



## Winds of Change

By Pastor Victor Atallah



Muslims regard two texts as sacred for the instruction and guidance of their religious beliefs and practices and the conduct of their lives.

The first and most foundational sacred Muslim text is the *Quran*, believed to have been revealed from heaven to their prophet, Mohammed, who lived in Arabia during the 7th century after Christ. It is composed of chapters (*suras*) and verses (*ayat*). The text of the Quran is traditionally viewed as absolutely holy, to the extent that non-Muslims are not to touch any print of it, lest they defile it. Much of its form is in typical ancient Arabic poetical rhyme, with a

distinctly musical sound when recited. Major sections are written in very archaic Arabic, the equivalent to Chaucer English. Thus, understanding the plain meaning of much of the content is extremely difficult, if not impossible, even for the most learned Arabic readers.

The second source of Islamic authority is *Sunna* which is composed of the sayings and conduct attributed to the Muslim prophet, Mohammed. The *Hadith* are said to be the collected sayings of the prophet. These are used to deal with specific religious, ethical and legal questions, complimenting the content of the Quran.

### A People Adrift

Worldwide studies, however, have shown that only about 2% of confessing Muslims sufficiently understand the teaching of the Quran. Less than 30% know what they believe or why they are Muslims.

This is related to the fact that officially, the Quran is not translatable to other languages. The vast majority of Muslims live in non-Arabic speaking countries. In Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Indonesia, most Muslims do not understand Arabic. Only limited numbers of their clergy study enough Arabic to gain some understanding of Muslim sacred texts.

Most of those who memorize and recite the Quran do not necessarily know Arabic. Still, millions of Pakistani, Afghani, Indian and other Muslim children attend *madrasas* (Arabic language classes). For years these were generously financed and popularized by wealthy Muslim zealots, mostly from the Arabic-speaking Middle East. Such institutions are used to recruit young people for jihadist activities.

### Serious Doubts

Things, however, seem to be rapidly changing. More than 60% of Muslims are under the age of 34. With more education and travel, younger people



in the Muslim world are now increasingly exposed to much more open-source information about Islam. Information provided online by modernist, agnostic or atheistic former Muslims is very influential. Much of it is very critical of Islamic convictions and practices, even about the Quran and the life of their prophet Mohammed. This is impacting the thinking and commitments of a significant number of educated young Muslims. Large numbers in the Islamic heartlands of the Middle East and North Africa have developed serious religious doubts. Growing numbers express total disenchantment with the religion of their families. Unlike even a decade ago, some dare to quite openly express rejection of Islam. They refuse to blindly sub-

mit to the instruction or counsel of Muslim clergy. Many more boldly call for freedom of religion and speech.

### New Ideas

In recent years, this has caused significant numbers of Islamic scholars to dare to express non-traditional views. They hope to stem the tide of disenchantment among thinking Muslims. These Islamic leaders share a two-fold pressing concern. On the one hand, they want to enable Muslims to meet modern challenges to their religious views and practices without totally abandoning them. They face serious difficulties in providing modernized readings and interpretations of major parts of the Quran and Sunna, the two sacred Islamic texts. On the other hand, they want to present to the world a more appealing image of Islam. Traditionalist Muslim clergy treat such efforts with great suspicion, if not with outright condemnation.

### Gospel Seeds

In the providence of the

Lord, some disenchant-ed Muslims are attracted to the gospel alternative. Christ is clearly honoured in the Quran as a great prophet. Nowadays, the teaching and life of Christ appeal to thinking Muslims. Many want to learn more for themselves. This provides fertile soil for planting gospel seeds, especially among young Muslims. Unprecedented numbers are taking advantage of online availability of the Bible in Arabic, Farsi and most other major languages of Muslim peoples. Over the years MERF has developed much expertise in the use of the radio and the internet to relevantly and effectively reach Muslims in Arabic and other languages, covering

the most heavily Muslim populated regions, from Morocco in the west to Indonesia in the far east.

S and A of eastern Arabia (two brothers) say: "...We are educated people... It is not easy for us and some friends and relatives, and it is not easy for any Muslims to acknowledge this...The majestic goodness, grace and beauty of Jesus the Christ (Issa Al-Masih) sharply contrast not just with Muhamed but with all other influential and admired persons... His is a message beyond anything earthly... We do not know what heaven is like but we can imagine that the purity and power of his life is constantly adored even in heaven..."

*"Be exalted,  
O Lord, in your  
strength!  
We will sing  
and praise  
your power!"*

— Psalm 21:13

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