasonable, generous, efficient, sophisticated and enlightened. In a questionnaire among Christians, I did in November 2008, only 27 percent states that they believe that Muslims' civilization is as good and high as western civilization.
- 4) Islam is seen as the enemy not as a partner. People with closed views see Islam as violent and aggressive, firmly committed to barbaric terrorism, and implacably hostile to the non-Muslim world.
- 5) Muslims are seen as manipulative not as sincere. People with closed views frequently consider that Muslims use their religion for strategic, political, and military advantage rather than as a religious faith and as a way of life. In a questionnaire among Christians I did in November 2008, 70 percent do not explicitly disagree with the statement that Muslims do not show their real face until they are a majority, and 43 percent of respondents are not willing to trust Muslims, and only 20 percent wholeheartedly want to give Muslims the benefit of the doubt.
- 6) Racial discrimination against Muslims is defended rather than challenged. A closed view of Islam has the effect of justifying racism, and anti-immigrant prejudice.
- 7) Muslim criticism of "the West" are rejected and not considered. A closed view of Islam frequently dismisses criticisms which Muslims make of western liberalism, modernity and secularism, and considers them not worthy for debate.
- 8) Anti-Muslim discourse is seen as natural not as problematic. Islamophobic discourse which is sometimes blatant and often subtle and coded, is part of the fabric of everyday life in many countries in Europe.

### **Fear of Islam and Muslims among Christians in Europe**

I have pointed out many European Christians share a "closed" view of Islam with their fellow Europeans and the characteristics of it mentioned above. In addition I can identify the following fear-raising factors that cause many Christians in Europe to have a negative attitude towards Muslims and Islam.

#### Persecution of Christians

In an online symposium of FrontPage Magazine, dated October 10, 2003, managing editor Jamie Glazov discussed the issue of The Muslim Persecution of Christians with Bat Ye'or, Paul Marshal and Habib Malik and concluded that the Muslim persecution of Christians is clearly a widespread and horrifying phenomenon.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jamie Glazov, "Symposium:the Muslim Persecution Of Christians," *Frontpagemagazine*, <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=8C1D2863-9FE5-43E9-BA8E-B21C2FFE5158/> (accessed April 14, 2009). In the symposium Paul Marshall, a Senior Fellow at Freedom House's Center for

In the World Watch List, a list of the top fifty worst persecuting countries in the world published annually by the Christian organization Open Doors Islam is the majority religion in six of the top ten worst persecuting countries: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Uzbekistan.<sup>21</sup>

Christians living in countries dominated by Islam (e.g. Nigeria, Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia) often testify of the difficulties they face from the hands of Islamic authorities or Muslims in their cities or villages. Such difficulties vary from persecution, verbal assaults, destroying property, inability to attend a certain university, finding a certain job.<sup>22</sup> The difficulties faced by those who converted from Islam to Christianity can be worse and even lead to their murder.<sup>23</sup>

Christians who do not experience these acts of persecution themselves hear about them through organizations such as Open Doors<sup>24</sup> and the Voice of The Martyrs,<sup>25</sup> which encourages the global church to stand by their persecuted brothers and sisters. As a result even though they have not personally experienced the dark side of Islam, they identify with those who have and this often colors the way they look at Islam in their own context.

This attitude among Christians in the global church probably explains why the majority (55 percent) of the respondents to the questionnaire I conducted believe that the growth of the number of Muslims in Europe is dangerous for the freedom of Christians.

## History of Islam

Other Christians point out that Islam is spread by the sword;<sup>26</sup> it invaded Europe in the seventh century, expanded into the heartlands of Christianity, leading to the Crusades in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Others point to the military campaigns of the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century, leading to various degrees of Islamization in their conquered Eastern European regions. Serbian Orthodox professor Trifkovic writes that “Islam is and

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Religious Freedom, stated that persecution of Christians in the Islamic world is very widespread and that there are few Muslim countries where it does not occur. He also sees an upsurge of persecution in the Islamic world.

<sup>21</sup> For more details and the whole list see:

<http://www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/documents/WorldWatchList.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Poole, "Islam's Global War Against Christianity," *American Thinker*, [http://www.americanthinker.com/2007/07/islams\\_global\\_war\\_against\\_chri.html](http://www.americanthinker.com/2007/07/islams_global_war_against_chri.html). (accessed April 14, 2009). Poole writes that “the global war on Christianity by Islam is so massive in size and scope that it is virtually impossible to describe without trivializing it. The website Answering-Islam makes reference to this article.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.persecution.com> (the website of the Voice of the Martyrs) reports the story of the martyrdom of Fatima Al-Mutairi. In August this year, a Muslim cleric and member of Saudi Arabia’s Commission of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, killed his 26-year-old sister, Fatima Al-Mutairi, after she proclaimed her faith to her family, in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. They also report about a Saudi member of the religious police cut his daughter’s tongue off and burned her to death for converting to Christianity. The father, who works for the Commission for Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, killed his daughter following a debate on religion.

<sup>24</sup> The website of Open Doors is: <http://sb.od.org/>

<sup>25</sup> The website of the Voice of the Martyrs is: <http://www.persecution.com>

<sup>26</sup> Mark Hartwig, "Spread By the Sword," *Answering Islam.org*, [http://www.answering-islam.org/Terrorism/by\\_the\\_sword.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/Terrorism/by_the_sword.html). (accessed April 14, 2009). In this article Hartwig examines the meaning of the word *jihad* in the Qur’an and the history of Islam, he concludes that the allegiance that Islam was spread by the sword is a fair charge, because “modernist interpretations notwithstanding, it is clear that military jihad—even in its expansionist form—is an authentic part of Islam.”

always has been a religion of intolerance, a jihad without an end. Despite the way the apologists would like to depict it, Islam was spread by the sword and has been maintained by the sword throughout its history.”<sup>27</sup> Others refer to the fact that in the heartland of Christianity (e.g. Algeria and Tunisia) after Islam arrived on the scene, the church that previously blossomed was persecuted and gradually disappeared. Patrick Sookhdeo, Director of Barnabas Fund, a charity which assists persecuted Christians particularly in the Muslim World points out that “sections of the church (e.g. North Africa) have disappeared completely in the face of the challenge of Islam.”<sup>28</sup>

### The Qur’an

Some Christians say that the real problem is not the Muslims themselves but the use of violence associated with them which goes back to the very heart and origin of Islam, namely to the Qur’an and the example of Muhammad.<sup>29</sup> In an article *Islam and Violence* placed on the website *answering-islam.org* an unknown author refers to 20 verses in the Qur’an that can and have been used in the history of Islam in support of violence in the name of God and the glories of martyrdom in a holy war and concludes that “a simple reading of such Qur’anic passages makes it obvious how easy it is for many Muslims to feel hatred and enmity against Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims.” The article also points out that violence in Islam, whether in the form of terrorism, or the persecution of Christians or capital punishment for an individual who turns away from Islam or death threats on those who insult the prophet Muhammad, are not simply some isolated incidents or aberrations from the true and peaceful religion of Islam, but “goes to the very roots of Islam as found in the Qur’an and the actions and teachings of the prophet of Islam himself.”<sup>30</sup>

Almost a third of the respondents (31 percent) of the questionnaire I sent out believe that the Qur’an encourages terrorism, almost half (47 percent) believe it encourages violence against Christians, and 43 percent stated that because Muhammed was a warlord, fighting is part of what Islam is.

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<sup>27</sup> Serge Trifkovic, *The Sword of the Prophet: Islam, history, theology, impact on the world* (Boston: Regina Orthodox Press Inc, 2002),132.

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo, *Islam: the Challenge to the Church* (Wiltshire,UK: Isaac Publishing, 2006), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Trifkovic, 301. Trifkovic believes that the violent message of the Quran is a huge problem for all Muslims. “Islam, in Muhammad’s texts and its codification, discriminates against us. It is extremely offensive. Those who submit to that faith must solve the problem they set themselves. Islam discriminates against all “unbelievers.” Until the petrodollars support a Kuranic revisionism that does not, we should go for it with whips and scorpions, hammer and tongs. Secularists and believers of all other faiths must act together before it is too late.”

<sup>30</sup> Answering Islam. “Islam and Violence.” [http://www.answering-islam.org/Terrorism/islam\\_and\\_violence.html](http://www.answering-islam.org/Terrorism/islam_and_violence.html) (accessed April 14,2009). Another article *Violence in the Bible and the Qur’an: A Christian perspective* on the same website comes to the same conclusion <http://www.answering-islam.org/Terrorism/violence.html>

## The Ambition of Muslims: Islamization of Europe

Some Christians make reference to the fact that Islam is a missionary religion that trains and sends out missionaries around the world to promote Islam, which is called *dawah*.<sup>31</sup> Others believe that Muslims have a master plan to take over our countries and take possession of our neighborhoods, schools, and governments. Under the heading “The third conquest of Europe”, Trifkovic gives many examples of how European Muslims are imposing their religion on Europe. He thinks that Muslim purposefully have large families, because

most Muslim countries regard demography as a political weapon, they will gladly export their surplus population to Europe and America, aware that the bigger the diaspora, the greater the political influence it will exert, and the more concessions the Islamic world will be able to extort from the West...Islamic religious instruction in the newly planted Muslim communities on both sides of the Atlantic has been carried out by immigrant imams who have a clear agenda aimed at inculcating their Western-born wards with disdain and even hatred for their surroundings.<sup>32</sup>

According to the Christian website *Answering-Islam.org*, “the central goal of Islam is to establish Islamic law in every country, and this is the declared purpose of many Islamic organizations also in the USA and in Europe.”<sup>33</sup> David Pawson, a prominent contemporary Bible teacher based in Great Britain, writer of more than thirty books, many of which have been translated in other languages, and a worldwide speaker, believes that he has received a prophetic revelation from God that Islam will take over England.<sup>34</sup>

Other Christians point out that Europe is gradually becoming *Eurabia*, a continent that submits to the demands of Muslims.

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<sup>31</sup> In session 2 of the *course Engaging with Islam*, which is developed to train Christians to relate to Muslims, author Steve Green, says that the goal of the Qur’an is the movement from a minority group to the formation of an Islamic state, and that the goal of the devout Islamic community is to bring about an Islamic state, where *Shariah* law is enforced and brought about and where Muslims can live under the laws of Allah. Session 5 is devoted to the explanation of the Islamic concept of *dawah*. Green gives several examples of how Muslims do *dawah* in the West, namely through Islamic awareness weeks, book tables, television programs, through their participation in politics, in which Muslim politicians bring about Islamic laws, through banking, and through businesses. Samuel Green, *Engaging With Islam: A Training Course for Christians* (Kingsford, Australia: Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Trifkovic, 283.

<sup>33</sup> Answering Islam.. “Being a non-Muslim under Islamic rule. Answering Islam Home page. <http://www.answering-islam.org/NonMuslims/index.htm> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> David Pawson, *The Challenge of Islam to Christians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003). In this book he writes: “While listening to a talk of Patrick Sookhdeo in 2002, I was suddenly overwhelmed with what could be described as a premonition that Islam will take over this country.” (7) He also quotes a remark made at the opening of a mosque in Stockholm: “In the next fifty years we will capture the Western world for Islam. We have the men to do it; we have the money to do it; and, above all, we are already doing it.” (21) He points to the growth of Islam in Britain and writes that education is being infiltrated (31) “Muslim leaders in Britain have been quite frank about their hopes of taking the United Kingdom for Allah and bringing not only Muslims but all of us under his laws (Shariah). To quote one: That must be our goal or we have no business here and may Allah give us success.” (33).

## Islam's Aggression is Against Israel

The Arab-Israeli conflict also influences the way Christians in Europe look at Islam. In a questionnaire I conducted, 70 percent of the respondents agreed with or were not willing to explicitly disagree with the statement that "it is because of Islam, there are troubles in Israel." Many Christians, especially evangelicals, back the State of Israel, claiming that its establishment in 1948 fulfills biblical prophecies.<sup>35</sup> Many Christians believe the Christian community should oppose those who hate Israel, which of course are Muslims.<sup>36</sup>

## Muslims' Unresponsiveness to the Gospel

Other Christians indicate that they fear Muslims because of the fact that for centuries Muslims have been among the most unresponsive people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In addition Muslims are very outspoken against some of the main Christian doctrines such as the divinity of Christ and his crucifixion. In relation to this, it is noted that even many Europeans, who were brought up as Christians, are becoming Muslims.<sup>37</sup>

## Consequences of Islamophobia

For the average European, Islam's progress in establishing itself as a permanent feature of European culture has been and continues to be a difficult phenomenon to accept. For many decades, Muslims were exclusively perceived as temporary guests relegated to the fringes of society. Their evolution –from foreigner to permanent resident to citizen – has been troubling. European societies essentially have a negative response to the growing visibility of Islam in their midst.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Steve Bell, *Grace for Muslims?* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2006), 52.

In this book Bell writes "One reason of the negative attitude of many Christians towards Muslims is the over-romanticizing of the Holy Land that has come about through the idealized teaching of biblical history and biblical prophecy." (52). Also Chawkat Moucarry in his book *Faith to Faith* in which he examines the claims of Christianity and Islam, considers this an important issue in the Christian-Muslim relations. Moucarry Chawkat, *Faith to Faith: Christianity & Islam in dialogue* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> European Coalition for Israel, "4th Annual Policy Conference: Promoting The Reform Process In The Middle East -what Role Can The European Union Play?," *European Coalition For Israel*, September, 2006, <http://www.ec4i.org/content/blogsection/6/49/> (accessed April 1, 2009). In March 2004, the four major international Christian pro-Israel organizations with activities in Europe launched the European Coalition for Israel to address the issue of growing anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism in Europe. During their 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Policy Conference in September 2006, attended by 100 participants from 17 different nations, several speakers pointed out that the same forces which are trying to wipe Israel off the map would also want to conquer Europe and that the same militant Islamic forces which are waging a war against Israel would also like to see Europe conquered.

<sup>37</sup> During the break of a church meeting in Slovakia in 2003, after I shared about the importance of reaching out to Muslims with the love of Christ, one of the people present, handed me a piece of paper on which he had written the Bible verse Matthew 7: 6 "Do not give dogs what is sacred, do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces."

<sup>38</sup> Pauly believes that this results from "widespread Western misperceptions of Islam as a monolithic faith whose adherents possess a universal penchant for the proliferation of radical religious fundamentalism." Pauly, 2.



Among the consequences of the negative perception of Islam in Europe, there are two worth discussing here: 1) marginalization and discrimination; 2) xenophobia and the resurgence of nationalism.

### Marginalization, Discrimination, and Exclusion

Directly or indirectly linked to the predominantly negative perception of Islam in Europe is the fact that many Muslims in Europe experience marginalization and social discrimination or exclusion. Sometimes this exclusion is self-inflicted (e.g. due to reluctance to learn the local language, unwillingness to attend or finish education, a negative view of Western society resulting in a withdrawal from it). The socio-economic situation for many Muslims in Europe is far from good. In every country in Europe, the rate of Muslim unemployment is higher than that among European nationals.<sup>39</sup> Muslim's level of income is lower than the European average. Muslims tend to live in overcrowded and under-serviced apartment buildings in crime-ridden urban areas.<sup>40</sup>

Muslim immigrants often encounter multiple forms of discrimination when applying for housing in more coveted areas, or when looking for jobs or places of internship, they are refused entry into bars and night clubs and are treated with hostility because of their appearances. Muslims are often profiled and harassed by law enforcement agents who randomly demand to see their identification papers, though they have committed no crime.<sup>41</sup> Many Muslim immigrants in Europe are excluded from the economic, political, and social benefits afforded to the majority populations.<sup>42</sup>

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Cesari states that "Islam is systematically conflated with threats to international or domestic order." Jocelyne Cesari, "Mosque Conflicts in Europe," *Journal of Ethnic and Migrations Studies*, Special Issue., (November 2005), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cesari, *Islam and Democracy*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Trica Danielle Keaton, who interviewed fourteen Muslim girls, between fifteen and nineteen years old, in Paris, points out that the youth of Arab and African descent in Paris suffer humiliation at the hands of the authorities and their civil and citizenship rights are continually violated by people who treat them as foreigners simply on the basis of the color of their skin and they are both assimilated culturally and excluded socially. She points out that many young Muslims in Europe suffer from racialized discriminations, which manifests itself in the most basic social structures, including employment, housing, education, social services, the criminal justice system, and the relations with the police. Trica Danielle Keaton, *Muslim Girls and the Other France: Race, Identity Politics & Social Exclusion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), x

<sup>42</sup> The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). "Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia". [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Perceptions\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Perceptions_EN.pdf) (accessed April 14, 2009). This study is based on in-depth interviews with members of Muslim communities in ten EU Member States. The overall outcome of these studies was that migrants throughout Europe experience discriminatory practices to a significant extent, particularly with regard to employment and in the sphere of commercial transactions. Nearly one third of respondents stated that they experienced discrimination through being refused access to jobs, missing promotions, or being harassed at work. More than one in four respondents claimed to have experienced discrimination in commercial transactions, either through denial of access to housing, or credit or loans. In the opinion of the interviewees, many Muslims in the European Union feel excluded from economic, social and cultural life. According to the interviewees, even when Muslims are citizens of a Member State, they can still feel a sense of exclusion. They feel that they are perceived as 'foreigners' who are a threat to society, and treated with suspicion. This feeling is reported to be stronger among young European born Muslims than their parents. While the second and third generations are in many ways more integrated than the first, at the same time their expectations are greater and so the consequent exclusion is more keenly felt.

## Xenophobia and Resurgence of Nationalism

In every European country that is home to Muslims issues of race have reemerged.<sup>43</sup> Matters involving race, religion, and ethnicity are all put together. The influx of Muslim immigrants into Europe coincided with the growth of far-right political parties.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, Christians sometimes seem to sympathize with the ideas of the extreme right. A questionnaire circulated by the author shows that 60 percent of the respondents agree with the way Geert Wilders, a Dutch MP and head of an extreme right party, perceives Islam.

### Analyzing fear

Most of the facts that are used to justify one's fear of Islam and Muslims contain elements of truth. Terrorism in the name of Islam exists. There are Muslims that seek to overthrow governments in the West in order to establish a Muslim state. There are intolerant verses in the Qur'an. Christians are being persecuted in many Islamic countries. There is no point in denying these facts. Of course, one could counter each argument with other arguments by pointing to how Muslim scholars interpret the violent verses of the Qur'an in a less strict way as would seem clear to the casual reader.<sup>45</sup> Or one could point out that Muslim extremists make up a tiny percentage of all Muslims. One could also take another approach by showing that Christianity has a violent past, and that the Bible too contains intolerant verses, or that Israel is not only a victim but also a perpetrator of violence.<sup>46</sup>

Of course, there is justification to fear violence that takes place in the name of Islam. Not all fear is wrong. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that fear is based on perception. Or more precisely, fear is caused by one's perception of reality. Some perceptions might be accurate, but one also needs to be willing to recognize that perceptions could be distortion of

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<sup>43</sup> Cesari, *Islam and Democracy*, 29.

<sup>44</sup> Cesari writes that "Although most of these political parties had already been present, their popularity grew once they linked the issues of the need to defend national identity and the recent increase in Muslim immigration." She believes that the most important reason why the parties of the Extreme Right seem to have gained a firm foothold in European political life is "the ability of these movements to present Islam as an unyielding force, incapable of being assimilated into the national culture, by emphasizing both the fragility and the importance of European cultural values." Cesari, *Islam and Democracy*, 31

<sup>45</sup> Two key verses that are important in the discussion on the peaceful or aggressive nature of Islam, are Sura 9:5: "When the sacred months are past, then slay the polytheists, wherever you find them and take them and besiege them" and Sura 9:29: "Fight the idolators until they pay the jizya (poll tax) from their wealth submissively" (Sura 9:29) The first one is called 'the sword verse'; Sura 9:29 is often referred to as "the jizya verse", but occasionally also as the sword verse. Many Muslim scholars have written about Sura 9:5 and Sura 9:29 and the verses are interpreted differently, as pointed out by Jane Dammen McAuliffe in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* Brill, London Boston, 2006), Section Expeditions and Battles, 151: "...early Muslim exegetes preferred to interpret the sword verse in its context, that is, in relation to the situation of the Prophet when it was revealed and in association with the verses surrounding it. Q 9:1-5 are believed to have been revealed on the eve of the raid on Tabuk, when many of the pagans and hypocrites who had treaty obligations with the Prophet resisted joining him on the battlefield. Though al-Suddi explains the verses as a repudiation of Muhammad's agreement with all pagans, al-Tabart, al-Zamakhshari, and others, deny that the Qur'an could decree such intolerance. They divide Muhammad's non-monotheist allies into offensive and inoffensive groups and insist that the repudiation applied only to those non-monotheists who had violated their agreements." Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* (Boston: Brill, 2006), 151.

<sup>46</sup> The subject of war and judgment in Scriptures is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is a topic Christians need to look at and understand, as it will come up over and over again in dealing with Muslims.

the reality. As has been argued above, *Islamophobia* is often based on a distorted perception of the reality.

When one looks beneath the attitude of fear, one might discover that it probably has more to do with oneself or fallen human nature than with the words or deeds of others. As a result of sin, humanity seems to approach the “unknown other” with a negative attitude and with suspicion instead of giving that “unknown other” the benefit of the doubt. The attitude that was already evident after the Fall in the relationship between Adam and Eve, has become part of every human being on the face of the earth. This same attitude seems to lay at the foundation of the fear of Islam and Muslims among Christians.

#### Fear: Result of the Sinful Nature

Dr. Paul Weller, of the University of Derby, who researched *Islamophobia* and religious discrimination in Britain, historically and contemporarily, links *Islamophobia* to what he calls “the nasty side of human nature.”<sup>47</sup> In biblical terms, one would say, the sinful human nature.

In discussing in which way the effects of this nasty side of human nature can be dealt with, Weller refers to the book *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*, by Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg. In this book, the authors look at the way in which people in Ireland, including Christians, developed, cultivated and tried to overcome a hatred for “the other.” The authors speak of the phenomenon of sectarianism, and characterize such an approach to the other as:

A system of attitudes, actions, beliefs and structures at personal, communal and institutional levels which always involves religion, and typically involves a negative mixing of religion and politics

which arises as a distorted expression of positive, human needs especially for belonging, identity, and the free expression of difference

and is expressed in destructive patterns of relating:  
hardening the boundaries between groups  
overlooking others  
belittling, dehumanizing, or demonizing others  
justifying or collaborating in the domination of others  
physically or verbally intimidating or attacking others.

Liechty and Clegg developed a scale of sectarian danger consisting of eleven points all representing approaches to marking or evaluating difference:

We are different, we behave differently  
We are right  
We are right and you are wrong  
You are a less adequate version of what we are

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Paul Weller, "Addressing Religious Discrimination and Islamophobia: Muslims and Liberal Democracies, the case of the United Kingdom," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 3 (2006), 295-325.

You are not what you say you are  
We are in fact what you say you are  
What you are doing is evil  
You are so wrong that you forfeit ordinary rights  
You are less than human  
You are evil  
You are demonic.<sup>48</sup>

### Fear and Our Identity

This scale brings out something that might be considered a key element when looking at fear of Islam, namely the will for identity or the fear to lose one's identity. Management Board Chairman Robert Purkiss, Management Board Chairman of the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) believes that the conceptions of European identity are probably among the strongest drivers of Islamophobia. "Despite Islam's contribution to the development of European societies, it has been excised from the prevailing understanding of Europe's identity as Christian and white. Islam has long served as Europe's "other", as a symbol for a distinct culture, religion and even ethnicity that characterizes non-Europeans."<sup>49</sup> Europe is afraid to lose its identity with the influx of Muslims.<sup>50</sup> Claims that Islam is totally different and "other" often involves stereotypes and claims about us (non-Muslims) as well as about them (Muslims), and the notion that Europeans (non-Muslims) are superior. Europeans are civilized, reasonable, generous, efficient, sophisticated, enlightened, and non-sexist. They are primitive, violent, irrational, scheming, disorganized, and oppressive.

The presence of Islam in Europe seems to coincide with the identity crisis Christianity in Europe faces. As a result of secularization, Christianity in Europe has lost most of its former power and influence. The decline of Christianity in Europe coincides with the growing number of religious Muslims in Europe. As a result, church buildings that were no longer used because the congregations had died out are turned into mosques. At first glance this

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph Liechty and Cecelia Clegg, *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2001), 245.

<sup>49</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. "The fight against Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Bringing Communities Together." FRA. [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications\\_reports/thematic\\_reports/pub\\_tr\\_fight\\_antisemitism\\_islamophobia\\_03\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications_reports/thematic_reports/pub_tr_fight_antisemitism_islamophobia_03_en.htm) (accessed April 14, 2009).

Matti Bunzl, "Between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Some thoughts on the new Europe," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005) 499-508. In this article, Bunzl, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign states that "at the heart of the Islamophobic discourse is the question of civilization, the notion that Islam engenders a worldview that is fundamentally incompatible with and inferior to Western culture.

Tariq Modood believes there is an anti-Muslim wind blowing across the European continent, based on the perception "that Muslims are making politically exceptional, culturally unreasonable or theologically alien demands upon European states." Tariq Modood, "Muslims and the Politics of Difference," *Political Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2003): 100.

<sup>50</sup> Just over a quarter (26 percent) of the respondents to the questionnaire I conducted agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Islam is the biggest threat to our national identity. Of these 83 percent were African immigrants in the Netherlands.

gives the impression that Islam is gradually replacing Christianity in Europe as the main religion. Christians are encouraged to defend Europe's Western and Christian roots.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, the presence of many Muslims in Europe forces Christians to deal with the issue of identity and diversity.<sup>52</sup> The pluralism of European societies seems to inflame exclusivisms and highlight ethnocentricity among Christians.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps Europe's fear of Islam is a fear of losing its identity as Christians, which leads to an attitude of exclusion.

### Fear of Islam and the sin of exclusion

As shown earlier in this chapter, *Islamophobia* in Europe results in Muslims being frequently excluded from the economic, social, and cultural life of the nation. The exclusion that Muslims in Europe experience has several dimensions: being ignored, overlooked, or not given service in a shop or restaurant, having their ideas or opinions being devalued or ignored, being avoided or having others physically move away, being excluded from conversation or activities, being excluded from the right of citizenship, being excluded from certain jobs or promotions, or from renting apartments, from living in certain sections of the city etc.<sup>54</sup>

One should be careful not to hide behind structures, communities, or leaders, and ignore making exclusion a personal matter. One must acknowledge that not only does society exclude Muslims, but Christians who fear Islam and Muslims are guilty of excluding the Muslim from their hearts, their love, their compassion, their concern, their interest, and their lives.

The Kroatian theologian Miroslav Volf, in his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, looks in a theological way at ethnic and cultural conflicts, involving attitudes of exclusion directed at others, particularly against the background of the inter-ethnic problems in the Balkans. Volf believes that exclusion names "what permeates a good many of sins we commit against our neighbors."<sup>55</sup> It is this sin of exclusion that causes Europeans to react out of fear and anger to all those who are not within its circle. Fear of Muslims and Islam often grows out of an attitude of exclusion.

Volf gives the following four characteristics of an attitude and a culture of exclusion. First, exclusion, making the other an enemy that must be pushed away and driven out of one's space; second, exclusion considers the other as a nonentity that can be disregarded and

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<sup>51</sup> Serge Trifkovic believes that "like communism, Islam relies on a domestic fifth column – the Allah-worshipping Rosenbergs, Philbys, Blunts and Hisses – to subvert the civilized world." To combat this, he suggests that Europe should defend its Western and Christian roots. "Those roots much be defended, in the full knowledge that those who subscribe to Islam and its civilization are aliens, regardless of their clothes, their professions or their places of residence." Trifkovic, *The Sword of the prophet*, 292

<sup>52</sup> The Kroatian theologian Miroslav Volf believes it may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference. "The issue is urgent. The ghettos and battlefields throughout the world – in the living rooms, the inner cities, or on the mountain ranges – testify indisputably to its importance." Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, US: Abingdon Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>53</sup> Musk wonders "Is it the necessity of relating to one another that highlights the inbred ethnocentredness of us all? We didn't know we couldn't get on together until it became plain we had to. Bill Musk, *Holy War, Why do some Muslims become fundamentalists?* (London: Monarch Books, 2003), 259.

<sup>54</sup> For specific examples see the EUMC report "Perceptions of discrimination and Islamophobia", particularly pages 23, 28, 39, 42, 59. [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Perceptions\\_EN.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/Perceptions_EN.pdf), (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Volf, 72.

abandoned; third, exclusion fails to recognize the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to the community of humankind; and fourth, exclusion considers the other an inferior being who must either be assimilated or be subjugated.<sup>56</sup>

Such a culture of exclusion often characterizes the relationship between the West and Islam or Muslims. As pointed out earlier, the attitude of Christians hardly differs from that of their secular countrymen. Because Christians often find it difficult to distance themselves from their culture, they echo its reigning opinions and mimic its practices, including those of *Islamophobia*.<sup>57</sup> Christians have to understand that, like Jews and Muslims, they can never be first of all Asians or Americans, British or Dutch, and then Christians.<sup>58</sup> Instead of being molded by their way of thinking, Christians need to be agents of change and transformation in our societies (Rom. 12:1, 2).<sup>59</sup> In order to be agents of change and transformation, Christians need to be transformed themselves and develop another attitude towards Islam and Muslims.

### **Developing Another Culture, Another Attitude and Another Behavior Towards Islam and Muslims**

The Christian's thinking, attitude, and behavior with regard to Muslims, and even militant Muslims, should be guided by God's self-giving love manifested at the cross of Golgotha. Volf points out that: "As God does not abandon the godless to their evil but gives the divine self for them in order to receive them into divine communion through atonement, so also should we, whoever our enemies and whoever we may be."<sup>60</sup>

When a follower of Jesus Christ considers his or her attitude towards others, including Muslims, in the light of the self-giving love of God, it becomes clear that negative attitudes of fear, prejudice and suspicion, which are part of a culture of exclusion, are inappropriate, and should be replaced by a) another culture, namely a culture of embrace; b) another attitude, namely a grace-response and c) another behavior, namely one that is based on the model of the cross.

#### A Culture of Embrace

The attitude of fear, prejudice, and suspicion that characterizes many Christians in Europe towards Muslims and Islam belongs to a culture of exclusion. The desired attitude on

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<sup>56</sup> Volf, 67.

<sup>57</sup> Mennonite author, teacher and missionary, Gordon D. Nickel, writes that Christians cannot follow national feelings as their approach toward Muslims. "If it indeed happens that a Muslim nation becomes a political enemy of our own country, then the command of Jesus becomes our rule, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6: 27, 28)... The mission of God to save a lost world –including Muslims – simply takes precedence over national goals of defense or domination. Gordon D. Nickel, *Peaceable Witness among Muslims* (Ontario, Canada: Herald Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>58</sup> "At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures." Volf, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Volf refers to an empirical research conducted by Ralph Premdas in a number of countries, which has shown that "the inter-communal antipathies present in the society at large are reflected in the attitudes of churches and their adherents. Volf, 36, 37.

<sup>60</sup> Volf, 23.

the basis of the self-giving love of God is motivated by grace and, to use Volf's metaphor, is part of a culture of embrace.

The work of reconciliation should proceed under the assumption that, though the behavior of a person may be judged as deplorable, even demonic, no one should ever be excluded from the will to embrace, because at the deepest level, the relationship to others does not rest on their moral performance and therefore cannot be undone by the lack of it. . . . . At the core of the Christian faith lies the persuasion that the others need not be perceived as innocent in order to be loved, but ought to be embraced even when they are perceived as wrongdoers. The story of the cross is about God who desires to embrace precisely the "sons and daughters" of hell.<sup>61</sup>

Volf uses this metaphor of embrace to express "the absolute indiscriminate and strictly immutable will to give ourselves to others and welcome them, to readjust our identities to make space for them."<sup>62</sup> Such willingness to embrace someone who is perceived as unworthy, a possible enemy and guilty is possible in the biblical sense only when the Holy Spirit works in us and enables us to resist the power of exclusion. Volf gives four features of a culture and attitude of embrace: repentance, forgiveness, making space for the other, and a willingness to forget or overlook the evil suffered.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Repentance***

Those who fear Islam and Muslims justify their attitude by pointing to the other, the "them" who are so aggressive, intolerant etc., but genuine repentance demands that one refuses "to explain our behavior and accuse others, and simply take our wrongdoing upon ourselves."<sup>64</sup> Islamophobes need to repent of *Islamophobia*<sup>65</sup> in order to develop a genuine relationship with Muslims.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Forgiveness***

A second characteristic of the culture of embrace is forgiveness. According to Volf, "Forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace. It heals the wounds that the

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<sup>61</sup> Volf, 85.

<sup>62</sup> Volf, 29.

<sup>63</sup> Volf, chapter III (99-165).

<sup>64</sup> Volf, 119.

<sup>65</sup> An example of a collective repentance on the part of the Christians of their wrong attitudes can be found in the Declaration on Christian Attitudes Towards Muslims, drafted by the Association of International Missions Services (AIMS) in cooperation with AIMS member agencies focusing on the Islamic world. This declaration was published in the International Journal of Frontier Missions, 13, no (July-September 1996 and can be read on their website [http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/13\\_3\\_PDFs/02\\_Declar\\_on\\_Musli.pdf](http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/13_3_PDFs/02_Declar_on_Musli.pdf) (accessed April 14, 2009). A slightly adopted version of this declaration can be found in lesson 9 of the course *Encountering the World of Islam*.

<sup>66</sup> Musk acknowledges that also Christians need to walk a path of repentance. "It is time for us to recognize issues of injustice, many of which inflame various fundamentalisms, and speak out against them per se, in defence of whoever is being victimized. Musk, *Holy War*, 267.

power-acts of exclusion have inflicted and breaks down the dividing wall of hostility.”<sup>67</sup>  
Forgiveness is the only way to break the cycle of vengeance.

The Psalms make clear how Christians are able to satisfy their thirst for justice and calm their passion for revenge so as to practice forgiveness, namely bringing the puzzlement and rage over injustice into the presence of the God of justice.<sup>68</sup> Reflecting on these Psalms could help a Christian to overcome their attitude of fear and exclusion towards Muslims.

### ***Making space for the other***

A third aspect of the culture of embrace, according to Volf, is “making space for the other,” making peace, restoring the broken communion. God has made space for us and therefore such attitude should be the mark of a Christian. Volf points out that: “At the heart of the cross is Christ’s stance of not letting the other remain an enemy and of creating space in himself for the offender to come in.”<sup>69</sup> Having been embraced by God, “we must make space for others in ourselves and invite them in – even our enemies.”<sup>70</sup>

### ***Forgetting, or overlooking, the evil suffered***

The fourth characteristic of a culture of embrace is the willingness to forget or to overlook the evil suffered, the insult received, the maltreatment, the prejudices, the stereotypes used to exclude you. In this we are called to follow God’s example:

God forgets humanity’s sins in the same way God forgives humanity’s sins: by taking sins away from humanity and placing them upon God-self. How will human beings be able to forget the horrors of history? Because at the center of the new world that will emerge after “the first things have passed away” there will stand a throne, and on the throne there will sit the Lamb who has “taken away the sin of the world” and erased their memory (Rev. 22:1-4; John 1:29).<sup>71</sup>

## A Grace Response towards Muslims

The example of God’s self-giving love as manifested on the cross of Christ should encourage Christians to approach Muslims with a willingness to embrace them. The metaphor of embrace, which Volf uses, could be theologically defined as “grace”. This means that a “willingness to embrace”, could also be defined as a “grace response.”

In his book *Grace for Muslims?* mission leader Steve Bell defines “grace-response” as follows:

A grace-response is a willingness to alter the default mechanism in our brains which causes us to fear the unfamiliar in another person; being prepared to give others the

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<sup>67</sup> Volf, 125.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Psalm 12, 44, 58, 83, 109, 137, 139.

<sup>69</sup> Volf., 126.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 140.



benefit of the doubt and make an effort to find out why they behave as they do. A grace response is willing to include the other person within the scope of God's love and the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, rather than imagining there is an exclusion clause which puts them beyond our concern.<sup>72</sup>

An attitude of grace, on the part of Christians with regard to Muslims in Europe, consists of the following characteristics.

### ***Dialogue***

Dialogue is a key aspect to overcome the attitude of *Islamophobia*,<sup>73</sup> because it helps one to know the other better and it helps one to learn to see oneself as others see him or her. The word *dialogue* is used very broadly and often stirs up negative emotions among Evangelical Christians.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, dialogue is necessary between Christians and Muslims to overcome the animosity between them.<sup>75</sup>

When Christians look at Islam or Muslims, the temptation is to compare one's own ideals with the other's realities. In answering the question, "How should Christians respond to resurgent Islam and to fundamentalist Muslims?" author and theologian Dr. Bill Musk believes that:

We must begin, in relating to fundamentalists as to others, by listening and learning to empathize; trying to discern what life is about from their perspective. We must be careful not to stereotype 'fundamentalists' for they are not all the same. Equally, we need to recognize that not all Muslims are Islamists.<sup>76</sup>

Related to this is the necessity to understand the Muslims' history and background. Ancram, Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom, points out that:

An understanding of the past provides the background that is necessary to inform dialogue. It discloses the sources of the fears that in turn have given rise to the bitterness and the hatred. It rapidly becomes the basic building block of discourse.

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<sup>72</sup> Steve Bell, *Grace for Muslims, the journey from fear to faith* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2006), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Michael Ancram, "Clash or Dialogue of Civilisations?" (speech, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, May 16, 2003) Michael Ancram, [http://www.michaelancram.com/sp\\_display.aspx?id=69](http://www.michaelancram.com/sp_display.aspx?id=69) (accessed April 13, 2009). Ancram stated that a key to begin dialogue is to understand each other's fears, because fear is at the core of the animosity. Fear of being overwhelmed by the other. On one side fear of Islamization of Europe and on the other side fear of Westoxification of Muslims in Europe.

<sup>74</sup> Patrick Sookhdeo in his book *Islam: the Challenge to the Church*, writes that interfaith dialogue initiatives have some inherent risks which makes him reject such approach. Bat Ye'or, who is not an Evangelical Christian, considers Christian initiatives toward interfaith dialogue with Muslims as opening the door for the islamization of Christianity Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*, 211.

<sup>75</sup> In her book *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* Kate Zebiri analyses modern Muslim writings on Christianity and Christian writings on Islam. In this book she refers to discursive dialogue: "In some respects, the position of mainstream Muslims is comparable to that of conservative evangelical Christians, who initially at least expressed strong reservations about dialogue, fearing that it would lead to religious syncretism and compromising the essentials of faith." Muslims concerned with *da'wah* and evangelical Christians are likely to give priority to 'discursive dialogue; at the very least this may serve to eradicate distortions and misunderstandings and thereby eliminate obstacles to conversion." Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*, 38.

<sup>76</sup> Musk, *Holy War*, 267.

Knowing how and why the knots of hatred and mistrust came to be tied is the only route to loosen, to unravel, and eventually to undo them.<sup>77</sup>

Dialogue is one of the best ways that these underlying fears can be assuaged.

One gets a picture of the kind of dialogue that gets beneath the surface in Luke's description of Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke 2: 46, 47).<sup>78</sup> Such dialogue consists of a) social interaction; b) listening; c) asking questions and d) offering answers.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Speak well of the Muslim neighbor***

Against the hate speeches or judgmental way of referring to Muslims, or stereotyping, Christians should be encouraged to speak well of our Muslim neighbors. The ninth of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16). When applying this to Muslim neighbors, it implies that when one speaks about Islam, one should seek to be as truthful as possible. Sometimes fear can lead people to exaggerate situations. Essentially, Islam is what a Muslim says it is.

Christians should be careful to interpret the Qur'an correctly and not take verses out of context, taking into consideration how these verses have been or are interpreted by Muslims scholars. Christians should be willing to listen to Muslims and to learn to see the world through their eyes and let them interpret their religion for us.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Being critical without being judgmental***

Volf states that to fight exclusion successfully, what is needed are "nonexclusionary judgments passed by persons willing to embrace the other."<sup>81</sup> Applying this to Islam, one could say that one does not have to embrace Islam, in order to embrace Muslims. One can pass judgment on Islam, without excluding Muslims. Volf acknowledges that:

It is true that sometimes judgments lead to exclusion and can be an act of exclusion. But the remedy for exclusionary judgments are more adequate judgments based on a distinction between differentiation and exclusion and made with humility that counts with our proclivity to misperceive and misjudge because we desire to exclude.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Ancram, "Clash or Dialogue of Civilisations?" (speech, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, May 16, 2003).

<sup>78</sup> Colin Chapman, *Cross & Crescent: responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Books, 2007), 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> This is what Musk seeks to do in his book *Kissing Cousins: Christians and Muslims face to face*, in which he wants to help the readers "to look beyond the systematizing processes of institutionalized religion to search for the intentions of faith which allows us to let each faith be its own interpreter.", Bill Musk, *Kissing Cousin? Christians and Muslims face to face* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2005), 15.

<sup>81</sup> Volf, 65.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 68.

We should be able to respect Islam and Muslims, without agreeing with their teachings. Colin Chapman suggests a good middle way between demonizing Islam or Muslims and being naïve about the intentions of some of them, as follows:

A middle way between these two extremes would mean (a) being realistic about the real intentions of *some* Muslims, (b) recognizing the diversity among Muslims and relating to them as individuals and groups with openness and honesty, (c) taking a firm stand on issues of human rights, (d) working for the common good of the whole society, (e) demonstrating a fundamental respect for Islam (without agreeing with all its teaching), and (f) unapologetically commending the Christian faith through word and deed.<sup>83</sup>

While acknowledging the injustices that have taken place in name of Christianity, one must at the same time speak out against injustices done in the name of Islam and also be ready to ask difficult questions of Muslim friends. Colin Chapman suggested that Christians be prepared for “hard talk” with Muslims and Islamists, and he lists some of the questions we may want to ask.<sup>84</sup>

There might also be times when, alongside Muslims, one would do well to join the struggle against common enemies. Islam’s critique of the Western worldview should provoke Christians to stop and reflect According to Musk:

We are the sixth generation children of the Enlightenment and it is becoming increasingly plain that secularization is not the benign or neutral god our fathers believed it to be. Secularized society is but a posh name for “pagan society.” We don’t marry up to four wives, but we do engage in sequential polygamy. There is no religious favoritism in our secular societies, except that our TV programs, school textbooks, and public arts are loaded with references to the occult. We don’t cut off hands for theft, but we casually kill our unborn in their millions...<sup>85</sup>

It is sometimes assumed that when religious and theological misunderstandings are cleared up, Muslims and Christians will automatically enjoy more cordial relations, but as Zebiri rightly points out, even when Muslims have a good grasp of Christianity:

there is a good chance that a Muslim will still be genuinely repelled and even offended by it. One sometimes encounters a kind of aesthetic aversion to central Christian truths, particularly the Crucifixion. Muslim rejection of Christian beliefs cannot always be attributed to misunderstanding, obtuseness or polemicism. The same would have to be true of Christians who find it difficult to see in the Muhammad of history an ideal model of human conduct, or who have reservations about parts of the Qur’an. This is not necessarily as inauspicious for Muslim-Christian relations as it may seem; it may be existentially impossible wholly to suspend judgment in areas

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<sup>83</sup> Colin Chapman, "Christian Responses to Islam, Islamism and 'Islamic Terrorism,'" *Cambridge Papers* 16, no. 2 (June 2007).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, for example: Are you prepared to be critical of your history? Do you accept the concept of universal human rights as they have developed in recent years? What about the means that you use to achieve your goals? Does the end justify the means? Are you willing to accept the existence of pluralist societies?

<sup>85</sup> Musk, *Holy War*, 251.

which directly impinge on one's own truth-claims, but as in life generally, one does not need to denigrate those with whom one disagrees.<sup>86</sup>

### The Cross as a Model for a Relationship with Muslims

For Christians, the challenge is to draw back from seeing Muslims or Islam as “the enemy.” Often Christians consider Islam a threat, have strong prejudices against Muslims, and find it easier to believe that extremists represents true Islam as opposed to moderates,<sup>87</sup> particularly pointing to the terrorism of Islamic extremists in the West and the persecution of Christians in predominantly Muslim countries.

In response to these facts, I could point to moderate Muslims, to Muslims who interpret the Qur'an in a more peaceful way, to Muslims who are working day and night to build social cohesion in their cities, to Muslim Background believers who are accepted and respected by their family members, and to Muslims who truly are committed to seeking the welfare of Europe and its citizens and values, etc.

But such arguments and counter arguments seems to point to the fact that if Muslims were more loveable, Europeans could love them; if they were more trustworthy, they would trust them; if they were less aggressive, they would not fear them; if Muslims were more peaceful, they would leave them in peace. But this kind of reasoning violates the principle of grace found in the Bible, and the example of embracing of enemies and creating space within oneself for them.

Musk points out that,

even where some Muslims cast themselves as opponents of (in their view) “unbelieving” Christians and Jews, and make Westerners their enemies, the words of Christ about our attitude towards ‘enemies’ needs to color our responses. The kingdom of God grows in peoples’ hearts, not via the sword, but via the Cross.<sup>88</sup>

For Muhammad, the use of weaponry to achieve God's goal was permitted and commanded. As a result of the Qur'anic command to use force to achieve supremacy, Muslims speak about the nature of jihad. Nevertheless, Musk asserts:

for Jesus, such approach to the appropriation of physical force was an option he consistently refused to take. In Islam, the progression from preacher to powerful ruler was legitimized by God himself....In Christianity, the call is continually for Christians to have that mind in them that was in Christ Jesus – to walk the way of humility and vulnerability.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Zebiri, 234.

<sup>87</sup> Although in the questionnaire I conducted, 68 percent of the respondents did not believe that Muslim extremists (e.g. Taliban, Al Quaida) represent true Islam.

<sup>88</sup> Musk, *Holy War*, 10, 267.

<sup>89</sup> Musk, *Kissing Cousins*, 218.

But instead of love and humility, many Christians live by and express an attitude of fear. Such attitude comes out particularly when someone says one should not be afraid of Muslims or Islam.

Gordon Showell-Rogers, General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance, during the Alliance's General Assembly in October 2007, said that Christians have nothing at all to fear from any form of Islam. Several people disagreed with Showell-Rogers strongly and said he lost his mind.<sup>90</sup>

In order for Europe to become free of *Islamophobia* and related issues, what is needed are not only new laws against religious racism, less discrimination, a more balanced representation of Muslims in the media, an equal access of Muslims to education and the workforce, and a society where people of all races and religions live harmoniously together. The primary need is for people, transformed people, who want to be instruments of transformation, or in Volf's terms "social agents" and who are able to live in harmony with others, including those that could be enemies.<sup>91</sup>

Such transformational, social agents have three defining characteristics: a) they live their lives in the light of the cross; b) they share the Gospel in the way of the cross; and c) they are willing to bear the scandal of the cross.

### ***Living Our Lives in the Light of the Cross***

If Christians would live a more authentic, biblical life in a pluralistic society where Islam is growing, Muslims could be drawn to the truth of the Gospel as lived out by their Christian friend.<sup>92</sup>

### ***Sharing the Gospel in the Way of the Cross***

The attitude of Christian witness among Muslims needs to reflect the truth of the Gospel.<sup>93</sup> A great stumbling block for Muslims is the cross, because it models the vulnerability of God. In the words of Nickel, "it is crucial that Christians model and interpret the cross."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Gordon Showell-Rogers, "Christians have nothing to fear of Islam," speech delivered to General Assembly European Evangelical Alliance, October 17, 2007, Greece. In response to the article of this speech, someone wrote: "I think we have A LOT to be concerned with concerning Islam. Since ISAAC is the Son of the Promise and there is no other answer to the Ishmaelites than that. To try in any way to embrace Islam as a "brother" descended from Abraham, as Tony Blair is doing, is INSANE and Anti-Christ." <http://christianpost.com/Intl/Overseas/2007/10/evangelicals-have-nothing-to-fear-from-islam-says-european-leader-20/index.html> (accessed April 14, 2009).

<sup>91</sup> "What is needed are social agents that are shaped by the values of God's kingdom and therefore capable of participating in the project of authentic social transformation." Volf, 118.

<sup>92</sup> Pawson, 91. Pawson ends his epilogue of his book *The Challenge of Islam to Christians* with a quote from Nietzsche, who said: I want to be saved if Christians looked more saved and writes: "Muslims must not be allowed to make the same observation if we are to earn the right to share our faith with them."

<sup>93</sup> Nickel, 17. Nickel writes that "the Muslim setting repeatedly raises the question of whether the manner of Christian witness matches the content of the gospel message."

<sup>94</sup> Nickel, 11. Nickel believes that "the genius of the early church was the ability to hold together open proclamation of the good news with a peaceable manner of living and speaking and suggests we follow in their footsteps in our encounter with Muslims."

### *Willing to Bear the Scandal of the Cross*

It is been pointed out that the divine self-giving love manifested on the cross lies at the heart of the Christian faith and should guide one's thinking and behavior towards Muslims. Instead of excluding them from one's societies, communities, and hearts, the heavenly Father has given Christians the example of embracing those that are unlovable, wrongdoers, or even enemies.

But does this work in a world of self-centered human beings, where violence reigns, where sin abounds. Is it not naïve to give oneself to Muslims, to welcome them, to readjust one's identity in order to make space for them? Will it not be abused; will one not lose oneself in the process?<sup>95</sup> Volf states that this is indeed a strong possibility, but also that there is no other way: "there is no genuinely Christian way around the scandal. In the final analysis, the only available options are either to reject the cross and with it the core of the Christian faith or to take up one's cross, follow the Crucified – and be scandalized ever anew by the challenge."<sup>96</sup>

When the Church in Europe follows the Crucified in serving him among Muslims, Christians need to live their lives in the light of the cross, share the Gospel in the way of the cross, and be willing to live the scandal of the cross and to encourage others to do the same, so that Muslims will come to worship the Crucified as the Lord and Savior. One needs the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in one's hearts, because only the Holy Spirit can replace a spirit of fear with that of grace and love in the midst of hostility.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Volf calls this the scandal of the cross. "The ultimate scandal of the cross is the all too frequent failure of self-donation to bear positive fruit: you give yourself to the other –and violence does not stop but destroys you; you sacrifice your life – and stabilize the power of the perpetrator. Though self-donation often issues in the joy of reciprocity, it must reckon with the pain of failure and violence. When violence strikes, the very act of self-donation becomes a cry before the dark face of God. This dark face confronting the act of self-donation is a scandal." Volf, 26.

<sup>96</sup> Volf, 26.

<sup>97</sup> Musk points out that with his help, "Christ's mind can become ours as we get to know the 'Muslim fundamentalist,' our fellow human being. From a secure servanthood might arise creative ways of sharing the heart of the gospel with people for whom that heart is a missing and much-needed centre."Musk, *Holy War*, 18.